

January 2007 • Volume 57 • Issue 1

The Outlook

Dedicated to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith



But the path of
the righteous is
like the light of
dawn, that
shines brighter
and brighter
until the full day.

Proverbs 4:18

• Habakkuk's Challenge • The Ten Plagues: An Introduction to the Conflict • Looking Above • Bible Studies on Jacob
• The Holiness of God • Reformed Youth Services National Convention • New Testament Evidence Regarding Paedocommunion (IV)

The Outlook

Dedicated to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith

January 2007—Volume 57 No. 1

Habakkuk's Challenge	3
Rev. Oord presents a challenge for the year 2007.	
The Ten Plagues: An Introduction to the Conflict	5
Rev. Stromberg introduces what will prove to be an excellent series of articles on the ten plagues of Exodus.	
Looking Above	8
Rev. B. Vos looks at Chapter 7 of Revelation to that glorious promise given to the redeemed, that God shall tabernacle with His people.	
Bible Studies on Jacob	13
Rev. Vander Hart supplies readers with his next installment of studies on the life of this Patriarch.	
The Holiness of God	19
Winning Second Place in the College Division of <i>The Outlook's</i> Essay Contest, Miss Monica Rubingh presents an essay on <i>The Holiness of God</i> .	
Press Release of the Combined Meeting for the Publication of the Book of Praise (CanRC) and the Psalter Hymnal (URCNA)	22
Reformed Youth Services National Convention	24
Mr. Ed De Graaf, Director of RYS, gives a review of the RYS National Convention held at Covenant College this past summer and gives a preview to upcoming speakers for the 2007 Convention.....24	
Ashley Hoekman follows up Mr. De Graaf's article by giving us the view of one of the youth at the convention.....25	
The New Testament Evidence Regarding Paedocommunion (IV)	28
Dr. Cornelis Venema looks at John 6 in light of the sacrament and who may participate in it.	

(ISSN 8750-5754) (USPS 633-980)

"And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. . .and they cried, 'The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon.'" (Judges 7:20).

Journal of Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

Send all copy to:

Editor, Rev. Wybren Oord

7724 Hampton Oaks Dr.

Portage, MI 49024

Phone: (269) 324-5132 Fax: (269) 324-9606

Email: editor@reformedfellowship.net

Website: www.reformedfellowship.net

Board of Trustees

Henry Gysen, *President*; Ed Marcusse, *Vice President*; James Admiraal, *Secretary*; Casey Freswick, *Treasurer*; Ed Marcusse, *Vice Secretary/Treasurer*; George Knevelbaard; Rick Bierling; Walt De Lange; Evert Helms; Dave Klompjen; David Kloosterman; Don Langerak; Henry Nuiver; John Velthouse.

Editor: Wybren Oord

Contributing Editor:

Dr. Cornelis P. Venema

Business Manager: Shellie Terpstra

Design & Production: AVP Services

Cover Design: Mr. Jeff Steenholdt

This periodical is owned and published by Reformed Fellowship, Inc., a religious and strictly non-profit organization composed of a group of Christian believers who hold to the Biblical Reformed faith. Its purpose is to advocate and propagate this faith, to nurture those who seek to live in obedience to it, to give sharpened expression to it, to stimulate the doctrinal sensitivities of those who profess it, to promote the spiritual welfare and purity of the Reformed churches and to encourage Christian action.

The publishers of this journal express their adherence to the Calvinistic creeds as formulated in the *Belgic Confession*, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the *Canons of Dort*, and the *Westminster*

Confession and *Catechisms*.

All contributions represent the personal views of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the members of Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

Subscription Policy

The Outlook (USPS 633-980) is published monthly by Reformed Fellowship, Inc. (except July-August combined) for \$25.00 per year (foreign subscribers please remit payment in US Funds). Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue without the formality of a renewal order and he will be billed for renewal. Anyone desiring a change of address should notify the business office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of delayed delivery. Zip Code should be included. Periodicals postage paid at Grandville, MI and an additional office. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Outlook*, 3363 Hickory Ridge Ct., Grandville, MI 49418; OR in Canada to *The Outlook*, P.O. Box 39, Norwich, Ontario NOJ1P0. Registered as International Publications Contract #40036516 at Norwich, Ontario.

Advertising Policy

1. *The Outlook* cannot accept announcements or advertising copy inconsistent with the stated purpose of the Reformed Fellowship, Inc.
2. *The Outlook* reserves the right to reject, edit or request resubmission of announcement text or advertising copy.
3. All advertisements or announcements are to be submitted to the business office at 3363 Hickory Ridge Ct., Grandville, MI 49418, and must be received at least two months before the publication date.
4. Books, pamphlets or tapes to be advertised are to be screened as to author and content prior to publication of the advertisement, and such material should not conflict with the stated purpose of the Reformed Fellowship, Inc.
5. *The Outlook* reserves the right to limit the size of all announcements and advertisements, and to limit the number of issues in which they appear.
6. All advertisements and announcements must be approved by the board of the Reformed Fellowship, Inc. prior to publication in *The Outlook*.
7. All announcements and/or advertisements approved by the Board of the Reformed Fellowship, Inc. for publication in *The Outlook* shall appear free of charge; however, a gift would be greatly appreciated.
8. This Advertising Policy supersedes all prior policies, resolutions or other statements.

Editorial Office

7724 Hampton Oaks Dr.

Portage, MI 49024

(269) 324-5132 Phone

(269) 324-9606 Fax

editor@reformedfellowship.net

or wybkath@juno.com Email

Circulation Office

3363 Hickory Ridge Ct.

Grandville, MI 49418

(616) 532-8510 Phone

Business Mailing Address

3363 Hickory Ridge Ct.

Grandville, MI 49418

Email: reffellowship@juno.com

Habakkuk's Challenge

"...but the just shall live by faith." (Habakkuk 2:4b)

Habakkuk is a minor prophet with whom we are not all that familiar. In fact, I dare say most readers would have difficulty finding the Book of Habakkuk in the Bible. Having trouble with Habakkuk, however, puts the reader in the same category with many great theologians and scholars.

The eighth of the minor prophets, Habakkuk is a very controversial person. When discussing the meaning of his name, some claim it comes from the Hebrew meaning "a strong embrace." Others claim that "Habakkuk" is an Assyrian name meaning "basil," the spice that many of us have in our kitchens but seldom use. This confusion is the result of the fact that theologians do not know whether Habakkuk was an Israelite, an Assyrian, or the child of a mixed marriage between the two.

In addition, many historians claim that Habakkuk was not the original prophet but an editor of the present book. Some believe he was a temple prophet, and others claim him to be a Levite in the temple choir. Outside of a brief reference in the Apocrypha, Habakkuk is completely unknown except for the oracles in his own book. That is the way it is with prophets. It is God's story, not their own that they come to announce.

Habakkuk Challenges God

In the opening verses, Habakkuk lifts up a challenge to the sovereign

God. Habakkuk is the first of the Old Testament prophets who dares to address the Deity with questions that rise from his logical thinking. Habakkuk saw moral decay all around him. He heard men say, "God does not care what you do or how you live." The people set apart by God and given the Promised Land were doing whatever they wanted to do and there seemed to be no moral consequences at all.

In viewing the lack of punishment upon the immorality that he saw all around him, Habakkuk is moved to question the justice of God. He bluntly asks God, "How long are you going to allow this to continue? How long are you going to overlook evil?" This is a complaint that we often have, as well. As we prepare to enter the year 2007, we stand amazed at the supposed tolerance of our God. How can He permit such evil to dwell in the land?

When you think about it, that is pretty bold language—a creature challenging the Creator. Yet, it is a very real complaint for Habakkuk, and for us as we look back on 2006 and move ahead to 2007. It was no different in the days of Habakkuk. He saw that Israel had sinned and deserved punishment.

God responds to Habakkuk's complaint and tells the prophet that He is raising up a nation that will be an instrument of punishment against all those who have disobeyed Him. At first, Habakkuk is content with

the answer he has received. One can almost picture him sitting smugly on a rock overlooking Israel, just waiting for the Babylonians to come and destroy the Israelites.

But wait a minute! Did God say the Babylonians? Habakkuk could well understand the need to punish Israel for her evil, but why use a nation that is even more evil to carry out that judgment? And so, he complains to God again. How can a pure and holy God use such wicked people as His agents? How can God surrender not only Israel, but all the nations of the world, to the mercy of such a wicked nation?

Is this God's government of the world? This is often the same question we ponder as we see false religions prosper and terrorist attacks increase. We wonder about God's wisdom as He permits heathen nations to produce nuclear weapons, churches turned into mosques, and Christians around the world persecuted for their faith. Is this how God judges the world? Is not such a judgment a triumph of violence and unbelief on a larger scale? For Habakkuk, the wrongdoings of the Babylonians far exceeded the evil that it was meant to punish.

God Challenges Habakkuk

How does God respond to the challenge that is set before Him? Does He promise to raise up another great nation, perhaps the Egyptians, who will conquer the Babylonians? Does He promise that the armies of God will rise up

and conquer this wicked nation as in the time of Elijah? Does He ask for three hundred fearless men to fight the Babylonians as in the days of Gideon?

In the vision that Habakkuk receives, God promises something far greater. Instead of becoming concerned about the events of the world, God declares: “The just shall live by faith.” The righteous will triumph not because of their great weapons but because of their great faith.

For Habakkuk, the word “faith” meant much more than mere creedal opinion or traditions. It meant an active, personal belief in the promises of God. It was an active belief that God would take care of His people regardless of outward circumstances. John Calvin writes of the second chapter in Habakkuk, “These verses confirm the teaching that the just shall live by faith, because we could not live by faith unless we were firmly convinced that God cares for us and that the whole world is governed by His providence.”

Habakkuk Challenges Us

Several of our readers will face 2007 alone after many years of marriage. Others will go through trials in this year that they had not faced before. We may not be able to explain why God brings certain things into our lives, but Habakkuk challenges us always to have faith that God is in His holy temple and He will always put things right for those who love Him.

Although other prophets believed God was good to His people, Habakkuk’s affirmation is different

from those who came before him. Habakkuk has pondered the problem. His faith is no longer in God simply because his parents believed, or because that is what Israel believed. Instead, he has agonized over it and reaffirmed it for himself.

Habakkuk’s faith is a reasoned faith, not one casually accepted without question at the hands of tradition. Because of this, Habakkuk’s faith is much stronger and can stand the strains of the future. His challenge to us in 2007 is that we accept God’s divine providence no matter what circumstances the new year may bring.

Habakkuk challenges us to praise God in times of adversity because God rules over all things, making events work out for His final purposes and our spiritual welfare. God will punish evil doers—leave them to Him.

We do not need a faith based on custom or superstition. We do not need a faith dependent upon our parents, spouses, traditions or some institution. We need a saving faith. This is a faith that has within it a certain conviction as to the truth of the God of the Bible. It is a faith that acknowledges that God is in control of the world, the governments of the world, and all that is in the world—even our very lives.

We need an active faith, as was the faith of Habakkuk, that believes in the promises of God. He has led us through 2006; He will lead us through 2007. Such a faith has that glorious conviction that God fulfilled

His promise in His only Son so that all who believe in Him will not perish but, cleansed by His blood, will have eternal life.

God is in control. He was in control during the time of Habakkuk; He was in control during the time of the Reformation; God will also reward those who allow their faith to grow, who allow themselves to be tested and refined so that God will become their only source of strength and comfort. He is in control today and He will be in control tomorrow.

Rev. Wybren Oord is the pastor of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He is also the editor of *The Outlook*.

The Ten Plagues:

An Introduction to the Conflict

In the eleven issues of 2007, we present a study of the ten plagues of the great exodus. We will see how the conflict that began in Genesis 3:15 extends to the book of Exodus. Genesis 3:15 is prophetic. As the divine Prophet, God is describing the basis for the unfolding of human history. In verse 15, God defines the relationship between the serpent and humanity. With the statement, "I will put enmity between you and the woman," the relationship between the woman and the serpent is redefined. The term "enmity" is related to the term enemy; it means that there is hostility between two parties. The noun form occurs five times in the Old Testament, and in each case it communicates severe hostility, the type of hostility that results in murder (Ezekiel 25:15; 35:5; Numbers 35:21-22).

By personally appearing in the garden and speaking directly to the serpent and the woman, God is announced a new order. The original order of creation had been altered. Extreme hatred, animosity and the desire for bloodshed would characterize the new order.

It is important to note that God is the one setting up this new order. An outside authority did not impose this new order upon God against His will. God is in control of human history from the beginning, and remaining so to the end. As the author of providence, God is managing human history according to His

good will and His pleasure.

This conflict is described in three stages. The first stage of the conflict is between the serpent and the woman. God addressed the serpent first with the personal pronoun "you" because God was speaking directly to the serpent. In the previous verse, God had just pronounced a curse upon the serpent. The serpent was more cursed than all the other creatures that God has created.

The second stage of the conflict is between "your seed" and "her seed." The two seeds both exist within humanity. All men are spiritually related to one of the two seeds. The Hebrew term for seed is commonly used in reference to lineage or posterity. In the context of Genesis 3:15 the reference to seed is not a reference to physical lineage, but to the spiritual lineage of Satan and the woman.

According to the Scriptures, Satan is a fallen angel. As a fallen angel there is no biblical evidence that he has the ability to reproduce physically. In John 8:44 Jesus said to the Pharisees "You are of your father the devil." The Pharisees were not physical descendants of Satan, but they were spiritual ancestors of the Devil. By way of contrast, Jesus also taught that His heavenly Father has spiritual sons and daughters. In the Lord's prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray "Our Father who art in heaven." Therefore, we

should understand that within the context of humanity there are essentially two seeds, the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.

In the book of Genesis the reader does not have to wait long before the enmity between these two seeds is displayed through two brothers. Cain and Able shared the same biological father and mother, but they did not share the same spiritual pedigree. In Genesis 4, Cain is identified with the seed of the serpent. Cain rose up against the seed of the woman; he murdered Able, his own brother. This conflict between the two seeds can be seen throughout redemptive history.

The third stage of the conflict is between the serpent and the Messiah. Genesis 3:15 contains the promise that God will deliver His people through the seed of the woman. The Bible traces the development of this Messianic promise to the person and the work of Jesus Christ. From this point on, the Scriptures reveal an unfolding of redemptive history in which Jesus Christ is presented as the fulfillment of the promise that God made in Genesis 3:15.

This conflict is vividly portrayed in Luke 4 following on the heels of Jesus' baptism and the beginning of his formal ministry. Jesus is led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. As the second Adam, Jesus withstands this ordeal.

In Revelation 12, we have a vivid description of the battle that has taken place in heaven between Satan and the seed of the woman, Jesus Christ. Satan has been cast

The oppression that the Egyptians imposed upon the Hebrews should be viewed as an act of hostility.

out of heaven with the other fallen angels. He continues to be active on earth, but he works with the knowledge that his time is short. Through the death and the resurrection of Jesus he has been defeated, as a result he works with the knowledge that his time is short and with the knowledge that he has been defeated by the Messiah.

The Growth of Enmity

Now that we have the lens of Genesis 3:15 in place, we should be able to see how important the two seeds are for understanding the conflict between Pharaoh and God's people. In the book of Exodus, the enmity is no longer limited to two people; Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, but now the conflict is extended to two nations. Two nations are in conflict.

The Egyptians are identified with the serpent and its seed; and the descendants of Jacob are identified with the woman and her seed. Throughout the narrative we see how profound the enmity is between these two seeds. Yet today the church is either naive or uninformed concerning the profound nature of this conflict. There is the temptation for the church to make peace with the world. When the church makes peace with the world, peace is gained on the world's terms and the church accommodates itself to the world. As a result, the church loses its distinctives.

In Exodus 1, the Hebrews have experienced God's blessing. God has caused them to be fruitful and to multiply greatly; they are swarming and abundantly filling the land. Eventually there is a new Pharaoh; a new political power emerges in Egypt. We are not told the name of the new Pharaoh or his origin, but the new king does not have the same loyalty to Joseph and to the Hebrews as the previous kings have had. The new Pharaoh begins to view the Hebrews with suspicion. He is threatened by the incredible growth that Jacob's descendants have experienced in the land of Egypt. By comparison, the Egyptians have not experienced the same growth.

"Behold, the people of the children of Israel are many and more numerous than we are." The Israelites were perceived as a threat to Egyptian sovereignty. This idea is much more explicit in the original Hebrew than it is in most English translations.

In the original Hebrew, Pharaoh says, "Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we." The idea that the descendants of Jacob are "more and mightier than we" is reason for concern. The Egyptians must take decisive action.

Pharaoh responded to the threat by enslaving the Hebrews and afflicting them with burdens; they are forced to build the store cities of Pithom and Rameses. Institutional

slavery was imposed on the Hebrew people as a means of controlling and oppressing them. Pharaoh was not content to control the people, however; he wanted to reduce their numbers through oppression. The oppression that the Egyptians imposed upon the Hebrews should be viewed as an act of hostility. The oppression was an act of enmity whereby the seed of the serpent is trying to oppress and destroy the seed of the woman.

In support of this interpretation, the prophet Isaiah later used the Hebrew word for burdens to describe the work of the coming Messiah. In Isaiah 53:4 the prophet writes, "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted." In verse 11 Isaiah develops this idea further, "He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities."

The prophet Isaiah presents the Messiah as a suffering Servant that bears the burdens of God's people. By bearing the burdens of God's people, the Messiah brings deliverance to God's people. "My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities." In conjunction with this idea the prophet Isaiah also presents the Messiah as the faithful Israelite. As the faithful Israelite, the Messiah merits the covenant blessing for God's people.

The Seeking of Glory

Returning again to the book of Exodus, consider verses 1:10-14. In this short passage there is an allusion to

the story of Babel. In verse 10, Pharaoh says, “Come, let us.” Those are the same words used to introduce the intent of the wicked men in Genesis 11. In Genesis 11 ungodly men conspired to build a city with a tower reaching into heaven. In Exodus the Egyptians are pictured building cities out of brick and mortar just like the people of Babel. What is the point of this connection between Genesis 11 and the first chapter in Exodus? The serpent and his seed have not changed. The serpent continues to inspire his followers to seek their own glory and honor over and against the glory and honor of God.

Throughout history ungodly men act in the same way: they build edifices to their own glory and honor. The fact that one of the cities is called Rameses, presumably after the name of the reigning pharaoh, confirms this conclusion. From the time of the fall, the power brokers of this world have been consumed with their own power and glory.

In contrast, godly men are consumed with the glory of God. The true people of God are characterized by their concern for God’s glory and not their own. They worship and exalt the one true God, the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Consummator of human history.

Pharaoh’s plan to destroy Israel did not work because a greater power than Pharaoh was in control of the situation. The Egyptian scheme to oppress the Hebrews as a means of reducing their numbers was turned back on Egypt. In

verse 12 the Hebrew word translated “spread” in the NIV carries the idea of breaking out or bursting forth from the womb (Genesis 38:29). Such an increase should be understood as a partial fulfillment of God’s promise to Jacob. The descendants of Jacob are breaking out in great numbers and filling the land.

The multiplication of the Hebrews occurred to such a degree that the Egyptians were in “dread of the children of Israel.” The Hebrew word which is translated “dread” has an active thrust. The word is related to the word for loathe, hatred, abhorrence. The more the Egyptians oppressed the Hebrews the more the Hebrews multiplied and filled the land, as a result the Egyptians loathed the Hebrews.

The situation must have been very frustrating to the Egyptians. The initial reason for their oppression of the Israelites had to do with the fact that they perceived the Hebrews as a threat to their sovereignty. In their attempt to correct this perceived problem, the problem becomes even more severe. In response to the Egyptian oppression the Hebrews are multiplying at an alarming rate. The intentions of the Egyptians are thwarted by God; in the face of oppression God is blessing Israel.

In this conflict we see the intense animosity that exists between the two seeds, but we also see how the seed of the serpent is ineffective in thwarting God’s plan. God is faithful to His covenant promise, and God is effectively carrying out His plan of redemption.

As a member of Christ, you be-

long to the spiritual seed of the woman. As a member of Christ, you are not content with the edifices of this world and the accomplishments of sinful men. You know that your life is hidden in Christ. Your concern is for God’s glory and not your own.

Rev. Mark Stromberg is the pastor of the Belgrade United Reformed Church in Belgrade, Montana.

Looking Above

A Series on The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Revelation 7:15-17

“His Tabernacle Over Them”

“Who is able to stand?” That is the question with which Revelation 6 ends—a most fitting question in response to the opening of the sixth seal. Recall the scene of the opening of the sixth seal and understand the necessity of the question:

“I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’”

(Revelation 6:12-17)

So terrifying is the opening of the sixth seal, and so fitting is the question with which it ends, Chapter 7 is given as an answer. Chap-

ter 7 serves as an interlude between the opening of the sixth seal and the seventh seal—an interlude that answers the question: “Who is able to stand?”

In the interlude of Chapter 7, we have a picture of the Church Militant in verses 1-8. The Church is numbered and listed in terms of a military census, arrayed for battle and prepared for war. The Church Militant is under attack by the hordes of Satan; she is a Church on the defensive. But she is also a Church on the offensive, as she goes forth to conquer, not with weapons of war, but with the Word and Sacraments.

Having been given the picture of the Church Militant, we are then given a picture of the same Church, only now as the Church Triumphant, in verses 9-17. The climax of that picture is found in verses 15-17, where we find a picture of the eternal state of the Church as she stands in glory.

Righteousness in Christ

We read first of the activity of the saints. “Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple...” (7:15).

That we have in view the saints of God is evident from verse 14, where the elder instructed John as to their identity: “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their

robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation. In view here is not only the great tribulation that immediately precedes the return of Christ. In view here is also the tribulation that the Church has endured, and continues to endure, ever since the ascension of Christ into glory. In the world the Church has tribulation. She is the object of Satan’s rage and the world’s scorn. She is hated by her enemies. In the world she has tribulation.

This verse is not speaking about some pre-tribulation rapture. This verse is speaking about the tribulation that has afflicted the church since the ascension of Christ: that tribulation that is a harbinger of the great tribulation to come. Those who come out of the great tribulation, then, are not raptured saints. Rather, they are all Christians who have died from the time of Christ’s ascension to this very moment. They have come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

What a beautiful picture we are given here of the saints! The saints have washed their garments in the blood of the Lamb. The death of the Lamb has washed away our sins. He was delivered over to death for our sins. God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us. He was made a curse for us. And by His blood He has washed away our sins. Praise God for the passive obedience of Christ!

Do you think you will grow weary of singing the praises of the Lamb who died the death you deserved to die?

But there is even more. The saints have washed their garments in the blood of the Lamb, and their robes have been made white. Elsewhere we see that the robes of white are indicative of the righteousness of Christ. Not only has Christ died the death we deserved to die; He has also lived the life we could not live. The life that He lived—His active obedience—has been imputed to us. His righteousness has become ours. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. By His life we have been clothed in garments of righteousness. Praise God for the active obedience of Christ!

We have before us both the active and passive obedience of Christ to teach us that those whom Christ has saved, He has saved to the uttermost! There is nothing lacking in our salvation! There is nothing that needs to be made up in our salvation! His life and His death are sufficient! His life and His death are complete! His life and His death are perfect! You need nothing more than that! You who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ belong to Him completely! He has accomplished and secured your salvation! Your sins have been washed away by His death—you stand in righteousness before Him by His life!

The Result of Salvation

“Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple” (Revelation 7:15). What is the result of salvation? Worship! We are saved to worship! Salvation is not an end in itself. We are saved for a purpose, and that purpose is to worship God! We see the pattern already in the Old Testament exodus from Egypt. Why did Moses command Pharaoh to let God’s people go? That they might worship God! The great Old Testament deliverance of the people of God is found in the book of Exodus, but the story does not end there—it does not end with deliverance.

Following the book of Exodus comes the book of Leviticus—a book that instructs the people of God as to the proper response to deliverance, namely, worship! So it is with us: we are saved to worship! That is the purpose of salvation! It is no coincidence that everywhere in the book of Revelation we find the redeemed of the Lord worshiping God and the Lamb. We saw it in Chapters 4 and 5. We see it again in Chapter 7. We shall see it in Chapters 11, 14, 15, 19, 21, and 22. The redeemed of the Lord have been saved to worship God.

Do you think the worship of the Church Triumphant in heaven will be boring? Do you think you will

grow tired of worshiping the Lamb who has wrought your salvation? Do you think you will grow weary of singing the praises of the Lamb who lived the life you could not live? Do you think you will grow weary of singing the praises of the Lamb who died the death you deserved to die? Do you think you will grow exhausted in looking upon the face of the Lamb who has saved you to the uttermost? Do you think you will become bored with the glory of the Lamb? Then you have not yet understood the depths of your sin! You have not yet understood the heights of God’s grace! You have not yet understood the glory of your Savior! You have not yet understood the majesty and holiness of your God! You do well to think upon the amazing grace of God, and when you have thought upon that, to lift your voice in song: *When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise, than when we’d first begun!*

We shall serve Him and worship Him for all eternity in His temple. This is not some earthly temple; this is the cosmic Holy of Holies, the new heavens and the new earth, the very dwelling place of God! We do not go back to an earthly temple! We do not go back to an earthly tabernacle! Those things were only shadows and types of the heavenly reality. We shall stand in God’s presence. We shall serve Him in His Temple, in His glorious Presence.

The Activity of God

“And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them.” Literally

The glory of the Lord is pictured again and again as hovering over His people

the phrase reads, “He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them.” The phrase takes us all the way back to Genesis 1:2, where the Spirit of God hovered over the waters of the deep. As the Spirit of God hovered over the waters of the deep, He brought forth light into the darkness, He divided the waters and made dry land appear in the midst of the deep, and He created man to dwell in Sabbath rest in the Paradise of God.

The phrase then takes us to the Old Testament exodus from Egypt. God Himself makes reference to that in Exodus 19:4, where He says, “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself.” God hovered over His people, even as a bird hovers over its young. The picture becomes more complete when we consider Deuteronomy 32:10-12, “He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, he instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the Lord alone led him, and there was no foreign god with him.” How did God hover over His children in the Old Testament Exodus? He hovered over them by His glorious Presence, the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.

He hovered over them and brought them to the promised land of rest.

The phrase then brings us to the end of Exodus 40, where upon the completion of the tabernacle, the glorious Presence of God comes down—that pillar of cloud and pillar of fire—and fills the tabernacle with His glorious Presence! The scene is repeated once more at the close of 2 Chronicles 5:11-14, where we read,

“And it came to pass when the priests came out of the Most Holy Place (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves, without keeping to their divisions), and the Levites who were the singers, all those of Asaph and Heman and Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, stood at the east end of the altar, clothed in white linen, having cymbals, stringed instruments and harps, and with them one hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets—indeed it came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying, ‘For He is good, For His mercy endures forever,’

that the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.”

The glory of the Lord is pictured again and again as hovering over His people.

And now, in Revelation 7, you see the fulfillment of these shadows and types. Then the cloud filled the earthly tabernacle, preventing the priests from entering the Presence. Then the cloud filled the earthly temple, again preventing the priests from entering the Presence. But now God Himself spreads His tabernacle over us who have been made priests to God, and who stand in His glorious Presence! We rejoice in the shadow of His wings (Psalm 63)! We rejoice in God, who is our dwelling place (Psalm 90)! We abide under the shadow of the Almighty (Psalm 91)!

This great and glorious God shall keep us for all eternity. That is what it means that He spreads His tabernacle over us. Verse 16, “They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore, the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat...” We are reminded of the words of Psalm 121,

“He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your Keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the

moon by night. The Lord shall preserve you from all evil. He shall preserve your soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth and even forevermore.”

He shall protect and preserve us, for the Lamb shall be a Shepherd to us, verse 17: “...for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters...” “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...” The Shepherd has become our Lamb, our Lamb who Shepherds us! Our Savior gathers us, His little sheep, in His arms and carries us close to His breast. He is the Savior who leaves the ninety and nine to seek and to save the one that is lost. He is the Savior who upon finding that lost sheep, reaches down, picks up that sheep, restores that sheep, heals that sheep, and brings that sheep safely into His fold. He is the Savior who knows His sheep, and His sheep know Him, and no one can snatch His sheep out of His hand. “The Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters...”

And then, the most precious statement of all: “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” How often we weep in this life! We weep over our sin. We weep over the sin of others. We weep

over the brokenness in our lives. We weep over the brokenness in the lives of others. We weep when we go through trial. We weep when we lose a loved one. We weep at the grave of our loved ones. How often we weep!

Yet, God Himself will wipe away every tear from our eyes! The preciousness of this verse is underscored all the more by the fact that it is God Himself who wipes away our tears. Throughout the book of Revelation, God sends His agents to do His work. He gives the revelation to Christ. Christ gives the revelation to His angel. The angel gives the revelation to John. John writes down the Revelation. The four living creatures command the horsemen of the apocalypse to ride forth. The angels sound the trumpets. The angels pour forth the bowls. Everywhere God commands and His agents run forth to accomplish His work. But not here. Here it is not an angel. Here it is not the cherubim. Here it is not the seraphim. Here it is not a living creature. Here it is not an elder. Here it is God Himself who wipes away every tear from our eyes. Think of it! God Himself reaching forth, touching your eyes, and wiping away your tears, wiping them away so completely that there shall be no more tears to cry! You shall weep no more!

Who is able to stand? Revelation 7 gives you the answer: only those

who are saved by the Lamb, washed in His blood, clothed in His righteousness, shall stand. And they shall stand, only to fall down in worshipping Him, their Shepherd who shall spread His tabernacle over them for all eternity. And in the tabernacle of His glorious Presence, you will never weep again.

Rev. Brian Vos is the pastor of the Trinity United Reformed Church in Caledonia, Michigan.

Who is able to stand? Revelation 7 gives you the answer: only those who are saved by the Lamb.

Bible Studies on Jacob

Lesson 9: The Lord Directs Jacob to Leave Laban

Read Genesis 31:1-55

Introduction

Jacob has been disadvantaged by Uncle Laban on several counts: he tricked Jacob at the time of the marriage so that Laban is able to get both daughters married to Jacob, and he gets fourteen years of work from a willing Jacob. Not bad for Laban! But God's "hidden hand" is also working out a great plan for this patriarch so that God's promises can be realized. Jacob is blessed with children in his tents and with increased livestock in his fields. In sum, God has kept His word to Jacob. The evidence is clear for all to see.

Restless relatives (31:1-3)

Jacob detects that a different atmosphere has developed in the household of Laban. Even his cousins, Laban's sons, grumble against him as they see God blessing Jacob's flocks. Uncle Laban also appeared to become more and more alienated from Jacob. There is something of irony here: blessings from the LORD toward Jacob do not awaken rejoicing in Laban's household. Instead, bitter muttering begins to brew.

We are reminded of something similar (not precisely the same, however) had happened between the herdsmen of Abram and the herdsmen of Lot in Genesis 13. While the situation with Jacob and Laban is not exactly like that of

Abram and Lot earlier, one point of similarity between the two stories is that the divine blessing that is so clearly present with Jacob causes feelings of jealousy and suspicion in Laban's family. "Jacob has taken all that our father owned," say Laban's sons. This is no longer "one big happy family."

So there are human factors that are certainly at play in Jacob's decision to leave Laban. But more importantly, it is the LORD Himself who tells Jacob to leave. Mother Rebekah had told him that she would send word to him when it was safe to return home. But that word never comes. Therefore, it is the covenant God who will now move His son Jacob back to the Promised Land. Notice how the LORD describes Canaan: it is the land of *your fathers* (verse 3). Whereas Abram had come from Ur of the Chaldees in Mesopotamia, and this uncle with his family still live in Haran, Canaan is now viewed as the land of the ancestors. Even in the words that God uses, Canaan is home, the center, the place where Jacob really belongs.

Jacob rallies his wives (31:4-13)

Rather than go back to his home to speak with his two wives, Jacob summons them to the field where the flocks are (does he fear that someone—maybe a relative—might steal from him?). Leaving

Laban and his family is no small matter. After all, Rachel and Leah are the daughters of Laban. Thus Jacob must persuade them that this separation is necessary. Jacob's speech is interesting in that he mentions some of the sore points in his relationship with his wives' father, Laban. But he also acknowledges that it was God who was the ultimate source of his prosperity. We further learn that Jacob has had another dream: an angel of God has told him to leave Paddan-Aram. The "God of Bethel" is now directing him to leave and return to his "native land" (verse 13). His speech points out human factors (father Laban has cheated him) and the decisive divine factor in his decision. "God told me to leave here and go back home."

The wives 'stand by their man' (31:14-16)

It is important that Jacob have his wives on his side in this struggle with Laban. We readers may wonder how Rachel and Leah will respond. After all, Jacob has not spoken too favorably about their father. Whose side will they be on? But in their response it becomes clear that they are loyal to Jacob, no longer tied to their own father Laban.

Their comments reveal to us that not only has Laban tried to use Jacob for his own purposes, but he has also taken advantage of his own daughters. "Our father has treated us as foreigners, and he has certainly eaten up our inheritance!" they say. They even say that he has "sold" them. So they urge Jacob to obey God.

Jacob and his household make their exodus (31:17-21)

Jacob had, by the grace and favor of God, become a wealthy man. He has many children, servants, and livestock. Anyone who has had to move from one home to another home can begin to appreciate something of the preparations and detail that go into the act of moving. Jacob is running away; he is fleeing (verses 20,21). Therefore, he must move quickly, lest his preparations for moving become known to someone from Laban's household. Even then, once Jacob and his large household actually leave, they must move quickly. Travel on camel can go relatively quickly, but to move livestock ahead quickly, is another matter all together. This flight is filled with danger, real danger and not imagined.

The remarkable thing here is that Rachel *steals* the teraphim, while Jacob *deceives* Laban by leaving without telling Laban. What were these teraphim? Check one or two Bible dictionaries. Laban later on calls them "gods" (verse 30). They could be small or large, and most scholars think of them as images of household gods. They are referred to in Judges 17:5; 18:14-20; 1 Samuel 19:13-16; 2 Kings 23:23-24; Ezekiel 21:21; Hosea 3:4; and Zechariah 10:2. Prophets denounced their use. The passage in 1 Samuel 19:13-16 is a rather humorous incident in which Michal, Saul's daughter and wife of David, uses these teraphim to trick her father's own messengers who have come to arrest David. Apparently they

may have been large enough to be placed in a bed to suggest that a human being was under the bed covers! These teraphim may have identified who had inheritance rights to property. They may have functioned as a kind of deed to the property: the holder of the images is the owner of the property. If that is the case, then this is why Laban is so upset that they were missing. But what does that say about the religious practices in Laban's family? Or, is this "pay back time" for Rachel against her father, since Rachel and her sister Leah believe that they have been cheated out of property inheritance by their father (see verses 15,16)? Rachel's motives may not be completely clear to us. Still, what were idolatrous images doing in this home in the first place?

Laban in hot pursuit (31:22-35)

Laban had been involved in sheep-shearing, and therefore he is not in the immediate area when Jacob flees. To move such a large household could not have been a quick affair, and yet it takes Laban and his force seven days to catch up with him, and by then Jacob and his family are in Gilead (about 350 miles distant). This is a great deal of distance made in a week's time!

But God is still in charge. By means of a dream He puts Laban

on stern notice that he must not do anything to harm Jacob. "Watch your words, Laban!" And yet when Laban speaks, he pours forth words in questions that are angry and insistent? "What's this? Why...?" It reminds us of similar questions in Genesis 3.13; 4:10; and 29.25. Laban, the uncle who has manipulated many things to his own advantage stands before God's chosen one, and he sputters out charges against Jacob, as if Laban is a prosecuting attorney.

Laban knows that he cannot do anything against Jacob, but he demands to search for his precious "gods," the teraphim. The readers can tense a bit, since we readers know something that Jacob does not know: the idols are in Rachel's saddle bag. But the readers' tension switches to a smile when we picture Rachel, claiming to be in her period of monthly impurity, sitting on the "gods"! To think that people actually believe that a creature could have divine powers! See Romans 1:18ff.

Jacob's angry response (31:36-42)

Laban has treated Jacob as a common thief, with accusations and property searches. Once it is clear that Laban's precious idols (the teraphim) are not found, Jacob then responds with great anger. We sense that much frustra-

This flight is filled with danger, real danger and not imagined.

tration has been building up over all these years. It is clear that God has kept His word to be with Jacob. He has thrown His protecting shield around him. Laban has enough fear of God that he takes seriously God's warning. Laban may use talk tough, but in the end he takes no hostile action against Jacob.

Covenant made to keep the peace (31:43-55)

Laban answers Jacob with words that sound like he must "get the last word in." He basically says, "I really don't care what you say or think, Jacob. This is *my* family, and these are my *animals*. All you see is mine" (verse 43). These are remarkable words: brazen, possessive, proud. Yet Laban is also realistic now, knowing that God has thrown a shield around Jacob and his household. Laban can protest all he wants, and he can demand all he likes, but he will not get this family and these animals back under his control. God is in control! No doubt Laban has in his mind the stern warning that the LORD gave him in the dream.

Laban then retreats to the next best thing: let's make a covenant. The terms of the covenant focus on the following things: 1) protection of Laban's daughters, lest Jacob prove unfaithful, and 2) prevention of hostility between Laban and Jacob. Laban still seems so self-centered ("Mine!"),

and yet he makes a very interesting statement about God in terms of this situation. God is witness to all this, including the marriage of Jacob with Rachel and Leah. God will be the "unseen Seer" in all these events.

Take notice of the components of this personal covenant: there is a sacrifice, coupled with a vow, witnesses are present (God, first of all, and then a heap of stones), and then a concluding meal. In a far grander way, God binds Himself to His elect with the sacrifice of His Son, His Word (of promise), the witnesses of Himself and all creation, and meal of bread and wine to confirm in believers the truth that is placed before us in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Genesis 31 marks the conclusion of an important chapter that was written by God in the history of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Sad events caused Jacob to flee from family in Canaan (Gen. 28), and now a sad situation causes Jacob to flee from his extended family in Paddan-Aram. Jacob, now in his 90s, seems to be a "man on the run." He has been blessed by the LORD, but God's blessings have provoked in Laban less than pure desires. Jacob's future and that of his family are not in this area. God's plan for His people at this point includes location in the Promised Land, and

that is where God's Word and human events now direct Jacob. S.G. De Graaf (*Promise and Deliverance*, vol. 1, p. 207) says this,

By His Word the Lord had separated Jacob and Laban, so that Jacob would live only for the Word of the Lord and await the fulfillment of the promise in Canaan. Events had to take this course for the sake of Christ, who is completely removed from the sinful life of the world. Since Jacob's separation was not complete, the cleansing of his house would have to continue later.

It is clear that God has kept His word to be with Jacob. He has thrown His protecting shield around him.

Lesson 9: Points to ponder and discuss

1. Rachel and Leah seem bitter toward their father (verses 14-16). Can this be a proper motive for encouraging Jacob to leave Laban? What should be the believer's motivation when doing the will of God?
2. God is pleased to work His covenant plan through believing households, through families where He is believed and honored. Yet human families are not the ultimate since the Kingdom of God can "set father against son and mother against daughter." Rachel and Leah choose for Jacob (albeit with less than pure reasons; question #1 above). Believers' heart loyalty is to God and His Son Jesus Christ. How can such loyalty to God today affect families? At what point does a person make a break with his or her own family members because of the Christian faith? And, if a break must be made, what then could and should be our attitude toward non-Christian family members?
3. What parallels do you see between the flight of Jacob and his household from Laban, and that of the Israelites later from Egypt? What kind of situation are both groups leaving? What does God say and do that enables both groups to leave, even to escaping real dangers?
4. Rachel wants to keep the teraphim. What does the presence of these idols and their use suggest about the level of spirituality in Laban's family? Is Rachel spiritually like Lot's wife who "looked back" when she should have spiritually "cleaned house" in the move away from Paddan-Aram?
5. God is a Witness, the unseen audience of One to all that is said and done. How should that reality control what is said at a profession of faith, at a wedding, in business dealings, and in courtroom trials? Read Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 37, Q/A 102.

Bible Studies on Jacob

Lesson 10: Jacob Prepares to Meet his Brother Esau

Read Genesis 32:1-21

Introduction

One crisis with Laban has been averted; another looms ahead for Jacob with Esau. A covenant seals the deal between Jacob and Laban so that there may be peace between them and their descendants.

"Good fences make good neighbors," it is said. But Esau is a new neighbor that is just over the Gilead horizon to the south. Esau was fiercely angry when we last met him in the text (Gen. 28). Are there still storm clouds in his heart and soul?

Heavenly and human messengers (32:1-8)

Jacob continues to move toward the place where he will encounter his twin brother Esau. Laban, his father-in-law, is headed back to his home (Gen. 31:55), but Esau is before him. Yet while Jacob is moving south, we read that "the angels of God met him" (Gen. 32.1). The last time that Jacob saw angels was in Genesis 28:12 when he spent the night at Bethel, and he dreamed of angels ascending and descending on the stairway that connected heaven

and earth. We've come full circle. That dream had been a source of great comfort and encouragement to Jacob as he left the Promised Land with only his staff in hand. God promised him great blessings in His covenant.

Jacob is returning home in Genesis 32, but now he is a richer, more powerful man. Yet the question is this: what will be the attitude of Esau now after twenty years? Will the murderous intentions earlier have died away? Or, will Esau still bear a grudge so intensely that Jacob needs to fear for his life? In addition, if Esau still seeks to destroy Jacob, he will certainly want to destroy his family (or enslave them, or sell them), and confiscate his vast possessions.

Jacob interprets the presence of this band of angels as a positive sign, namely, that God was with him and would help to protect him. So he gives this place a name: "Mahanaim" (which means "Two Camps," God's camp and Jacob's camp). The word for "camp" in the original language can also mean "army." Is there ambiguity here? Could it be that God's "army" has arrived because there is going to be a battle? In Genesis 31 Laban's "camp/army" had come in pursuit of Jacob and his "camp," but bloodshed was

averted. Laban went back in peace. Can peace be preserved between Jacob and Esau?

In any case, Jacob sends messengers ahead to meet Esau first before he himself will encounter him. Again, the original language catches the wordplay since the word for "angels" in verse 1 is the same word for "messengers" in verse 3. God sends His heavenly messengers to Jacob, and Jacob now sends his earthly messengers to Esau. He wants to soften Esau, if that be needed, and to sweeten his disposition before the actual meeting takes place.

Furthermore, as a strategic precaution, Jacob divides his one camp into "two camps." See verses 7 and 10. After all, if Esau should attack one group, then there will be time, he hopes, for the other group to make its escape (verse 8).

The messengers that Jacob sends have instructions on how they are to speak. It is an interesting picture that they are to paint to Esau once they meet him. On the one hand, Jacob refers in verse 4 to his brother as "my master Esau." As for himself, he calls himself, "your servant Jacob" (verses 5,18). In the context of the ancient Near East, that is suggestive that Esau is the "head" while Jacob is the "tail" (see Deut.

28:13,44b), that Esau is the *lord*, but Jacob is the *slave*. This is not quite how Genesis 25:23 said it was going to be! So, Jacob is clearly humbling himself before Esau in language that is very politically polite.

On the other hand, he wants to include in the message to his brother the fact that he has gained so much wealth in the time he lived by Laban. What a list: donkeys, sheep and goats, menservants and maidservants! What message does Jacob intend to send with this inventory list of livestock and people? Does Jacob want Esau to be impressed? It could very well be that Esau, if he is still seething with anger, might hear this list of goodies and it could make him covetous and quite desirous of getting his hands on all this wealth.

Jacob's messengers return to him with ominous news: Esau knows that Jacob is coming in his direction, and he is coming toward Jacob. But Esau is not alone: there are 400 men with him. The text in verse 6 leaves the reader with a question: are the 400 men an attack party? Or, is Esau coming in peace with a large contingent of his forces in order to have a reunion party? Which is it?

Jacob is going to "play it safe." He is seized with great fear and distress, says verse 7. Now he carries out his safety net plan of dividing his camp into two groups with the hope that if there is a violent encounter with Esau, then at least part of his group can likely survive.

Jacob is returning home in Genesis 32, but now he is a richer, more powerful man. Yet the question is this: what will be the attitude of Esau now after twenty years?

**Jacob's first recorded prayer
(32:9-12)**

When Jacob had realized the presence of God “in that place” of Bethel, he had responded to the dream of the previous night with wonderment, fear, and with a vow to serve the Lord God if He carried out His promises. It was not a prayer that was addressed to God directly. Here in Genesis 32 we now have the first recorded prayer of Jacob. This is not to suggest that this is the first time that he ever prayed in his life. We simply are not given information on the prayer-life of this patriarch (as we are rarely given insight on the prayer-life of many Biblical characters!). In any case, review the various aspects that Jacob mentions in his desperate prayer to God:

1. He addresses the God of his ancestors, Abraham and Isaac. He is speaking to the one, true God.
2. He recalls something that God had said to him earlier, specifically, the fact that God is the One who had directed him to return to the Promised Land and to his family. Jacob recalls a bit of history.
3. He humbles himself: “I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness You have shown your servant.” His word for “unworthy” is literally, “I am the little one, the younger one.” He was, after all, the younger of the twins born to Isaac and Rebekah. He adopts a lowly spirit in the presence of Almighty God.
4. He acknowledges that he has been blessed. From one walking staff... to two groups!

***Jacob, ever resourceful,
draws up a strategy to pacify Esau (verse 20).
He wants to soothe his (possibly) hostile spirit
with wave after wave of gifts.***

5. He presents his petition, “Spare me! I’m very afraid for myself, for my children and their mothers!”
6. He concludes by mentioning again God’s covenantal promise to make his descendants like the sand of the sea (see Gen. 28:14; cf. Gen. 22:17).

This is really an awesome prayer! God often seems to whisper in our prosperity, but He shouts to us in our pain. We have no way of knowing how “close” Jacob was to God during the twenty years of living with Uncle Laban. He labored, and he prospered greatly. Did Jacob give God the thanks and the praise of this during those twenty years? We do not know. But now, as Esau approaches, Jacob is afraid of losing all that he has. Yet, because he has nowhere else to go, he turns to the covenant God, who is ever faithful, and Jacob reminds the Lord of what He has said Himself. “This was Your Word, O my God, and these were Your promises!” God is working in Jacob, stirring up in him a proper and prayerful dependence upon his heavenly Father.

Gifts that Jacob keeps on giving (32:13-21)

It is interesting to note that this section begins and ends with a notice that Jacob spent the night there (verses 13 and 21). The wrestling with the “mysterious

Stranger” will also occur at night. Jacob has not yet come into the daylight, one might say. That will come later. For now, he makes plans at night.

Jacob, ever resourceful, draws up a strategy to pacify Esau (verse 20). He wants to soothe his (possibly) hostile spirit with wave after wave of gifts. These are valuable gifts of various animals: 550 animals in total, of which 490 are female. The female animals are valuable, of course, because of the prospect of bearing more animals later on and thus increasing the owner’s wealth.

We wonder: is Jacob feeling something of “guilt feelings” over having deceived his brother Esau in Genesis 27 by getting father Isaac to bless him? Is this a way to pay back his brother with something of the abundance that the LORD has showered upon him? Perhaps so. In any case, the gifts are on their way, headed to Esau. Time will tell whether Esau will accept them (and favorably), or, whether he will tell the messengers of Jacob to “return them to sender.”

How different are God’s gifts to us in Jesus Christ! We earn nothing, and we cannot merit any of God’s blessings. All that we have is a freely given gift to us in Jesus Christ. The wage we earn is death because of our sins, both in

terms of our actual deeds and the sinful nature we receive from the first Adam. Jacob is trying to win Esau's favor. But Christians are liberated from all attempts to placate God's justice, since God has dealt with all of our sinful deeds and sinful nature by pouring out His wrath in justice upon Christ on the Cross. Therefore, Christians live in joyful thanksgiving, not in cringing terror before God (cf. Rom. 12:1ff).

Rev. Mark Vander Hart is Associate Professor of Old Testament Studies at Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana.

Lesson 10: Points to ponder and discuss

1. Read 2 Kings 6:8-17. Elisha is calm, even though Syrian armed forces have surrounded the village to capture him, because he knows that the angelic forces were present. Recall what Christ said in the Garden of Gethsemane about the legions of angels He had at His command. Do such angelic forces still surround believers today? How do Romans 8:31ff and 1 John 4:4 relate to this?
2. Jacob is afraid of his brother Esau. Does he have good reason for this fear? Why or why not? So many times we hear people in the Bible being told, "Don't fear!" What are the reasons for fear in Christians' lives? Are there things that we should fear? What things should we never fear?
3. Some twenty years have passed since Esau and Jacob have faced each other. Is it possible that a person can harbor a grudge or nurse anger for at least two decades? What would be the point? Does Esau have a just cause, if he indeed is still angry? What does the Bible say on how Christians must handle anger? See Ephesians 4:26,27, and 31.
4. How do you evaluate the various strategies Jacob uses to protect himself and his grand camp? We might well ask, "Where is Jacob's faith? If the heavenly messengers have come to protect Jacob and his camp, how trusting is Jacob, after all?" Is Jacob doing the human thing, "just to make sure?" "God is with me, but I've also got to be 'practical'?" On the other hand, is wise strategy wrong? After all, Jacob is not using his strategy as a substitute for God, for his prayer shows his full reliance upon God.
5. Read Genesis 32:12. Why does Jacob remind God of the promise to make his descendants abundant "like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted"? Could it be because Jacob is holding onto the promises of Genesis 28? Does he fear that a violent attack from Esau could wipe out the covenant future (humanly speaking)? Abraham had a similar situation in Genesis 22, when God told Abraham to sacrifice his only son, his beloved son. How did Abraham face that test? See Hebrews 11:17-19.
6. Reflect on what Jacob was like before he had fled from Esau, and what Jacob is like now. How has he changed, if at all? How does God work in His people to mature and sanctify them in Christ through His Holy Spirit?



Second Place Winner College

The Outlook Essay Contest

The Holiness of God

The church today often speaks of God as just a big daddy who is there to love us and take care of all our hurts. We can climb into his arms and get a big hug when we are feeling sad. While this is nice to think about, it is hardly the way Isaiah felt when He stepped into God's presence. Rather he fell flat on his face and cried out, "Woe is me, for I am undone" (Isaiah 6:5). So where has the church today gone wrong? One of the problems with our attitude towards God is that we have pushed God's holiness into the back of our minds and forgotten what it means for God to be holy.

God's Holiness in Light of His Other Attributes

God's holiness is often mentioned in the Bible. God reveals Himself to the Israelites as a holy God requiring holiness from His people (Leviticus 11:45). Hannah praises God as being holy in I Samuel 2:2. God is also often referred to as "the Holy One" (Psalm 71:22, 78:41). God's holiness is the only attribute of God that is elevated to the superlative degree. In Isaiah 6:3, the angels sing praise to God saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." This is repeated in Revelation 4:8 where the four living creatures spend day and night singing, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." In Hebrew, emphasis is shown by repetition, so this indicates

that a special importance is placed on the holiness of God. It is easy for us to forget or avoid this attribute, so it seems like God puts special emphasis on it for this reason. However, it also seems to have special importance because of its relation to the rest of God's attributes.

God's holiness is intrinsically linked to His other attributes. God's glory and beauty are part of His holiness (I Chronicles 16:29). In II Chronicles 20:21, when Jehoshaphat commands singers to praise God in the in the beauty of holiness, they sing of His mercy. David describes the giving of glory and strength to the Lord as worshipping Him in the beauty of holiness (Psalm 29:1-2). God's acts of mercy, jealousy, and judgment reflect His holiness (Ezekiel 39:25, Amos 4:2). In Revelation 4:8, God's holiness is mentioned in the same breath as His eternity and omnipotence. God's holiness is also used in connection with His truthfulness. "Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie" (Psalm 89:35). God's holiness is especially reflected in His justice and wrath. God is angry with sin because it violates His holiness (Leviticus 20:3), and He will punish sin as it deserves. When Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu, sinned by offering profane fire before the Lord, He killed them because they

were not regarding Him as holy (Leviticus 10:1-3).

Theologians disagree about exactly how God's holiness relates to the rest of His attributes. Wayne Grudem categorizes it as one of God's moral attributes and treats it as just another one of God's attributes. Robert Dabney, on the other hand, views God's holiness as the sum of all God's moral attributes. R.C. Sproul takes it a step further when he says that holiness is a summary of all of God's attributes. He writes, "God is called holy in a general sense. The word is used as a synonym for His deity. That is, the word *holy* calls attention to all that God is."

Thus every attribute of God can be described as holy: holy mercy, holy love, holy justice, holy wrath, etc. All of God's attributes are closely linked, and each must be understood in light of all the others, but His holiness is broader than most. It should be viewed as a "summary attribute" of God. God's holiness deals more with the entire being of God than with any single aspect.

God is holy, and His holiness is a basis for the rest of His attributes, but what exactly is the holiness of God? Theologians view God's holiness as having two parts. First, God's holiness is His being separate from and above everything else. Second, God's holiness is His moral purity: His absence from sin and His possession of everything that is good.

First and foremost, God's holiness is viewed as His being distinct and exalted. R.C. Sproul writes, "The primary meaning of *holy* is 'sepa-

rate.' When the Bible calls God holy it means primarily that God is transcendentally separate." Transcendence means exceeding the normal limits, so God could be said to be above any limits. L. Berkhof says, "The Scriptural idea of the holiness of God . . . denotes that He is absolutely distinct from all His creatures, and is exalted above them in majesty." He even goes as far as to say that if any attribute of God could be picked out as most important, it would be this one.

There is good Scriptural justification for this description of God's holiness. God's holiness is described as what separates Him from His creation and makes Him distinct. "Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exodus 15:11). "For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place'" (Isaiah 57:15). In Psalm 96, the psalmist tells the earth to tremble before the holiness of the Lord. Also God's holiness is worthy of our praise. The psalmist speaks of giving praise, thanks, and blessing to God's holy name (Psalm 30:4, 103:1, 145:21). Thus God's holiness is that aspect of God, more than any other, which makes Him transcendent.

God's Holiness and Man's Sin

God's holiness can also be defined as His moral purity and separation from all evil. "Holiness, on the one hand, implies entire freedom from moral evil; and, upon the other, absolute moral perfection," according to Charles Hodge. Berkhof agrees saying, "The word 'holiness' points to God's majestic purity or ethical

majesty." It is separation from sin.

This aspect of God's holiness means that He cannot tolerate human sin. In Isaiah 1:4, God is provoked by the sin of His people because He is holy. Habakkuk calls on God to judge the wicked because as the Holy One, He is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness." (Habakkuk 1:12, 13). We cannot please God because we will always be sinful. Joshua pointed this out to the Israelites, warning them that God would consume them because of their sin (Joshua 24:19). God's judgment is also carried out on sin because He is holy. In Revelation 6:10, God's holiness is appealed to for the swift judgment of the earth as the angels ask "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge?" Though He may be merciful for a season, He will eventually punish all evil.

A holy God created mankind perfect and holy. When man fell, the standard of holiness was not relaxed, so mankind is left in a dilemma. Human beings are required to reflect the image of a holy God by being holy. Man, however, is sinful in every part and incapable of attaining this holiness. Humans are left with an awful gap between themselves and God. God did not leave them this way, but graciously breached the gap and made His people holy. But how could God accomplish this reconciliation without being contrary to His holy na-

ture? Only the atonement can satisfy God's holiness and reconcile God and man.

First, we must have a proper understanding of God's wrath against sin. The Bible clearly teaches that because God is holy, all sin is an offense to Him and brings His wrath. The Lord tells His people to act justly "lest My fury go forth like fire and burn so that no one can quench it, because of your evil doings" (Jeremiah 21:11). God's wrath is kindled because of the rebellion of His creation. If God was only a God of wrath and justice, then we would have been hopelessly lost. Yet God is also merciful, and He often refrains from punishing sin to the full extent. The prophet Micah marvels, "Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy" (Micah 7:18). God is holy and His holy character cannot stand for sin to go unpunished, yet He loves His people and does not desire for them to perish. Because of this love, He provides a way for His anger to be turned away.

In the atonement, God mercifully allows His wrath to be turned away from His people by pouring out that wrath on Christ. This idea is expressed in the Bible by the term "propitiation." Paul describes it this way, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through

If any attribute of God could be picked out as most important, it would be this one.

Not only does Christ turn away God's wrath from us, but he removes our sin.

the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood . . . to demonstrate His righteousness" (Romans 3:23-25). The previous chapters of Romans deal with God's wrath against sinners. Here Paul says that propitiation turns away God's wrath so that His righteousness might be shown.

John also expresses this idea when he says that Christ was sent by God "to be the propitiation for our sins" (I John 4:10). A holy God cannot ignore sin. Yet God's wrath is a loving wrath, and He chose to accept Christ's offering on our behalf as stated by Paul, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). God poured out His wrath on Christ, deflecting it from us. God's holiness was satisfied, and He is no longer enraged by the believer's sin. In this way, God saved His people without going against His holy character. For this reason, Isaiah is able to say, "Your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 54:5). Atonement by propitiation does not contradict God's holiness in any way.

Another concept involved in the atonement is that of expiation. Not only does Christ turn away God's wrath from us, but he removes our sin. Although the term "expiation" is never used in the NKJV, the concept of removing sin is throughout the Bible. God speaks of blotting out the sins of His people, "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgres-

sions, for My own sake, and remembers your sins no more" (Isaiah 43:25). Taking away sin was also a central part to many of the sacrificial laws of Israel. Aaron was required to make atonement for himself with a sin offering to take away his sin (Leviticus 16:6), and the scapegoat was used to remove the sins of the Israelites (Leviticus 16:21). In Isaiah 44:22, God tells His people that He has redeemed them by "[sweeping] away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist." This idea is carried over into the New Testament where it is said that Christ "had appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Hebrews 9:26). In addition, John says, "He was manifested to take away our sins" (I John 3:5). In the atonement, Christ removes our sins from us so that we can be pure and holy in God's sight.

God's holiness is the foundational aspect of His character, it is what makes Him separate from His creation, and it is what makes Him abhor sin and love what is right. The Bible clearly reveals to us a holy God. His holiness permeates God's entire nature and defines all His other attributes. His holiness means that God is set apart from His people in a supremely exalted way.

And finally, God's holiness is moral purity and is the basis for His hatred and punishment of sin. A proper understanding of God's holiness will affect our ideas about God and will shape our response to God. God

will no longer be a daddy just waiting to take us into His lap and give us a hug. God is an awesome, powerful God, who graciously allows us to come before Him, but requires us to do it in an attitude of respect and worship.

God's holiness makes Him wrathful against sin, but through the atonement, His wrath is turned away, and our sins are removed. God personally visits wrath on sinners because hatred of sin is inherent in His character. God's wrath is turned away from us, or propitiated, through the atonement. We are also expiated, or purged of our sins. Without Christ's sacrifice, we would still be separate from God and on our way to hell. God, in His great mercy, decided to have mercy on our condition and found a way to close the gap between us and Him without compromising His character. Praise be to God!

A true understanding of God's holiness will radically change our thinking about God. Even though our sin has been removed through Jesus' sacrifice, God is still holy. He is still greater than we are. If we were to see a glimpse of His holiness, our reaction would be the same as Isaiah's. We should think of God as a holy Father, approachable, but to be honored and respected in all we say and do. If God's holiness was properly understood, then we would come to church services with trembling before our great and awesome God to hear what He had to say to us and gratefully to thank Him for turning away His wrath through Christ's sacrifice. Prayer would no longer be a drudgery or a time to tell God what we want Him to do for us.

We would fall on our knees before the Holy One, grovel in our sin and misery, and go forth to bring God honor and praise when He graciously raises us up to be His people and to take part in His glorious holiness.

Bibliography

Berkhof, L. *Systematic Theology*, 3rd ed. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1946.

Dabney, Robery L. *Syllabus and Notes of The Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology Taught in Union Theological Seminary, Virginia*, 2nd ed. The Banner of Truth Trust.

Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology*. Inter-Varsity Press: Leicester, England, 1994.

Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, [1872?]. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999.

Sproul, R.C. *The Holiness of God*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publisher, Inc., 1985.

Miss Monica Rubingh lives in Ellsworth, Michigan, and attends the Chain-of-Lakes OPC in Central Lake, Michigan

Press Release of the Combined Meeting for the Publication of the Book of Praise (CanRC) and the Psalter Hymnal (URCNA)

October 25-27, 2006

The Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Psalter Hymnal Committee of the United Reformed Churches in North America met in joint session beginning Wednesday evening, October 25, through Friday morning, October 27, at the Bethel URC church building in Jenison, Michigan. Rev. Douwe Agema, Mrs. Daphne Jasperse, Rev. Ed Knott, Rev. Rand Lankheet, Mr. Chris Nobels, Rev. Derrick VanderMeulen Dr. Christine van Halen-Faber, Rev. George van Popta, and Rev. Dick Wynia were present. Dr. Nick Gootjes was not able to attend, due to his teaching duties at the Theological College.

According to our custom, since the Psalter Hymnal Committee served as hosts for this meeting, Rev. Knott served as chairman, and Rev. Wynia served as secretary. Rev. Knott opened our meetings with a brief meditation on Psalm 148, and led us in prayer.

After reviewing the minutes of our last joint meeting, in Ancaster in April 2006, the respective committees reported on the assignments we had been given in previous meetings. These assignments consisted mainly of reviewing a number of hymns with which we had some concerns, but, which we also thought might be improved with word or tune changes. Concerns

with words include such things as archaic language, individualism, or sentimentalism; concerns with tunes include a poor match between the tune and the words, or too high a setting for congregational singing. The committees researched the hymns and made recommendations, either to make improvements, or, not to include the hymn in the "Gross List".

The committees also reported on other assignments, including: research done into the question, "May we sing songs addressed to the Holy Spirit?"; arrangements made for experts in songbook publishing to speak to us about preparations for going to print and copyright issues and, for a hymn writer to speak to us about issues related to poetry in psalmody and hymnody; and contact made with a musical expert who is willing to serve as a resource for the committee, particularly when we have questions about harmonization.

Rev. Lankheet and Rev. van Popta have almost completed the series of articles familiarizing the churches with the Principles and Guidelines which were adopted by our respective synods in 2004; these articles have been published in the Christian Renewal and the Clarion. We decided that when the series is completed, we will put them together in booklet form, and distribute them to the consistories, and, to make the articles, as well as the Principles and Guidelines

themselves, available in a Web site.

Mr. Chris Nobels and Rev. Wynia will write to Dr. C. van Dam and Rev. M. VanderHart, professors of Old Testament at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches, and at Mid-America Reformed Seminary respectively, for advice about the appropriate way to translate and handle the Name, “Yahweh”, in the Song Book. We reviewed and approved the Common Report that we will be presenting to our synods in 2007.

On Thursday morning, the committee enjoyed an informative presentation made by Joyce Borger and Lynn Setsma of CRC Publications, on the subjects of music editing and the copyright process. Committee members asked a variety of questions, and we found it very helpful to be alerted to some of the aspects of the process that lies ahead when song selection is completed.

Following brief reports on the activities of the two committees since our last combined meeting in April 2006, the committee turned once again to a review of hymns that were found in our list of tentative song selections. The hymns we reviewed during this meeting had been taken from the “new” Trinity Hymnal, a production of Great Commissions Publications, and used by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and by the Presbyterian Church in America. We considered a total of 87 hymns. Once again, many were referred for further study to the respective committees, to see whether changes could be made, to make the hymns more suitable for inclusion in our new Song Book. The committees will

review these hymns, and prepare recommendations for our next combined meeting.

Apart from evaluating hymns in the light of our principles and guidelines, the committee must also give consideration to which category a particular hymn might fit into, such as, Christ’s birth, death, resurrection, atonement, etc. When the song book is completed, we will review our selections to make sure that there is a good balance and proportion among the various categories. We want to make sure that we include the best hymns possible. We also want to be alert to those areas in which we need more good hymns. In addition to searching existing hymnals, and considering submissions from the churches, the committee will also consider commissioning hymns to be written, to meet the need.

When it was time to bring our meetings to a close Friday at noon, after agreeing to meet, D.V., in April 2007 in Ancaster, committee members expressed their thanks to the Lord and to one another for the able leadership of Rev. Knott, for the gracious hospitality of the Bethel URC, and for the good spirit which once again prevailed in the meeting. Rev. Derrick VanderMeulen led us in closing prayer.

The committees welcome the questions and suggestions of the churches and of individuals, regarding anything you have read here, or in the articles produced by Rev. Lankheet and Rev. van Popta, or any other concern that you might have. It is the constant prayer of the committee that the Lord may bless our work so that His Name is glorified, and the churches are built

up, the Lord willing, through the use of a new Song Book in worship. You may contact Rev. Dick Wynia at ccchurch@bellnet.ca, or, PO Box 959, Wyoming, Ontario, or, Mr. Chris Nobels, at cjnobels@aei.ca, or c/o Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise c/o Theological College, 110 West 27th Street, Hamilton, Ontario, L9C 5A1.

For the committees,
Rev. Dick Wynia

Reformed Youth Services National Convention

2006 Review and a 2007 Preview

Returning to the site of former conventions from the 1990s, this summer's RYS national convention was held at Covenant College on scenic Lookout Mountain, Georgia. More than 600 young people, sponsors, speakers and staff attended the weeklong event.

Rev. Rich Kuiken and Rev. Jason Tuinstra served as the main speakers, clearly communicating the convention's theme of "Look Out!" based on I Philippians 2:4. Conventioneers were urged to "slay the Me Monster (selfishness)" and "look out" for opportunities to both serve and display God's light in a dark world.

Ten related workshops were offered, including guys and girls only workshops. Again this year, we were blessed to have attentive students who appreciated the efforts of pastors and others to communicate the truths of Scripture to them. Some of the student evaluation comments included the following:

I really learned a lot from both speakers, they didn't just challenge me, they challenged me to change.

He was so demanding and captivating with his lectures. He had my attention the entire time.

Both of these men did a great job using illustrations and analogies that helped me understand the biblical points better. I went away challenged wanting to change.

All the sessions and workshops were inspiring.

The adult sponsors also appreciated that RYS intentionally presented its convention from a Reformed perspective.

Our kids are blessed to have a convention that emphasizes the Reformed faith.

RYS is invaluable (priceless) for our covenant children. To God be the glory!

As a committee, we were also greatly heartened by the reports of the campus employees. One Covenant staffer stopped us, unsolicited, to tell us that our group was the best-behaved group of students she had ever encountered in her years of serving at the college. At the end of the convention, when it was time to report which rooms still needed to be cleaned up, not one student was required to return, a first-ever occurrence! We praise God for blessing us with a great group of polite, friendly, cooperative kids! We truly believe the Spirit was at work here with us on the mountain. RYS also unveiled its new logo in commemoration with the tenth anniversary of its ministry. To God be all the glory!

The Board of Reformed Youth Services is also pleased to announce that the 2007 National Convention will be held July 30-August 3 at Concordia University in Irvine, CA, D.V. The theme that was selected is "Rooted in Christ," based on Jeremiah 17:7-8.

Rev. Phil Vos of Escondido URC (CA) and Rev. Paul Murphy of Messiah's Reformed Fellowship (URC) of Ground Zero, NY will be the main speakers.

Workshop speakers will include the following pastors and laymen:

- Rev. Mike Brown, pastor of Christ URC of Santee, CA
- Rev. Bill Green (missionary to Costa Rica)
- Rev. Chris Gordon, pastor of the United Reformed Church of Lynden (WA)
- Rev. Rich Kuiken, pastor of Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church (NJ)
- Rev. Jason Tuinstra, pastor of Emmanuel's URC of Lemoore, CA
- Rev. Tyler Wagenmaker, pastor of Beaverdam CRC in Hudsonville, MI
- Pastor Jeff Doll, a pastoral assistant of Cornerstone URC in Hudsonville, MI
- Rip Pratt, an associate pastor at New Life PCA in Escondido, CA
- Jeremy Veldman, a graduate from Mid-America Reformed Seminary and presently a candidate for ministry.
- Mrs. Julie Murphy, wife of Pastor Murphy, will lead a women-only workshop on the topic of submission.

Registration brochures will be sent to RYS-member churches in late December. For more information about the 2007 national convention, please contact RYS Director Ed DeGraaf at rys@iserv.net or (616) 667-0694.

Mr. Ed De Graaf is the Director of the Reformed Youth Services.

Convention 2006



Midnight: Lookout Mountain, Georgia or bust! (Our attitudes when we boarded the buses at Bethany URC Monday morning.) Nine O'clock am: Us: hyped up on Mountain Dew and absorbed in card game tournaments. Chaperones: not quite sure how to get us to shut-up and sleep. One O'clock pm: ZZZZZZ... or Are we there yet? Five O'clock pm: We are here, finally, and ready for an amazing week!

We grabbed our luggage, checked in, and went in search of our dorms. Gabby Spriensma and I had a nice dorm room, which we totally rearranged. We went to meet up with our suite mates, two of which were my classmates at school (the other three were from California and didn't come until later).

Each night after supper, we had a snack, met up with new friends and old, and spent free-time talking, participating in tournaments, and playing cards. We also had tournaments during our day free-time, which included volleyball, basket-

ball, and tennis (We got totally creamed in volleyball, but it was still pretty fun). There was also a swimming pool. When everyone got moving in the same direction, a pretty awesome whirlpool effect was started up.

Lights out was scheduled for midnight, however, most of the girls stayed up way past then talking. We regretted it the next morning, though, when they served breakfast at about seven a.m.

Sessions and workshops were the highlights of the week. Rev. Tuinstra and Rev. Kuiken touched on the problem of selfishness, more commonly called "the me-monster," by conventioners. We took a look at "looking out for each other's interests" (thus the theme for conven-

tion). Selfishness seems to be at the heart of every relationship problem. It is a lot more affective than we tend to think. The speakers both told us that they did not want us challenged, but changed. The sessions were spiritually enriching, and I felt so close to God--especially during singing. Three people led us in singing before the sessions started. This helped us prepare for worship. The music this year was so extremely amazing, and the awe and closeness that one could feel to God was so cool.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, various speakers touched on specific areas of our lives where selfishness might be displayed. "Ticking Time bombs" showed us what went into the making of a good and meaningful friendship. "Parents. Who needs

them” looked at how to honor our parents and how our selfishness strains our relationship with them. The girls workshop, which was about modesty, told us how to honor God with our thoughts, actions, and dress. “Everyday Evangelism”, taught by Rev. Murphy, pointed at a unique way to view evangelism and how our actions are a main part of spreading the Gospel. The week was a time of major spiritual renewal.

On Thursday, half of the conventioners went shopping, to the Imax theater, and to an aquarium. I, along with the other half of the conventioners, choose to risk our lives white water rafting. It was a complete blast, as well as a little tense on some of the bigger hills. If you ever have the chance to go white water rafting, GO! You’ll love it! Seeing God’s power and majesty in nature the entire ride was breathtaking.

The entire week was so much fun and so spiritually renewing. It was really cool to get together with 500 other believers my age and be able to express my faith without being nervous or afraid. Friday was really hard because we had grown spiritually closer to so many people. I can’t wait until next year: California or bust!

Ashley Hoekman is a high school junior and member of the Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

The New Testament Evidence Regarding Paedocommunion (Part Four)

In the course of our consideration of the New Testament evidence regarding paedocommunion, we have noted on several occasions that there are no passages that directly address the issue. For this reason, advocates of paedocommunion commonly appeal to the covenant status of children of believing parents to argue for their admission to the Lord’s Supper as a sacrament of the new covenant. The principal biblical argument of paedocommunionists is the alleged analogy between the Old Testament Passover, which was a meal that included the participation of the young children of the household, and the New Testament Lord’s Supper. In these respects, the paedocommunion argument bears a striking resemblance to the common argument Reformed theologians have advanced for the practice of paedobaptism.

However, there are two passages in the New Testament that do speak rather directly to the general question of who may be admitted to the Lord’s Supper. The first of these, John 6, which we will treat in this article, does not often play a prominent role in contemporary discussions of the topic of paedocommunion. Despite the relative neglect of this passage, it constitutes an important piece of New Testament evidence, since it specifically addresses how believers partake of Christ’s body and blood. The second passage, 1 Corinthians 11, has al-

ways been regarded to be of special importance in determining who may receive the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. In this passage, which we will treat in subsequent articles, we have the most extensive New Testament description of the manner in which believers are to participate sacramentally in the body and blood of Christ. The historic insistence of the Reformed churches that only professing members of the church be admitted to the Table of the Lord is largely based upon a particular reading of this passage.

Though John 6 may not appear at first glance to be an important passage for determining who may partake of the Lord’s Supper, there is a long tradition in the Christian church of treating this passage as the apostle John’s account of the institution of the Lord’s Supper. The strong language that Jesus employs in this passage to describe what it is to eat His body and drink His blood, has often been appealed to by the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches as evidence for their understanding of the “real presence” of Christ in the Supper. It has also buttressed a sacramentalism that views the sacrament as a necessary and indispensable means of participation in Christ. Because this passage has been appealed to in support of a certain unbiblical view of the Supper, interpreters in the Reformed tradition have often shied away from associating the language of

this passage with the sacrament.

Whatever the connection may be between John 6 and the Lord's Supper, this passage is not often cited or treated as especially important in contemporary debates on the subject of paedocommunion. Our interest in the relevance of this passage to the topic of paedocommunion stems from the way it describes the believer's participation in Christ's body and blood. Whether John is expressly alluding to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper or not, his account of Jesus' discourse has significant implications for the way the body and blood of Christ are to be received. We will argue that this passage has important, albeit indirect, implications for our question whether the children of believers should be admitted to the Table of the Lord, which the Lord appointed as a sacramental means of participation in His body and blood.

John 6 and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

Before looking more closely at what John 6, especially verses 47-58, say about the manner in which believers participate in Christ, we need to pause to address the question whether this passage is the Gospel of John's account of the Lord's Supper. The obvious problem with this claim is that John 6 nowhere expressly speaks of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Despite the absence of any express reference to the sacrament, those who read this passage as John's account of the institution of the Lord's Supper appeal to several features of the passage that allegedly allude to the sacrament. First,

though the discourse of John 6 occurs prior to the period of Christ's betrayal and death, the description of what it is to eat and drink Christ's body and blood is recalled by the apostle John from the perspective of Christ's ministry, including His death and resurrection, in its entirety. The discourse makes sense only within this broader context, which includes the institution of the sacrament whereby Christ's body is eaten and His blood is drunk.

Second, this passage, like many other passages in the Gospel of John, represents Jesus making reference to a future occurrence, namely, the institution of the Lord's Supper, even though His disciples at the time might not have fully understood all of its implications. Throughout the Gospel of John, for example, Jesus refers to His impending death though His disciples had no real understanding of what He was telling them.

Third, Jesus' words in John 6 occur within the context of John's account of Jesus' feeding of the five thousand. In the account of this miracle, John describes how Jesus "took the loaves, and when He had given thanks, He distributed them to those who were seated" (v. 11). This language is very similar to the language used in the Gospel accounts of the last Supper (cf. Luke 22:19; Matt. 26:26-27; Mark 14:22-23), and suggests a possible allusion to that event.

Fourth, at the end of John 6 (vv. 60-71), we read that many were offended by Jesus' words and that Jesus responded by referring to Judas as the disciple who would betray Him. This reference to Judas' betrayal parallels the Gospel

accounts of the last Supper, which include Jesus' identification of Judas as His betrayer.

And fifth, the language that describes what it is to "eat" Christ's body and "drink" His blood is so reminiscent of a sacramental eating and drinking of Christ that it is difficult to deny the connection. For this reason, already in the earliest history of the church, this passage was traditionally associated with what transpires in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Indeed, it was often appealed to by those who opposed the church and accused its members of engaging in a form of cannibalism in their celebration of the sacrament.

Though these considerations seem to support the view that Jesus in John 6 is speaking, albeit obliquely, about the Lord's Supper, they prove no more than that this discourse may have implications for our understanding of what it is sacramentally to eat the body and drink the blood of Christ. There are two significant obstacles to connecting directly the discourse of John 6 with the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. On the one hand, the occasion for the discourse is the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, and not the last supper, when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. The arguments for a sacramental reading of John 6 are finally unable to answer satisfactorily the question why the historical occasion for the discourse is entirely different than the one on which the Synoptic Gospels record the institution of the Lord's Supper.

On the other hand, the strong language of the discourse suggests that the eating and drinking that

Jesus describes it as an *indispensable means* for saving participation in His Person and work. If Christ's discourse in John 6 directly refers to the kind of eating and drinking that only takes place in the sacrament, then a strong sacramentalism seems to be the inescapable implication. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, for example, a sacramentalist reading of John 6 is the basis for a view of the Eucharist that requires participation by all members of the church, including infants, in order for them to have communion with Christ. And in both the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, a Eucharistic reading of this passage has encouraged a simple identification of the sacramental elements, bread and wine, with the body and blood of Christ, and to a quasi-magical view of the way the sacrament communicates Christ whenever it is received.

In my judgment, John Calvin's comments on this passage strike a fine balance on the question whether it is a description of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Commenting on Jesus' words in verse 56, "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him," Calvin argues that

it is plain that it is wrong to expound this whole passage as applying to the Lord's Supper. For *if it were true that all who come to the Lord's holy Table are made*

partakers of His flesh and blood, all alike will obtain life. But we know that many of them fall into perdition. And indeed, *it would have been inept and unseasonable to preach about the Lord's Supper before He had instituted it.* So it is certain that He is now treating of the perpetual eating of faith. At the same time, *I confess that there is nothing said here that is not figured and actually presented to believers in the Lord's Supper.* Indeed, we might say that Christ intended the holy Supper to be a seal of this discourse. This is also the reason why John makes no mention of the Lord's Supper. And therefore Augustine follows the proper order when, in expounding this chapter, he does not touch on the Lord's Supper until he comes to the end. And then he shows that this mystery is represented in a symbol whenever the Churches celebrate the sacred Supper, in some places daily, in others only on the Lord's day. (emphasis mine)

According to Calvin's interpretation of this passage, it is not first of all about the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Rather, it is a general discourse that describes what

it means to eat and drink of Christ in the way of faith. When believers receive Christ by faith, they share in Him and obtain life by eating and drinking His body and blood. Since the sacramental eating and drinking of Christ is a sign and seal of the believer's participation in Christ, it is one mode of such spiritual or believing participation in Christ. However, John 6 is not speaking or alluding to the sacrament, though it may warrant certain inferences regarding the sacrament and its reception.

As we shall see in our discussion below regarding the teaching of this discourse, it speaks broadly (and not specifically sacramentally) of what it is to participate by faith in Christ and share in the life He communicates to His people. This participation and sharing in Christ takes place when God the Father draws the elect into life-giving communion with Christ. That this life-giving communion may be nourished and strengthened by the instrumentality and use of the sacrament is undoubtedly true.

However, Christ speaks much more comprehensively in this discourse than a direct sacramental application requires. If the discourse were specifically about the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, it would seem to follow that the *only way* in which someone could have life in communion with Christ would be by means of a participation in Christ through the sacrament. We prefer, therefore, to read John 6 as a general description of what it means for believers to enjoy communion with Christ. However, as a general description of such communion, the passage has significant implications

The discourse makes sense only within this broader context, which includes the institution of the sacrament whereby Christ's body is eaten and His blood is drunk.

for the sacramental form of such communion.

The Occasion and Teaching of the Discourse

The occasion for Christ's discourse in John 6 is the account of Christ's miraculous "sign" of feeding the five thousand (vv. 1-15). When a large crowd followed him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus multiplied the five barley loaves and two fish of a young boy and fed those who had gathered. At the close of the meal, John reports that there were twelve baskets of bread left over (v. 13). Upon witnessing this "sign," the people declared, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" (v. 14).

In this context, Jesus commences to discourse at length about Himself as the bread of life, whom the Father has given in order to nourish and sustain His people (vv. 25-40). Recalling the event of the Lord's feeding manna to His people Israel in their wilderness wandering under Moses, Christ declares Himself to be the fulfillment of this event: "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes from heaven and gives life to the world" (vv. 32-33). Whereas the manna of the old covenant nourished Israel in the wilderness, Christ is the true bread from heaven whom the Father has given to nourish His people unto life eternal. All who come to Christ in faith will no longer hunger or thirst, since He is the true heavenly food and drink who grants the fullness of life to all who partake of Him (vv. 35). No

It is not first of all about the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Rather, it is a general discourse that describes what it means to eat and drink of Christ in the way of faith.

one who comes and eats and drinks of Christ will be "cast out," but the Father will draw them by faith and preserve them forever.

Before we consider the most striking portion of the discourse in John 6, it is important to note that Christ emphasizes the necessity of faith to a participation in the life that He alone is able to give. Some come to Him and eat and drink, others do not. Those who do not believe in Him, even though they have seen Him, have no part in the saving benefits of His person and work. Those who come to and have a part in Him only do so because the Father draws them.

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that *everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life*, and I will raise him up on the last day. (Verses 37-40, emphasis mine)

These words are especially important to a proper understanding of the strong language that Christ uses

subsequently to describe what it is to eat His body and drink His blood. Though it may be an inadequate way of expressing it, the eating and drinking of which Christ is speaking is peculiar to those whose reception of and participation in Christ is *by faith*. The Father who sent Christ to be the life-giving nourishment of the world, is the One who draws believers to come to Christ and share fully in the life that He imparts. The communion with and participation in Christ that is described in the discourse of John 6 is a *spiritual, believing* communion and participation. Those whom the Father does not draw into communion with Christ by Christ, have no part in Christ or the life that He imparts.

The heart of Jesus' discourse in John 6 is given in verses 47-58. In this section of the discourse, Christ speaks in bold and unqualified terms of what it means to eat His body and drink His blood. Since this portion of the discourse is usually viewed as the most obvious allusion to what occurs in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we will quote it in full before making any further comments.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven,

so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not as the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

The language of this portion of Jesus’ discourse is strikingly provocative. The term used for His body is “flesh,” the same term that we find in the prologue of John’s Gospel, when he speaks of the Word who “became flesh and dwelt among us” (1:14). The verbs used to describe the believer’s participation in Christ’s body and blood are ones that could be used for physical chewing and swallowing. At one point in this section of the discourse, Jesus switches to a term for eating that not only calls attention to the

acts of chewing and swallowing, but also to the sounds that accompany these acts. Throughout the discourse, the emphasis falls upon a real participation in Christ who is the Word become flesh, and who grants true life to all believers who genuinely eat His flesh and drink His blood. It is not surprising, therefore, that these words provoked the response from the crowd, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (v. 53). For a Jewish audience, these words must have appeared to contradict the Old Testa-

It is important to note that Christ emphasizes the necessity of faith to a participation in the life that He alone is able to give.

ment prohibitions against the drinking of blood (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 3:17; Deut. 12:23). The language employed at this point to describe the believer’s participation in Christ was also the occasion in the early church for the charge of “cannibalism” to be brought repeatedly against the Christian community by its opponents. It is not difficult to understand why the language of these verses has been the occasion for the development of a “realistic” view of a literal eating of Christ’s body and drinking of His blood, as in the Eastern Orthodox or Roman Catholic traditions. Nor is it difficult to see how the unqualified language of these verses has given rise to a

kind of sacramentalism, which views the sacramental participation of believers in Christ as indispensable to their participation in Christ and enjoyment of fellowship with the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Since we have already discussed whether the discourse of John 6 refers to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, we will not revisit that question here. What is important to our purpose is that Christ clearly teaches the necessity and indispensability of a true communion in His body and blood, which were given for the life and salvation of His people. Only those who enjoy a true communion with the body and blood of Christ can obtain eternal life, enjoy fellowship with the Father who sent the Son, and benefit from all that was accomplished by the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Rather than attempting to explain the manner in which believers enjoy this true participation in the body and blood of Christ, the discourse simply describes the mystery of this life-communion in the boldest possible language.

The Implication of John 6 for the Question of Paedocommunion

It was not our purpose by means of these comments on the discourse of John 6 to sort out all of the questions that pertain to what it means to eat Christ’s body and to drink His blood. Our interest is principally focused upon the question of the implications of the teaching of this discourse for the subject of paedocommunion. Since this passage describes the manner in which believers partake of Christ’s body

and blood, it has significant for the manner in which this participation takes place by means of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. If the sacrament is a divinely-appointed means whereby its recipients enjoy a true participation in Christ's body and blood, the description of the nature of *any such participation*, which is given to us in this discourse, is of particular significance for the question who may receive Christ sacramentally at the Table of the Lord.

The implication of this passage is expressed well in the language of the Belgic Confession, which declares that "the manner of our partaking [of Christ by means of the Lord's Supper] is not by the mouth, but by the Spirit through faith" (Article 35). Without specifically citing John 6 as a proof text, the Belgic Confession echoes the teaching of Jesus' discourse, when it insists that "we ... receive by faith (which is the hand and mouth of our soul) the true body and blood of Christ our only Savior in our souls, for the support of our spiritual life." The point of these affirmations in the Belgic Confession is to emphasize that those who commune with and partake of Christ by means of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper do so *by the mouth of faith*. There is no communion with Christ apart from a believing appropriation of the gospel Word that declares Him to be the Word become flesh for us and for our salvation. Unless the Father grant a believing response to the gospel in the hearts and minds of believers, they will not be able to come to Christ to eat His body and drink His blood. The necessary prerequisite to any participation in Christ is this divinely-worked re-

sponse of faith. If this holds true for any participation in Christ, it holds true for any sacramental participation in Him and His saving work.

Admittedly, John 6 does not speak directly to the question of paedocommunion. In our reading of the passage, we are not even prepared to concede that it speaks directly of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. But the general teaching of John 6 regarding how believers participate in Christ's body and blood has a clear and com-

Lord's Table first profess their faith before they be admitted.

Dr. Cornelis Venema is the President of the Mid-America Reformed Seminary. He also serves a contributing editor of *The Outlook*.

***Christ clearly teaches
the necessity and
indispensability of a
true communion in
His body and blood,
which were given for
the life and salvation
of His people.***

elling implication for *any mode of communion* with Christ, whether by means of the gospel Word or the sacrament that accompanies the Word. The church's requirement that those who are admitted to the Table of the Lord confirm in a public manner that they are genuine believers is a legitimate application of the teaching of this passage. Without becoming sidetracked with questions about the precise age at which such faith may best be publicly attested, we can conclude in a preliminary fashion that the teaching of John 6 lends important support to the historic insistence of the churches that communicants at the

Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

3363 Hickory Ridge Ct.

Grandville, MI 49418

(616) 532-8510

Subscriptions and Bible Study materials can be purchased online at www.reformedfellowship.net or email address: sales@reformedfellowship.net

John Piersma

Daniel

Henry Vander Kam

Sermon on the Mount

Ephesians

I & II Thessalonians

I Peter

I John

Parables

Acts (Chapters 1-13)

Acts (Chapters 14-28)

Nelson Kloosterman

Walking About Zion,

Singing of Christ's Church in the Psalms

Gospel Power Magnified through

Human Weakness (*II Corinthians*)

The Law of the Lord as Our Delight

(*Deuteronomy*)

Pilgrims Among Pagans (*I Peter*)

Mark Vander Hart

Genesis 1 - 11

Catechism Materials

Learning to Know the Lord

by P. Y. De Jong (\$1.50 plus *\$2.00 postage)

First Book of Christian Doctrine

by Hylkema & Tuuk (\$2.50 plus *\$2.00 postage)

A Beginning Course in Christian Doctrine

by P. Y. De Jong & John R. Sittema
(\$2.00 plus *\$2.00 postage)

Other Materials

Cornelis P. Venema

But for the Grace of God

An Exposition of the Canons of Dort

(\$6.00 plus *\$2.00 postage)

What We Believe

An Exposition of the Apostles' Creed

(\$6.00 plus *\$2.00 postage)

John R. Sittema

With a Shepherd's Heart

Reclaiming the Pastoral Office of the Elder

(\$15.00 plus *\$3.00 postage)

Norman Shepherd

Women in the Service of Christ

(\$2.00 plus *\$1.00 postage)

THE PARABLES OF OUR LORD

by Rev. Henry Vander Kam

This 16 lesson study guide includes discussions on all of the more well-known and well-loved parables told by our Lord, such as "The Parable of the Sower," "The Wise and Foolish Virgins," and "The Prodigal Son;" and it also includes discussions on some of our Lord's parables which are perhaps not so well-known and not so well understood, such as "The Parable of the Seed Growing in Secret," "The Unrighteous Steward," and "The Unclean Spirit."

The introductory lesson of this study is, in essence, a primer on Reformed hermeneutics, how the parables can be properly interpreted and applied to our day and age. This lesson itself is worth the cost of the book.

The Parables of Our Lord would make an excellent study guide for any age group in the church, from high school on up, who seeks to better understand the main point of these masterful stories told by our Lord.

Subscription Form

One year US \$25.00

Two years US \$50.00

Three years US \$75.00

*For subscriptions outside the US please pay \$33 US per year. In Canada please add 6%GST.

Mail to: *Reformed Fellowship, Inc. 3363 Hickory Ridge Ct. Grandville, MI 49418*

or subscribe online at www.reformedfellowship.net

Name

Street

City

State

Zip

Denominational Affiliation