

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

The Church and the Lodge Problem
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Resetting Our Sights in Christian Education
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Homiletics

Brief Studies

Book Review

Vol. XXXVI

March 1965

No. 3

HOMILETICS

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The outlines and textual studies in this issue include the Feast of Pentecost. This makes it possible to devote the entire April issue to the subject of missiology. Norman C. Habel, assistant professor of exegesis at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, has contributed textual studies on Hos. 11:8 f. for *Misericordias Domini* Sunday and on Jer. 31:31-34 for Pentecost Sunday.)

EASTER

JONAH

JONAH 1:17

MATTHEW 12:39, 40

Introduction. Dr. Krister Stendahl of Harvard University Divinity School suggests that mission boards should send to the Southern Hemisphere those preachers who speak of flowers and signs of "springtime" as exhausting the meaning of "Easter," for there it is fall and autumn. Easter is not springtime.

Among many symbols in the catacombs Jonah and the big fish are frequently depicted—a much better symbol for Christian death than flaming torches (extinguished) turned upside down, broken columns.

I. *Story of Jonah*

(A short story — only 4½ minutes to read the 48 verses.)

A. Assyria, completely superior; no one overcomes it. Jewish prophet Jonah was sent to Nineveh to speak for repentance—"only 40 days remain!" God's concern for heathen.

B. Jonah went, not northeast to Nineveh but to Spain. He can't get away from God. "Bed in Sheol? Thou art there." Jonah slept; no feeling of doing wrong. He could rationalize his actions, but God is never satisfied with disobedience.

C. The Lord works up a storm. The sailors try to "uncover" the cause. Jonah is

discovered. "What's your occupation?" Is *your* life equal to *your* calling and station? *Our* sins also hurt others.

D. Jonah is recognized as the sinner and thrown overboard. "It is because of *me*." God gives him a second chance. The Lord provides a fish. "Get to Nineveh!" Easter is God's reversal of deserved death.

II. *Sign of Jonah*

A. Life for others. As Jonah was sent for salvation to Nineveh, it is made clear that mercy and love are not restricted to Israel. Christ left His Father's home, did His Father's will, laid down His life (no one took it from Him), and He took it up again. And His life-and-death-and-life (not death-and-life or merely life-and-death) is for the salvation of all mankind, for others.

B. Life for self. In the midst of death God preserved life. Jonah did not perish. God did not abandon him in the boat, in the fish, or in the sea, not even under the gourd. So Jesus Christ, God's Holy One (Acts 13:35), did not see corruption. Jesus did not remain in death. It was the incorruptible God-man who died. 1 Cor. 15 points out that if Christ is not raised, then there is no resurrection of the dead.

C. Life to others. Jonah was resurrected from the grave of the sea to bring life to self and to others. The water of Baptism is a symbol of being buried with Christ by Baptism into death (Rom. 6) to rise to newness of life. Jonah rose a new creature ready to serve the Lord. We rise to newness of life. Fishers of men are to put the people into the water so they rise to serve.

D. Life in a word. Nineveh repented. Would Jerusalem after it knew of the risen Lord? (Pentecost is part of the answer.) Nineveh repented because its citizens listened to God's Word. "Though one rise from the

dead," said Jesus, "they will not believe. They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them." (Luke 16)

E. "Go and tell!" is the Easter story through Jesus and His angels. His disciples, like Jonah, are raised and assured of resurrection to tell of His message of repentance and of redemption.

QUASIMODOGENITI, FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

JOB

JOB 42:1-6

Background

Job's question (14:14): "If a man die, shall he live again?" is answered in Easter's declaration that resurrection of the dead is not only possible and probable but *proved*.

When Job feels the weight of his friends' torment, is forgotten by friend and servant, is repulsed by his wife, is stripped by God of goods, aware of his wrongs, only one hope shines to take all shadows away. It is "I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last He will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eye shall behold, and not another." (19:25-27)

Introduction

Nothing else but the appearance of the risen Lord helped Thomas so that he would believe (Gospel, John 20:19-31). Job's difficulty is not unlike Thomas'. "Can God do all things well and lovingly?" "Can suffering or death be conquered?"

Thomas wants sight. He wants more than sight and more than reasoning. He wants to hear, to see, to touch. Job also wants more than reason and comprehension. He will admit he is a sinner. He will admit God is almighty and just. But the theological problems remain: "Why do the righteous suffer? How is it possible for a person to believe without seeing agreement between faith and sight?"

Job — Oh, to Believe

I. Recognition of God's Omnipotence

A. Job 42:1,2: "I know that Thou canst do all things and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted." God asks Job 71 questions in 2 comprehensive examinations (38:1—40:2 and 40:6—41:34). Job must admit God can do all things. He is sorry he did not believe that before.

B. God's purposes and power unchanged. God's will is done in creation. God's will is done even in the face of the death of God's Son. Jesus Christ rose "as He said." His purpose is to create and to preserve. Nothing, not even death, will separate man from God. Easter is a must. He came to give His life as a ransom for many. Thomas acknowledges in adoration.

II. Recognition of Man's Shortcomings

A. Job 42:3: "'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." Job had maintained he was "clean without transgression" (33:9), and Elihu warned him not to judge God (Job 35). Job admits to God that he spoke too quickly and says he would complain or question no longer; but still God makes inquiries (Job 40:1,2). Thus Job was led to recognize his shortcomings. Thomas, too, cries out, "My Lord and my God." Included here was an admission of shortcoming by Thomas.

B. Job said, "I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). Job is only man and not God. He recognizes, and he is sorry for, such a shortcoming. He does more — he changes his mind. Thomas, too, not only admits he was wrong concerning resurrection but kneels in adoration; he is not faithless but believing.

C. We deserve rebuke of God. If He asked a thousand questions, we could not give one answer (Job 9:3). We are not just, nor are we righteous. We doubt the resur-

rection, question the validity of life, rebel against suffering and death.

III. *Recognition of God's Revelation*

A. "'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.' I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees Thee; therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:4-6)

Theophany was demanded in Thomas' claim, "Unless I see." Theophany helped Job. "My eye sees," he says. God loved Job, and Job received the revelation and recognized God. God loved Thomas, and Thomas received a revelation and recognized God. "Last of all He appeared unto me" (1 Cor. 15), says Paul, and it was an appearance in grace.

B. God reveals Himself to me in His acts of creation, of preservation, of redemption, and of resurrection. The "last Word" is His Son, Jesus Christ. God reveals Himself in Word and Sacrament.

C. In midst of trial and heartache, of doubt and "faith falling short," both Job and Thomas recognize need for revelation and by His grace receive it. So God comes to me where I am. And as they knelt in adoration and stood in awe of God, so in the light of His revelation of love to me in His Son's atoning sacrifice and resurrection I stand in a state of repentance and in a state of rejoicing. Repenting, for it was my needs that brought Christ to the cross and the open tomb; rejoicing, for it was His love that brought Christ to the cross and the open tomb.

MISERICORDIAS DOMINI, SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

HOSEA

Hos. 11:8 f.

Proper and Background

Today's Epistle, 1 Peter 2:21-25, gives the day's motif: Christ was reviled, yet He Him-

self reviled not; He suffered, yet He threatened not — for He endured and suffered and loved as the Good Shepherd, who gave His life and brought back the sheep to Himself. The Gospel, John 10:11-16, with its Old Testament lesson and parallel, Ezek. 34:11-16, emphasizes still further that other sheep *must* be brought in to the fold. The Collect gathers together those who are "delivered from the danger of everlasting death." The mind and will of God is man's redemption even at the cost of Himself. This is the "goodness of the Lord," the *misericordias Domini*.

Introduction

A certain man was given a grandfather's clock by his wife on their anniversary. Several months later she died. After a time he remarried. To the second wife the grandfather's clock in the living room became an irritating reminder of the love of her husband's first wife. Each tick, each chime, told of another love. Finally, in desperation, the second wife insisted that it be silenced.

God gave the laws, the sacrifices, and blessed the land to which He had led Israel. He attached His blessings to feasts so that with clocklike regularity the people would be prompted to remember. But they silenced God. Prophets forgot his Law, priests turned to other sacrifices and to other gods, people with bowls of wine and "cows of Bashan" wallowed in their prosperity and drowned themselves in cholesterol. Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah spoke of coming doom and punishment.

God had a right to destroy Israel, as He had destroyed Admah and Zeboiim (Deut. 29:23; Gen. 14:8; Hos 11:8). But God will do the impossible. He will redeem. He will bring in the other sheep. He will restore. He will show mercy. He will do the unexpected. In this redeeming drive of God's we see our own redemption as well.

Hosea — Other Sheep

I. *Living Parable*

A. Signs signify theological emphasis in earthly framework. The scenery is earth, and the voice is God's. The rainbow becomes an ongoing parable. Jeremiah, trusting the promises of God, purchases the field at Anathoth (Jer. 32:9 ff.) for the people will return to redeem the field. Hosea marries Gomer, yes, purchases her from the slave market, wicked as she is. Whether we consider Hos. 1 and 3 two separate incidents or identical ones matters little; what is important is that a living parable displays God's love and grace.

B. As the Introit says: "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." This goodness is done not merely by one act of creation but by God's ongoing acts of love: daily bread, constant presence with us, never-failing promises, daily and richly forgiving us our sins in Jesus Christ. Constantly, steadfastly, resolutely, He displays love which we deserve not.

II. *Faithless Wife*

A. Hosea relates the relationship of parent and children and of husband and wife. Both stress intimate relationship with husband and with father.

B. God rejoiced over His marriage with Israel (Is. 62:5), but she played the harlot by having other gods (Judg. 2:17). Idolatry equaled adultery. (Hos. 2:5, 8, 9)

C. The "Shepherd-King" (Micah 5; Ezek. 34) will give His life for the flock. The Husband will find He cannot let His wife go. "How shall I give thee up?" (Hos. 11:8). Israel would destroy itself, but in God is help (Hos. 13:9 f.). God would gather them as a hen gathers chicks, but they would not (Matt. 23:37). "I can't let you go!"

D. We belong to God by the right of creation. We belong to Him by the right of His stewardship. Our life and being are

dependent on Him. We rebel, laugh, mock, scorn, despise, spit, jeer, chide, fight, hate. As a nut within a shell is safe against all attacks of weather so are we under the cover of His mercy and love.

III. *Faithful Husband*

A. When a man brings a faithless wife back, others say, "Fool!" It is so hard to forgive and not to make others pay. But that is what forgiveness is — the one who is hurt does the paying.

B. Despite faithlessness of Israel God's love is persistent and consistent. Though people are "bent on" turning from Him (11:7), He bends to redeem and restore. The love of God reaches us on the brink of destruction, determined to save.

C. We are the "bride of Christ," (Eph. 6; Rev. 21:2; Rev. 22:17). He presents a glorious church, a holy church, because we are robed in His righteousness, His spotless garment. The sinful bride is dressed in robes of purity by Him who alone purifies. He will not give up trying to change us. He is God and not man. (Hos. 11:9)

Conclusion

God is God and not man, says Hosea in the text. He is different from man, not that He is removed from us and afar off, but He is different in that He is faithful even if all men prove faithless. He died on our behalf and forgives us all our sins.

EXEGETICAL NOTES — Hos. 11:8 f.

I

Hos. 11:8 f. forms part of the literary unit comprising Hos. 11:1-11, which describes the process whereby God announces punishment and reconciliation for His rebellious son Israel. The message is presented in terms of God in dialog with Himself. The component parts of this unit are: 11:1-4, God's recollection of His love and discipline to-

ward Israel; 11:5-7, God's announcement of severe punishment for persistent stubbornness; 11:8 f., the affirmation of God's holy love for the rejected son; 11:10 f., the renewal of God's promise of restoration. God Himself is the Spokesman throughout, and He presents His message in the form of a historical sequence of events from the birth of Israel to its virtual death in the present, and from the perspective of an internal development in the heart of God. Here history and theology are inextricably intertwined. Through the former, Israel's prophets are led to a deeper insight into the nature of the latter. Revelation is God doing things and leading men to understand what His involvement means.

The election motif is dominant in this chapter. (See E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 201 ff.). Through his marriage experience Hosea was to appreciate the depth of the choosing love (אַהֲבָה) of God (Hos. 3:1). The election of Israel is depicted through a variety of metaphors. In 9:10 the choice of Israel is portrayed as an exciting discovery (cf. Deut. 32:10). More significant perhaps is the election image of God as the Father and Israel as the son. In fact the idea of God as Father in the Old Testament normally implies election or adoption. "Israel is My firstborn son" was the affirmation of Israel's preferred status before God at the time of the exodus (Ex. 4:22). Even more closely linked to 11:8 f. are the descriptions of God as the Father who creates Israel, begets Israel, and suffers birthpangs in the selection of Israel as His chosen son (Deut. 32:6, 18). The suffering of Yahweh as the God of Israel becomes tantamount to a rebirth for Israel in Hos. 11:8 f. God feels the birthpangs of love once more. The God of Israel is both a sovereign overlord and a jealous father.

The punitive actions prescribed for a rebellious son also lie in the background of this chapter (Deut. 21:18-21; cf. Is. 1:2 ff.).

Stubborn rebelliousness ultimately meant death. The curse of death and exile for breach of covenant and for ungrateful disregard of God's elective love are likewise involved in this context. Briefly the sequence of thought in Hos. 11:1-7 is as follows. The initial selection of Israel was motivated by the undeserved love of Yahweh. Israel thereby became God's chosen son, who experienced God's personal involvement in its history. This selection became apparent through Israel's historical salvation in the exodus from Egypt. The concern of Yahweh persisted, but the natural inclination of Israel was to go its own rebellious way. From the beginning Israel's supreme sin was the worship of Baal as a substitute for, or as a deity supplementary to, Yahweh (cf. 2:8, 13; 9:10). Despite Israel's perverse tendency Yahweh had patiently disciplined His people both during and after the wilderness wanderings (cf. Deut. 8:1-5). His care meant repeated "healing" of Israel because of the injuries inflicted through its own waywardness. Much of the time Israel was not even aware of the extent of its own corruption. Nevertheless, Yahweh persisted in His love as a sympathetic involvement in the course of Israel's historical needs, just as a compassionate man trains his child, eases the harsh yoke on his animals, or feeds his family. God's compassion, however, was met with a refusal to repent, that is, to attempt a radical reversal of allegiance from evil to Yahweh as the sovereign Lord to whom all honor is due, and as the gracious King who deigned to rescue and honor Israel as His own son. The punishment announced fits the repeated crime. Israel, the child from Egypt who could not "return" to Yahweh, will be forced by Yahweh to "return" to Egypt. Historically this meant vassalage and exile in Assyria, as v. 7 b indicates. Ephraim and Israel in this context signify the Northern Kingdom, which was conquered by Assyria in 722 B.C. and taken captive to various parts of the Assyrian

Empire (cf. 2 Kings 17). The anger of Yahweh would be apparent in the devastation wrought during the military campaigns of the Assyrian conquerors. Deliberate rejection of Yahweh meant decisive punishment at the hand of Yahweh: Israel's exile was really the yoke of divine wrath. To this point Yahweh has proclaimed the Law in terms of total and inevitable disaster for deliberate disobedience. In sharp juxtaposition to this proclamation is the "Gospel message" of Hos. 11:8-11. This sharp tension between the full impact of judgment preaching and the inexplicable confrontation with undeserved salvation must be recognized so that the ultimate depth of meaning in this passage can be appreciated. It hurts God to hurt His own!

II

11:8 *a*. The opening "How" (הֵיכֵן) is characteristic of laments and reflects the divine mood. Ephraim and Israel are synonymous terms for the Northern Kingdom, which was virtually reduced to the territory of the former tribe of Ephraim during the years preceding the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. "To give up" implies total surrender to the process of divine judgment unto death (cf. Judg. 6:13; Micah 5:3; Ps. 44:11). The wording suggests a struggle within Yahweh. Israel should be destroyed like Admah and Zeboim, the cities which were annihilated along with Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Gen. 14:2, 8; Deut. 29:23). Deut. 29:22-28 incorporates the ultimate curse of devastation with brimstone and salt, like that of Sodom and Gomorrah, as the expected outcome when Israel violates its covenant of allegiance to Yahweh alone. But Yahweh is repulsed at the idea of taking this final step even though Israel deserves the punishment as much as Sodom and its neighbors (cf. Hos. 5:9). In the midst of Yahweh's jealous wrath His jealous love is aroused.

11:8 *b*. Yahweh had "overthrown" (הִפֹּת) the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen.

19:25; Deut. 29:23). But instead of treating Israel in like manner, Yahweh lets His own heart be "overthrown" (הִפֹּת), or "recoil," as the RSV renders the verb. Yahweh inflicts the punishment upon Himself. The pain of God is more than pity. The "heart" of Yahweh is the divine self and will; it is the seat of divine planning and compassionate purpose. The radical change in Yahweh's attitude toward Israel is further underscored by the use of the expression "my compassion grows warm and tender." The term for "compassion," although relatively rare, emphasizes the inner depth of divine concern. The expression "warm and tender," however, is inadequate to capture the full force of the verb הִפֹּת. Excitement, ferment, and heat are all elements associated with this verb. "My sympathy was fervently aroused" would express another dimension implied in this line of the Hebrew text. An almost identical idiom is found in 1 Kings 3:26, which involves the pangs of a mother's love when the life of her newborn son is in jeopardy. This inner struggle of Yahweh over the fate of rebellious Israel is a recurring theme of the prophets. Some of the prophets themselves reflect this divine agony or suffering love in their own lives. The classic expression of the pain of Yahweh is found in Jer. 31:20 (cf. Amos 7:3, 6; Jer. 26:3, which speak of Yahweh's change of heart). One is also reminded of the personal anguish of Jeremiah in passages such as Jer. 4:19-22 or 8:18-9:2.

11:9 *a*. After the divine struggle follows the divine verdict. The full fury of Yahweh's wrath will be nullified. The judgment of 8:5 is reversed. "I will not *again* destroy" does not necessarily mean a previous destruction, but rather that Yahweh will once again restore Israel to its state of acceptance in His sight despite His threat to send Israel to Egypt *again* (v. 5). How many times had God similarly reversed His decision to destroy Israel! Historically speaking, of course,

Israel was conquered, many were taken into exile in Assyria, and the people of the Northern Kingdom were assimilated with other races. The assertion in this promise of a deeper divine purpose of love just as this historical disaster was breaking is, therefore, all the more significant.

11:9 b. How can such a reversal of divine attitude be possible? Where is the consistency of God? His character is readily understood in terms of the prophet Balaam: "God is not man that He should lie, or a son of man that He should change His mind. Has He spoken and will He not do it?" (Num. 23:19). The perspective of Hosea's message is just the opposite. It is precisely because Yahweh is not a man that the normal analogies of human experience are inadequate to explain Yahweh's methods. There is no human counterpart to illustrate the depth of Yahweh's love. Yahweh is different; He is sovereign in His mercy. Or in the terms of the Old Testament, Yahweh is the Holy One. Although Yahweh had been designated holy in earlier periods of Israel, and even though the designation "holy ones" was used both in Canaan and early Israelite poetry to describe the heavenly council (Ps. 39:7; Deut. 33:2), Hosea seems to have been the first to have used the expression the Holy One as a title for Yahweh. The term underscores the transcendence and the mysterious otherness of Yahweh as He moves through the history of His people. "Holy" means to be separate rather than to be sinless, powerful rather than pure. At times the holiness of Yahweh is tantamount to the unseen "operation" of His presence as it impinges upon the people, places, and events of sacred history. The striking affirmation of Hosea's oracle, however, is the fact that this transcendent divine power, this mysterious unpredictable God, is not removed from the scene of Israel's fate, but is "in your midst!" In this the ancient covenant character of Yahweh as the great "I AM WITH YOU"

is recalled, and the eternal engagement of Yahweh as "GOD WITH US" in Jesus Christ is anticipated in faith. The prophetic picture is not one of God invading from the outer space of heaven to act as a troubleshooter for His people, but rather as an underlying personal force in the midst of life who is to be discerned as incomprehensible Love at the very moment when things appear blackest. In suffering and defeat God's compassion is revealed. The agony of Yahweh over His firstborn son Israel is a foretaste of the agony of God in His only Son at Golgotha.

III

The specific terms of hope in which the love of Yahweh would be experienced in Israel are described in Hos. 11:11. Those who actually felt the ignominy of exile would enjoy a second exodus and return from Egypt and Assyria. The fact that we have no historical evidence that any Israelites of the Northern Kingdom actually returned from exile in no way nullifies the importance of this vision of hope. Israel could hope in Yahweh precisely because Yahweh was the Holy One who was empathetic to Israel's needs. The purpose of Yahweh would prevail despite political disaster. In this pericope the whole range of elective love, disciplinary love, punitive love, suffering love, and inexplicable holy love exhibit the character of Yahweh as the God who through His Son Jesus Christ brings all the dimensions of love into focus for us. Christ was the Holy One in our midst in the ultimate sense. He has so interpreted and revealed God's love that we can see the holy love of God in the midst of life here and now. For in Christ His only Son He has elected us as Israel, as His own new people. In us, the new Israel, Yahweh will express the compassionate purpose of His holy will so that we will be led to experience through living "with Him" in the midst of life, what and who God is — the Holy One.

JUBILATE, THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

ISAIAH

Is. 40:25-31

Introduction

This Sunday in North American circles is remembered by business houses and family enthusiasts as "Mother's Day." The Gospel's illustration of the birth of a child (John 16: 16-22) will probably come in for its share of attention. Deeper than the illustration Jesus uses is the theology behind it. Today's Epistle, 1 Peter 2:11-20, stresses that we bear sufferings for God's glory. As Jesus stresses, so does our prophet:

Isaiah — Sorrow Turned into Joy

I. The God of Captive Israel

A. Isaiah predicts people will be carried into captivity, Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar ruled for 43 years. Empire went from Mediterranean to Susa in Near East, from Persian Gulf to upper Tigris, from Taurus Mountains to first cataract of the Nile. Conquerors transport peoples from one land to another to control them more easily. December 598 B. C., King Jehoiachin and 10,000 leading citizens are captured. "Sing us a song! How can we sing? Our harps we will not use. Sorrow!" (Ps. 138)

B. Does God know? Does God care? Does God understand? Can God understand the thousand languages from Babylon? Nations, peoples, individuals, driven to despair, with spiritual problems, temptations, and doubts as well as physical trials.

II. The God of Creation

A. Text: Is. 40:25 f. summons to remember the Creator and look to the stars. The stars will not help, but they will remind. Ps. 147: "outcasts of Israel" and "stars."

Dr. Hubble, Wilson Observatory, says there are 100 million stellar systems scattered in the universe at an average distance of 2 million light-years (and 1 light-year = 6

trillion miles, and this means 12 plus 15 zeros miles away)! As a general parades the army, God knows *all* of them, and not one is missing.

B. The God of Creation knows me, a mere cipher to others, amongst the millions in our land. He's got the whole world in His hands. And in Jesus our security is certain.

III. The God of Eternity

A. Text: Is. 40:27 f. stresses that God is everlasting; nothing and no one wears Him out.

God's care is eternal. With Him there is no night, no day; no time out or time off. He is always there. "From generation to generation Thou art God" (Ps. 90). He has the final say.

B. Christ is crucified, but sorrow turns to joy, for He rises from the dead, ascends, and returns to take us unto Himself. The eternal God cannot be conquered; He lives!

IV. The God of Might

A. Text: Is. 40:29-31 points out that even if we weary and get tired He knows our way and gives us strength. Ultimately we rejoice.

B. We may feel "our way is hid" and our "right disregarded" (Is. 40:27), but God knows, and God acts. It is His nature to give what is right, and He is almighty. Shame to the proud, strength to the weak, poverty to those who trust in riches, light to the darkened, health to the sick, life to the dead, forgiveness to the sinner. He has authority in all things.

C. "Wait" for God, be not impatient. Wait for the Lord, and He shall strengthen thine heart. Cf. Is. 49:23. Emmaus disciples, Thomas, Mary Magdalene, weep and lament. Sorrow is turned into Easter joy.

D. "Walk" — seems anticlimactic. We want the wings of a dove to fly (Ps. 55:6) or feet to flee from trouble (Gen. 39:9 ff.).

We want to jet out of trouble and tour the world, go to another city and start life over, run out of the house when there is trouble. But He wishes us to walk with Him at our side. He turns our sorrow into joy. Christ is with us, in us, around us, before us, above us. Jesus Christ has defeated all our enemies, sin, Satan, sepulcher. Here and hereafter our sorrow is turned into joy.

CANTATE, FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

ISAIAH

Is. 54:1-8

Propers

The *Epistle* (James 1:16-21), declaring that good gifts come from God, fits well into the promise of the Savior that He will send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit (*Gospel*, John 16:5-15), who is the "better Gift" (Luke 11:13). The stress of singing is centered in the *Introit* for the day (Ps. 98:1 f.). Is there a connection between "singing" and the sending of the Holy Spirit? Indeed, for even if our Lord departs from us and we are "left alone," yet our sorrow turns to joy. We will not have His visible presence, but our eyes, even as the disciples said on the way to Emmaus, will be opened. This is what Gregory had in mind, *Moralia*, 8, 13: [it is] "as if He were openly to say: If I do not withdraw My body from your bodily perception, I cannot through My consoling Spirit lead you to spiritual vision" (Toal's *Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, II, 338). It is in weakness that we see His power, in sin we find His forgiveness, in darkness we rejoice because of His light, in death we have His life.

Introduction

All good men dislike to see children suffer. But it becomes disturbingly clear that neither all men nor all women are "good." Evidences of parental brutality toward chil-

dren, increase of women abandoning children born in and out of wedlock. Family concern (the stress of this month in the parish program) needs emphasis. But Isaiah leads us to a wider concern. How does God deal with His children? Each one of us is tempted to speak Zion's complaint—Is. 49: 14. The Lord's message to us is that He never forgets His children (49:15). In this text Isaiah uses the idea of God's *gift* of children as proof of His love. God demonstrates His love for His children by promising them children and by giving them children. If we will think of our many needs as "barrenness," His promises can be our reasons for songs.

Sing, O Barren

I. Sing in the Midst of Barrenness

A. It may appear hopeless. Sarah laughed at the very idea that she would have a child. The tradition among the Jews was that Rachel wept for her children as they went into captivity because they would be no more. Everything rational may prove that we are in the midst of hopeless situations. The Emmaus disciples had no hope. Despair tempts us as we bury loved ones, or when our task seems overwhelming, the odds too great. Recognize that what *is* almost too great, too deeply ingrained, is our sin. We doubt God's interest in or His ability to do anything in our situation.

B. God is Creator, gives power of procreation. Sarah and Abraham have Isaac. But more—God makes it possible for the sinner to sing. Whatever our reason for despondency, there is cause for rejoicing. Israel will rise again. "Ought not Christ to have suffered and risen again?" "Is anything too much for God?" "With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible." It is more than "where there is life there is hope." God gives the capital-lettered LIFE, Jesus Christ Himself.

II. *Sing, for Barrenness Must Pass*

A. The house is to be built larger, the cords of the tents are to be lengthened, the stakes are to be strengthened for expansion. Growth is coming. Hopes and promises are to be fulfilled. It is the eve of the return for exiles.

B. "Sorrow for a moment," said Jesus to the disciples, for "sorrow turns to joy." "For the brief moment" (Is. 54:7) it appears that God forsakes. "Our hearts will burn within us," as did those of the Emmaus disciples.

C. The church seems to be fading and passing. Statistics reveal a birth-rate increase in non-Christian areas and a decrease in Christian areas, as well as an increase of non-Christian adherents as compared with Christian disciples. "The church is losing out," cry enemies within and without. "The gates of hell shall not prevail." Although some declare this an overworked passage, the only "overworking" is that of our God, who continues to preserve and to increase His own. We ought not weep for ourselves or our children but for others who know not God. We ought to sing out God's righteousness that the church might "break forth on the right hand and on the left."

III. *Sing, for Barrenness Has Passed*

A. The chapter preceding this text, Is. 53, one of the suffering Servant songs, and the chapter following our text, Is. 55, one of the pictures of the Messianic kingdom, show that in Christ and by His suffering and triumph the new era is upon us. Do we doubt it (Is. 53:1)? Have we ignored Him (v. 3)? Still God has accomplished His loving purposes (vv. 4-6). Are we hesitant? Do we look elsewhere for aid (Is. 55:1 f.)? It is time—now—to seek the Lord. (Vv. 3, 6, 7)

B. The fruitfulness extends to others. "Lo, they come from afar" (Is. 60). Sins are paid for, so that all may rejoice.

ROGATE, FIFTH SUNDAY
AFTER EASTER

ZEPHANIAH

ZEPH. 3:8, 9

Prophets

Both *Epistle* (James 1:22-27) and *Gospel* (John 16:23-30) make a fitting climax to the Easter season and give a foretaste of Ascensiontide. Because our Lord Christ has redeemed us with His blood (*Gradual*), we are delivered from sin, sepulcher, and Satan. In Jesus' name we may approach our heavenly Father and make our supplications to Him. Whether it be the formal liturgical prayer as God's people come together or the "arrow" prayers shot so quickly to God in our hour (year or second) of need, we are honoring and praising Him with trust that in Him alone is our help. The victory of Easter makes possible Rogate. But our task is to translate His victory into our praying.

Background and Introduction

Zephaniah, descendant of Hezekiah and thus of royal descent, was distantly related to King Josiah. In early days of Josiah's reign Zephaniah foresaw the dangers. He speaks of judgment upon Judah and upon the nations. He prophesied ultimate deliverance for Judah.

With Amos and Hosea he notes that the future of God's people is bound up with the quality of their relations with one another. He sums up the ideal relationship with God as a praying relationship. His message to us is that we must look where we stand with our fellowmen and how we stand with God in order that we may be God's praying people.

If men are to communicate with one another, they must understand one another. If men are to communicate with God, they must know something about God. If they are to pray to God *about* man (themselves and others), they must understand what stands between God and man—and the

"Go-between" God and man. Only then are they able to speak.

The Language of Prayer

I. *We Need to Understand God and Man*

A. *God is filled with indignation and fierce anger.*

1. What is your relation to God? Have you moved Him to jealousy? Is He the Cornerstone, Capstone, Core, Heart, Crown of your life? What are your fears? Do they seem greater than God? What are your hopes? Do they include God? In the midst of distress where would you turn? What insurance do you have to assure your children an education if you die? If mutual funds fail, what happens to your pension? Is God the Giver of every good gift to you?

2. What is your respect for your neighbor? In home life, with son, daughter, with father, mother? Are your in-laws outlaws to you? Are you concerned about keeping your neighbor's home holy and clean? Are you jealous of what others have and thus moved to suspect or to disrespect your neighbor? And also in turn to disrespect or suspect your God? Discontent and unbelief are twins.

B. *God's indignation and fierce anger will be expressed.*

1. He will act. Cf. Zeph. 1:14-16. The Day of Wrath comes on account of our shortcomings and our rebellings over against God's commandments.

2. His acts will come as we see "Heav'n and earth in ashes burning" (Hymn 607).

C. *God is summoning us by indignation and fierce anger to prayer.*

1. We reexamine the quality of our religion. We reexamine the love of God to us in Christ, who conquered sin and death as He suffered the wrath of God. We reexamine our relations to our fellow men. We

reexamine the privilege of prayer in His name.

2. With confidence we go about our work. May 19, 1780, almost 200 years ago, in New England at 10 a.m. it was as dark as if it were 10 p.m. The Connecticut Legislature was in session. Col. Davenport, a member of the legislature, said that if it were the Day of the Lord, "we have nothing to fear . . . because Jesus Christ is our Salvation." And if it were not, he went on, then we have much work to do. "I would rather be found here in the legislature doing my duty, instead of running off some place, trying to find refuge and security."

3. In the midst of doom or gloom we pray. Zephaniah urges us to call upon God while He may be found, while He is near.

II. *We Need to Understand Ourselves*

If our prayers are to speak a language that shows we know what we are talking about, we must understand ourselves.

A. The language of prayer is a language of pure lips. Is it not easy in midst of argument between husband and wife for one to shout in answer at the other, "O.K., I love you!" and thus to indicate, "Let the argument be settled, and please, please keep quiet!"? The words of prayer are not enough. They pass through lips dried with bitterness or moistened with honey, and how they are said reveals the state of the one who prays.

B. The language of prayer is a language of a sincere heart. "The words of my mouth" and "the meditations of my heart" go together. This is why our service begins: "Beloved in the Lord! Let us draw near with a true heart. . . ." A true heart sticks to the facts, conforms to all that is true, is a heart that can be trusted. So we approach God and confess in prayer that many times we have missed the mark of holiness. What a joy to know that in Jesus Christ this is possible! The good news of God's love in Christ rises to its peak of blessedness at this

very point. It is possible because of Christ that I can be truthful in my confession of sins. And God is faithful and true and forgives us our sins. (1 John 1)

C. The language of prayer is a language of faith and confidence in His will.

1. *Robinson Crusoe*, by Daniel Defoe: ill man after shipwreck crawls to a trunk, opens it, and pulls out a book that opens to the passage: "Call on Me in the day of trouble. . . ." He prayed "without ceasing." Ships returning to his native England passed him by. After he finally returned he wrote: "All the time I was there I doubted. God said, 'Call on Me in the day of trouble and I will deliver thee,' and I forgot the rest of the passage, 'and thou shalt glorify Me.'" He remained on the island to instruct his man Friday.

2. Tad Goethal was in Gen. Andree's army, which fought against Adolf Hitler and was defeated. Tad was in a concentration camp, later released by British forces. Together with 50 others he emigrated to Canada and requested our Missouri Synod to provide services in his native tongue, Polish. When it was learned that the only available pastor was a man who years before by unfortunate circumstances had been a member of Hitler's forces and had fought against their people, Tad and his friends were disheartened, but finally agreed to accept his services. Tad then said, "If we pray to God for forgiveness of our sins in Jesus' name, then, too, we must learn to forgive and love as we have been forgiven and loved." This is the language of prayer, for it is a language that glorifies and honors God.

THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

Ps. 68:18

Introduction

The psalm is quoted in Eph. 4:8-10. For Paul the ascension of our Lord fits into the

framework of this psalm. Psalm 68 was written to celebrate the return of the ark of the covenant from the enemy camp of the Philistines to Mount Zion. The Israelites sang the psalm as they climbed the heights of Zion.

Paul knew well how a conquering Roman general returned from the wars. There would be a victory procession with slaves from England or from Gaul, young men, princes, and princesses; chariots and soldiers; spoils of war and trophies. The conqueror would receive tributes and gifts. He would distribute gifts and souvenirs that others might share in his victory.

After taking upon Himself our nature, Jesus met mankind's enemy head on. His death seemed to be a defeat, but His resurrection showed it to be a part of His larger victory. For 40 days He appeared, displaying Himself as Savior and Lord before He withdrew His visible presence from men. These appearances demonstrated that for all future time His disciples could pray, "Come, Lord Jesus, be our Guest." His appearance need cause no fright to His disciples. He is a conqueror, yes, but they know Him as their Friend. He gives gifts that enable us to share His victory.

I. Thou Hast Ascended on High

A. Jesus is Lord. Not a mere prophet who is misunderstood, but as Thomas said, "My Lord and my God." "Jesus the Crucified is Lord," said Peter on Pentecost.

B. God highly exalted Him. The ascension was a lifting up on high "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow" (Phil. 2:9-11). Jesus is enthroned. He reigns without defeat "until all enemies are under His feet." "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." (1 Cor. 15:25-27)

II. Thou Hast Led Captivity Captive

Time has been captured by the Timeless One. Sin has been destroyed by the Sinless One. Fear has vanished because of the Fear-

less One. Death has been overcome by the Deathless One. He will be obeyed. He fights; He punishes; He rewards; He contends for His own. We are safe and secure. (Col. 2:15; 1 Peter 3:21)

III. *Thou Hast Received Gifts for Men*

A. He gives teachers, pastors, evangelists, for His saints. (Eph. 4:11 ff.)

B. He made purification for our sins. (Heb. 1:3)

C. He promises divine companionship. (John 14:23)

D. He promises the Holy Spirit. (John 15:26)

Conclusion

There comes the grand day when those who conquer will be seated with the Conqueror on the throne (Rev. 3:21). We who today stand gazing into heaven must now use His gifts to be able to share in His victory.

EXAUDI, THE SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION

HABAKKUK

HAB. 2:1-4

Prophets for the day.—The *Gospel* (Luke 15:1-10), describing the search for the lost sheep and the lost coin, places strong emphasis on the steadfast love of God. God's steadfast love is not content merely to wait for the return of the lost, but moves Him to go and search till the lost is found. The *Epistle* (1 Peter 5:6-11) calls for steadfastness and confidence in suffering, and thus the circumstances of every Christian are sketched. Is the knowledge of God's steadfast love enough to keep us steadfast in every trial?

This is Habakkuk's problem, too: "Can one maintain faith and confidence in God?"

Introduction

The problem is never new and ever new. It is a national and a personal problem. Questioning may arise at "the prosperity of

the wicked" (Ps. 73:3), or might show itself in the *why* which Job attempted to answer. Habakkuk wonders why the ungodly triumph and why God's promises tarry.

The Righteous Shall Live by His Faith

I. *Faith Requires Confidence in God's Promises*

A. Each promise has an appointed season. The "vision awaits its time" (v. 3). Gal. 4: 4: "When the time had fully come, God..."

B. Each promise proves true; "it will not lie" (v. 3). Christ said: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." His predictions came true; His promises are Amen.

C. Each promise is individually fulfilled. Fruits of the earth ripen, each one in its own season with its own fruit and blessing. All the promises of the Christ were worth waiting for, and more are yet to come. Mulberry tree comes slowly and almond quickly, but each punctually in His pattern.

II. *Faith Stands Ready to Be Reproved and Ready to Be Blessed by God*

The promises may be delayed; "subject to change without or with notice."

A. Faith takes a determined stand: "I will take my stand to watch" (v. 1); not doubt-filled like a wave of the sea (James 1:6). "I believe; help me when my faith falls short."

B. Faith stands at attention; "to watch"; as a sentinel on the tower; "look forth to see what He will say to me" (v. 1). Ready to be taught by the Lord.

C. Faith stands patiently, knowing that God is near: "I will . . . He will . . . I will." Between me and God. He died for me (for us, too). I (not merely we) am a sinner. I cannot lose myself in the crowd, but need have no fear of being lost in the crowd. I am saved in a world that is loved.

D. Faith has a submissive attitude: he who exalts himself shall "fail" (v. 4). Chas-

tisement will still become blessing. Faith accepts both. God has two hands: one with the strap and the other with the apple.

III. *Faith Has Works to Do*

Not only to wait but to work; not only to have an attitude but to perform an act. "Make it plain upon tablets . . . write the vision . . . so he who runs reads." (V.3)

A. "Write"; record it permanently, and have it declared for others. "Speak"; so others run and read and declare and see; and then still others will read and run and declare and see.

B. We take this work seriously. Share and tell loved ones, neighbors, fellow workers of God's plans, God's grace, God's fulfilled promises. Faith cannot live in isolation. "I believe; therefore have I spoken."

IV. *Faith Brings Results*

"He whose soul is not upright in him shall fail, but the righteous shall live by his faith." (V.4)

A. The proud man feels no need of God. Why have a Savior if there is no sin or if sin can be removed by self? An almighty God is not needed by one who feels no weakness. If I have all I need, I have no need of God.

B. The humble man sees his need of God. His righteousness is not in his own self but in God, in whom is his faith.

Conclusion

It is the promise of God's love in Christ — which has never failed — that summons me to bow before Him and to summon others to faith.

WHITSUNDAY, THE FEAST OF PENTECOST

JEREMIAH

JER. 31:31-34

Introduction

"The Lord speaks!" This refrain is frequently repeated in the disclosures and

expressions of the prophet Jeremiah. He speaks as well today. How we should listen!

The Babylonians had conquered the countries along the Mediterranean Sea even to the border of Egypt. Jerusalem, too, was unable to escape an inexorable power. Jeremiah stressed the implication of the conquest, a punishment they deserved. While false prophets said the doom would be delayed or that it would never come (Jer. 23:9-22), Jeremiah emphasized its inevitability.

God made a covenant with Israel by oath "from her youth" (Jer. 22:21), but from that day to Jeremiah's day Israel had not obeyed (Ex. 29:5; Jer. 7:23-26). Israel would not hearken to, would not obey, the voice of God (Jer. 11:3-5). When she refused, all that was left was judgment — the destruction of the temple, the end of temple worship, the captivity of the "worshippers."

God warns, God gives words of hope, God gives words of encouragement. God speaks. It is as true today when the Spirit speaks to the heart as when God speaks through prophets. Judgment still threatens those who do not listen. Blessing is given to those who hear.

The Lord Speaks

I. *The Lord Covenanted with His People*

A. "Covenant" is a mutual agreement between two parties and remains in force as long, but (among men) only as long, as both abide by the terms. God's covenant is always a "one-way" covenant of grace (חֶסֶד — the unmerited favor bestowed by a superior upon an inferior). Jerusalem had not kept or obeyed the utterances of the Lord. The bride was unfaithful like a harlot (Jer. 3). God asked that she acknowledge her past action, show contrition for her way of life, give expression to a desire for a change of heart and mind and body and soul — for all of this is "repentance" (Jer. 4:4). She "listened" to dumb idols instead of the living Lord. (Jer. 10)

B. What alert and sensitive person among

us—in moment of real soul-searching—will not confess his spiritual identity with rebellious Israel?

But God will not abandon His people, He will not break His covenant, He will not go back on His oath. (Jer. 29:10 f.)

C. In Holy Baptism we were made children of God. By His Word and the water He brought us into His gracious covenant. Buried with Christ by Baptism into His death, with Him we are enabled to rise to new life.

II. *The Lord Speaks in a New Spiritual Covenant in the Heart*

A. The renewal of the covenant to God's people assures us that it is an "everlasting covenant" (Gen. 17:7). From the time of Adam (Hos. 6:7) through Abraham (Gen. 22:18). It was signed with circumcision (Gen. 17:9-14), sealed with blood (Ex. 24:7 f.; Heb. 9:18-22), and fulfilled in the blood of the covenant with Christ (1 Cor. 11:25; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; Matt. 16:28). Now the bestowal of the Spirit energizes God's covenant people in a new way.

B. The Law is to be written in the heart, so that obedience will be heartfelt, sincere, willing. This sign (Ezek. 36:27) because Christ came not to destroy the Law but to fulfill it. To know the Law would mean to know the torah, the "revelation of God." Having the Spirit, one could know the Lord. Without Him one cannot know the Lord or His will. Only the Spirit gives a man knowledge of God. Even Scripture, says Peter, is not of private interpretation but is of the Spirit.

C. The Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are God's children. He forgives and remembers sins no more. Daily He repeats His forgiveness, everlastingly (Jer. 50:29). The heart forgiven can pray, praise, serve, love, rejoice.

D. Receiving the blood of the new covenant in Holy Communion, I am aware God

has not forgotten me or left me in my sin, but out of grace and mercy He has given me His Son Jesus Christ. This assurance is before me constantly in the presence of Christ at Communion.

Conclusion

Thus the bride "knows" again her Beloved. He forgives: the heart is no more troubled, the heart is renewed. For God is faithful, and His people are faith-filled in the new covenant.

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EXEGETICAL NOTES — JER. 31:31-34

I

Jeremiah's message is not a flight of fancy into distant reaches of time. It is a word molded in the crucible of his own day and his own experience with a form and content that has immediate rapport and meaning for his disillusioned audience. The fall of Jerusalem meant humiliation unto death. Moreover, this degradation of God's people was inevitable. That was the relentless message which Jeremiah drummed into the people of Judah (31:15). The day of disaster meant the end of an age, the death of a nation, and the removal of all the aids to faith, like Zion, the ark, the kingship, and the temple, which over the years had lost any real meaning. Even the election itself had become a mechanical item during years of complacency and apathy. For Zion to fall was a traumatic experience beyond comprehension for God's people. Such an act called into question the efficacy and the reality of Yahweh as their God. "Your ways and your doings have brought this upon you" (4:18), stated Jeremiah time after time. God's people were rejected. The covenant bond of Sinai was apparently broken forever. The people of Judah suddenly realized that they faced a future of despair and total alienation from

God, who had once chosen them for His own possession and given them a preferred status above all nations (Ex. 19:3-6). History had come full circle. Soon they would be under the intolerable burden of slavery and exile once more. Just as this hour of desolation was about to envelop God's people, the prophet Jeremiah seemed to reverse his character. The same man who had been vehemently preaching unmitigated doom for years now dreamed of a new dawn, a new beginning, a new exodus, a new entry into the Promised Land, and therewith a new covenant. It is the new covenant aspect of this dream which we shall now examine.

II

V. 31. "Behold, the days are coming" is an eschatological formula of introduction; it does not necessarily designate a distant age. The oncoming era will be one of radical divine involvement and intimate rapport with God which in turn is either indicative of, or to be fulfilled in, the final kingdom of God. The expression suggests a new beginning in history. The oracular formula of prophetic authority, "says the Lord," is repeated four times in this pericope, thereby underscoring the intimate conversation of the prophet with his God and the great theological import of this pericope. The absolute divine initiative in the new covenant, as in the case of the covenants with the patriarchs, is emphasized by the chain of verbs in the first person: "I will cut (make)," "I will write," "I will put," "I will forgive," "I will remember" (cf. Gen. 17:1-8). "Make a covenant" is a paraphrase for "cut a covenant," which designates the ancient perspective of binding a covenant treaty through the inscription of its laws on stone (Joshua 8:32) and through sacrificial rites to enforce the covenant oath (Jer. 34:18 f.; Gen. 15: 7 ff.). If the Hebrew text is correct in v. 31, the prophet hopes that this covenant will be made with "the house of Israel and the house of Judah." The dream persisted for genera-

tions that the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah would one day be reunited as in the days of David (Hos. 1:11; Is. 11:11-13; Ezek. 37:15-24; Jer. 3:18; 50:4). But the dream died as a political hope.

The expression "a new covenant" belongs, first of all, to the entire category of typology which stemmed from the enslavement of God's people in exile. A new exodus, a new election, a new crossing of the desert, and a new entry of the Promised Land are envisioned in Jeremiah and Is. 40-55 in particular. Terms such as "the new song" (Is. 42:10, Ps. 96:1; etc.) and "a new thing" (Is. 43:19) belong to the same circle of ideas. The humiliation of the exile, although tolerable physically, meant a complete and radical reversal of theological thinking. The destruction of Zion meant the end of an era. The "new," which God alone could introduce, would be a sharp break with the past. In this respect the new covenant stood in antithesis to past renewals of the covenant, which were reaffirmations and reenactments of the essentials of the Sinai covenant concerning the rejection of all false gods (cf. Deut. 5:3). Jeremiah had experienced just such a renewal in the reform movement of King Josiah in 621 B.C. (2 Kings 23:1-3). The new covenant is one which cannot be defined in terms of God's past actions; it terminates the previous *Heilsgeschichte*. Truly a remarkable affirmation for a man about to taste the bitter destruction of his city and people.

V. 32. "Not like" makes the antithesis explicit. Rarely are God's own mighty deeds contrasted in the Old Testament. "The fathers" in this context are not the patriarchs but those who had experienced the exodus. The exodus from Egypt was *the* great moment of redemption in Israel's past. That event was the "Gospel event" to which His people repeatedly turned as the source of faith and hope (cf. Ex. 14:30 f.). The descriptive title frequently applied to Yah-

weh was "the One who brought you out of Egypt." The exodus was, above all, the motive for the initial election response and covenant decision by Israel at Sinai (Ex. 19: 3-6). The significance of a new exodus is already implied in Jer. 31:1-6. The old covenant in Jer. 31 means the Sinai covenant rather than the unilateral covenant promises given to the patriarchs, as in Gen. 17:1-7 or 15:18.

Israel had flagrantly violated the Sinai covenant times without number. This is the unending refrain of the early oracles of Jeremiah (e.g., 2:1—4:4; 11:1-8). The expression "break a covenant" means to deliberately violate a bond or trust. The bond is described here in terms of a marriage relationship between Yahweh and Israel (cf. 2:2; 3:6-14, and often in Hosea). Israel was once the bride upon which Yahweh had lavished His elective love; He was her husband. The wording of Jeremiah has a *double-entendre* at this point, for the Hebrew בַּעַל can mean both "master" or "husband" and "Baal." In reality God's people had preferred to treat Yahweh as a Baal or to worship Baal, the storm god of Canaan, in addition to Yahweh. Quite understandably, therefore, Hosea dreams of an era when Israelites would avoid saying "my בַּעַל" and say "my man" instead (Hos. 2:16). Despite Israel's repeated rejection of the covenant, Yahweh's covenant love still persisted. In this agony of Yahweh's heart we find an underlying element of continuity between the old covenant and the new.

V. 33. The terms of the new covenant expectations of Jeremiah leap beyond his immediate experience into the realm of the ideal. They are expressions of the superlative of faith. He hears the oracle, "I will put My Law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts." Several factors need to be borne in mind at this point. Jeremiah regularly operated with the heart as the religious self or center of man rather than as the seat of human intellect. God tests the

"heart" to discover man's attitude to Him (12:3; 11:20). Jeremiah insisted, however, that the heart of Israel was totally perverse and ineradicably evil. Guilt had been indelibly engraved on its heart with a diamond stylus. Israel stood eternally guilty (17:1; cf. 7:24; 11:8; 13:10, 23; 16:12; 17:9). A new beginning, therefore, demanded a new heart, a new creation of the inner man. God Himself would have to do what He had demanded: "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, remove the foreskins of your heart." (4:4)

Ancient Near Eastern covenant treaties regularly incorporated laws or stipulations whereby the covenant relationship was made dynamic and binding. These laws were frequently inscribed on a tablet which was thereupon deposited in the local shrine. The new covenant envisioned by Jeremiah will have no external covenant Law, no decalog inscribed on stone, but an innate sensitivity to the will of God. The Law, which for Jeremiah normally means the covenant Law of the Decalog, will be a part of man's nature. Obedience will no longer be a problem. Unwavering covenant allegiance will be instinctive. Truly a remarkable ideal! Commitment will then be as natural as rebellion had been previously. The "commanded covenant" (Deut. 4:13) would be replaced by the "implanted covenant." The covenant nevertheless remains a covenant in which the inner personal relations of mutual trust are expressed by the traditional formula, "I will be their God, and they shall be My people." The magnanimous covenant Overlord selects Israel once more as His undeserving vassal people. Israel's response, however, will now flow from the inner springs of faith. The threat of the covenant curse will be gone, and the obligation to perform external rites will no more burden the lives of God's people. The danger of legalism will be abolished!

V. 34 a. The second major ideal of Jeremiah's new covenant has been variously in-

terpreted. The wording of the text reads, "And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and teach his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest." By associating this hope with the context of 31:29 f. it becomes apparent that there is a greater emphasis on the individual than upon the communal aspect of man's relationship with God in the new covenant. Everyone, from the least to the greatest, will have a firsthand experience of God's reality and presence in his life. Intimate religious experiences will not be confined to the prophet who is privileged to stand in the heavenly assembly (cf. 23:18-22), or to a chosen generation that enjoys an exodus or a Sinai encounter, or to the assembled congregation in cultic array. The insights of this second ideal, however, penetrate much farther than this. The emphasis is not primarily on the individualistic aspect; the new covenant is made with Israel as a people, the new, recreated people of God. The radical element of the second ideal is the termination of past traditions as vital forces of faith for Israel. The advent of the new covenant will mark the end of the old modes of education. Religious instruction will no longer be necessary. The ancient practice of dialog and questioning in the city gate will be obsolete. The routine of query and exhortation associated with the reenactment and renewal of the covenant will be irrelevant. (See Deut. 5—11)

In ancient Israel "knowing the Lord" had two basic features: personal experience of God and learning God's covenant will through priestly instruction (Hos. 4:1; 5:4; 6:6; Jer. 2:8; 9:24). The latter feature will be eliminated in the new covenant so that Israel's experience of God will be direct and immediate. It will be unnecessary to inquire about the will and word of Yahweh through the traditional channels of communication. Instead, each Israelite will possess an instinctive understanding and appreciation of Yahweh as his covenant Lord. The radical di-

mension of Jeremiah's affirmation of hope can only be realized when we recall that he envisions the removal of the ark of the covenant, the elimination of the temple, the destruction of the holy city, as well as all the accepted media of education in Israel. The new people of God will not need these props of faith; their love of Yahweh would be natural and immediate. Not only the Law but also the Gospel would be written in their hearts! Once again, an unbelievable ideal of prophetic hope!

V.34 b. The final assertion of this prophetic dream provides the basis and ground for the entire vision. The causative *יִּ* (because) is emphatic and introduces the foundation for the preceding claims. "For I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more!" This statement must be set in juxtaposition to the forthright proclamation of Jeremiah that the sins of Israel cannot be erased, that its heart is totally perverse and stubborn, and that the people are controlled by the violent forces of an evil which Israel has set in motion. No rite could expiate or ward off the effects of this evil. Only a miracle could save Israel from eternal rejection when the inevitable judgment of Yahweh took its toll. And that is what Jeremiah anticipates in faith. In the depth of God's grace a new beginning is always possible (cf. 18:1-11; Hos. 11.). The final action of Yahweh will be to forgive and forget. The term "forgive" (*סָלַח*), like the expression "create" (*בָּרָא*), is regularly used only of divine activity. Such forgiveness means that divine initiative whereby God Himself effects reconciliation with His people through a condescending act of sheer grace. "Not to remember" means to make ineffective the forces of alienation which come into play when God marks (remembers) an offense against Himself. When this happens, the covenant love of Yahweh grounds the covenant relationship on the basis of a divine freedom which is freely

imparted and implanted in His people. Logic is transcended and normal experience becomes an obsolete criterion in such a vision. Such a hope is unbelievable. Hence Yahweh Himself must impart belief through the experience of forgiveness.

III

A word must be said about the realization of this prophetic hope of a new covenant, a hope which is not confined to Jeremiah. It is immediately apparent that the idealistic terms of the portrait are never fulfilled perfectly. There was no union of the tribes of the North and the South in the way that many of the prophets seemed to hope. The return of Israelites from exile was a sorry trickle of disgruntled faithful from isolated areas. There was no mass return from all corners of the diaspora. Moreover, the expectation that God's people would possess an instinctive knowledge of Law, which they would quite naturally obey, or an immediate comprehension and understanding of God apart from the traditional modes of instruction is only partially realized even in the most sanctified of God's servants. It is a glib overstatement, therefore, to say that *all* these prophecies are fulfilled in Christ Jesus of Nazareth, for they looked beyond Him to the new Israel. The hope as a whole is indeed realized in Christ—but how? In that basic affirmation which is the springboard for all the other possibilities of faith! In the forgiveness of sins!

When Christ Himself refers to the new covenant, He speaks of "the blood of the new covenant which is poured out for many for the remission of sins." The connection between the hope and the realization is the remission of sins. This word is the link, the focus through which all the other hopes can be reinterpreted in the light of Christ's coming. For Christ is the *New*. When the *New* finally comes, we must reevaluate the old in order to see the deeper dimension which God has intended. The realization of a hope rarely corresponds precisely to the original range

of the hope itself. This truth must be kept in mind even when viewing the fulfillment of the promises and hopes of the Old Testament in general. Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant is a case in point.

The New Testament references to the new covenant passages illustrate further how the New Testament *interprets* the hope of Jeremiah and adds dimensions of meaning or association never spelled out by Jeremiah. Paul and Christ speak of the "blood" of the new covenant, thereby linking the new covenant with the old covenant rite or sprinkling or pouring blood as a seal of intimate covenant communion. The writer to the Hebrews sees numerous other Christological connections between the new covenant and the rites and mediatorship of the old covenant (Heb. 8—10). Thus it is only through the coming of Christ, the *New*, that the veil is removed for us to understand and interpret the old covenant Word (2 Cor. 3:14-16). This principle of interpreting the activity of God in the Word and in the world, as the prophets and apostles did, from the perspective of forgiveness is one basic truth which this pericope offers. By applying this truth we can learn to see the *New* not only in explicit references to the Word fulfilled but also in the Word at large throughout the Scripture, the worshiping community and the world of our day. Then perhaps we can leap beyond the frightening omens of the future and offer a vision of ideals that will give hope to this struggling post-modern age.

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