

The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

...Sometimes it is easy for us to give abstract defenses of doctrines but very difficult to speak personally and spiritually about our faith in God. We must be able to tell men how wonderful and blessed our God is. We must be able to tell our neighbor, who is not of our church, what wonderful things the Lord our God has done for us. We must be able to tell our neighbors in a personal way of the great blessedness of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ, how great His forgiving mercy, how marvelous His love, how amazing His grace.

See "The Calling of All Believers in the Work of Evangelism" —page 175

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MEDITATION

The Faith of Amram and Jochebed

Rev. H. Veldman

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment."

Heb. 11:23

Amram and Jochebed, the parents of Moses, both of the tribe of Levi—why are they mentioned here in Hebrews 11? What a difference between all these "heroes" of faith! What deeds of faith are listed of Abraham! And notice what we read in the verses 33-34. But all that we read of Amram and

Jochebed is that they hid Moses for three months! One might ask: how can this be considered an act of faith? Is this not the least that one might expect of them? Would we, for example, compare this act of Moses' parents with what we read of Abraham and of the three friends of Daniel?

What a comforting scripture this is! Presuppose that only the heroics of Abraham and other similar heroics were mentioned here in Hebrews 11. Wouldn't we become very discouraged? Must we, to show our faith, match the heroics of Abraham, quench the violence of fire (as did the three friends of Daniel) and stop the mouths of lions (as did Daniel)? However, Amram and Jochebed are also listed here.

ITS DARK BACKGROUND

Egypt had become for the children of Israel an house of bondage. Israel had entered the land of Egypt as a guest, invited by the king. However, Israel's status had been changed from that of a guest to that of a slave. This history we know.

How must we account for this change? On the one hand, it was certainly an act of cruelty. To change the status of a defenseless people, invited as a guest, to that of a slave, and then to attempt deliberately to destroy them, was a cruel act indeed. It is true that a new pharaoh had ascended the throne of Egypt, a pharaoh who was an Egyptian, having succeeded the shepherd kings who were Hyksos, and who knew not Joseph and regarded him not. What Joseph, a Hebrew, had done for Egypt did not interest him in the least. Besides, there was also the tremendous growth of the children of Israel. Israel might therefore threaten Egypt, later ally itself with forces and powers that would seek the overthrow of this mighty nation.

However, this does not constitute the fundamental reason for this bondage. After all, Egypt had nothing to fear from Israel. Besides, the king could have requested or commanded Israel to leave Egypt. The cause for Israel's oppression was spiritual. It is true that Israel was not a warlike people. They were a shepherd people. But it is also true, and most emphatically, that they were a different people. Egypt was a heathen, idolatrous nation. Israel worshipped Jehovah. Israel, therefore, remained alone, did not amalgamate with Egypt, retained its own peculiar identity. And Egypt, we can readily understand, hated that life of the people of Israel; Israel was a constant testimony against them. And, of course, Egypt and Pharaoh were moved by the devil to destroy this people of God and to frustrate the coming of the birth of the Christ. This is vividly held before us in Revelation 12:1-5.

Is it not always thus? Does not the same thing happen when Israel, enroute to Canaan, requests of Edom permission to pass through its land and Edom denies them this? Do the children of God ever threaten the world? Are they not pilgrims and strangers here below, desirous only of reaching the City that has foundations? And yet the world will

always molest and harass and persecute that church of God, only because they are evil and the church is the church of God!

Specifically, one more thing must be said at this time. We now refer to Pharaoh's devilish and inhuman decree. Having subjected the people of God to a hard and cruel bondage, Exodus 1:13-14, he had failed in his purpose; Israel had continued to grow. Then the king had commanded the midwives to kill the child immediately upon birth if it were a son. However, these midwives feared God and did not heed the king's commandment. So, finally, the king issues the inhuman decree to his own people that they must throw every male child of the Hebrews into the River Nile. It is this which constitutes specifically the background of the birth of Moses. This decree of the king could not have been in effect very long inasmuch as Moses' parents did not seem to have any difficulty when Aaron, three years older than Moses, was born. And it does not seem to have been in effect long after the birth of Moses. But it was in effect when Amram and Jochebed were expecting Moses. How anxious they must have been as Moses' birth drew near!

ITS MANIFESTATION

Apparently, from the viewpoint of reason, the hiding of the child was surely an act of folly. First of all, there is the commandment of the king, that all the male children of Israel must be cast into the river. This is the third and most effective attempt of Pharaoh to destroy the children of Israel. How foolish therefore is the attempt to save the child by hiding it three months! We read that Moses' parents acted by faith. And faith is what we read in Hebrews 11:1, the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things unseen. What they did is apparently contrary to all human reason. Their action of faith is surely not as great as the faith action of Abraham. They did not protest against the king. They simply hid the child. Nevertheless, it is called an act of faith. But it surely appears to be the height of folly. We may be sure that Pharaoh, having issued his decree, would have his secret agents, his gestapo, throughout the land of Goshen. Besides, it must have been known that Amram and Jochebed were expecting a baby. They certainly were placing their lives in danger by disobeying the king. How foolish they apparently were because they would never be able to hide him from Pharaoh and all his secret agents.

Secondly, it was apparently an act of folly because of their own people. The impression we receive of the people of Israel at this time is hardly attractive. In fact, it is actually repugnant. First, there is their reaction to their servitude. They simply submit. Then, they actually fought one

another. Did not Moses find two Israelites fighting each other? And when finally Moses and Aaron appear in their midst, after Moses' return out of Midian, and Pharaoh increases their burdens because of Moses' resolve to deliver them, they resent what Moses and Aaron had done and complain bitterly. All this simply adds to the folly of Moses' parents in hiding him three months. Presuppose that a neighbor who had his baby cast into the river would become jealous because Amram was attempting to frustrate the king!

Thirdly, how could Moses' parents keep the birth of their child a secret? On the one hand, the imminent birth of Moses must have been generally known. And, on the other hand, a growing child would certainly make himself known.

How, then, did they reveal their faith? Would not any parent, from a purely natural point of view, do what Amram and Jochebed do here, that is, attempt to save their child? First, Pharaoh had no jurisdiction over them. They had been invited as guests, were no part of the Egyptian nation. Secondly, what else could Amram and Jochebed do but disobey the king? The king had demanded of them that they murder their son. Besides, the king's design was to destroy the children of Israel and frustrate the birth of the seed of the woman. Had not the Lord given Israel the promise of the Messiah, and was it not clearly the design of Pharaoh to frustrate the fulfillment of this promise? How could the children of Israel obey the king's direct violation of the Lord's own promise and commandment, kill the children of the covenant? Hence, living by faith, clinging to the promises of Jehovah, the believing people of God could not obey the king's command. Thirdly, Amram and Jochebed did what they did *by faith*. It was not merely parental love. Of course, this parental love, also here, must have been very strong. However, they were moved by faith. Indeed, parental love itself would not have been sufficient for them to defy the king. How terrible were the conditions under which Moses was born! Would not parental love rather cast the babe now into the river than have it killed some weeks or months later? However, what parental love could not do, faith could do and did. They hid the child because they feared not the commandment of the king. That commandment did not dictate their action. They believed, and faith also here is the evidence of things unseen and the substance of things hoped for.

ITS ENCOURAGEMENT

Moses, we read, was a proper child. Literally we read that he was very fair and beautiful. Stephen also mentions this in Acts 7. Moses' parents hid the

child because they saw he was a beautiful baby. The definite decision to hide the child was reached when they saw he was such a beautiful baby. The text surely means this.

What does this mean? Indeed, the motive for hiding the child was not its beauty. This motive was faith. However, that which served as the occasion to arouse this faith into action and strengthen it was the beauty of the child. We are always determined first by motives from within. But we are also guided by circumstances and occasions from without. Moses' parents believed. But their faith, or believing, was weak. And now the Lord uses the beauty of the child to persuade these parents to hide that child. Let us understand this. Amram and Jochebed did not save the boy because he was so beautiful. Parents certainly do not love a beautiful child more than a child not as beautiful. We do not believe in mercy killings. However, this beauty of a baby was surely a special sign from the Lord. This beauty was so outstanding that it served to impress the parents that the Lord had reserved for this baby a special calling in life. God had given this child such a beauty that it was divinely marked. The parents saw that this child was a special child. Hence, the beauty of the child served to strengthen the faith of these parents. Now they place their faith completely in the Lord their God.

How comforting this is for us! Perhaps at times we have our moments of sorrow and grief and despair; we are ready to cry out, what is the use? And then the Lord gives us a sign, shows us something from His Word, and our faith is renewed and we once more cling to the promises of the Lord. Besides, God also watches over the weak as well as the strong. O, this faith may not compare with that of Abraham and Daniel and Daniel's three friends. But if we read only of Abraham's faith in the Bible, we might conclude that, for such a little one as I am, there is hardly a place in the church and covenant of the Lord. But the Lord also cares for His little sheep and lambs, also for you and me, and in due time also our little faith will come to manifestation as the fruit of His grace and it will speak of the glory and power of His grace.

*The Standard Bearer
makes a thoughtful gift
for a shut-in.*

EDITORIAL

The E.P.C. of Australia—Revisited (Conclusion)

Prof. H.C. Hoeksema

On the last weekend of our stay in Australia we enjoyed what was probably the most different of our experiences there. For example, who would expect to find on a 2,000-acre ranch in the interior of Australia, in sparsely populated country, where the postal service is only twice weekly, where it is possible for days on end to see no one but members of your own family—who would expect to find there, thousands of miles from home, a Reformed Book Shop which features Protestant Reformed literature? Yet such was our experience.

Let me explain.

Already before we left Grand Rapids, Pastor Coleborn had promised to show us something of the Australian Midwest and to take us to a place called Chinchilla, some 200 miles or so from Brisbane. So, early on the last Saturday of our stay we started out. We had rented a larger car for the trip, so that the Coleborns and we could travel together. Our destination, Chinchilla, was on the western side of the coastal mountain range; and as soon as one crosses this moderately high range, he finds himself in a different kind of countryside. This is the "midwest" of Queensland. It is rich farmland—that is, wherever there is an adequate water supply. But where the latter is lacking, it is country which begins to remind one of the waste and arid "outback" of the Australian interior. The land is extremely flat. One can see for miles and miles. The sky was an unbroken blue. And in July, when we were there, the days were comfortably mild—shirt-sleeve weather—while the nights were still cold and frosty.

We were headed for the ranch (Australians call them "stations") of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Hurse, who live several miles from the village of Chinchilla. To give you some idea of the kind of country this is, let me explain that at the Hurse's ranch there is no possibility of irrigation either from a river or from wells. The latter (irrigation from wells) is impossible because the ground-water is brackish. They are completely dependent, therefore, on rainfall. The average rainfall is four inches per growing season. This would be sufficient to raise

various grains of drought-resistant varieties. But in the Hurse's case it has been ten years since they have received even that average four inches! When we visited, there were crops of oats and wheat coming up; Mr. Hurse told us that if they received just one more inch of rain, there would be a crop. Later we heard that the one more inch never came; there was nothing to do but allow the cattle to eat what was left of the drought-stricken crop which never grew. You can understand, then, that water is a very precious commodity in a place like that. And, in a most direct sense of the word, children of God in such a situation learn to live directly from the hand of their heavenly Father.

But why would there be a Reformed literature center in such a place?

That stands connected with another aspect of the Hurse ranch. On their property is a large area of petrified wood. To obtain specimens of this petrified wood, as well as of various semi-precious stones in the same area, people come from all over the world. One of the special attractions is the fact that one kind of petrified wood is found only here, on the Hurse ranch, and at one other location in South America. So when visitors come to dig for petrified wood on the Hurse property, they are not only introduced to the various kinds of wood and stone available, but also to Reformed literature.

Well, it was here that we spent a very interesting weekend. For at the Hurse ranch is also a "preaching station" of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. There are two families committed to the Reformed faith here: Mr. and Mrs. Hurse and Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Bell and their young son. For these two families, plus the Coleborns, plus my wife and daughter, I preached the Word on that Sunday. It reminded me of the times when I had preached for an even smaller congregation in Pella several years ago. But we had a blessed Lord's Day. There was a real interest in and receptivity for the Reformed faith. Again I had the opportunity to tell about our Protestant Reformed Churches and their history. And all day long we exercised the communion of saints.

Early on Monday morning we left the Hurse ranch to go back to Brisbane. We were scheduled to leave Brisbane shortly after noon to fly to Singapore, at which we would arrive some ten hours later. That noon at the Brisbane airport Pastor Coleborn assured me that he had not quite exhausted the list of subjects about which we wished to talk during our visit, but would save the remainder for our next visit! I could not quite believe him: for we talked all the way to Chinchilla and all the way back to Brisbane, even to the extent that I took the wheel so that Pastor Coleborn could concentrate wholly on the discussion!

This marks the end of our account of last summer's visit among our friends in the Evangelical Presbyterian Churches of Australia. Permit me a few general observations and conclusions.

In the first place, we found ourselves thoroughly at home among the people of the E.P.C. and in their churches on the three Lord's days which we spent among them. They are Reformed. They love to speak about the things of our Reformed faith. And they want to live and practice their Reformed faith. In the second place, I believe that I could detect growth and development and progress among them. This is, of course, not always so easy to assess. But I believe that their congregations, in so far as I could observe, are more stable than five years ago. Further, they have grown in their understanding of us and of our position and attitude. I believe our contact and our literature has contributed to this. There was a time when at least some of the E.P.C. were fearful that it was our purpose to overwhelm them and swallow them up. I believe this has lessened considerably. There was a time, too, when the E.P.C. feared that our position was that of "automatic grace" or presupposed regeneration. This fear, too, has lessened. There has also come about a significant understanding and appreciation of the truth of the covenant of grace. This has become practically manifest in an increasing interest in providing Christian education for their covenant children. All of these things are reasons for rejoicing and gratitude.

In the third place, if I may make a few positive suggestions to the brethren and sisters of the E.P.C., they would be the following: 1) Try, if at all possible, to revive the publication of your quarterly magazine in the near future. We in the U.S. have

missed the contact which this magazine provided; and from our point of view this would be a valuable means of strengthening ties. But I believe—and in our own churches we know this by experience in connection with the *Standard Bearer*—that your own churches would profit and be strengthened through this means. You are small and widely scattered in vast Australia. Especially the churches in Queensland are separated from those in Tasmania. The reintroduction of your little magazine could serve as an excellent means of keeping in contact with one another and strengthening the ties in your denomination. 2) I believe a second area in which the E.P.C. should work is that of providing future ministers and providing them with a thorough theological education. No communion of churches can long lead a distinctive existence without this. 3) I would urge, thirdly, that the E.P.C. not only work harder at keeping in contact with us of the Protestant Reformed Churches, but also that they explore the question of ways and means of strengthening the ties between our two denominations, as well as making our ecclesiastical contact a *practical* reality in spite of the vast expanses of ocean between us. Although I am not a member of our denomination's Contact Committee, I know that the committee feels this way and that they have often wished to hear from you more frequently.

Finally, I would like to make a general suggestion which both of our denominations could explore. There simply is no substitute for face-to-face and person-to-person contact when it comes to ecclesiastical fellowship. I believe it would be very beneficial to have a conference of representatives of our denomination and the brethren of the E.P.C. When I was in Australia and some of us discussed this idea, it was suggested that such a conference, if held, should be in Australia, so that all the men of the E.P.C. could share in it. Such a conference, of course, should be well planned in advance. It should be designed to provide for discussion of both similarities and differences. It should be mainly theological in nature, and there should be definite assignments of subjects and introduction of these subjects by men of both denominations, followed by full opportunity for discussion. This, I believe, could be productive. I suggest that the men of the E.P.C. think about this, and also that this possibility be considered in our own churches, particularly by our Contact Committee.

*Know the standard and follow it.
Read The Standard Bearer.*

REPORT FROM SINGAPORE

The Calling of All Believers in the Work of Evangelism

Rev. Arie den Hartog

The work of evangelism is a very important part of the calling and work of the church of Jesus Christ. It is not the only work of the church, as some today would have it, nor even the most important. It is nevertheless a very important work, so much so that no church that is not actively involved in it is fulfilling the whole of her calling and purpose. The work of evangelism is surely part of the great commission which our Lord Jesus gave to the New Testament church. This great commission stands for our church today. Our reference to evangelism shall be limited in this article especially to the work of proclaiming the good news of salvation in Christ Jesus to those who are outside of our own church. Evangelism in the broadest sense of course refers to the proclamation of the gospel also in and for the established church, for the building up and preservation of the saints already gathered into the church. The work of evangelism has been variously designated also as mission work, or church extension work. We prefer the term evangelism. Those outside of our own church to whom we must preach the gospel are usually divided into two classes. There are those who never before have heard the gospel. These are found particularly on the foreign mission field, such as the field in which we have the blessed privilege to labor. Secondly, there are those who have before heard the gospel. There are those who have apostatized from the true faith and must be brought back. There are those who are in apostatizing churches that must be called out to join the true church of Jesus Christ.

The work of evangelism is a glorious and wonderful work. It is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, a work which He alone accomplishes through the sovereign working of His Word and Spirit. It is through evangelism that the Lord Jesus is pleased to gather the church of His elect from all nations, tribes, and peoples. The Lord is pleased to use His church for this glorious work. To accomplish this task the Lord has empowered His church with His Word and Spirit. The Lord has also given to every believer in the church a place and calling in this work. On this we would like to concentrate.

Evangelism is accomplished centrally through

the preaching of the Word. The preaching is the official proclamation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ through His ordained ambassador. We as Protestant Reformed Churches have always stressed the importance of preaching. In this we have done well. The scriptures stress the importance of the preaching. Without the preaching there is no evangelism. The preaching is the primary means whereby the Lord will have the gospel proclaimed and through which He will gather His church. Never ought we in any way to minimize the importance and significance of the preaching.

There is however, we believe, an area of the work of evangelism which has not always received the proper emphasis in our midst. This is the whole area of the calling of all believers in the work of evangelism. This is a very important part of the work of evangelism. In fact it is very doubtful that there will ever be any successful evangelism when this aspect of the work is neglected. The involvement of every believer in the work of evangelism goes much further than just the sending and supporting of a missionary. That is surely important. Furthermore it is important that we as members of the church pray constantly for our missionaries. But there is much more than this. The believer's involvement in the work of evangelism must be such that he also gets involved in the actual proclamation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. By this we do not mean that every believer must become a preacher or missionary in his own right. Rather the calling of the believer is that he must give a living and personal testimony of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that he hears in the preaching. The apostle Paul writes concerning this when he describes the outstanding faith and activity of the saints of Thessalonica. "For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not speak anything" (I Thessalonians 1:8). The Thessalonians had heard the gospel as the elect of God. Through the mighty operation of the Spirit, the Word of God had been effectual in their hearts, so that they believed. They were filled with the truth

of the gospel. They rejoiced greatly in the blessed and glorious gospel delivered unto them. They zealously published the truth of the gospel by giving a living testimony of the truth of the gospel to all with whom they came in contact. Therefore the Word of God echoed and re-echoed throughout all of the land, from one believer to another.

That we are to be personal witnesses of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is possible because the Lord has anointed us with His Holy Spirit to the office of all believers. Included in the fact that we are anointed to the office of all believers is the wonderful fact that we are all made the prophets of the Lord, who can and must give testimony with the mouth concerning the truth of the gospel, and priests who must consecrate their lives in holiness unto God and walk in all good works which the Lord has before ordained.

Now this has great significance for the believer's calling in evangelism. First of all, we have received the truth of God. He has revealed His truth to us and has caused us to know it spiritually and believe it with our heart. This in itself is a most glorious and blessed thing. This is the result of the grace of God and not at all due to our own wisdom. The blessed and wonderful gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ has been preached to us and it has come to us with the power of the Holy Spirit so that we have believed. This is particularly glorious and blessed because to us has been preached the Reformed Faith. This faith is the true faith of the scriptures. It is therefore the most blessed and most glorious faith. It is the wonderful gospel of sovereign grace which exalts and glorifies God alone. Any other faith than this is not only contrary to the truth of the gospel; it is also impoverished, it is a miserable gospel which really is no gospel at all.

In order to see our calling in the work of evangelism we must first of all see the blessed and glorious character of the gospel that has come to us. It is sad that so many Reformed Christians have no real sense of this. Therefore they are silent about the gospel they believe. Many who are Arminian put them to shame in the manner in which they publish the gospel.

Secondly, our involvement in evangelism must come out of a fervent and zealous love for that gospel that has been delivered to us. It is this that must compel us to speak of it. Many of us are to be blamed for our lack of zeal concerning the gospel which God in His wonderful grace has delivered to us. We are in danger of losing our first love. This is very serious. We must remember from whence we have fallen and repent lest the Lord remove His candlestick from our midst. The fervent and zealous love for the gospel must be evident in our earnest desire to know that gospel ever more

deeply and richly. That surely means that we eagerly and earnestly attend the gatherings in our church where the Word of God is proclaimed and taught and discussed. There is in some of our churches very poor attendance at societies and Bible classes. There are many who care not to come to these. This is serious. It is a sign of apostasy.

Thirdly, a zealous love for the truth of the gospel must be revealed in an intense desire to speak of that gospel. As the old proverb has it; what the heart is full of, the mouth will speak of. That must be the case. There is no such thing as a silent prophet; that is a contradiction in terms. As prophets we must speak of the blessed and glorious truth of the gospel that God has given to us in a living, personal, and spiritual way. It is not enough to be able to speak in an abstract way about doctrine. Surely it is important to maintain and defend the doctrines of the scripture. But we must also be able to speak spiritually and experientially about what these doctrines mean to us. Sometimes it is easy for us to give abstract defenses of doctrines but very difficult to speak personally and spiritually about our faith in God. We must be able to tell men how wonderful and blessed our God is. We must be able to tell our neighbor, who is not of our church, what wonderful things the Lord our God has done for us. We must be able to tell our neighbors in a personal way of the great blessedness of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ, how great His forgiving mercy, how marvelous His love, how amazing His grace. We must be able to admonish and exhort and encourage our neighbors with the Word of God and with our faith in God. That is what it means to give a living testimony of our faith. In this way we must be active in evangelism.

The testimony of the saints must be subservient to official preaching of the gospel. We must give a living testimony of the truth that we hear in the preaching. With that testimony we must encourage others to come to the house of the Lord with us. How beautiful are the words of Isaiah 2:3, "And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." When we hear the gospel preached to us we must be so filled with love and zeal for it that we tell others about it. If we as a church are going to carry out the work of evangelism this is a necessary part. This is the part of every believer. This is where I believe that the young Christians in Singapore excel so greatly. And we can learn from them in this. It is simply amazing how many visitors come to the worship services and the many other meetings we have in the G.L.T.S. How do these visitors come? They do not come by newspaper advertisements or by radio an-

nouncements. They come because the members of the G.L.T.S. say to relatives and friends and neighbors and working colleagues and school classmates, come with us to the house of the Lord and hear the wonderful gospel of our God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

This same kind of thing must be practiced at societies and Bible studies. These can be very effective means for doing evangelism. That is true, of course, only if we as members of the church are first of all zealous and faithful in our participation at these gatherings. Then we can encourage others to join us to study the Word of God. With personal encouragement outsiders can be brought into our midst and come into the place where they can hear the Word of God regularly and grow in the faith and knowledge of salvation.

There are several motives that must drive us to be faithful in our personal involvement in the work of evangelism. The first and primary motive must always be the glory of God. The great theme of the Reformed Faith is this: to God alone be the glory. When the Word of God and the greatness and might of God, the righteousness, holiness, and truth of God, the wonderful salvation of God in Christ Jesus, when all of this is published abroad by the personal witness of the saints, God's name is glorified. If we are truly Reformed Christians we will seek to tell of the great glory of our God through our testimony before men.

The second motive must be the desire for the gathering of the church of Jesus Christ. The true Christian earnestly desires the salvation of all those ordained to eternal life. He longs for the time when

all of the elect will be gathered and the Lord Jesus Christ will return for the perfect salvation of His church. The Christian may not have a smug attitude concerning his own church, having no concern for those who are not yet brought into the church. He does not take the attitude that those who are outside of the church are hopelessly lost and reprobate. It is his sincere desire by every means to gain those of the saints of God who are still without the church.

Thirdly, we must be motivated by the compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ for lost sinners. The Christian is deeply conscious of the awful judgment and condemnation that is upon the sinner. He knows that all who do not repent will perish everlastingly in hell. He knows how dreadful and awful this is. It is his earnest desire to call men everywhere to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the desire of every true child of God that all of the Lord's own shall be brought out of the depths of their sin and misery to the blessedness of salvation and life in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore the heart of the true Christian burns with compassion also for those who are without. He will therefore do everything he can by his personal testimony to exhort and admonish, to urge and encourage men everywhere unto faith and repentance and obedience in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have not yet said anything about the importance of the holy and godly life of the Christian in the work of evangelism. Perhaps on another occasion we shall address this very important subject.

FROM HOLY WRIT

The So-Called Postmillennial Proof-texts in Holy Writ

Rev. G. Lubbers

Chapter 2

The Infallible Key Of Knowledge

In Luke 11:52 Jesus speaks of the "key of knowledge." He has a word of rebuke and reproof for the Bible teachers of His day, the "lawyers" who give instruction in the schools and in the synagogues. These "have taken away" the key of knowledge, so that they are become blind men who lead the blind. They are very evil teachers; they do not enter the

kingdom themselves, and them who were entering they hindered, by confusing them with their legalistic teaching which denied the glad-tidings. Now, we must beware that we do not fall under this rebuke from Christ in our own writing. It is a fearful thing when Christ says to a writer, "Woe, I say unto you." We must be workmen who rightly divide the word of truth, workmen who are not put to shame before the Lord. We must find the "key of

knowledge" and follow sound hermeneutical principles laid down by Christ Himself and by His holy apostles.

It is a remarkable thing that Christ, after His resurrection, gave His apostles such hermeneutical principles, and gave an infallible interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures. When He had not yet died and risen again He said that He had many things to say to them, but that they could not receive them now (John 16:12). Yet when the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth. But immediately after Christ's resurrection He taught them, "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3b). We have the record of this instruction in Luke 24:25-27 and in Luke 24:44-48; it is the instruction in which we have given to us the "key" to understanding the Scriptures of Moses and of all the prophets. The latter includes also the Messianic Psalms. And we ought to notice that this instruction gives us pure principles of hermeneutics, the science of Biblical interpretation. For the term "expounded" in the KJV is the translation of the Greek verb "*di-ermee neuein*": to interpret, to make *very* clear (dutch: *verdeudelijken*); it means to unfold the meaning of what is said, explain, expound. That is Christ's hermeneutics to His apostles. And thus He gives us, His church, the "Key of knowledge," knowledge of the things of the kingdom of God.

What is particularly striking in Jesus' interpretation is that He interpreted the entire Old Testament Scriptures to His disciples, setting everything into perspective, in such a clear and understandable way that the two travelers to Emmaus exclaim later, "were not our hearts burning within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke 24:32). And what had Jesus done in interpreting the Scriptures, opening them? He had chided these two sorrowful and bewildered and groping men that there was really no need of their deep perplexity, if only they believed "all of the Scriptures." They must believe not simply certain parts, but they must believe all of the Scriptures. They were such that they could not put all the teachings of Scripture in perspective, see the unity of their message, as all is comprehended in the simple, brief, and clear statement: The Christ, the Messiah, must suffer all these things and thus enter into His glory! That is the "pattern" of the Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 24:26). He spoke of the things concerning Himself (*ta peri heautou*). Yes, Jesus is the great subject of the entire Old Testament Scriptures, that He through suffering must enter into His glory. Furthermore, Jesus, a bit later in this resurrection day evening, also interpreted the Scriptures to the apostles in the upper room at Jerusalem. He here sets in perspective His

teaching to them which He had given them while He was with them before His death and resurrection: all things must be fulfilled which were spoken by Moses and the Prophets, the entire Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 24:44). Yes, "thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." This was Jesus' interpretation of the central thrust and fulfilment of all the Scriptures: Moses, Psalms, and all the prophets.

Here we have the infallible "key of knowledge" of which Jesus spoke to the lawyers of His day!

Here we may pause and note that this does not yet say anything concerning the doctrine of the last things, although the text speaks of "all the nations" hearing the preaching of the gospel of Christ. We shall return to this matter of "all nations" later in another connection. What we are interested in doing here is to show that here is a certain "pattern" of teaching indicated. It is the same pattern which Paul signals in II Timothy 2:8, where we read, "Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel."

Peter must have learned his lessons in Scripture interpretation well. We see this in that great sermon-address which he spoke at the feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem, as he shows from the Old Testament Scriptures Christ's death, resurrection (Psalm 16:8; Acts 2:25), ascension (Psalm 16:10, Acts 2:27-30). However, what Peter writes in his first epistle demonstrates beyond a shadow of doubt the great perspective and hope of the grace which is to be ours in the "last time." In I Peter 1:3-12 we deal with a section which gives us eschatological perspectives of the "last time." And it ought to be clear that in this perspective of the very last time, just before the return of Christ, no mention is made of the great and wide influence which the church shall exert in the world, but that this last time is the very moment when we shall have the "revelation" of Jesus Christ (I Peter 1:8, 13). This "last time" when the "salvation," the final glorious eternal salvation, of the eternal state shall be ushered in. That is now the hope that is "ready to be revealed in the last day." It is the living hope, the inheritance which is ours, and which is incorruptible, undefilable, and which does not fade away. It is the state of eternal immortality in Christ (I Peter 1:3, 4; I Cor. 15:53-55). It is the inheritance which is ours in the ages to come after Christ's Parousia (Matt. 24:3), that is, in the consummation (*sunteleias*) of the ages (Matt. 28:20). This is not a time, a proper time (*kairos*) *shortly before* the last and visible appearance of Christ, but it is the *final return* of Christ,

when He shall come with the sound of the trumpet and with the voice of the archangel, when the redeemed church shall be caught up in the air, and thus ever be with the Lord (I Thes. 4:16, 17).

When Peter speaks, in I Peter 1:10-12, of all the prophets of the Old Testament dispensation "searching out what time or manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings to come upon Christ and the glory to follow," he is employing the "Key of Knowledge" (Luke 11:53) which the lawyers in their hermeneutical Jewish principles took away. They deliberately kept the truth of the gospel down in unrighteousness. Here Peter rightly divides the Scriptures, giving us an infallible pattern of sound doctrine, so that we may enter into the kingdom of God, the Kingdom of heaven in hope, and presently in abiding possession in the ages to come. Post-millennial writers of our day like to speak of an *Eschatology of Victory*, as does Marcellus Kik, but Peter gives us an eschatology of victory which shall be ours in the revelation of Jesus Christ, that is, the "glory to follow" in the eternal state. That is victory, the victory when death shall be swallowed up in victory (I Peter 1:12). This will be the "glory after these things" (*tas meta tautas doxas*).

We do safely when we follow this hermeneutics concerning the concept "last times" as far as the "glory" is concerned of which the Old Testament prophecies are so replete. For the Old Testament often speaks of the glory which shall be seen in the last days, when the whole earth shall be full of His glory (Numbers 14:21).

We shall need to show in succeeding chapters of this study that this Scriptural pattern concerning the doctrine of the last times, as we have attempted to elicit this from the various Scripture passages, is the "key" to understanding prophecy, when it speaks in many passages and by various prophets and in divers times (Heb. 1:1) of "all nations," "kindreds of the nations," and "uttermost parts of the earth," and "the last time," etc. If we do not

use this "key," as given in the New Testament Scriptures, we will need to start comparing passages in the Old Testament *ad infinitum*, and come only to the Jewish interpretation of them: somehow a kingdom of God *here on earth*, prior to Christ's return from heaven upon clouds. Then that reign shortly, before the return of Christ will need to be fulfilled here up earth!

Dr. Lorrain Boettner writes on Page 14 of his "*The Millennium*" as follows:

We have defined Postmillennialism as that view of the last things which holds that the kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the Gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individuals, that the world eventually will be Christianized, and that the return of Christ shall occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace commonly called the "Millennium"....

The Millennium to which the Postmillennialist looks forward is thus a golden age of spiritual prosperity during this present dispensation, that is, during the Church age, and is to be brought about through forces now active in this world. It is an indefinitely long period of time, perhaps much longer than a literal thousand years. The changed character of the individuals will be reflected in an uplifted social, economic, political, and cultural life of mankind. The world at large shall then enjoy a state of righteousness such as the present time has seen only in relatively small groups, as for example in some family circles, some local church groups and kindred organizations.

This does not mean that there even will be a time on this earth when every person will be a Christian, or that all sin will be abolished. But it does mean that evil in all its forms will be reduced to negligible proportions, that Christian principles will be the rule, not the exception, and that Christ will return to a truly Christianized world.

Truly, we are called upon to study the representative Scripture passages of Scripture which Postmillennialists cite for this rather bizarre and fantastic presentation of the Kingdom of Christ on earth and we shall need to apply sane and Biblical methods of exegesis, to say the least.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The Shame of a P.R. Minister

Rev. R. Flikkema

Well, this is the last article that you will read written by the undersigned, at least for awhile. For the next twelve articles in this rubric you must look

to Rev. Bruinsma and Rev. Koole. It is my prayer that you who took the time to read my articles might have been edified by them. And further, it is

my prayer that you who take the time to read the future articles written by my colleagues might also be edified by them. I am confident that you will be.

For a subject for this last article from my pen I was somewhat at a loss. I really did not know about what I should write. That loss did not occur because of a scarcity of subjects. But, rather, that loss occurred because of an abundance of subjects. As you have probably noticed in my past articles, "food for thought" for my articles have been derived from magazines such as the *Reader's Digest* or *Time*. In the past two issues of *Time* magazine I found an abundance of "food for thought." As I read those two issues I thought to myself that an article could be written on religious persecution. There is a great deal of that going on these days in the Soviet Union. Or, so I thought to myself, I could write an article on a recent Supreme Court decision to ban the Ten Commandments from public schools. Or, so I thought to myself, I could write a sequel to my article entitled "Who Shot J.R.?" In the December 1 issue of *Time* the answer to that question is given. I said in my past article, and I say it now in this one, I am not interested in the answer to that question. But I and you with me should be interested in a quote made by one of the actors of the program about future episodes: "We've just scratched the surface of evil. Just wait." I won't! Or, so I thought to myself, I could write an article on the Pope's recent visit to Luther's Germany and his attempt to reunite the Romish Church and the Lutheran Church. Maybe Luther was not so wrong after all when he called the Pope the Antichrist. I could write an article on the poor state of the economy; blatant sexuality in the television commercials; the recent earthquake in Italy in which many thousands were killed and many more were left homeless. And last but certainly not least, I could nicely write an article about the Bible being accused today of sexism, male chauvinism, and anti-women!

As you can see, much "food for thought" did I have for this article. But this article is not about any of those "foods for thought." Rather, this article is about another "food for thought" about which I have not written anything yet.

Allow me to explain. Usually, so I said, I find "food for thought" in issues of the *Reader's Digest* and *Time* magazine. Usually I do. But not this time. This time I found "food for thought" in our own *Standard Bearer*! As I look at the calendar I discover that it is December 9. I received my December 1 issue of *The Standard Bearer* yesterday. Last night I read the issue in one sitting. As I read that issue I thought to myself: "What a marvelous, marvelous issue this is! This issue is all about our schools! This issue is all about God's covenant faithfulness mani-

fest in our schools. How marvelous that is!" But when I got to the article written by Mr. Don Doeze-ma, my marveling was diminished somewhat. Some of the things that I read in that article I had to read over again. I said to myself: "What in the world is going on? Are these things really happening in our high school? I am just a simple country pastor of a congregation which must of necessity send its children to a public high school; and things are not much worse in that public high school!" And, too, so I thought to myself, "ignorance is bliss," as the saying goes. Maybe it would have been better had Mr. Doeze-ma not informed me about some of the things that go on at our high school. And not only that, but maybe it would have been better if he had not informed all of the readers of *The Standard Bearer* about some of the things that go on at our high school. Some of the readers of our *Standard Bearer* are not Protestant Reformed. What are they going to think about our high school? In fact, it is undoubtedly the case that some of the readers of our *Standard Bearer* are deeply opposed to our Protestant Reformed Churches. What are they going to think? Having read that article, so I thought, they will just laugh to themselves and say to themselves "See? Things are not so rosy in the P.R. churches after all."

And when those thoughts arose in my mind, I was ashamed! And I am not ashamed to admit that either. From a negative point of view I was not ashamed of Mr. Doeze-ma's article. Let me state that very clearly. Without reservation and without qualification I was not ashamed of his article. And let me state this also very clearly: Mr. Doeze-ma need not be ashamed of his article either. He, in my opinion, did nothing wrong in writing what he did. In fact he did everything right in writing what he did. I commend him for having the courage to tell the readers of *The Standard Bearer* about some of the things that go on at our high school. Ignorance is not bliss! Our readers must be informed as to what happens in our high school. Yes, even those readers who are deeply opposed to our cause as churches must be informed about the situation in our high school. Especially they have to be informed when a man is called upon to write about that school. After all, a writer must speak the truth. And if that writer must write about a rose that has some withered petals, that writer may not write only about the petals that are not withered, but he must also write about the withered petals. To do anything else, on the part of that writer, is false and deceitful. Yes, therefore, it was perfectly right and proper for Mr. Doeze-ma to write what he did before the eyes of each and every reader of *The Standard Bearer*! But I must say more about that a little later in this article.

But from a positive point of view my shame

arose exactly because of the things that go on at our own high school. Of that I was ashamed! And my ashamedness at that led to concern—concern at the inroads that the devil and all his hosts are making in the sanctified, godly walk of life of some of our young people! That is a sign of the times! Make no mistake. We as Protestant Reformed Churches are the purest manifestation of the body of Christ in the midst of this world. We believe that, and we may never forget that. But it is simply a fact that in the purest manifestation of the body of Christ, the devil works the hardest. That too, we may never forget. The devil does not have to work so very hard in the world or even in churches that have long ago departed from the truth. He has them! What he does have to do, and does do, is work very hard in those churches which do manifest the marks of the true Church. How does he do that? He does that in the first place by attacking the precious truths that that church holds dear, and by attacking the preaching of those truths. But in a very real sense of the word he does that by attacking the covenant homes of that church, and the parents and young people in those covenant homes. His word is: if I can't get the preaching, I will strive to get the young people! And if I can get the young people, they, who will be the future parents—fathers and mothers—of the true Church, won't listen to the preaching anyway! That is what the devil says.

What then must we say about that? Must we ignore that? Must we overlook that? Must we say to ourselves, "We cannot do anything about that anyway. That is just the way it is. And besides, young people decades ago were just as bad, and look how they turned out." Is that what we must say? Oh, no! I for one refuse to say that and take that position. Sin may never be overlooked. That first of all. And secondly, maybe it is true that young people decades ago were just as bad. But with respect to that, let me assure you in the first place that I am not concerned about young people decades ago; and in the second place, let me assure you that those young people who maybe did do things just as bad decades ago were brought by God's grace to repentance! And that is exactly the answer to our question. What must we say about that? We must not say, overlook it. But we must say, repent! And having said, repent, we must repent! Notice reader, I said we! And that we is all-inclusive. It does not only include our young people. That to be sure. But it also includes the parents of our young people—the parents of *all* our young people. And it also includes every single one of our ministers and office bearers, including myself. Why? Because we are all sinful! We are all in need of repentance. Not a one of us may be excluded. In shame, in sorrow for sin, all of us—our

young people, our parents, our office bearers, our ministers—must fall down together before the foot of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and say, "O God, be merciful to me the sinner." That must be done.

Why? The reason lies exactly in a question that our Lord Jesus spoke many years ago. That question is found in Luke 18:8, "Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" Shall He? Shall He find faith in the purest manifestation of the body of Christ in the midst of the world? The answer to that question is a resounding no, if in the purest manifestation of the body of Christ there is no repentance! But the answer to that question is a beautiful yes, if there is repentance.

Is there? There is in me. Having read the article of Mr. Doezeema, I in my shame was brought by the grace of God to repentance. Were you? Were you as the young people of our churches? Were you as the ministers of all our young people? Only you can answer that question before the face of our God.

If we are, then it is not so bad that those who deeply oppose the cause of our churches read Mr. Doezeema's article. Let them laugh! Let them say that things are not so rosy in the P.R. churches after all. Let them say that! I assure all you who read this article who oppose the cause of our churches that things are not so rosy in the P.R. churches. We who comprise the Protestant Reformed churches are not perfect. Far from it! We are sinners! But let me also assure all you who read this article who oppose the cause of our churches, that we are repentant sinners! We are! We are repentant sinners who boast not in ourselves. Nothing of ourselves do we bring. It is only to the cross that we cling, and to God's covenant faithfulness—Christ's word of forgiveness, and God's promise to uphold believers and their seed in His gracious faithfulness. Of that you may be sure!

And having said that, I have come to the end of my article. But this article is not the end, is it? I have used this expression in one other article, and now I use it again: "It is only the beginning"—the beginning of a humble repentant Church and people in whom the Son of man shall indeed see faith manifest.

*The Standard Bearer
makes a thoughtful gift
on any occasion.*

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Mark—The Gospel of Jehovah's Servant (1)

Rev. J. Kortering

When trying to determine a specific theme for each of the gospels, a person encounters some difficulty. Evidence of this can be seen in the variety of themes suggested for this gospel of Mark. Among them we find Jesus, the Son of God; the gospel of the Lion of Judah's Tribe; Jesus the Mighty King; Jesus the Servant of Jehovah. Some draw their theme from a general overview of the entire book; others focus attention upon some specific text. In this instance, it would seem appropriate to view this gospel as a record of the ministry of Jesus, culminating in the cross. He is the Servant of Jehovah, Isaiah 42:1, 2, Who is "come not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many," Mark 10:45.

THE AUTHOR

The authorship of this gospel by Mark is uncontested. All agree that he is the John Mark mentioned in Acts 12:12: "And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying." This is a reference to Peter, who after the angel had led him out of the prison gates, went to the home of John Mark's mother.

This tells us something about him. We do not know much detail about his personal family. We do know he was a cousin of Barnabas. We learn of this in Colossians 4:10, "Aristarchus my fellow prisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him)." Barnabas hailed from the island of Cyprus. He is mentioned in Acts 4:36, 37 as one who contributed money to the coffers of the early church and he is called, "Jones, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas (which is being interpreted, the son of consolation), a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus." Whether this means that Mark was also from Cyprus, we cannot be sure.

We do learn from the gospel accounts that Mary, Mark's mother, was a wealthy woman. She evidently owned her own house in Jerusalem and had servants. This is drawn from the fact that her house became the meeting place for important

events. It is generally agreed that the "upper room" was in her house. Here Jesus celebrated the last passover. The disciples met there after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit to this place. This explains why Peter, being released from prison, went there without hesitation, because it was there he was sure to find his fellow saints.

This being true, Mark witnessed at least some of the ministry of Jesus. As a young man, the presence of Jesus in his house was common. He must have heard Jesus preach, saw His miracles, and personally, to some degree at least, received the gospel of the Son of God. The garden scene which he describes so vividly in chapter 14:43-53, contains a reference to a young man who followed Jesus, even after the disciples fled, whom the soldiers grabbed, but he fled away naked. This is mentioned only by Mark and we consider this a personal reference to himself. In addition to this, he made a reference to "Simon the Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus," Mark 15:21. These probably were personal acquaintances of Mark and known to his readers, giving indication that Mark was knowledgeable of the people associated with the history of the crucifixion.

John Mark became involved in the active ministry of the early church. In Acts 12:25 we read, "And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark." This same Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, Acts. 13:5. However, according to Acts 13:13 John Mark left them at Perga and returned to Jerusalem. Why, we do not know; but Paul considered this to be disloyalty and refused to take him along on the second journey. Barnabas felt differently, and this difference brought about the separation of the two. Paul took Silas on his journey and Barnabas went in a different direction with Mark.

Evidently, Paul and Mark were reconciled to each other later on. The reference in Colossians 4:10 indicates that Mark was with Paul while the latter was imprisoned in Rome. The same is indi-

cated in Philemon 24. Paul, in his letter to Timothy, instructs him to "take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry" (II Tim. 4:11).

Finally, we also conclude from Peter's reference to Mark in I Peter 5:13, "The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus *my son*," that he was with Peter to a great extent. This is confirmed by the early church fathers, such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Jerome that Mark spent much time with Peter, in fact wrote down much of what Peter preached, and that this makes up the bulk of the material in his gospel. It is confirmed to this extent that Peter's sermon, recorded in Acts 10:34-43, preached in the home of Cornelius, is a condensation of this gospel. The gospel of Mark follows precisely the order mentioned in that sermon of Peter.

DATE, PURPOSE, AND THEME

The question of date of authorship is closely connected with another question which deals with Mark's relationship with Peter. Did Mark write during the lifetime of Peter and therefore have his personal authorization to publish what he had preached, or did he write after Peter's death? It cannot be proven with conviction either way. The earlier date would place it about A.D. 60, and the later date A.D. 70. It is quite commonly agreed among conservative Bible scholars that Mark wrote first and that Luke and Matthew used his gospel as source material.

There are a number of considerations that lead us to believe that Mark had a Roman audience in mind as he wrote this gospel. A first consideration is the reference to Simon of Cyrene, who is identified as "the father of Alexander and Rufus" (Mark 15:21). Not only does this tell us that Mark knew the people involved in the history of the crucifixion, but one thing further must be stated and that is that this Rufus became a member of the church at Rome. Paul extends his personal greetings to him in his letter (see Romans 16:13): "Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine." We would ask, why would Mark identify the man who carried Jesus' cross as the father of Alexander and Rufus unless he thought it would bring the gospel closer to those who would read it? They would be able to identify with Rufus because they were Romans.

Mark also used Latin expressions which he favored over against similar Greek ones which he could have used. Examples of this include *modion* for bushel in Mark 4:21, *keenson* (census) for tribute in Mark 12:14, *kenturion* for centurion in Mark 15:39. He used these Latinized forms because they would be more understood by his readers.

One cannot help but read this gospel narrative and conclude that there is little reference to Jewish law and custom. This is especially noticeable when compared to Matthew. Mark did not see the need for such when he had Romans in mind.

The style of writing also leads to the same conclusion. I suppose that the style reflected the character of Mark, just as the style of other books of the Bible reflected their respective authors. He writes in short, concise sentences, omitting long discourses, stating the facts and moving on to more events. This was especially adapted to the Roman world and, we might add, to our day and age as well. In the gospel of Mark we find a concise statement about the ministry of Jesus. A few things serve to illustrate this. The conjunction "and" is used 1,331 times in this gospel. It serves to join long sequences of events. Also the Greek word translated "straightway, immediately, forthwith" is used 42 times in Mark, more than all the rest of the New Testament put together. The present tense of the verb is used 151 times, this too indicating action.

This is not to say that Mark was not concerned about the gospel and its impact upon his readers and the church of all ages. It certainly would not do for us to say that the gospel of Mark is nothing more than a record of events. The opening sentence disproves this idea, "The beginning of the *gospel* of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). The gospel contains a record of events in the life of Jesus which make up the good news, the evangel. Jesus' ministry of teaching, miracles, warning the wicked, comforting His people, climbing the hill of Calvary, rising from the dead, and His promise of return make up the content of the gospel. Mark's record is the *beginning*, the setting forth of the first principles, of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This leads us to consider briefly what the theme of this gospel is. It would seem that we should follow the identification given in the first verse of the gospel, "gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The identification "Son of God" is not included in the Nestle's Greek text though included in the KJV. This becomes a disputed point dealing with the reliability of manuscripts. Besides this, it would seem proper to bring together the general emphasis that Jesus worked and taught and did miracles as God's servant. He came to be busy in the things of His Father's house. Mark records this in detail and we must conclude from this that Jesus is in truth God's servant.

His service however is not external, that is, He has not come to serve *man*, but He is God's servant to do His will. As Isaiah declared, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he

shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street" (Isaiah 42:1, 2). Mark gives us an account of the ministry of this Servant of Jehovah.

Well may all who read take comfort in the work which the Lord Jesus accomplished as God's servant. Bear in mind that the Christian Romans of Mark's day were in the midst of the severest persecution. Mark more than likely lost his trusted spiritual fathers, both Peter and Paul, in the blood-bath of Nero. This monster hunted, burned, tore apart, ruthlessly made the sport of the wicked,

God's saints in order to please the bloodthirsty lust of these depraved people.

The comfort comes in Mark 10:29, 30 where Jesus assured Peter, "There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life."

That is good news from the Servant of Jehovah.
Well may we read and believe.

GUEST ARTICLE

Be Ready With an Answer

Rev. J. Slopsema

There is a Word of God that the church today needs to hear. This Word is found in I Peter 3:15, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you."

Peter speaks here of the "hope that is in you." Hope is a term used throughout the Scriptures to describe the power of the born again heart which causes the Christian to look with eager expectation for the coming of the Lord Jesus. To this hope belongs especially three elements. First, hope is expectation. The Scriptures very clearly teach that Christ is coming again and coming soon. When He comes He will destroy the world and bring His church to the glory of a new creation. There are even certain signs in history and nature which indicate that these things are so. Hope is that power of regeneration which enables the child of God to discern these signs of Christ's coming so that he lives in constant expectation of that coming. One who lives in hope, therefore, does not place the coming of Christ into the far and distant future. He lives rather in the constant expectation that the end of all things is at hand.

In the second place, hope is an earnest longing for the day of Christ. There are some things which we expect to happen but dread. Other things we anticipate, but we take an attitude of indifference. Still other things we know will come, and we desire them. This latter is the idea of hope. That which one expects in hope he also desires. He who lives in hope longs for the day of Christ and the salvation that shall be revealed.

Finally, hope is certainty. Today the word

"hope" has taken on the idea of doubt. To say, "I hope it rains today" means "I would like it to rain but I really don't know if it will." The element of doubt, however, has no place in the Christian's hope. Hope as the Bible speaks of it is an assured confidence. It is the confidence that Christ is coming again and that His coming will be soon. It is, furthermore, a personal assurance that when He comes, He will bring me to the final glory of the new creation.

Such is the nature of hope. Do you possess this hope? Is this hope strong in you so that you look to the day of Jesus Christ with eager expectation and longing? It may be worthwhile to stop and reflect on that a bit. In our day the tendency is for the children of God to be rather weak in hope so that their longings and expectations are more earth-bound than heavenward.

When God's people are strong in hope as they ought to be, this hope necessarily determines the course and direction of their life. It only stands to reason that the person who longs to dwell with God in perfection will not walk in the wickedness of this world. Neither will he make common cause with the world, joining them to help build their anti-christian kingdoms. He will rather live in spiritual separation. He will be a pilgrim and a stranger here below. He will have different goals, different attitudes, different customs, different speech, different dress. Everything about him will be basically different. The world which lives in darkness will consider him to be very strange and odd. That is because one who lives in hope walks not in dark-

ness but in light. And, therefore, even though he appears odd to the world, he is the delight of the living God. This, too, is something we ought to examine about ourselves. Does the world see anything strange about your behavior? If not, you are not living in the power of the Christian hope as a spiritual citizen of the kingdom of heaven.

The child of God who in hope lives as a pilgrim and stranger will sooner or later be questioned by the world. There is not much that the church does but that the world is watching. And when the ungodly notice that the saints live differently and will not make common cause with them they ask for a reason. They demand an explanation. Often these questions will come in a spirit of hostility. The world does not appreciate those who do not conform to their ways. They are especially intolerant of those who walk in the light and not in the darkness, who will not join in with them in the pursuit of their antichristian goals. For this kind the world has no use. It's either join in with the world and do as the world does; or there is no room for you on the earth. And so it is with a spirit of hostility that the world will approach the spiritual pilgrim with the question: why don't you send your children to our schools? Why don't you join our labor unions and lodges? Why don't you go to our movies and dances? Why doesn't your church get involved in social issues and community affairs? Why won't you work with us to make this world a better place in which to live?

These and other questions may come from a number of different sources. They may come from various individuals with whom we rub elbows every day. They may come from different organizations of the world which level their attacks against the church. We may one day be asked some of these questions in court. It may be very soon that we will be asked in court why our children do not attend the public schools. Should we live to see Antichrist enthroned as ruler of the world we will be asked why we will not receive the mark of the beast. Live as a pilgrim and stranger in the power of hope and the world will question you, often in a spirit of hostility. Have you ever been questioned by the world?

When we are questioned we are to be ready with an answer. The meaning is that we are to be prepared to give an answer; we are to be properly equipped so that we can give an explanation. This must be true first of all from an intellectual point of view, from the viewpoint of knowledge. All too often when the saints are questioned by the world as to the reason for this practice or that stand, the only answer they can manage is that this is the rule and stand of the church. The church tells me I must live this way. The church says I may not do this.

This is not being ready to give an answer to every man who asks for a reason of the hope that is in you. To be ready with an answer is to be ready with an answer from the Scriptures. Are you able to demonstrate from the Bible why we have Christian schools, why we do not allow union and lodge membership, why we do not condone movie attendance, why we do not make common cause with the world? Many in the church today are woefully unprepared to give answers to these and other important questions. And remember, many well-meaning saints have done harm to the cause of the church when they give the world and even those of other churches the *wrong* answers.

But in the second place, we must be ready with an answer from a spiritual point of view. As we have already indicated, when the ungodly ask us for a reason of the hope that is in us they usually ask in a spirit of hostility. When in turn we give them an answer they are often offended so that their hostility increases. For that reason the saints of God are sometimes intimidated. They become afraid to give an answer. They become ashamed of the gospel. That in turn leads them to compromise their pilgrim's life and walk, to hide their light under a bushel. It takes courage to live as a pilgrim here below. It takes courage to face the hostilities of the world and explain to the world why we live in spiritual separation. That courage we must have if we will be truly ready to give an answer to every one that asks us a reason of the hope that is in us.

Are you ready to give an answer? That state of readiness is not easy to attain, nor easy to maintain. It requires daily use of God's Word and constant prayer. These two are on the wane in the church today. In many homes Bibles are left to collect dust. Prayer bones are seldom used. That explains why there is such a lack of readiness in the church to give an answer to the world.

Yet it is important that we be ready. God requires it. He will use the answer we give to accomplish His purpose. He will use our answer first to harden the heart of the reprobate unbeliever. There is a hardening process that God works in the heart of the reprobate. Through this hardening process the reprobate grow and increase in sin until they fill the cup of iniquity and make themselves ripe for final judgment. God works this hardening process through the Word. This Word is first the Word as faithfully preached by the Church. But this Word is also the Word spoken by the saints daily as they give an answer to the ungodly who ask them a reason of the hope that is in them. Positively, however, God also uses the answer of the saints to bring the elect to repentance and salvation. For the Word of God is also the power of God unto salvation. Again, that Word must first be preached by

the Church. But in the power of the preaching the saints must also walk as pilgrims and strangers, bringing the Word to all who ask them for a reason of the hope that is in them. These two together, and not the one without the other, God uses to gather His church.

Do you stand in the service of God's cause and purpose? Then live in the power of the Christian's hope. And be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.

THE DAY OF SHADOWS

Jacob's Faith Triumphs

Rev. John A. Heys

All in all Jacob's life was a troubled life.

There were moments when he experienced great happiness, and when life seemed good to him. He had his moments when he rejoiced because he had attained to what he set his hand to get. He wrestled with his hungry and weary twin brother for the birthright and got it. He deceived his blind father and obtained the promise of the birthright blessing. He fought his uncle Laban and got the flashing beauty he wanted for a wife. In a struggle for his uncle's cattle he came out the victor and could eye hundreds upon hundreds of sheep and oxen and call them his own.

But his many disappointments and difficulties were too many to characterize his life as a long and happy life. He knew sorrows too often and had moments of deep grief. As a little boy he grew up in the awareness of the fact that his father preferred his older twin brother. And although he had the heart and preference of his mother, he had to leave her and spend twenty years as an outcast while his brother enjoyed all the pleasures of the home. His wedding turned out to be a disaster. He woke up and found himself married to a woman for whom he had no love, tricked by his uncle Laban after he had worked hard for seven years for the beautiful sister of the woman he had married! Those twenty years of working for Laban were not under pleasant working conditions by any stretch of the imagination. And when he left Laban, he was pursued and accused of great evil by him. Then came the confrontation with his twin brother whom he had cheated out of the birthright blessing. When that crisis was over and he could breathe a bit more freely, his daughter Dinah was defiled by Shechem; and his sons, in cold-blooded murder, brought him great embarrassment—to say the least—by killing all the Shechemites in a very cruel but also tricky and dishonest way. Soon after this the faithful servant of his mother, who nursed him as a child and

came to live with him and serve his family in the declining years of her life, died, and it robbed him of some of the little comfort that he knew in his life. And now the unexpected and painful blow: his beautiful and beloved wife, Rachel, died shortly after giving birth to his twelfth son.

Let it be stated that part of his rough life which was filled with disappointments and difficulties was due to his own nature. Jacob was a very competitive man, and his birth indicated what kind of life he would live. He was born holding on to the heel of his twin brother in an attempt to prevent him from being the firstborn. The name Jacob actually means heel catcher, and the last four letters in his name come from the Hebrew word for heel, the word being *aqeb*. And when a man with a competitive spirit meets and works for an uncle with an equally competitive spirit, you can expect life to be rough and to have problems arise, especially when both resort as well to trickery.

And the question that needs to be asked is, "What would you and I do if we had to experience all Jacob went through, and if we had his nature and lived under the same circumstances under which he lived?" It is easy, some three thousand years later, to sit in judgment upon Jacob. But let us heed Jesus' words, "Judge not that ye be not judged." For it is simply a fact that we always judge others according to what we ourselves would, except for the grace of God, have done. We know what our own evil nature would have done under those same circumstances, and we are able to judge others so correctly exactly because we know this sin so intimately in our own souls.

Let us therefore instead rejoice in the fact that Jacob's faith does triumph in this sad hour of the death of his beloved wife. It is stated that the true man in us comes to manifestation when we are in difficulties and under stress. Men otherwise calm

and collected will show, when a serious situation confronts them, what is really in them. And in Jacob's moment of intense sorrow at the death of Rachel, the new life of Christ did come out into the open. So often it was so deeply hidden in his soul that we would be tempted to question whether he had ever been born again. But now the grace of God upon him fans to a bright flame his faith in God. And Jacob revealed himself as a true child of God's covenant.

Rachel had an unusually hard labor so that the Scriptures make mention of it twice. God had told Eve that she and all women would "in sorrow... bring forth children." But when Scripture twice calls it hard labour, and Rachel died shortly after giving birth to a son, we may believe that this was unusually painful labour that God gave her. It was more than Rachel's body could take, and her soul departed and left that body. But before she did die she named this son Benoni, which means Son of My Sorrow.

Now there are different opinions as to what she meant. According to some she expressed her reaction to that hard labour, considering it a shame that she was not able to stand this pain, that she was such a "weakling" in comparison with other women who also had hard labour. She gave that name as she felt her life slipping away, though at the moment she may not have expected it to take her life. At least at the moment nothing mattered to her except her own terrible pains and discomfort. Her mind certainly was not at the moment upon God and His covenant. Others explain the name as meaning that she was defeated in her warfare with Leah to supply Jacob with sons. Because of the hard labour she would never again compete with Leah this way. It was too painful and terrifying for her to bear sons for Jacob. She admits defeat, and realizing the sorrow of the shame of having lost the battle, she names her son Benoni. Herein also is no faith on her part to be found. Covenant-mindedness is certainly not evident in such naming of a child. There is no rejoicing that another covenant child is born. There is no singing of, "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is His reward." There is no happiness over the fact that another arrow has been placed in Jacob's (and her) quiver. We say, then, "What a way to die!"

"But his father called his name Benjamin."

That little word "but" and the name Benjamin give us an entirely different picture of Jacob. No, he was not about to die, and his body felt none of those pains that Rachel suffered—though his soul did in his great love for her. And although from that point of view, and because of the death of Rachel, there was reason to say that he had his sorrows at the

moment, the name Son of My Sorrows was a name only his flesh could accept, a sorrow over the death of his wife. Yet, over against this sorrow was the fact that his quiver was now full, and he had twelve sons. He had both honour and strength, and the blessing of God was upon him. Two sons he now had from his beloved wife; and subsequent history show how much these two sons, Joseph and Benjamin, meant to him. The joy of another covenant son would never allow him to let this child go through life with a name that reminded him of his mother's sorrow.

Yet we must not explain Jacob's changing of the name as nothing more than a concern for the son, and a joy because of earthly strength and honour. Benjamin means Son of My Right Hand, and can mean Son of My Strength. The idea of Son of My Honour cannot be ruled out however. The Hebrew word *yamin* means right hand, or right side; and being seated at or being at one's right hand meant being in a place of honour as well as in a place of power. Thus Jesus' being seated at God's right hand means that He has been given all power (both in the sense of strength and of authority) over all things, and therefore has the highest honour the creature can have before the Creator. For now He is Lord of all lords, and King over all kings, which is quite some honour! Either way—Son of My Strength, or Son of My Honour—Jacob's faith triumphs over his flesh in so changing the name.

Consider that Rachel was his beloved wife, for whom he worked fourteen years, and for whom his love did not fade or diminish. His raising up a pillar over her grave shows that. For his mother's nurse's grave he used an oak tree already standing. And this pillar was no mere formality. It spoke of his love and of loving memories which he had for Rachel. And that made it hard for his flesh to go contrary to the dying wishes of a beloved wife. His flesh undoubtedly cried out to do what his wife wanted done. And we may believe that it was hard for him to change the name.

Sons and daughters will often contest the will of a father or mother for what earthly possessions are left behind. Such action does not stem from love for that parent. It rather shows a love for money, which is the root of all evil. It is not concerned with the wishes of the departed parent, because there is not the love there that ought to be present. The love of the money is greater and rules the actions of those who contest the will.

Now, granted that by doing this the departed parent is neither hurt nor benefited, for we cannot touch them after they have left our earth, and also conceding that out of sight so often means out of mind, and fleshly, earthly love needs constant reminders to keep the love burning brightly, yet

contested wills often have their beginning even before the funeral arrangements are made.

None of this was true of Jacob. And he did not change the name months or years later but before or at least on the eighth day of the child's life, and when he was circumcised. While his own sorrow over the death of Rachel was still great, he went contrary to her dying wishes and refused to call his son Son of My Sorrow.

Consider also that with all the other eleven sons his wives picked the names, and he let them stand. Here he makes the only exception and that for the child of his beloved wife whom he had just lost through death. We cannot escape the fact that Jacob realizes that this is something that he just cannot allow. His faith in God will not allow this. It will not let him accentuate and perpetuate the remembrance of Rachel's sorrow—whether that be because of the pains of her labour, or of her defeat in her struggle with Leah. A name that avoids—and indeed even denies—the joy of an inheritance from God, and a reward given in the covenant sphere, must not be carried on in that covenant home. Rachel's name expressed her fleshly sorrow, but in the covenant sphere there are spiritual joys. Our

light affliction which is but for a moment works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (II Corinthians 4:17). And nothing, not extremely hard labour, nor even death, can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:38, 39). These can only bring God's covenant people to endless, heavenly joys.

Rachel expresses the pessimism that must be the world's. For we live in a vale of tears, and there is no hope that unbelief can see, or can ground on a solid foundation. Look at man—and Rachel was looking at herself—and you can only rightly call your children sons of sorrow, and you can give to this world the name Vale of Tears. Faith in Christ, Who removed the curse by His cross, makes one an optimist in the true sense of the word. He sees his children as an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb as His reward. He has hope even in death. Death and the sorrow of bearing children is part of the curse because of man's sin. Faith sees sin paid for by the blood of the cross, and consequently sees the curse removed. Faith sees the strength and honour of having children in God's covenant, and it has hope of seeing the children's children in the new Jerusalem.

TRANSLATED TREASURES

A Pamphlet Concerning the Reformation of the Church

Dr. A. Kuiper

(Kuiper has discussed the unity of the church as that unity is expressed in broader ecclesiastical assemblies and in relationship with other denominations worldwide. He now concludes chapter 2 of his book with the following paragraph.)

33. Whether the Churches Ought to Interfere in What Does Not Belong to the Church

A church of Christ ought not to be locked up within itself in order to live for itself only. It also has a calling over against that which is outside, and that in three respects. First, after the members of the family of faith are properly cared for, the church must extend her alms and the care of her mercy to the wretched ones outside her gates. Secondly, the church must win, through evangelism, for the confession of Christ, those who live together with the church in the same city or village but do not participate in her glorious confession.

Thirdly, the church must send evangelists or missionaries to other regions and areas to plant the church where it is not yet found. The church's work is the work of philanthropy, evangelization, and missions.

Mercy towards those outside must be shown, not in order to obtain a good reputation, but because it is God's will and because the church lives in the consciousness of common guilt as the fountain of common misery.

Evangelism must have as its exclusive purpose the extension of the church in places where it is already established, and it ought to extend to Jews and heathen, to unbelievers and superstitious, to the poor as well as to the rich. The preaching of the gospel to those baptized is not evangelism but rather catechizing, and must proceed from the ministry of the Word; or, if the ministers are neglectful of

this, from the office of all believers. Each person in particular is called for the work of evangelizing among those who are outside the church in so far as God the Lord brings him in contact with outsiders. But the church as church is called so that definite men may be appointed as evangelists. Their activity must lead to the bringing in of these outsiders into the church. This is true because a good student who wants to make confession ought also to be baptized and the right to administer holy baptism belongs only to the church.

Missions to other regions or lands can in the same way be either particular or ecclesiastical. Each believer who knows himself to be called to this must go to strange lands or regions to preach the gospel, and one could wish that more people felt themselves compelled to do this.¹ On the other hand, particular mission societies who wish to send with authority in order to establish the ministry of the Word, to organize an administration of the sacraments, and to erect a church of God must not be tolerated. What individuals may do is bring together money to help a believer who wants to go so that he has travel money and provisions. But then such a one is no missionary, no sent one, no minister of the Word; he does not have the right to administer the sacraments and all he may do over there is to be a witness of Christ, and to preach the gospel. If such an individual, however, succeeds in converting Jew, heathen, or Mohammedans, and they request baptism, then such an individual ought to turn to his own church or to a neighboring church so that this church, now sending, can transfer a missionary, and by this missionary can administer holy baptism to these converts. Then he, by uniting them to a church, can prepare, through the choice of elders and deacons, the ministry of the Word for that group. But a church can also directly send, i.e., dispatch an evangelist or minister of the Word with the mandate to preach the gospel, and with power, if the Lord gives converts, to administer baptism to those in the name of the church, to gather them ecclesiastically, and to introduce among them the ministry of the Word.

Only a mission on this foundation may continually rely on the sympathy of the Reformed churches. No one has the right, while he himself does nothing, to judge others who do what their hands find to do.

Only one matter must be positively condemned. The so-called commission of Mission Societies by certain preachers is an action which must be called irresponsible. Preachers are no Roman priests who

work *ex opere operato*, and even if there were together legions of preachers loosely joined, outside of a church connection, these have neither the authority nor the least competency to grant a commission which can only be granted by the church federation.

34. What the Calling of the Churches is With Respect to the Schools

Education forms a uniquely independent sphere of spiritual activity just as home upbringing does. Therefore it is not proper for the church to assume public education as part of its duties. This would restrain civil development even as Rome's strong meddling in family life has killed family life in a number of lands.

On the other hand, it is good that the church has dealings with the school in three respects: 1) The church must establish, support, and maintain schools in so far as it sees that these are lacking due to neglect or else by interference of incompetents in schools which exist but exist in a wrong spirit. 2) The church has to care for the children of the needy that they be educated which, for the sake of thriftiness, leads to the establishment of diaconate schools. 3) The church has to watch over the independently existing schools for good instruction in the pure truth which is according to the Word of God.

The first and the last of these rules apply to education in all grades, including higher education. According to its nature and essence it is not the business of the church to educate scientifically, although she is perfectly free to establish seminaries to prepare candidates for the holy ministry. If, on the other hand, there is no occasion to receive education in the higher sciences, or the existing education for Christian youth is useless, then the church would be properly held responsible, not by virtue of her office, but, being made aware of the lack, to provide in this deficiency. But also where, whether through individuals or through the magistrate, high schools are established which are useful for the children of holy baptism, the church should always have to watch and to see to it that the content of the education given is the truth and is not detrimental to the truth.

The church of Christ is the pillar and ground of the truth and thus where that truth which is according to the Word of God is threatened or in danger, whether inside or outside her sphere, it is her right and her calling to raise her voice loudly and to rise heroically for the rights of her King and Lord.

Chapter III

Concerning The Deformation Of The Churches

35. What We are to Understand by the Deforma-

¹It is clear the Kuyper here denies that mission work always proceeds from the church and is always the official work of the church.

tion of the Churches

Deformation develops in churches which were once properly formed but have now lost their purity. All imperfections which characterize the church in the process of formation are not discussed here. In the Apostolic church in Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, etc., the formation of the church, during the life of the apostles, was still far from perfect. Many parts of the ecclesiastical organism were not yet developed. Likewise, the churches which came to manifestation anew in this country during the time of the Reformation often did this in a very effective way. Before 1563, even a common confession was lacking. Yet this was never considered deformation, either in the First or Sixteenth century, because deformation, disfigurement, corruption, degeneration, imply that the form or the nature was first good but since then has suffered and decayed. Nor must failure to attain the ideal be understood as deformation. In connection with the deformation of churches one can imagine an ideal situation, and that in a twofold sense. One can think of the condition of the heavenly church as an ideal here upon earth. But this will not do because it challenges God's order over this dispensation and opposes His arrangement. Or one can imagine a condition on earth which only one, in a single place, under very favorable circumstances, can exist and have existence for a short time, and which one now chooses as a model for the formation of all churches in every place and in every time. Measured by this standard and compared with that ideal model, nearly all churches will fall short and fall under the judgment of being incomplete. It is good, in this strong criticism, to have a living consciousness that the church never may have peace with itself nor fall asleep on what she has acquired,

but she must always hold high her glorious banner so as never to rest with what is wrong or faulty. Nevertheless, this way of judging is wrong for two reasons. First, it is wrong because our ideal must never be borrowed from what is sometimes seen in an individual church for a short time, but must always be taken from God's Word. Secondly, it is wrong because we do not do justice to the differences of places, times, and occasions; and to set forth the exception or the rule discourages, is unfair, and works toward Donatism. It is therefore pertinent that, with respect to the ideal, our only lawful ideal is that which Holy Scripture sets before the church of God as an obligation, whether directly or by lawful conclusions, also with respect to the interpretation of the Holy Spirit in history. This high ideal, just because it is an ideal, is never fully attained for any length of time on earth. And finally, with this in mind, one can properly speak of deformation if the church to which one belongs declines and sinks away from a higher level to a lower one. It surely remains the obligation of a church which has never occupied a higher level to strive for a more perfect state. And it is also permissible to consider that striving for a more perfect state as reformation. But it does not under such circumstances come to deformation, i.e., corruption. To proceed with discretion and clear insight, one must make a threefold distinction: 1) Church formation which is still in the process of attaining a fixed form; 2) church formation which, though having arrived at a fixed form, still has to strive for a more perfect form; 3) church formation which having given way from an earlier, purer church form must now lift itself up from that into which it has sunk. And only the last mentioned has to do with a deformed church.

Question Box

Those Who Fall Away

Rev. C. Hanko

A question has been sent in to the Question Box concerning Hebrews 6:4-6. The writer asks whether those who have tasted of heavenly gifts and were partakers of the Holy Ghost, and later fell away, were actually in the sphere of the covenant before they fell away. He likes some clarification on this matter.

The passage before us reads as follows: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened,

and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiv-

eth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned."

It immediately becomes evident that these individuals who are described here must be outstanding members of the church institute as long as they are on its rolls. They were once enlightened, that is, they were well instructed in the Scriptures. They understand the doctrines of the Scriptures very thoroughly, so that they can very well be scribes, teachers, ministers, or doctors of theology. They tasted of the heavenly gift. This gift is Christ. They know about the riches of salvation which are in Christ Jesus. The glad tidings of salvation have a pleasant ring in their ears. They were made partakers of the Holy Ghost. We think of Saul, the first king of Israel, who for a time had the gift of the Holy Spirit which enabled him to be a king over Israel, the theocracy. We think of Judas who had the power to heal and to cast out devils for a time. We think of those in the early church who prophesied, performed miracles and spoke in tongues. We can even think of preachers and evangelists who by their oratory seem to be filled with the Holy Spirit. They have tasted of the good word of God. They give others the impression that they are sincere Christians, for they can speak enthusiastically about the sermon they heard, about the worship service and the works of "charity" that they are privileged to perform. They give evidence of all the exuberance of those who experience temporal faith, an external excitement about salvation, even of the glories of the world to come, of which they speak and sing with vim and vigor.

They fall away. They are in no sense of the word the elect of God, children of the Most High. They never know regeneration or conversion, nor the gift of a true and saving faith. Upon this we are fully agreed, for there is no falling away of saints. Scripture is very clear on that. Also the text points out that they are guilty of crucifying Christ anew, just as the Jews once did, both in their sham-enthusiasm and in their departure from the way of truth.

They fall away, not from grace, but from the way of truth as professed by the church. They put Christ to open shame. In the verses 7 and 8 they are set in contrast to the soil that produces wheat. They belong to the soil that is full of seed of tares and produces nothing but tares. They are so corrupt that even the fruits they produce, their knowledge of the Scriptures, their powers of the Spirit, their enthusiasm about the Word of God and their exuberance concerning the world to come are fruits of darkness, mere thorns and thistles, worthy only to be condemned by God, exposed, and destroyed, so that they are cast into hell.

From this it must be evident that these temporary members of the church institute were not and are not members of the church in the real sense of the word, neither of the church invisible nor of the church visible, which is the body of Christ. It is not all Israel that is called Israel.

Thus it must also be maintained that these individuals who fall away are in no sense *within* God's covenant. They are not the true seed of Abraham. For God establishes His covenant with Abraham and his seed, which are the believers and their spiritual seed. Yet these unbelievers are for a time in the *sphere* of the covenant. They come in very close contact with that which is holy. That is evident, first of all, from the description that is given of them. That is evident, in the second place, from the fact that in verse 8 they are compared to thorns and briers, which have had the rain fall and the sun shine upon them. It is true, that they temporarily enjoyed the rain and the sunshine. But it is equally true that this rain and sunshine exposed them for what they are, corrupt soil that can only produce thorns and briers, which is fit for destruction.*

I hope that this may help to clarify the problems that arise in connection with Hebrews 6:4-6. If not, call again, and I shall give it another try.

*See further *The Standard Bearer*, volume 55, page 222, and "The Believers and Their Seed," by Rev. H. Hoeksema, pp. 137-145.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On January 25, 1981, the Lord willing, our beloved parents, MR. & MRS. HERMAN C. OPHOFF, will celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary. It is with deep gratitude and thankfulness in our hearts to our heavenly Father that we, their children, take this opportunity to thank them for the years of loving, covenant guidance and instruction they have given to us. We pray that God will continue to sustain them in their life together and that they may constantly experience His blessings.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children." Psalm 103:17.

Steven and Karen Ophoff
Bruce and Rosanne Van Solkema
John

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On January 9, 1981, our parents, MR. AND MRS. HENRY HOEKSTRA celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary.

We, their children are deeply grateful to our heavenly Father that He has seen fit to bless us with these God-fearing parents, who have instructed us in His ways. We pray that God will always be near them and bless them in the years to come.

"For the Lord is good, His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endureth to all generations." (Psalm 100:5).

James and Gladys Koole
Pauline Hoekstra
Linda Hoekstra
Harlan Hoekstra
Vernon Hoekstra

Mark Hoekstra
Mary Hoekstra
Rosalynn Hoekstra
Patricia Hoekstra

News From Our Churches

Following Rev. Kuiper's decline of their call, Redlands has extended a call to Rev. Flikkema, from a trio which included also Reverends Bekkering and Prof. H. Hanko.

From a Hull, Iowa bulletin, under the heading, "News from our sister churches," we find in rather concise form a report concerning the building projects of several of our churches: "Our church in Kalamazoo, Michigan has plans for their new building. Those plans may be seen on the bulletin board in the back of church. Our Loveland PRC has proposed the building of an addition to their present sanctuary which has become too small for their congregation. And also our Lynden PRC has decided to build a new sanctuary due to the growth of the congregation. Because of the required payment of taxes, the building project of our congregation in New Jersey has received a bit of a set-back." In connection with the tax payment by our New Jersey congregation we have learned that tax must be paid until the building is used for services.

While we're on the subject of building projects, from a South Holland bulletin we learn that a 5,000 square foot addition to their present school building was approved at their last Association Meeting.

In a bulletin two weeks after the one mentioned above, we find that South Holland's Council called "a meeting of all the men in our congregation who are interested in establishing a society for a Protestant Reformed High School." The South Holland Council further stated: "Our motivation in this is not mainly the weaknesses of the existing Christian High Schools. But our motivation is positive—the very same as that which motivated us to establish our Protestant Reformed Christian Grade School. It is our covenant calling as Protestant Reformed believers to instruct and bring up our children in the doctrine taught in our churches to the utmost of our power; and we promise to do this when we present our children for baptism (see our Form of Baptism). We are called to teach our children on the

basis of the inspired Scriptures as interpreted in our Reformed Creeds and confessed by our Protestant Reformed Churches. We are called to teach our children to live the life of the antithesis in the world, out of the principle of regeneration."

A Hudsonville bulletin announces some changes in their worship services: "the doxology of Psalter 197 will be sung at the conclusion of the morning service and the apostles' creed will be recited in unison while the congregation remains standing (this latter is for a three-month trial)."

In a recent letter from our mission field in Singapore, Rev. den Hartog writes of many exciting activities that are currently taking place there. In that connection he writes: "During the past two weeks, I have had the opportunity to give instruction to a group of Singapore University students in the doctrines of grace or the Five Points of Calvinism. This was indeed an unusual experience. We had altogether five sessions with a group of 12-14 young men. With only one exception, all of these brethren are strangers to the G.L.T.S. They came from different churches of Singapore. We were quite overwhelmed by their interest. Evidence of this is that all of the sessions which we had with them lasted from 2½ to 3 hours. It was amazing how many questions they had and how keen they were on searching out the implications of the truths of sovereign grace for all areas of Christianity, especially the area of evangelism." Later in that same letter Rev. den Hartog wrote: "It really continues to amaze us how filled with zeal the members of the G.L.T.S. are. It is indeed wonderful to see how much time and labor is spent by the members directly in the work of the church. Some of the members of the G.L.T.S. are busy with church work almost every evening as well as most of the Lord's Day. They do this in spite of the opposition many receive from their homes." And in closing he asks for "your continued prayers on our behalf and on behalf of the saints among whom we labor."