The Mind of the Spirit

An Introduction to the Interpretation of the Holy Scriptures

Rev. A. Moerkerken

THE MIND OF THE SPIRIT

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An Introduction to the Interpretation of the Holy Scriptures

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Preface

The words in the title of this book may be heard in the consistory room before the beginning of a church service. When the elder prays, bringing the needs of the minister and the congregation before God, he may ask that the Lord graciously enable the minister to speak "*according to the mind of the Spirit*." By this he expresses the hope that the minister will unfold the Scriptures in full harmony with the intention of the Holy Spirit, the "primary Author" of the Word of God. This should be the central aim of everyone who seeks to explain the Bible – not only ministers. What does the Author of the Scriptures Himself mean? This book is intended as a modest tool to help people grasp the meaning of the Scriptures. It is meant to help daily readers of the Bible who often long for deeper understanding.

The Mind of the Spirit is based on lecture notes for the students in the Theological School of the Gereformeerde Gemeenten in Rotterdam. I owe much to my students. Their questions and comments often prompted an even more thorough consideration of the questions that any "exegete" may have.

The book is organized as follows:
The first chapter deals with the question, What is the *object* of exegesis? Many terms have been used to describe it: the Bible, the Holy Scriptures, the Word of God. This chapter gives an account

of the author's view of the Scriptures. Portions from chapters one and five were previously published – in a slightly different form – in the book *Oriëntatie en evaluatie* (Houten 2000).

In chapter two, an explanation is given of the main *terms* in connection with the interpretation of the Bible. Important words like "hermeneutics" and "exegesis" are considered, as well as their position within the theological "encyclopedia." A number of hermeneutic rules are listed and several words that one may encounter in the practice of exegesis are discussed.

In chapter three, the *method* of exegesis is discussed. What steps must be taken in order to give a proper interpretation of the Bible? And in what order should these steps occur?

Chapter four is about the *practice* of exegesis. We should realize that this practice existed before theory. It is especially the practical interpretation of the Scriptures that has brought people throughout the ages to formulate rules for exegesis. An attempt will be made to apply hermeneutic rules using a number of examples from the Scriptures. Several passages from this chapter have been published before in the church magazine De Saambinder.

Chapter five gives a brief survey of what people have thought about the rules for exegesis in the course of *history.*

The descriptive bibliography following the final chapter is certainly not exhaustive. It is intended to encourage further study and orientation.

It was back in 1994 that I met Mr. H. Natzijl and Mr. A Bel of Uitgeverij Den Hertog to talk about a publication of *The Mind of the Spirit*. Both men – to whom I owe a lot – then gave me the

green light to move forward with the project. The reason that it has been quite some time before my vehicle actually passed the green light is my health, which was deteriorating at that time. It was in particular a severe burnout that manifested itself in 2007, which greatly delayed me, but finally the book is here. Let the benevolent reader consider this book to be no more than a simple attempt of the author to be a hand and a foot to those without thorough theological education, who desire to study the interpretation of the Bible.

Capelle aan den IJssel, 23 March 2010 Rev. A. Moerkerken

I

Above Fine Gold

The Object of Exegesis: The Holy Scriptures

What is the Bible?

What is the Bible actually? No one who desires to understand the Scriptures can avoid this question. There is a jumble of opinions about this one and only Bible. Today many people consider the Bible an obscure book from a distant past (a "book of fairy tales"), to which some people (for some inconceivable reasons) attribute authority. Moreover, there are professional exegetes who approach the Bible as a compilation of interesting literature, produced centuries ago by pious people in the Middle East. Others also assess the Bible in like fashion, but add to it that this literature can suddenly become the Word of God when it is used by the Spirit of God. Again others consider a greater or smaller component of the Bible to be the Word of God, and view the rest as being more or less interesting periphery. We could make this list much longer. A jumble of opinions. However, one question does not seem to be significant for many people: What does Scripture say about itself? Or, rather, how did Jesus Christ view the Bible and what did He testify regarding the Scriptures? It is the merit of a book like *Het kompas van het Christendom* (The Compass of Christianity) (Kampen 2002) by Dr. J. van Bruggen, that it draws attention to these questions. Van Bruggen is obviously not the only one who does so, but the advantage of his book is that it is readily

accessible and apologetically strong.

In the muddle of opinions about what the Bible is stand the classic Reformed confessions. In 1561, Guido de Brès put it as follows in his *Confessio Belgica* (Belgic Confession of Faith):

We confess that this Word of God was not sent nor delivered by the will of man, but that holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, as the apostle Peter saith. And that afterwards God, from a special care which He has for us and our salvation, commanded His servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit His revealed Word to writing; and He Himself wrote with His own finger the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures. (Article 3)

We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing without any doubt all things contained in them, not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves. For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling. (Article 5)

These words from our confession are the starting point of this book.

The Properties of the Bible

Already long ago, Reformed theologians stated that the Holy Scripture has "properties" (proprietates). Our fathers did not say this without good reason, and of course it was not just because they were fond of difficult distinctions. No, the doctrine of the properties of the Bible was forged in the battle against various heresies! Thus they came to speak of four properties of the Scriptures: its *necessity* (necessitas), its *clarity* (claritas or

perspicuitas), its *perfection* (perfectio or sufficientia), and its *authority* (auctoritas). Obviously, the doctrines of the clarity and perfection of Scripture were especially developed during the conflict with the Roman Catholic Church, whereas as far as the doctrine of the Bible's necessity is concerned, its front was especially in the "battle" against the Anabaptists – albeit that this is also a point of controversy with Roman Catholic theology. We should realize, however, that if these properties of God's Word had never been challenged, they would still have been part and parcel of Reformed theology. As a matter of fact, Scripture itself teaches its own authority, necessity, perfection, and clarity! The subject of the properties of Scripture is in no way less relevant than it was four centuries ago. Time and again this controversy continues to reemerge. In this chapter, we would like to reflect upon each of these properties of the Bible. This will not be done exhaustively – for this we have systematic theologies. However, such a consideration is certainly necessary in a book about the interpretation of the Bible.

The Necessity of Scripture

Regarding the necessity of Scripture, questions such as these must be answered: Which has the preeminence, the Bible or the church? In other words, do we owe the existence of the church to Scripture, or do we owe the existence of Scripture to the church? And is the knowledge of Scripture absolutely indispensable for salvation? Isn't it possible for the Holy Spirit to work the hearts of men without the Bible or by other means? As we have said earlier, this is where we fundamentally differ from Roman Catholic theology. According to Rome – when push comes to shove – the church does not really need Scripture. However, Scripture does need the church for its exposition and enhancement (!), to establish its authority. The church is perfectly conceivable without the Holy Scriptures – just think of the centuries before

the time of Moses! Scripture is, however, unthinkable apart from the church; the Bible's authors even came forth from the church! Briefly summarized, this is the Roman Catholic view. However, there is another front to be discerned in this battle. In the sixteenth century, a momentous controversy emerged regarding this with the Anabaptists. Sebastiaan Franck called the Bible a Babel, a city full of confusion. Another Anabaptist, Hans Denck, appeared to be impressed with the great number of "discrepancies" in Scripture, and during the tumultuous events occurring in the city of Münster around the year 1535, Bernhard Knipperdollinck, the father-in-law of Jan van Leiden (who as an executioner in Münster behaved like a madman), wanted to do away with the entire Bible! We should realize that these views are not isolated, but that they are part of a movement in church history in which the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Spirit were placed opposite each other almost as if they were in conflict with each other. In his *Systematic Theology* (1867), Charles Hodge provides us with an elaborate historical and fundamental outline of mysticism, also paying attention to the relationship between Word and Spirit (Volume I, 61-103). On both these fronts (Rome and the Anabaptists), the Reformation adhered to the necessity of Scripture. Yet there is another question which we have to face, particularly in reference to Rome. If the Holy Scriptures are necessary for salvation, how could those believers be saved who lived before even one letter of divine revelation had been put into writing? Moreover, how many of God's children died after the time of Moses without having known the full canon of Scripture!

Firstly, we should answer this question by saying that the necessity of Scripture is not an absolute necessity, but rather a necessity because this is what God wills and has decreed (in the words of H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, I, 439), a necessity "ex hypothesi bene placentiae Dei"; i.e. God *could* have decreed it differently; He could have quickened His church and kept them alive in different ways. However, it has pleased Him to do it in this way, by the Word of God. Secondly, we should realize that, although there was no written Word in those days, the *Word of God* was there! The Church of God never has life from itself, but always from the written or unwritten Word of God. Antonius Walaeus says, "Although we confess that God can gather and protect His church without Scripture even today, as He did of old, we affirm that the Holy Scriptures are absolutely necessary and that the Church cannot exist without them." (*Synopsis* II, 7).

A Lamp unto my Feet

Regarding the *clarity* of Scripture, there is another controversy with Rome. Roman Catholic theology states that the Scriptures are obscure. In this context, they have referred to many texts, the interpretation of which has troubled many people throughout the centuries. With a certain eagerness, Rome has taken advantage of the fragmentation of Protestantism to prove its statement that it is fatal to place the Bible into the hands of every man. Doesn't every heretic have his text, as the Dutch saying goes? And – says Rome – are Protestants also not in great need of the *exposition* of the Scriptures? Can they do without synodical decrees or assertions by exegetes in order to understand the Bible? Don't they have a certain tradition? In short, the Bible is very valuable as long as it remains in good hands; it *cannot* be its own interpreter. Along these lines of reasoning, the Roman Catholic Church arrived at the conclusion that the Holy Spirit as the proper Author of Scripture is its true Interpreter,

but also that this Spirit uses His instrument, the church, for this purpose. For Rome, however, the church is synonymous with the *pope*. Therefore in the Roman Catholic Church, any scholarly exegesis is subject to the church's doctrinal authority. Obviously, when talking about the Roman Catholic Church, I am referring to the old, official Roman Catholic doctrine. How does Reformed theology respond to these arguments? The answer is clear: We teach the clarity of Scripture. The question is: Do we really understand this ourselves? A minister who asks his catechism class students whether they think the Bible is either clear or obscure could easily receive an answer that he was not looking for. Therefore, we should first understand what the clarity of Scripture does *not* mean. We do not mean that there are no mysteries in the Bible which are incomprehensible to the human intellect. There clearly are such mysteries – just think of the Divine Trinity. Moreover, we do not mean that either exegesis or exposition are unnecessary. They certainly are necessary! Any sincerely Reformed person will confess that true preaching consists of the *explication and application* of the Word of God. The Reformed community has produced a great number of capable exegetes. It is true that an individualistic approach to the Bible, in which the Word of God is handled without any regard for the rules that need to be observed for the sound interpretation of Scripture, has done much harm and has led to endless confusion. Still, we hold to the statement that the Scriptures are clear. By this clarity, we mean that anyone who desires to be *saved* can find the way of salvation in the Bible. The fact that there are things recorded in Holy Writ that, to our perception, are "hard to be understood" (2 Peter 3:16), does not only have to do with the abovementioned mysteries, but also with the fact that our understanding has been darkened by sin. When a blind man says in broad daylight that the sun does not exist, this says nothing about the sun, but it does say a great deal about his eyes. The

sun is clear enough. Thus, according to the words of Psalm 119, Scripture is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our paths. In our present day, we must warn today against the notion that anyone can understand the Bible, provided they study it well, make sound use of their understanding and consult good commentaries. Sometimes people actually believe that using the best computer Bible software will guarantee the best understanding. This is nothing less than a great overestimation of the capacities of our darkened understanding and an underestimating of the words of Scripture, that the natural man neither receives nor understands the things of the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:14). Admittedly, this is hard to swallow for a person who thinks he has "gone through the Enlightenment," as it is called. However, in order to understand the Scriptures, we need the regenerating and illuminating operation of its primary Author, the Holy Spirit.

Thy Word Is Perfect

The third property of the Scripture is its *perfection* or *sufficiency*. Here is another front against Rome. Roman Catholic theology states that *tradition* provides an indispensable addition to the Scriptures. Roman Catholics say that many doctrines of the church cannot be found literally in the Bible, such as elaborate descriptions of the doctrines of Trinity, the union of Christ's natures, infant baptism, etc. Church tradition does teach these things and therefore this would be proof of the insufficiency of the Scriptures. Perhaps no one has more concisely and clearly put into words what tradition is than Vincentius van Lerinum, a semi-Pelagian opponent of Augustine from the fifth century AD. In his *Commonitorium,* he states that the Bible, which is interpreted in so many different ways, must be read according to the rules of tradition. Then follows his famous statement, "It should be ensured with the greatest care that we hold this

fast, which everywhere, which always, which has been believed by all, because that is really and truly catholic." Incidentally, the Roman Catholic Church itself has not maintained these three criteria concerning what the doctrine of the church consists of. In Roman Catholic doctrine, so much can be found which is not believed everywhere, always and by all! Roman Catholic theology has often pointed out that there is just as much tradition in Protestantism, indeed that no man can do nor live without tradition. That is true. Only sectarians think that they can do without any traditions. They think they have to reinvent the wheel time and again and imagine that church history started at their own birth or at the birth of their adored leader. This is *not* what Reformed religion says. The tradition that binds us to our ancestry is very valuable to us. We must be thankful for everything that has come down to us through the history of Reformed Protestantism. Much of it is not *literally* present in the Bible. We can think of many things concerning lifestyle. Only the biblicist and sectarian want to find a Scripture verse for everything. However, this is not necessary. Therefore, our controversy with Rome does not concern the question whether tradition is valuable and necessary. What the controversy *does* consist of has been put very concisely by H. Bavinck: "Rome desires a tradition independent of the Scriptures (…). The Reformation only recognizes such tradition as is founded on and flows from the Scriptures" (*Reformed Dogmatics*, I, 464). We do have to keep asking ourselves whether our association with tradition does not show Roman Catholic traits. How easily man's foolish heart, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant, is inclined to teaching the "commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9).

The Basis of the Scripture's Authority: Scripture Itself

Finally, I would like to say something about the *authority* of the Bible. The church of God, when speaking about the authority of Scripture, has primarily listened to Scripture itself. What the church says about the Scriptures is not decisive! The church never established the canon of the Holy Scriptures; it only faithfully *accepted* it, among others at the synods of Hippo Regius in 393 AD and Carthage in 397 AD. Neither has the church *granted* authority to the canon; it has only *bowed* under its authority. Herein lies a deep conflict with Roman Catholic theology. Whereas Rome teaches that there can be a church without Scriptures, but no Scriptures without the church, the Reformed confession says what we read in Article 5 of the Belgic Confession of Faith, "Believing without any doubt all things contained in them*, not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such,* but more especially because the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts that they are from God." I took the liberty to italicize some words: *not so much…* Guido de Brès did not mean to say that it is *not of any importance* what the church says about the Scriptures. A well-known (but often improperly used) saying from Augustine is that he would not believe the Gospel if the authority of the catholic church would not move him to do so ("Evangelio non crederem, nisi me catholicae ecclesiae commoveret auctoritas"). It is a blessing when one is granted to grow up under the administration of the Covenant of Grace and under a preaching that teaches the children of the church to bow under the authority of God's Word. In this light, Augustine's words make sense. But anyone who says that what the church says forms the *basis* of the authority of the Holy Scriptures errs! The Scriptures do not derive their authority from the church or from what the church says about them. The foundation of the Scripture's authority lies in the Scriptures themselves. They are, differently put, autopistos.

The Scriptures are Autopistos

The Reformed confessions have often been blamed for circular reasoning: We believe in the reliability of the Scriptures, because they confirm their own reliability! Yet this reproach is undeserved. It is often the case that people have to take each other at their word – and they do! Of course, it is important who the person is that asks us to take him at his word. Some people simply seem to be more reliable than others. There are people in our lives whose words we can count on because of their integrity. Does not the highly exalted God, whose name is faithful Witness and who is not a man that He should lie, deserve to be trusted by us? Would it show respect for His truth if we demand any other proof above and beside His Word on which to base the reliability of His Word? It is along these lines that we have to view the words of the abovementioned fifth article of the Belgic Confession of Faith, which says that we believe "without any doubt" all things contained in the canonical books "especially because the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves."

What the Scriptures say

In short, the Holy Scriptures have authority for us because they present themselves to us as authoritative. I would like to illustrate this with some examples. As for the *Old Testament*, what Christ said about the Tanakh is – or should be – decisive. A well-known text is, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me." But not only these words of the Saviour shed light on how He dealt with the Scriptures of the old covenant. All His words and deeds continually show great respect for His Father's Word, which was recorded in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Writings (the Tanakh). Concerning the manner in which the apostles have written about the Tanakh, the "locus classicus" is of great importance

for the inspiration of the Scriptures. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Another important passage is found in the words of the Apostle Peter. "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:19-21). We can learn from these statements that, not only for Christ Himself but also for the apostles, the Scriptures of the Old Testament were the authoritative and holy Word of the living God. To say it with the words of Psalm 12:6, "The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." It is another question whether these things also hold true for the writings of the *New Testament*. We have to admit that there is no New Testament text that *literally* confirms the divine authority of the 27 books of the new covenant. Yet the serious warning in Revelation 22:18 and 19 does not just refer to the last book of the Bible itself ("the prophecy of this book"), but these words are also a "conclusion to all of Holy Scripture," according to Annotation 49 of the Dutch Authorized Version. Moreover, as Louis Berkhof pointed out in *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (1950), there is "cumulative proof" for the inspiration doctrine of the Scriptures, for example, an accumulation of Scriptures on the basis of which we may conclude that the writings of the New Testament are part of the authoritative and inspired Word of God. Berkhof reminds us that the Apostle Paul uses the present tense in 1 Corinthians 2:13, when he writes that "we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost *teacheth*; comparing spiritual things with spiritual."

H. Bavinck has also given arguments to support the statement that the New Testament presents itself to us as the authoritative Word of God (*Reformed Dogmatics*, chapter 13). According to Bavinck, the testimony of Jesus Christ is divine, true, and infallible throughout the New Testament (think of John 1:18, 17:6; Revelation 1:5). He has not left anything to us in writing, but He has ensured that His testimony would be passed on in pure form. To this end He used His apostles. They were the ear- and eyewitnesses of His words and deeds. In this testimony, the apostles were qualified and equipped in a very special sense by the Holy Ghost, who led them into all truth. In their writing they speak with the same authority as Christ. "Their writing is a special type of witnessing," says Bavinck. Most apostolic writing, he states, had authority from the very beginning, among the churches where they were known: "The canonicity of the books of the Bible is rooted in their existence."

Inspiration

On the basis of the abovementioned texts and other Scriptures, Reformed theology has taught the verbal inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. Inspiration is a word of Latin origin, the Greek equivalent of which is *theopneustie*. The latter word reminds us of 2 Timothy 3:16, where *theopneustos* has been translated as "given by inspiration of God" in the King James Version. The inspiration of the Spirit of God bears upon the *authors* of the Bible as well as on their *writings*. Thus it is soundly Reformed to state that the Bible's authors were inspired, and that the Holy Scriptures are the inspired Word of God. The inspiration of the Holy Scriptures concerns the *original text*. By this we mean the "autographs," the authentic writings of the authors themselves. In contrast to what people often say, there are good reasons to assume the existence of such *original text*. The Bible is not a confused conglomerate of editorial adaptations

of a never-to-be-reconstructed original text. No, "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21) and "afterwards God, from a special care which He has for us and our salvation, commanded His servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit His revealed Word to writing" (Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 3). It is the task of *textual criticism* to determine the original text as closely as possible by means of the thousands of preserved "apografa" or apographs. Textual criticism is fundamentally different than Biblical criticism, even though we have to conclude that men who are often considered to be authoritative in the area of textual criticism, often also have assumptions which are critical of the Bible. This sometimes clouds their statements. I would like to make a plea for the value of the "textus receptus," the Greek text of the New Testament that formed the basis of the Dutch and English authorized versions that were drawn up in the seventeenth century. This text-type, often called "Byzantine," deserves more appreciation than it has often received since the twentieth century. In *De tekst van het Nieuwe Testament* (The Text of the New Testament), J. van Bruggen supported the reliability of the textus receptus. A much-discussed question is of what *nature* the inspiration of the Scriptures is. Among Reformed Protestants, it has been commonly assumed that the Holy Spirit has *organically* inspired the authors of divine Writ. It is important to point out that this does not mean to say that the Spirit of God treated man like senseless stocks and blocks when divine revelation was recorded. Sometimes people have emphasized the organic character of inspiration, in order to overemphasize the human factor in Scripture. This is never permissible. It is fully legitimate and suitable within the Reformed doctrines to confess that it has pleased the Holy Spirit to use the talents, physical structure, intellectual gifts and developments, emotional life, labour, and research of the Bible's authors. The "human factor" in the development of the Bible

may be mentioned. However, our speaking of the organic nature of inspiration must never become a "back door" in the churches of Reformed confession, which would unexpectedly let in Bible-critical standpoints that have been rejected at the front door. The Holy Scriptures are a Christian's most valuable possession. He highly esteems the Word of God and loves it "above gold; yea, above fine gold" (Psalm 119:127).

2

Word and Image

Several Exegetical Terms

In this chapter, several terms will be discussed which are relevant to our subject. First, of course, this book's two key words will be dealt with: *hermeneutics* and *exegesis*. What do these words mean? How are they related and how are they different? Also some hermeneutical *rules* will be named. Additionally, because someone who wants to study the interpretation of the Bible can easily come across several terms that do not speak for themselves, some *exegetical terms* and names of *figures of speech* will be explained. This may make some Bible commentaries a little more accessible to someone who does not know much about theology. Finally, attention will be given to different *subject matters* that we may encounter in the Holy Scriptures.

Two Key Words

What Is Hermeneutics?

When we think about the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, *hermeneutics* is a key word. The word is of Greek origin. In fact, it is an adjective (*hermeneutikè*) that, for example, may be used as a noun as *technè* (art, skill). Our word technology can be easily recognized in it. *Hermeneutikè technè* is the art or skill of interpretation or explanation. The Latin term is *ars interpretandi*.

In the word hermeneutics, we hear the echo of the name Hermes, a figure in Greek mythology. For the ancient Greeks, Hermes was the messenger of the gods. The Romans called him Mercury. The reader will remember Acts 14:11 to 12, where the inhabitants of the city of Lystra become ecstatic after the miracle by which a crippled man has regained strength in his feet. They believe that the gods have come down to them in the likeness of men. Then Barnabas is named Jupiter (the Greek "supreme god" Zeus) and Paul is called Mercury, or Hermes, "because he was the chief speaker," writes Luke.

A Sacred Hermeneutics?

A distinction can be made between general and particular hermeneutics. The former deals with many types of writings; man simply uses reading rules for anything that he reads. If someone changes the full stops of his text into question marks, he will not be understood or will be understood differently than he intended. *Particular* hermeneutics is used for the interpretation of a certain type of writing. For example, people use different reading rules for poetry than for prose; also legal texts have their own distinct reading rules. Besides these, there is a *hermeneutica sacra*, a sacred hermeneutics, which deals with the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. This has been disputed by many who believe that the rules of general hermeneutics can simply be applied to the Scriptures, because every general reading rule can also be applied when reading the Bible. This would make Biblical hermeneutics part of general hermeneutics. This discussion is comparable to the debate about ecclesiastical law. Is ecclesiastical law part of general law, only applied to the situation in the churches, or is ecclesiastical law a specifically theological subject? The latter is true. Ecclesiastical law is a theological discipline. And for hermeneutics, biblical hermeneutics is a theological subject, which is part of the biblical subjects of Divinity.

Position Among the Theological Subjects

There are quite a number of theological subjects. Someone who studies at a theological college will encounter many different disciplines. Sometimes it is not easy for a new student to see all the connections in his field of study. It is the subject *encyclopedia* that gives a summarizing overview of the theological subjects and sheds light on the connections between them. This encyclopedia usually distinguishes four groups of theological subjects. According to J. Douma, this division into four has become widely accepted (*Oriëntatie in de theologie*, page 17). We call them the Bibliological, the Ecclesiological, the Dogmatological, and the Diakoniological Departments. The *ecclesiological* subjects belong to disciplines such as Church Law and Church History.

The *dogmatological* department studies the doctrine of the church: Systematic theology and Symbolics belong to it. The *diakoniological* group of subjects focuses on the "official" subjects such as Homiletics, Catechetics, and Poimenics (pastoral care). The *bibliological* subjects are referred to as the "Biblical subjects." There are no objections to this, as long as one realizes that *all* theological disciplines must be "Biblical." Of course, the intention is that in the bibliological subjects the Holy Scriptures form the field of examination. Bibliological disciplines are Exegesis (the explanation of the bible), Biblical Introduction, and Biblical Geography and Archeology. Other subjects are Scripture Knowledge (in which the students have to acquire a thorough understanding of Bible history), Biblical Theology (in which the history of divine revelation is studied), and last but not least, Biblical Languages. It is most regrettable that there is a trend in theological studies to pay more and more attention to social sciences, which goes at the expense of the indispensable education in classical and biblical languages.

This development can only be fatal to subjects such as exegesis. Hermeneutics – and that is what this book is about – is a discipline that belongs to the bibliological subjects. The term hermeneutics has become much broader recently. More will be said about this in chapter 5. It is a problem that people no longer necessarily mean the same thing when using this word. In this book, we use it in the classical sense of the word, namely, as the theological science that reflects on the rules of exegesis.

What Is Exegesis?

Here we encounter another key word for the interpretation of the Bible: *exegesis*. This word is also of Greek origin. The verb *eksègeomai* means "point out, explain." The subject belongs to the biblical subjects of theology. Exegesis intends to "shed light on the meaning of the Scriptures," says F. W. Grosheide (*Christelijke Encyclopedie*). The same author states that exegesis is an empirical science that has no other goal than to study the object which has been entrusted to it. Grosheide argues that everything which is connected to the theory of exegesis is dealt with in a separate branch of science called hermeneutics. This does not mean that exegesis is applying rules dictated by hermeneutics. No, it is the other way around. In hermeneutics, the exegete gives an account of the rules which he follows. Time and again, the exegete will encounter cases for which no rules can be given (Grosheide, op cit). Thus, exegesis is looking for the meaning and intention of the words of Scripture. That it is an "empirical science" means to say that exegesis in the first place is about *what it says* in the text. The exegete must read very carefully and "taste" as it were the words before him. And in tasting the words, he has to try to find the author's intention.

J. I. Doedes has put it as follows: "We understand someone's words when we think the same thing concerning them as the author or speaker was thinking or wanted to think about them…"

(*Hermeneutiek voor de Schriften des Nieuwen Verbonds*, page 2). The interpreter needs to realize this when he prayerfully tries to understand what the prophets and apostles have thought and meant when recording divine Revelation. However, especially because the object of exegesis is Holy Scripture, the exegete will have to dig even deeper. It should be his desire to find out what was in the mind of its first Author – the Holy Spirit. After all, it is His mind that it is all about!

The Freedom of Exegesis

Whence All These Differences?

It may happen that several capable exegetes give very different explanations of a text. How is this possible? It will not be surprising when people with different religious beliefs – and, consequently, with different views of the Scripture – reach different exegeses. But even among exegetes who hold the same confessional point of view, different interpretations of certain texts are not uncommon. Of course, this will lead to confusion. Sadly enough, it even causes satisfaction among opponents of the Christian faith. They conclude that an appeal to the Scripture can never be decisive, because everyone can interpret it as they wish. The cause of the multiple interpretations of Scripture passages cannot be attributed to the Scripture itself. After all, we confess its *claritas* or *perspicuitas*, its clarity and perspicuity! This has already been discussed in chapter one.

We Know in Part

Let us return to our question: Where do these considerable differences in interpretation come from? We can only give one answer to this question, even though it may not be very pleasing to our pride: "*We know in part*" (1 Corinthians 13:9). Obviously, if two interpretations contradict each other, only one of them can be true, but it is not always given to us to understand the

true meaning of the Scriptures. Once again, this is not due to the Scriptures, but due to our darkened understanding. This leads us to the next question: Is exegesis free? The answer must be affirmative: Yes, exegesis is free. However, we must immediately add that this does not mean that everyone can just interpret the Scriptures as they please. The appeal to freedom of exegesis has been misused. With the statement that exegesis is free, the church of the Reformation turned against Rome, which connects interpretation – as we have just seen – with the authority of the church. However, exegesis is not connected with offices, but the interpretation and understanding of the Scripture is a privilege for every believer that is enlightened by the Spirit of God. With just as much emphasis the church of the Reformation has taught that exegesis has its own rules that may not be broken without serious consequences. In what way the church practises exegesis is laid down in the branch of hermeneutics.

Several Hermeneutical Rules

We have already seen (1.2) that hermeneutics follows exegesis. It is not true that a theory has been developed first which, subsequently, has to be kept in practice. Rather, it is the other way around. In hermeneutics, the exegete gives an account of the rules which he follows. So theory is followed by practice. However, no one can neglect this theory in the practice of exegesis without consequences! For those who want to know what these hermeneutical rules are, they cannot possibly be listed here. We will encounter such rules time and again, especially when we discuss the subject matters which the Holy Scriptures offer. For example, the exegesis of a parable requires different rules than the interpretation of a typology. However, some rules can be mentioned that must always be kept, no matter what part of Scripture is investigated. Only three rules will be discussed here.

The Context of the Text

It is obvious that an exegete, when interpreting a text, must reckon with the context in which the text stands. Yet it appears to be necessary to mention this time and again. For example, those who take the words from Mark 16:16, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"– the Great Commission – out of context, very easily use them as an argument against infant baptism.

The Analogy of the Holy Scriptures

This second rule means that the result of an exegesis may never lead to conflicts with other scriptural statements. This used to be called the *analogia Sacrae Scripturae*. This rule has everything to do with the exegete's view on the Scriptures. If he considers it to be a collection of religious writings by different authors from the distant past, without any internal cohesion, then he will not attach much value to this rule. But the exegete, who views Scripture as the God-inspired revelation of one *Auctor Primarius*, will also believe that this Primary Author can never contradict Himself. Consequently, he will reject any exegesis that is in conflict with express statements of the Holy Scriptures. This has nothing to do with prejudice. The Scripture presents itself to us as the authoritative Word of God and requires the exegete to trust its authority. The rule that an exegete has to work toward the analogy of the Holy Scriptures does not stand in the way of an accurate and careful exegesis.

The Analogy of Faith

According to F. W. Grosheide, the analogy of faith (the *analogia fidei*) is a term that is very hard to describe (*Christelijke Encyclopedie*, Volume I, 194). The expression is derived from Romans 12:6. The Annotations to the Dutch Authorized Version of the Bible tell us that the "proportion of faith" *may* be understood as "the conformity and agreement of the chief points of Christian

doctrine, plainly expressed in God's Word, and in the articles of faith, which are as a rule, according to which all interpretations of Scripture must be made." In this sense, Reformed exegetes usually agree on the rule that exegesis must be according to the analogy of faith. Of course, the question immediately arises if dogmatics is allowed to dominate exegesis. However, those who state that dogmatics is no more, but also no less, than the systematic and orderly consideration of the facts of the Holy Scriptures, will not easily oppose dogmatics against exegesis as competing quantities. Those who, through exegesis, find results that are in conflict with the "articles of faith" as accepted by God's church, will have to revise their exegesis. As soon as one looks for concrete examples in the confessions of the church, this rule will become clearer and sound more plausible.

Figures of Speech in the Holy Scriptures

God's Word has come to us in written form. At first, it was spoken by "*holy men of God … as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*" (2 Peter 1:21), but "afterwards God, from a special care which He has for us and our salvation, commanded His servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit His revealed Word to writing" (Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 3). The Scriptures have one primary Author, namely the Holy Spirit. However, they have several secondary authors, the Bible writers – oriental people. Because the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was *organic* – He made use of the Bible writers including their talents, characters, labour, etc. – and because oriental people, generally speaking, often use expressive language, it is not surprising that the Scriptures contain countless instances of "expressiveness," the suggestive power of language. The language can receive this suggestive power by means of a special sentence structure, for example, when the author unexpectedly changes the order of the words. Sound and rhythm may also give the language a suggestive power. But most

importantly it is the use of metaphors that enlivens the language. It is appropriate to write something here about the figures of speech as we find them in the Holy Scriptures. By figures of speech, I mean the phenomenon that an author diverges from the "normal" way of saying things, in order to cause a certain effect. Figures of speech are used by everyone, also in our daily conversations. Below you will find some figures of speech that often occur in Scripture, each one illustrated by one or more examples.

Tropes

There are two different types of tropes, metaphors and metonyms. A metaphor is imagery that is based on a certain similarity – for example, "*I will come on thee as a thief*" (Revelation 3:3). A metonym is a figure of speech in which something is called by another name, not on the basis of similarity, but on the basis of another relationship. Generally speaking, metonyms have less suggestive power than metaphors. We will first deal with the metonyms. Some of the examples from Scripture that will be given to illustrate the specific figures of speech have been copied from *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* by Dr. Louis Berkhof, which has been reprinted dozens of times since 1950. Dr. Berkhof taught theology at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids (Michigan, USA) from 1906 to 1944. His book provides a concise but mature piece of Reformed hermeneutics.

Metonyms

There are five different types of metonyms:

a. A part is taken for the whole; the well-known expression "pars pro toto." In Genesis 42:38, Jacob says he fears that his *gray hairs* will go down with sorrow to the grave. And in Acts 27:37 Luke writes, "And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen *souls*."

b. The whole is taken for a part; this is called "totum pro parte." "*Then died Jephthah the Gileadite, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead*" (Judges 12:7), or, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets…*" (Matthew 23:37). For both examples given above, the term "synecdoche" is used.

c. The maker is named instead of the product. "*They have Moses and the prophets*" (Luke 16:29).

d. The form is named instead of the content. "*This cup is the New Testament in My blood*" (Luke 22:20).

e. The material is named instead of the object. "*But the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron*" (2 Samuel 23:7).

Metaphors
The most well-known types of metaphors are:

a. The comparison with "as" or "like." For example: *And a Man shall be as an hiding place from the wind* (Isaiah 32:2). A full comparison usually consists of four parts:

1. The "primum comparationis" (the first part of the comparison): the object that is being compared – in this case *a Man*.

2. The "secundum comparationis" (the second part of the comparison): the image that is used; in this text *an hiding place from the wind*.

3. The point of comparison, also called the "tertium comparationis" (the third part of the comparison). This is the hinge that everything revolves around (in this case, the notion of safety).

4. Finally, the linking word – in this case *as*.

It must be noted that the function of the words "as" or "like"

can also be replaced by the word "of." "A giant of a man" is the same as "a man like a giant." In the Hebrew language, the status-constructus form often has this function. Ben-oni, son of sorrow, means something like "sorrow-causing child."

b. The asyndetic comparison. It is possible to shorten such a comparison with "as" or "like." In the abovementioned example (Isaiah 32:2), we see that the third part, the point of comparison, is not mentioned. In the asyndetic comparison, the object of comparison and the image are next to each other without a linking word: "I will say to God, my fortress…" (Psalter 416:6). The author of Psalm 119:105 says, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Obviously, he means to say, "Thy word is like a lamp unto my feet."

c. The metaphor in the narrow sense of the word. In this case, the object to be compared is *replaced* by the image. This occurs in Luke 13:32, where Christ says about Herod: "Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils." Thus in a metaphor in the narrow sense, three out of the four parts of a full comparison are in fact missing.

d. The personification. Lifeless things or abstractions are presented as living creatures. In the Bible we can think of Jerusalem, which is often presented as a (young) woman – the "daughter of Zion" – or the longsuffering of God, presented in Luke 8 as a dresser of a vineyard who pleads for the postponement of judgment. Another beautiful personification is found in Psalm 98:8, where the floods are urged to clap their hands.

e. The synaesthesia. In this figure of speech, an impression which is made on one of the senses is connected with another sense. For example, an auditory impression is linked with the sense of vision. "*And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet…*" (Exodus 20:18).

f. The allegory. This is an extended metaphor. Next to biblical literature, Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* may be the most well-known example of an allegory. Everyone will understand that he uses more than one figure of speech. Of course, Bunyan often uses personifications as well. In the Scriptures, the Song of Solomon contains a metaphor of no less than eight chapters. It is very essential to understand that *explaining an allegory* is not quite the same thing as *allegorizing a Scripture passage*! An allegory is a figure of speech that must be explained as such. Allegorizing is a bad thing to do, because then a scriptural passage is explained as an allegory, when in fact it is not. For example, those who observe a certain "step of grace" when reading about the daughters of Jerusalem, are not guilty of allegorical interpretation; they only explain part of an allegory. Those, however, who try to do the same thing with Luke 23, *are* allegorizing! We will discuss this in more detail later.

Parallellism

The parallellismus membrorum (parallelism of members) is a phenomenon that is not only frequently seen in the poetic parts of the Bible, but also in other passages. In the case of parallelism, one verse or phrase consists of two parts, the members of which correspond to each other or show parallels. There are several types of parallelisms:

a. *Synonymous parallelism. The same idea is repeated in other words.* See, for example, Job 6:5: *"Doth the wild ass bray when he hath grass? or loweth the ox over his fodder?"* If a linking word is used, it is usually "and."

b. *Antithetical parallelism*. The second member shows the opposite thought to the first one. Thus we read in Proverbs 14:34, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people."* Here we also see the exegetical value of the parallelism:

The first member which is more or less vague (what is "exalting" a nation?) becomes clear, thanks to the second one: "Reproach" refers to moral decline, so the word "exalteth" must also have a moral meaning.

c. *Chiastic parallelism*. The two parts of the verse are each other's mirror image, as far as the word order is concerned. For example, see Proverbs 13:24: "*He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes."* A chiastic parallelism can be synonymous as well as antithetical.

Other Figures of Speech

In this far-from-complete survey of figures of speech used in the Holy Scriptures, I will list several more examples. We speak of an *ellipsis* when some words are omitted which are necessary for the sentence structure, but which are not necessary to understand the sentence. For example, see Psalm 90:13: "*Return, O LORD, how long?*" A *hyperbole* is a fitting exaggeration as a figure of speech. We use hyperboles in everyday conversations: "I'll be back in a second." However, we have to be careful with this when explaining the Scriptures. Those who try to solve the problems that the sometimes high numbers in the Scriptures confront us with, by interpreting them as hyperboles, make improper use of the term hyperbole. A good example of a hyperbole is found in Matthew 23:24: "*Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel."* We speak of a *zeugma* when two nouns are connected with one verb, although this verb actually matches only one of them, for example, "Mr. Jones took his coat and his leave." In the Scriptures, we find a zeugma in Luke 1:64: "*And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed*." The translators of the King James Version have italicized the word "loosed" to emphasize this zeugma.

We speak of a *euphemism* when a sharper expression is

replaced by a softer expression. Someone may use the word "full-figured" to describe a fat person. Euphemisms are also found in the Bible, for example, when the word "sleep" is used to refer to the moment of death. Incidentally, people often think that the word "sleep" is only used in this sense for God's children, but this is not true. About the wicked kings Jeroboam and Ahab, we read that they "slept" with their fathers. *Irony* is used when someone makes a seemingly serious remark in order to mock. We may think of the words of the prophet Micaiah to King Ahab, "*Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king*" (1 Kings 22:15). A *litotes* is a strong confirmation through a denial of the opposite. Think of an exclamation like, "I'm not lying!" This figure of speech is often used in the Bible. We will quote only one example, which is found in Psalm 51:17. "*A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.*" It means that the Lord will have mercy upon such a soul. An *oxymoron* contains a narrow connection between two opposite terms. Romans 12:1 speaks of a "living sacrifice" and in 1 Peter 2:5 we read about "lively stones." In the case of an *anthropomorphism,* a figure of speech is used in which human body parts are attributed to God. Psalm 118:16 says "the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly." If human emotions are attributed to God (e.g. repentance), we call it an *antropopathism*. A *pleonasm* is a figure of speech in which more words are used than are necessary for clear expression. In Deuteronomy 3:27 God says to Moses, "*and behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan.*" Finally, a *climax* is when an increasing effect is achieved by an accumulation of expressions which become stronger and stronger. We may think of Psalm 1:1, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."

Different Text Types in the Scriptures

Parables

A parable is not the same as an allegory. We have already seen what an allegory is, an extended metaphor, continued briefly or for a longer time. It has long been a custom in Reformed hermeneutics to clearly distinguish between the parable and the allegory (see, for example, F. W. Grosheide, *Hermeneutiiek*, 208). Van Bruggen has made some critical remarks about it (*Het lezen van de Bijbel*, 147-160), but the old division still appears to be very useful. Both the allegory and the parable are types of figurative language. However, while in the allegory (nearly) all features may be "transferred," in a parable there is mainly one point of comparison, and the other features merely serve to work out the image. As I have said before, this division is still very useful, as long as we realize that there is no *fundamental* distinction between a parable and an allegory, and that it is possible that one cannot determine whether a text is a parable or an allegory (Grosheide, op cit, 208). In the Gospel according to John, we find several clear allegories. Think of the Vine (John 15). Obviously, all the "I am" sayings are metaphors! We hardly find any parables in the gospel of John. The "parable" of the sower (Matthew 13), however, does show some characteristics of an allegory. When explaining the parables, the danger of allegorizing (unlawful spiritualizing) is enormous, *precisely* because of the expressive language which is used.

Here are a few rules for the interpretation of parables (see also Van Bruggen, op cit, 156-160):

a. Try to get the *image* as clear as possible. In order to achieve this, knowledge of the religion, culture, geography, and even more so about the biblical times is necessary. If the image of a parable remains murky, it will be difficult to make the right

application! For example, was the youngest son in the parable (see Luke 15:12) right when he asked his father to give him the portion of the goods that "fell to" him? *What* part actually fell to him? And why didn't the widow in the parable of Luke 18:1-8 hire a lawyer? What is the significance that the Lord Jesus, in the parable of the good Samaritan, says that the robbed man was lying beside the road between Jerusalem and Jericho – what did it actually look like there? Didn't the man who found a treasure in the field while he was digging deceive other people by buying it without speaking a word about the treasure? When the picture becomes clear, a parable sometimes receives an unexpected colour and meaning.

b. Try to understand the *purpose* of the parable. Sometimes it is explicitly given in the parable or in its context, as is the case in Luke 18:1. Sometimes it is implicit, for example, in Luke 15:1-2. In other cases, the text around it gives a decisive indication, as in Luke 13:1-9.

c. Try to get the *tertium comparationis,* the point of comparison, as clear as possible. Bear in mind that the entire exegesis of the parable hinges on this point. A door cannot have hinges on both sides! In the threefold parable of Luke 15 (lost sheep / lost penny / lost son), the central theme is God seeks that which is lost. However, there are also nuances that give each of the three parables different "colours." The sheep went astray as a result of thoughtlessness, the penny just rolled away as a dead piece of metal, and the son left his family voluntarily and out of spite. Together, these nuances complete the picture of man's lost condition!

d. Carefully guard the borders in the *application* of the features of the image. The fact that a friend wants to borrow *three* loaves (Luke 11:5) does not mean at all that the Lord Jesus in this

parable alludes to the Trinity. The fact that the man who was attacked between Jerusalem and Jericho was left there *half-dead* is not a denial of the total depravity and spiritual death of man. It is part of the image, as there was no need for a dead Israelite to be saved by a Samaritan! Some church fathers taught that the two pence that the host received from the Samaritan refer to the sacraments. However, this is allegorical interpretation, not exegesis. An innkeeper cannot be expected to help an injured traveller for free (Luke 10:30, 35; see Grosheide, op cit 210).

Analogies

Another term in the field of exegesis is "analogy." The analogy should not be confused with the allegory! In the branch of hermeneutics, an analogy means that a statement from God's Word is considered applicable to similar situations (H. Mulder, *Christelijke Encyclopedie*, Kampen 1956, Volume I). It may also be the case that commandments which prohibit or command certain things are accepted as general rules. For example, think of the explanation given in our Heidelberg Catechism about the Ten Commandments (Lord's Days 34-44). I would like to add that certain Scripture passages can also offer analogies of the way in which God leads man to salvation. Thus, in the history of Genesis 24 (Abraham's servant goes out to find a bride for Isaac), people have often seen an analogy of the way in which the Holy Spirit draws a sinner to the Mediator. Also the book of Ruth can be seen as an analogy of the way in which Christ establishes a covenant with His church.

But it is necessary to go about this very cautiously! With the book of Esther, this is a little more difficult. It is not difficult to see Boaz as a type of Christ; however, it is harder to see Ahasuerus as a type of God. Yet in Esther's going to the king, hoping that the golden scepter will be handed to her, there are certainly several analogies that can be found in the lives of God's children. In an analogy,

the words "as/like/ so" are always important. As Rebekah's heart was moved with desire to her unknown bridegroom when seeing the silver and gold jewels that Abraham's servant showed to her, so the heart can be moved to desire Christ when hearing about the treasure of blessings that is to be found in Him. As the spirit of old Jacob revived when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, so the spirit of God's child can be quickened when seeing and hearing about the graces bestowed by the living Christ. I believe such interpretations of analogies are fully scriptural.

Typologies

This leads us to the subject of typology. According to J. G. Aalders, a "type" in the biblical sense of the word is an Old Testament person, who in his own person or work, portrays a certain shadow or reflection of Christ's Person or work (*Christelijke Encyclopedie*, Kampen 1956, Volume VI, sv). Aalders points out that an individual may also be a special type of Christ with respect to a certain *event* in his life, such as Jonah in the three days that he was in the fish. According to him, there is also a difference between a type and a symbol. A symbol mainly concerns things, while a type concerns people. I would like to discuss this in more detail. The Greek word *tupos* (type) is derived from the verb *tuptein*, which means "to strike." The word gradually accrued a number of meanings. In the first place, a tupos is a strike. From then on it acquired the meaning of the *effect* of a strike: a bruise, an imprint, a figure, a shape, a model. Thus in the Greek language, a footprint is called a tupos, and tupos is also used for a mould which is used for casting an image. In a metaphorical sense, it can mean an example of good as well as evil. It can even refer to someone's character. Considering the fact that we are used to calling certain people in the Old Testament "types of Christ," what are we to call Christ

Himself in this context? The appropriate word is antitype. The Greek word *antitupos* actually means striking back. The word occurs twice in the New Testament. In both instances in the King James Version, it has been translated as *figure*. In Hebrews 9:24, we read about "the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true." Here we might have expected the apostle to use the word *tupos*. Apparently, the terms are sometimes interchangeable. In 1 Peter 3:21, the word *antitupos* occurs in the sense which we are discussing. There we read that baptism is a figure of the water of the flood. Dr. S. Greijdanus writes in his *Kommentaar op het Nieuwe Testament* (149) that the apostle here presents baptism as the first and original notion, and the flood as a shadow of it. So in God's eyes, baptism was primary and the flood secondary! Thus it is with Christ: He was there before His types were there. He was the antitupos, the antitype. In His types He foreshadowed Himself. If one presses a stamp on an ink pad and puts it on a sheet of paper, an imprint is seen on the sheet: the type. However, the lines in the stamp are the antitype – and of course this existed before the imprint on the sheet!

Only Typi Innati?

Often the question has been raised *when* is it permissible to speak about types of Christ while reading the Old Testament, and when is it certainly not permitted? J. G. Aalders believes that it is not permitted to consider any biblical saint a type of Christ; in his opinion Scripture itself needs to explicitly identify them, such as is the case with Jonah. He states that otherwise we will fall into allegorizing (op cit). It was Salomo Glassius, a seventeenth-century Lutheran theologian who in his book *Philologia Sacra* (1623) distinguished between what he called "typus innatus" (an innate type) and a "typus illatus" (an illative type). By *typus innatus*, he referred to a type of Christ that Scripture explicitly identifies to be so, such as Adam, David, and Jonah. A *typus*

illatus is a type that the exegete considers as such. This distinction is useful. Of course, the number of illative types is much larger than the number of innate types. Many Reformed exegetes have a broader view than Aalders, who only considered innate types to be real types of Christ. In this line of reasoning, the history of Joseph would be outside the sphere of typology! Neither would Boaz be considered a type of Christ. We should not follow this line of thinking. It would impoverish the preaching considerably, and we would do injustice to the Word of God. Nevertheless, some real dangers are lurking here, and we should be well aware of them. Sometimes people want to locate types *everywhere and always* when reading the Old Testament, even when the Holy Spirit never intended it. Those who do so fall into *typologizing*, as it has been called. This is an unnatural and artificial "typology." Another danger arises if we, when explaining, and preaching about typologies, do not make sure that the type *remains the type*. Sometimes in sermons, preachers may be heard saying things like, "Boaz, who has presented Himself as Ruth's Surety from eternity." Of course, this is not acceptable because the type and the antitype are confused.

Rules for Typologies

We will now attempt to answer the question which was raised earlier: *When* is it permitted to speak about types of Christ while reading the Old Testament, and when is it absolutely not permitted? We will have to observe a number of rules. H. Bultema in his book *De typologie der Schrift* (11–15) lists no less than fourteen. I will only state five rules:

- If the New Testament confirms a person to be a type of the Mediator to come (an innate type), the matter is obvious and unchallenged.

- When explaining and preaching God's Word, we should

first look at the antitype (Christ) and next at the type; first at the Person and then at the shadow. God's children in the old dispensation couldn't do this, but the Church of Christ living in the new dispensation *can*! It is easier to recognize a shadow if we have previously seen the person than the other way around. Therefore, I positively reject the statement that we should read the New Testament in the light of the Old Testament. I would like to turn it around. A shadow cannot throw any light on the person that the shadow comes from, can it? We should endorse the words of Augustine that "that which is obscure in the Old Testament, is clear in the New Testament."

- If clear lines can be drawn from the Person of Christ – or His work, I will come back to this later! – to a person in the Old Testament, we may call him a type of Christ. As such, Zebulon is not a type of Christ, but Judah is; Rehoboam isn't, but Solomon is.

- Another condition before accepting a type is the phenomenon which the German language calls "Steigerung" (increase, rise). The Apostle Paul clearly does so by using the words "much more" when comparing Adam and Christ in Romans 5 (verses 15, 17, 20). So the antitype must be (much) more than the type! Carolus Tuinman says in his *Keurstoffen uit de Heilige Schriften der Propheten* (1764, 68) that the "antitype surpasses the type exceedingly." When Isaac obediently climbed the slopes of Mount Moriah with his father, on their way to the altar, he was a type of Christ. But we also have to say, "More than Isaac is here!" because Isaac did not know that he was to be sacrificed, but Christ did know it. Bultema says (op cit, 6) that shadows and fulfillments cannot only be compared, but also contrasted, and that the contrasts are often much greater than the points of similarity!

- Often more than one fulfillment can be found of a single type or symbol. For example, Israel's exodus from Egypt was a shadow of the Child Jesus' return from Egypt to Canaan (Matthew 2:15), of Israel's return from the captivity (Isaiah 11:11-16) and of the sinner's deliverance from the "house of bondage."

Those who carefully consider these rules will be kept from arbitrariness in the interpretation of the Scriptures. Bultema makes another valuable remark when he says, "Let us be humble and let us avoid the malicious desire to gratify the itching ears of our generation. Let us remain ministers of the divine Word and thank God on our knees for any new discovery in the field of typology."

Symbolical Texts

There is a difference between a *type* and a *symbol*. A symbol especially refers to things, whereas a type usually refers to persons. This is a useful distinction. Justus Vermeer, in his exposition of Lord's Day 6, puts it somewhat differently. He speaks about *personal examples* such as prophets, priests, judges, kings, etc., and *impersonal examples* such as sacrifices and other ceremonies. He means the same thing. Thus, we would rather not call the Ark of the Covenant a type of Christ, but a symbol or a shadow of the good things to come. The symbols in the Old Testament are numerous. The most well-known ones are the serpent of brass, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Passover lamb. Many other examples could be added. We know the expression from our Form for the Administration of Baptism, which says that "baptism was signified" by the passage of the people of Israel through the Red Sea. Another well-known passage is found in Lord's Day 6 of our Heidelberg Catechism, which says that "the holy gospel, which God Himself first revealed in Paradise, and afterwards published by the patriarchs and prophets, and represented by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law,"

was "lastly, fulfilled by His only begotten Son." In this answer we find a combination of four verbs: reveal, publish, represent, fulfill. In this context, the third word *represent* is most important for us. Apparently, in the old dispensation, God did not only make something *audible* about the Christ to come, but also *visible*. It is essential for us, when speaking about types and symbols in the Old Testament, to be aware of the *unity of Scripture*. The Bible is not a mere folder with 66 separate books without any cohesion. No, the Bible is a *book*! Dr. J. van Bruggen has pointed out that it is no longer self-evident for many people that the Bible should be read as a whole (*Het kompas van het christendom*, 14–16). In Dr. Van Bruggen's opinion, the Bible is more like a portfolio than a file. Moreover, in the nineteenth century, the Old Testament was preferably viewed as a compilation of religious literature from the Jewish people and the New Testament as part of "ancient Christian literature." I have already said that we consider the Scriptures as one complete book with one primary Author, God the Holy Spirit. He moved the holy men of God as they spoke (see 2 Peter 1:21). The "secondary authors" were the prophets and apostles. For this approach, it is decisive what the Lord Jesus Himself said. He spoke about the *Scriptures* or about *Scripture*. The apostles also spoke about Scripture or about the Word of God. Those who consider Scripture in such a way as one organic whole with one primary Author will also understand that the Spirit of Christ, who moved the apostles, was also present in the Old Testament prophets (1 Peter 1:11). It will be clear that the reader of Scripture, who accepts the unity of the two Testaments, will have a different view on finding types of Christ in the Old Testament than the reader who doesn't accept this unity. Sometimes people have gone quite far in indicating symbols. Some have stated that the altar of burnt offering in the tabernacle, which consisted partly of shittim wood and partly

of brass, was a symbol of the two natures of the Mediator – His human nature being portrayed by the combustible wood, and His divine, imperishable nature, by the brass that overlayed the wood. Others think this goes too far. Anyway, it is certain that Christ Himself said about Moses: "He wrote of Me" (John 5:46) – but how, in which texts and with what intentions Moses did this, cannot always be ascertained by our limited understanding. It is good for us to realize that any image falls short in some way. This means that we cannot simply transfer any feature. It is only permitted to transfer all parts of the image in the case of an *allegory*. But in the case of a parable, of a type or of a symbol that point to Christ, this is *not* permitted. They will always remain shadows – and shadows never fully portray the real thing. The cities of refuge may serve as an example here (Numbers 35, Deuteronomy 19, Joshua 20). The cities of refuge were only permitted to serve as a refuge for a person who "smote his neighbour unwittingly, and hated him not beforetime" (Joshua 20:5). Of course, we cannot conclude from this that Christ is only a Refuge for sinners who sinned unwittingly. But on the other hand, it also doesn't mean that these words have no symbolical meaning at all. Someone who killed his neighbour on purpose and with deliberation certainly didn't regret his deed. However, someone who accidentally took his friend's life with whom he had been talking shortly before he died would be consumed by grief. And isn't *grief* about sin exactly the distinguishing difference between a sincere child of God and a hardened sinner?

Allegorizing

It will be clear that neither the right interpretation of an allegory, nor the right explanation of an analogy, nor typological exegesis may be called allegorizing. This Greek word means spiritualizing, which is never permitted. If someone says that his minister "remarkably spiritualized" the text last Lord's Day, he says

something preposterous. Spiritualizing is never good. Perhaps such a person means to say that the minister cleverly drew spiritual lessons from the text, but that is something quite different. When do people allegorize? We can answer this question as follows. As soon as people cross a line which they are not allowed to cross. This leads to the next question: *When* do we cross this line? We cannot deny that there is a subjective element in assessing this question. Some people will be inclined to call something allegorizing sooner than others. There should be room for a certain amount of freedom. For example, Luther explains Psalm 3 very differently than Calvin does, and both are dear to us. Yet it would be fatal to say that no boundaries exist because exegesis is free. Of course, there is nothing wrong in saying that exegesis is free. However, we have already seen that Reformed theology has never meant to say anything more or less than that exegesis should not be bound by doctrinal authority. This statement is directed against Rome, and it has never been meant to allow for arbitrariness in exegesis!

Mind the Different Text Types!

As I have said before, there is a line that distinguishes sound exegesis from randomly allegorizing. Where is this line? It is very important to pay attention to the different *text types* in the Scriptures. Obviously, the word "road" in the traffic regulations simply means a common road. It is also clear that Jacqueline van der Waals in her poem *Najaarslaan* (Autumn Avenue) does not refer to a common avenue. Why? Because the latter is a poem. Similarly, we will need good arguments to point out a metaphor or an allegory in a historical text. In prophetical texts, these figures of speech occur much more frequently and even more so in apocalyptic texts. A large part of the book of Revelation consists of metaphors. However, the five smooth stones of David in 1 Samuel 17 and the daughters of Jerusalem in Luke 23 are

definitely not metaphors. On the other hand, however, those who take the numbers in Revelation literally make the opposite mistake, because these do have a symbolical meaning.

What About Galatians 4?

At this point, someone may raise an objection that we are in danger of becoming stricter than the Bible's authors themselves if we reason this way. Doesn't the Apostle Paul himself allegorize in Galatians 4? He speaks about Abraham's two sons; one from the "bondwoman" (Hagar's son Ishmael) and one from the "free woman" (Sarah's son Isaac). Then the apostle says, "Which things are an allegory." The original Greek text has the word *allègoroumena*. It is not difficult to recognize the word "allegory" in this term. Next, Paul writes that the two children of Abraham signify the "two covenants": the one from Mount Sinai (the old covenant of the law) and the new gospel covenant. Isn't Paul allegorizing here? He has often been accused of this, and people who like to allegorize themselves have praised him for it and have set him as an example for all exegetes. It would be better to refrain from either of these. What the apostle is doing here is not allegorizing, as it has crept into the church throughout the centuries and has been practised by people like Origenes (we will come back to him in chapter 5). It is possible to defend the view that the apostle considered the ancient history of Hagar and Sarah a *typology*! We should never forget this distinctive difference between a typology and an allegorical explanation. The former *takes the entire history and also the literal meaning of the text seriously*. For those who allegorize or spiritualize, neither the historical background nor the grammatical meaning of the text have any meaning. They are only concerned about the deeper meaning which they believe is hidden behind the words of Scripture.

One thing will be obvious. Paul takes the entire history of Abraham and his two children very seriously! The annotations to the Dutch Authorized Version really hit the nail on the head when they state about the word *allègoroumena*, "which are indeed a true history or event, but besides that, signify also somewhat else, as being types or representations of spiritual things: as also the brazen serpent, the marriage of Adam and Eve, the Israelites passage through the Red Sea, the flood." What Paul has meant to say in Galatians 4 is that these two children of Abraham are actually types or examples of the way in which Judaism ("Jerusalem which now is") hopes to be saved and the way in which the believer in Christ ("Jerusalem which is above") hopes to be saved. In conclusion, we do not find an arbitrary allegorizing in Galatians 4, but an example of a telling typology.

Prophetical Texts

Something must be added here about the special nature of *prophetical subject matters*. Today, Reformed exegesis is very often blamed for "spiritualizing" such texts. Certain evangelical and dispensational groups boast of taking the prophetical texts seriously by reading them "literally." However, this is not justified. One of the basic principles of Reformed exegesis is accepting only one meaning in Scripture, the literal one! However, it would be foolish to deny that the prophets used imagery in many passages. They expressed their thoughts in the conceptual universe of their days and with the images that were familiar to them. When the priest's son (!) Ezekiel sees the glorious time of promise approaching, he uses a familiar image to describe this, an impressive temple (Ezekiel 40-48). From his early youth, this priest's son had learnt to think and express his thoughts in images derived from the temple. Another example is the prophet Isaiah, who prophesies about the restoration of Israel and says that the Lord will "assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah

from the four corners of the earth" while "they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west" (11:12, 14). This passage can be interpreted in two ways. The fulfilment of these prophetical words can either be sought for in the historical days of Isaiah himself, *or*, – if this is impossible – in the days of the new dispensation of Christ's kingdom in the New Testament. The annotations to the Dutch Authorized Version take the latter position. But whichever way you look at it, those who believe in a *later* fulfilment than in the days of Isaiah will necessarily have to consider the *Philistines* a metaphor, because the Philistines have disappeared as a nation. Is this spiritualizing the prophecies? No! It is an interpretation of a metaphor. Thus, there is no reason to blame us for not taking the prophetical words literally! There are different ways to fill a bucket. You can fill it to the brim all at once. You can also pour the water into the bucket in several phases, if necessary, with some time elapsing between the "fillings." Thus, for many prophecies, a *multiple fulfilment* can be assumed: an initial, a central, and a final one.

- The initial fulfilment takes place in the days of the prophet or in the near future.
- The central fulfilment takes places with the coming and the work of Christ.
- The final fulfilment will take place on the Day of Judgment.

As an example, I will mention the prophecy from Jeremiah 31:8 and 9: "Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight

way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn." This prophecy is about Israel and Ephraim; in other words, the kingdom of the ten tribes. During the time that Jeremiah prophesied, it was already more than a century ago that this nation had been carried away to "the north country" (Babylon) and to "the coasts of the earth" (many far regions). Now the Lord promises here that from these ten dispersed tribes "a great company" will return to Him. This is striking because Jeremiah laboured among the kingdom of the two tribes. Apparently, there is still hope for Judah's "sister" (see Jeremiah 3). The initial fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy must be looked for in the time shortly after his death. Evidently, with the return of the two tribes under Zerubbabel and Joshua in the year 538 BC, many people from the ten tribes also returned to the land of their fathers. In Luke 2, we find old Anna, a distant descendant of Asher. Nonetheless, this does not imply a complete "fulfillment" of the word of Jeremiah. The annotations to the Dutch Authorized Version consider the "north country" to be an image of the "spiritual captivity." With Christ's coming, with the new dispensation of the Covenant of Grace which began at Pentecost, this prophecy received a new and deeper fulfillment. And it is still being fulfilled, also today, when God leads His "blind and lame, women with child and her that travaileth" from their spiritual captivity. What these four categories have in common is their inability to come by themselves. God will bring them in! But even so, the fulfillment of these words is still not complete. The final fulfillment will come when God sends His angels on the Day of Judgment and when He brings in His elect from the four corners of the earth. Those who object to such an explanation of this prophecy should realize that the authors of the New Testament frequently follow the same route. I will give some examples. In Acts 15, during the Jerusalem Conference, a discussion is held about the sharp

controversy which arose in the early church about the question whether the Gentiles who have come to believe in Christ must be circumcised. After Peter, Paul, and Barnabas have had their say, the Apostle James, "the Lord's brother," stands up. He quotes the prophecy from Amos 9:11 and 12, "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by My Name, saith the LORD that doeth this." This interpretation by James is instructive. The words of Amos, read superficially, seem to refer to a powerful national prosperity of the people of Israel, so much that even the Edomites will be subjected. This would be a "literal" fulfillment of this prophecy. But James sees the words of the prophet Amos, dating back to the eighth century BC, fulfilled in the conversion of the Gentiles during the missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas. The Annotations justly conclude of Amos 9, verse11, "whence it doth plainly appear that this and the like prophecies must be understood spiritually." Therefore, such interpretations of Scripture have nothing to do with unlawful "spiritualizing" but follow the footsteps of the New Testament apostles. A second example is by means of Isaiah, the Lord promises, "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David" (Isaiah 55:3). Paul, in his sermon in the synagogue of Antioch, associates these words with the resurrection of Christ (Acts 13:43)! To us this may seem a far-fetched association, but in fact this gives us the key to understanding the Old Testament prophecies: "For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen" (2 Corinthians 1:20). The fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies must be looked for in the finished Mediator's work of Christ – unless there is absolutely no other way and we are still to expect their fulfillment, for example, in those texts that explicitly speak of Christ's second coming upon the clouds of heaven.

The phenomenon of *prophetic perspective* deserves our special attention in the interpretation of prophetic texts. If one looks far into the distance in a mountainous country, the mountain peaks sometimes appear to be next to each other. It is only when one comes closer that one realizes that the peaks may be many kilometers away from another. This may also be true for prophecies. The well-known expression "the day of the LORD" is sometimes of a threatening nature in the Old Testament, and sometimes it is a prophecy of salvation. As a matter of fact, the day of the LORD begins with the first coming of Christ in the flesh and ends with His second coming on the Day of Judgment. Thus the expression becomes an equivalent to the "last days" and the "time accepted" or the "day of salvation." A clear example of the double character of the "day of the LORD" is found in Malachi 4:1 and 2.

Christ in the Old Testament

Throughout the ages, the coming Christ has cast His shadow before Himself during the Old Testament dispensation. I think of Luther's words, "The exegete must seek Christ everywhere in the Bible." The entire Scriptures "only deal with Christ if you look inside them, even though the outside appears and sounds differently." These words are true. However, we have to be careful not to interpret them too superficially. Typologically, the Old Testament does not only reveal Christ to us in the *objective* part of His work, but also in its *subjective* part! What do I mean by this? I will give some examples. Let us first look at the objective side of Christ's work. Undoubtedly, the anointing of David (1 Samuel16) is a shadow of the anointing of Christ, both concerning His ordination and His qualification. In many sermons about Lord's Day 12 of the Heidelberg Catechism, the minister will refer to this Scripture passage. Moreover, in the life of David after His anointing, two periods can clearly be

distinguished: one of fleeing from Saul like a partridge in the mountains, and one of kingship in Hebron and Jerusalem. It is not difficult to see a connection with the humiliation and exultation of the Mediator. This is also true of Joseph's life; a well-known book about his life is called *Kruis en kroon* (Cross and Crown). However, what do we mean with the subjective side of Christ's work, which is typologically apparent in the Old Testament? We mean that Christ has not only done His work *for* His people, but that He also works *in* His children. In other words, He is also active *in* the believer. It would lead to great impoverishment if we only admitted the former! We are convinced that numerous typologies and analogies of this can be found in the Old Testament. I will give two examples to show how Christ's work in the experiential life was "signified beforehand" in the Old Testament. We will limit ourselves to the lives of Joseph and Ruth.

The Life of Joseph

What is the purpose of the history of Joseph in the Holy Scriptures? Our answer to this question should be, in the first place, to show the reader in what a wondrous way it has pleased the Lord to "save much people alive" (Genesis 50:20). In these Scripture passages, the Holy Spirit is primarily concerned with God's *history of redemption*. It is all about the questions. How has it pleased God to cause Christ to be born? Along what seemingly dead-end roads was this accomplished? Therefore, the primary purpose of the histories of Joseph in the Bible is to reveal something about the history of redemption. It is the primary intention, but not the only one! In these chapters, we also find clear instruction about the question how God, by His Spirit, *leads a sinner to Christ*. In the way Joseph dealt with his brothers, we find striking shadows of the way in which Christ deals with His people. In the initial sternness with which Joseph approaches his brothers, we find something of the sharpness with which Christ

uses God's law when He convicts a sinner. How *hidden* was their loving brother's heart behind that stern face! Think of the following text, "And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him." How wise are the ways in which Joseph leads his brothers, by surprising them with a warm reception at his table, and where to their amazement he places them in order of age, showing that he *knows* them! How wisely does he finally convince them of their guilt, and in such a way that they are unquestionably persuaded to return to that stern man, who could just put them to death if he would. Here we find clear features of the Mediator to come, who casts His shadows before Him, not only of the way in which He will objectively *obtain* salvation for His own, but also of the way in which He will subjectively *appropriate* it by the work of His Spirit. Those who call this spiritualizing deny the shadows of Christ in the Scriptures!

As we have seen, the histories of Joseph and his brothers are full of typological features. While reading, one notices the remarkable phenomenon that the types sometimes *change*. This occurs in other Scripture passages as well. For example, when Isaac obediently follows his father on the slopes of Mount Moriah in order to have himself bound as a lamb on the altar, he is undoubtedly a type of Christ in His willingness and obedience. But when the ram caught in the thicket finally dies on the altar, the image changes and Isaac becomes a type of God's child, for whom a substitutionary sacrifice was made by Another. This is also the case with Joseph. In his journey to Egypt, his miserable life as a slave, and in his imprisonment, he is an image and type of Christ in His humiliation. But he is also an image of a child of God who knows what it means to be tried by the word of the LORD (Psalm 105:19). In the way that Joseph as an exalted overseer in Egypt deals with his bewildered brothers, he is a clear type of Christ and His dealings with His people. However, when

Judah finally in his plea stands surety for Benjamin, here too the images change, and Judah becomes a type of the Mediator. The exegete and preacher will need to pay careful attention to these things.

The Book of Ruth

In this context, I would like to say a little more about the typological interpretation of the book of Ruth. It will be clear that it is not the primary or only intention of the book of Ruth to show us how a sinner is led to Christ. What is to be said about the histories of Joseph also applies to the book of Ruth. In these Scripture passages, the Holy Spirit is concerned in the first place about showing us something of the *history of redemption*. So this is the primary intention of the book of Ruth, but again *not the only one*! The small book of Ruth gives us clear instruction about spiritual life. In the first chapter, we encounter a young woman, drawn from Moab in a wonderful way, intended to be one of the mothers of Christ. She doesn't know Boaz, but an unrepentable choice was worked in her to serve the God of Israel and to love His people. In the second chapter, she is led by God's providence to the field of him who is to become her bridegroom. She is allowed to glean quietly and gathers a lot of food. She only "tarried a little in the house" (2:7). Sometimes she is surprised to be invited by Boaz and to eat side-by-side with the reapers! In chapter 3, the circumstances change, and the shelves become empty. The barley and wheat harvest are finished. She needs to go to Boaz, and in such a way that she needs to completely surrender herself! How kindly is she treated on the threshing floor. She goes home with six measures of barley, not gleaned, but received from Boaz himself! But she is still "Ruth, the Moabitess," living on her own account, and not

as Boaz' wife. However, in the fourth chapter she does become his wife, when she is redeemed by her bridegroom in the gate. Are we really doing violence to the Scriptures if we see clear analogies of spiritual life in these histories? The lines that we find here are found throughout Scripture! We should not cloud things by saying that Scripture does not tell us how much she knew of Christ when she arrived in Bethlehem. Those who say such things forget that we are dealing with an *analogy* in this Bible book. The question is not whether Ruth knew something about Christ when she arrived in Bethlehem, but the point is *that she did not know Boaz. This* precisely is the analogy with the life of grace. And the main lesson that can be learnt from this small book – yea, from all Scripture! – is nothing other than this: *We need to come to Christ*; without Him there is no life and without Him we can't stand before God.

3

Step by Step

The Method of Exegesis

All of us practice exegesis much more often than we realize. Sometimes a child asks a question about something that he or she did not understand when the Bible was read. At another time a colleague asks us a question. And again, the doorbell rings, we open the door unsuspectingly and two Jehovah's Witnesses, armed with reading material, ask if we are aware that we live in the last days. An office-bearer, especially a minister, is actually an exegete every day. I am not only referring to the continuous preparation of sermons, but also to questions from catechism students, home visits, reading theological literature, encounters with non-Christians, etc. However, in this book, the focus is especially on the preparation of sermons or a Bible narrative. It is recommendable to adopt a certain *method* for exegetical preparation. What method should be used?

In any case, exegesis is *not* simply comparing some commentaries (or even sermons!) to see what this or that person says about a text or a pericope. Then, what is it? J. Van Bruggen has given

twelve points that an exegete should consider (*Het lezen van de Bijbel*, pages 53–104). I think the following seven are important (I am greatly indebted to Van Bruggen for his points):

Finding the Smallest Unit

The exegete must always try to find the *smallest unit for exegesis*. The largest unit for exegesis is the whole Bible. Starting at this point and working inward, several concentric circles can be distinguished: the Old or New Testament, a prophetical book, a gospel, and so on. The smallest unit is found when it cannot be split up in pericopes or segments anymore. The divisions into chapters and the layout produced by publishers can often be trusted, but not always! At any rate, always remember that the division into chapters and verses was not inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is known that the autographa (the manuscripts witten by the prophets and apostles) of the Holy Scriptures are not divided into chapters or verses. It was not until the Middle Ages that people were successful in making divisions that gained authority. The division into chapters as we know it originates – at least, broadly speaking – from Stephan Langton, a thirteenth-century archbishop of Canterbury. In the sixteenth century, the printer Robert Stefanus further divided the chapters into verses. According to his son, he performed this work while he travelled on horseback from Paris to Lyon! Moreover, some Old Testament books were already divided into verses some centuries before Stefanus. Undoubtedly, the division into chapters and verses has meant a lot to the research and exegesis of the Bible. On the other hand, we must bear in mind that it was all done by humans. It is obvious that the division of some chapters is inappropriate. The last verses of Isaiah 52 clearly belong to the fourth song of the Servant of the LORD, and they form a unity with chapter 53. Also the conclusion of Acts 21 may sound odd when you read the Bible after a meal with your family.

Moreover, when you read the first verses of Haggai 2, they may lead to questions; they only become clear when you realize that Haggai 2:1 forms a unity with the last verse of chapter 1. When one practices exegesis on a text, he must consider the *entire* smallest unit carefully, without neglecting anything.

Reading the Original Languages

The object of exegesis is the Holy Scriptures in the original languages. It has pleased the Holy Spirit to use Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek when God's revelation was recorded. One who interprets the Bible will have to focus primarily on the "original text". Van Bruggen points out that exegesis is not the same thing as reading commentaries (op cit, page 98). He even mentions that referring to exegetical literature is one of the last activities that an exegete should consider! Perhaps all of us sometimes forget that the *text* is the object of exegesis, not the commentary. Since none of us grasps the Hebrew and Greek languages as our mother tongue, we will have to manage as best as we can. To gain knowledge of the original languages in which God's Word has come to us, resources are available, such as grammar books and dictionaries. Two warnings are to be considered here. First, no one should allow himself to be tempted by advertisements for courses in which one can "learn Hebrew in ten lessons," or Greek in one winter. Studying the Bible's original languages is a lengthy and laborious task – one that must be *kept up*! Secondly, remember that grammar books and dictionaries are never neutral and especially not infallible. Often the theologians who have produced such dictionaries have liberal beliefs. Their integrity is not under discussion, but their view on the Scriptures is. Incidentally, those who do not have the opportunity to carefully study the Bible's languages may very well have developed good exegetical skills. Augustine knew less about languages than Jerome did – and was aware of it too – but yet he was an excellent

exegete, despite his tendency to allegorize. Those who lack a thorough understanding of the original languages will be able to manage quite well today with (digital) resources.

Reading Carefully What It Says

Fundamental for a good exegesis is *reading carefully what it says*. This is not as simple as it may seem to be. This is not only true when we read the Bible in the original languages, but also when we read a translation. You can test this by randomly asking a catechism student to read Psalm 45:7 aloud, "*Therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows*." After that, ask him or her who is the subject and who is the object in this sentence. In the Dutch Bible, Psalm 137:3 reads as follows, "*For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.*" Many people have problems understanding what the word "mirth" is doing there. Moreover, there are several persistent misunderstandings as to the right version of some Scripture passages. In Luke 13 Christ does not say, "Strive *thou* to enter in at the strait gate," but He addresses everyone who hears the words, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate" (verse 24). Good exegesis starts with good reading! This requirement applies to unknown Scripture passages as well as to well-known ones. Practice shows that people tend to have just as many problems understanding well-known texts as they do unknown texts.

Translating the Text

The next step is translating the text. Is this really necessary? Aren't the existing translations of the Bible good enough? The author of this book belongs to those groups that cherish the Dutch Authorized Version, not for nostalgic reasons, but especially because it is still considered the best Dutch translation.

Nevertheless, it is still very useful to make our own translation of the text that we are studying. After doing so, one is often impressed again by the quality and reliability of the old Authorized Version. Moreover, even the best translation is not able to say everything. There will always be things that are lost in the translation. The exegete needs to be aware of this. I will give some examples.

Verbal forms. The Greek language has two different forms to express the Past Simple Tense, the imperfect tense and the aorist. Usually, the imperfect tense implies an action or an event which was continually or repeatedly going on in the past. It can be compared to a line. The aorist is used for an action that happened once in the past, or that started to happen. It can be compared to a dot. This distinction between the imperfect tense and the aorist can rarely be expressed sufficiently in a translation, simply because many languages do not have these distinctions in the verb tenses. Yet it is important to be well aware of this. The healed man who had been possessed "besought" Jesus that He might be with him (Luke 8:38). The Greek text has edeito, the imperfect tense of *deomai*, to ask. This implies that the man asked it repeatedly, although this is not visible in the Dutch and English translations.

Synonyms, words with a similar meaning. When synonyms are used next to each other, they often receive their specific colours. Bike and bicycle are synonyms in English, but when they are placed next to each other, the second word sounds more formal than the first. A well-known biblical example is the use of "agapan" and "filein" (synonyms for "to love") in John 21:15-17. Those who fail to notice this actually miss the point when interpreting this text. Again, this shows the importance of knowing the original languages in which the Word of God was delivered to us.

Suggestive power. In chapter two, I wrote something about the suggestive power of language. This suggestive power can express itself in particular use of sentence structure, when the author surprises his or her readers by a special change

in the word order. Also sound and rhythm may give the language suggestive power. Genesis 1:2 says about the earth that it was "toohoe waboohoe," "without form, and void." The repeated dark sound in the Hebrew vowel "cholem" gives the words a suggestive power which is difficult to translate. *Word play*. In Isaiah 7:9, King Ahaz of Judah is told, "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." The Hebrew text has, "eem lo ta-a-mee-noo, key lo tey-a-may-noo." The word play is obvious here. In a translation this is lost, although it is possible to try and make a new word play in the other language. The NIV has made the following attempt, "If you do not stand firm, you will not stand at all." This is a clever solution, but obviously we lose much of the original meaning in such translations.

Determining the Text

The next phase is the determination of the original text. Of course, this part precedes the previous point in order. Practice, however, shows that text-critical problems are not easily solved, as long as there is any uncertainty about the translation of the words. We should be well aware that *textual criticism* is not the same as *biblical criticism*. By textual criticism, we mean looking for the original text of Scripture by comparing different manuscripts which have been preserved. We do not possess the autographs – the manuscripts which were written by the Bible's authors themselves. What has been preserved, are apographs, thousands of copies, written by various people, older and younger, reliable and less reliable, complete and incomplete. There is nothing wrong with textual criticism. The people who wrote the Dutch Authorized Version have also dealt with textual-critical questions. Biblical criticism, however, is an approach to the Scriptures in which the authority of the Bible is questioned. Biblical criticism is a general term. In chapter five, I will say more about the different forms in which the critical approach of the

Bible has broken through, especially after the Enlightenment. Textual criticism deals with the question, "What did it originally say?" With biblical criticism, the questions are very different; even God's authority and the historical reliability of the Bible are at stake. A complicating factor is that authoritative scholars in the area of textual criticism are often critical of the Bible, too. As far as the Old Testament is concerned, the original text of Scripture has been carefully and reliably transferred to us in the Masoretic Text (MT). The name is derived from the Masoretes, Jewish scholars in Palestine and Babylon who edited the Hebrew text of the Old Testament (the Jewish Tanakh) between the seventh and tenth centuries AD. The reliability of the Masoretic text was emphatically confirmed in 1947 by the discovery of a complete scroll with the text of the prophet Isaiah in the caves of Qumran, to the north-west of the Dead Sea (1QIsa or the Great Isaiah Scroll). The then-known oldest manuscript of Isaiah dated from ca. 1000 AD; the Isaiah scroll from Qumran was more than 1100 years older! The differences between these manuscripts appeared to be marginal, which proves the great accuracy with which the text of the Old Testament has been transferred throughout the centuries. As for the New Testament, the "Textus Receptus" served as basis for translations such as the Luther Bible (1522) and the English (1611) and Dutch (1637) Authorized Versions. For some readers, the term Textus Receptus may require some explanation. Everyone knows that there are differences between the various translations of the Bible. Sometimes these differences are marginal, but in other cases they are rather far-reaching. Some translations of the Bible even appear to have skipped some texts. Where do these differences come from? Two explanations can be given. There are different ways of *translating*, but also different *manuscripts* may have been used, which is what we would like to discuss now. When the printing press was invented halfway through the fourteenth century, it was only a matter of time before the first

printed version of the Greek New Testament appeared. This happened in Basel in 1516. It was the Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus, who supplied the printer with a Greek text that he could publish, based on the manuscripts he has access to. The thousands of manuscripts that partly or completely contain the Greek text of the New Testament can be divided into three "families," groups of manuscripts which show much relationship and agreement. We distinguish the Alexandrian, the Western, and the Byzantine text-types. The Byzantine manuscripts comprise approximately 80 percent of the total number of manuscripts. Erasmus, when preparing his publication, only had access to a limited number of manuscripts, which were of the Byzantine text-type. Later, the text drawn up by Erasmus was often revised, by himself, by the well-known Theodore Beza and by the brothers Abraham and Bonaventura Elsevier. In 1633, the Elsevier brothers published an edition of the Greek New Testament, the preface of which includes the following sentence, "Textum ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum" ("Thus you now have the text received by all"). This is where the term "Textus Receptus" comes from, the "universally received text." Today this text is somewhat unpopular with modern exegetes. They have pointed out that new manuscripts have been found long after Erasmus died, in particular the Codex Sinaïticus. This manuscript belongs to the Alexandrian text-type. Modern textual critics usually attach more value to the Alexandrian manuscripts than to the Byzantine ones. It really takes some courage today to stand up for the Byzantine text-type, which includes the Textus Receptus. Dr. J. Van Bruggen did have this courage. In his book *De tekst van het Nieuwe Testament* (1976), he argued for rehabilitation of the old and well-known text that occurs in the great majority of the text witnesses and that forms the basis of the influential Bible translation from the past. The Trinitarian Bible Society has published a useful edition of the Textus Receptus, a reprint of the Scrivener-edition from 1902.

Yet for readers who are proficient in Greek, it is recommended to look into the text publications of Nestle-Aland which contain the textual-critical apparatus, because otherwise we will miss the meaning of many remarks in commentaries. We should realize that the old Byzantine text does differ from more modern text publications, but that these differences are not essential in most cases. The God who inspired the Scriptures by His Holy Spirit also preserved the text of Scripture for the church by means of His special care. The text of the New Testament is reliable!

Asking Questions to the Text

Now it is time to ask your own questions about the text. If you start using commentaries too early, you do not approach the text with your own questions, but with those of the author of the commentary. Unfamiliarity may be a hindrance to interpreting a text, but so may familiarity. Approach the text as if you see it for the first time! An example is, "*And they brought unto Him also infants*" (Luke 18:15). Who brought the infants? And who are these infants? Babies, toddlers? There is a well-known song, starting with "When mothers of Salem," which seems to influence many ministers. Luke, however, uses a male word (*autois*). Certainly, there were also fathers! The most well-known passage from the Bible is probably the history of Jesus' birth, as described by the evangelist Luke. Also people who do not go to church will often be somewhat familiar with this passage of Luke 2. People who are familiar with the Bible will have to make sure they read it with much attention, especially such well-known passages. It may help us to ask questions while reading the text. Let us try this with the pericope Luke 2:1-7. We will ask questions about each verse. Verse 1: Do the words *And it came to pass* convey a certain message to us? Notice that the same words also occur in verses 6 and 15! What is a *decree* in this context? Who was

Caesar Augustus? What is the meaning of *all the world*? What does it mean to be *taxed* and what purpose did it serve? Verse 2: Why does it say that this taxing was *first made*? Did any other follow? Why is the *governor Cyrenius* mentioned here? Wasn't Jesus born in Judaea, rather than in Syria? Verse 3: Who are *all*? And what is the meaning of *his own city*? Verse 4: How far was Nazareth from Bethlehem? How did they make the journey? We read that Joseph was *of the house and lineage of David*. What about Mary? Verse 5: Mary is called Joseph's *espoused wife*. Were they married, or not? Verse 6: We read that *the days were accomplished*. Which days is Luke referring to? The days of Mary's pregnancy, or is there another possible meaning? Verse 7: Mary brought forth *her firstborn Son*. Did she give birth to other children? They *wrapped Him in swaddling clothes*. Was this a common thing to do or was it out of the ordinary? Does the addition *manger* mean that the Saviour was born in a stable? What should we think of an *inn*? The reader may think that such questions are somewhat strained or superfluous. But what is important is that the exegete needs to try to gain clarity about *each* part of the text. Nothing in the Bible is unimportant. An exegete must carefully read, spell – or even taste – the words! And He must certainly not fail to notice what the text *does not* say. This is very striking in this pericope. For in all the names of people, cities, and countries which are mentioned here, we cannot fail to notice that one name is missing – a name that we would certainly expect to see here: the Name of God! Then our question should be: Why would the evangelist choose not to mention God's Name? It is up to the reader to find an answer to this question, as well as to the other questions.

Looking for Answers

We must look for answers to the questions that we have asked about the text. This does not necessarily mean that we start

reading a commentary. It may be surprising and enriching to find an answer yourself, by looking in the Scriptures, in a concordance, or a Bible dictionary. Of course, it is not for nothing that we have commentaries. However, we should consider a few things first.

- What I have just said about dictionaries is especially true for Bible commentaries. They are never neutral and certainly not infallible. Behind the commentaries there are always authors with their own views of the Bible and beliefs about life. Often they hold liberal beliefs. Again, it is true that it is not their integrity that is at stake, but their view of the Bible.
- Those who hold the Reformed view of Scripture, as it is confessed in the Belgic Confession of Faith, will understand that there are only a limited number of commentaries which they desire and trust as guides for their study of the Bible. Thankfully, there is still sufficient choice.
- What is a good commentary? This question is not easily answered. It depends on who asks this question and what they are looking for. Those who are looking for a philological commentary will have different needs than those who do not have any knowledge of Hebrew or Greek. Within the target group of this book (especially readers without theological education, but who are interested in the interpretation of the Bible), there will be other differences. Some would like to use a simple commentary by which they are edified; others are looking for a short and concise explanation of the text.
- What if commentaries contradict each other? This happens quite frequently, because "we know in part" (1 Corinthians 13:9). Two things are important when exegetes contradict each other. We should learn to "weigh" the *commentaries* and we should learn to weigh the *arguments*. The necessity of weighing the commentaries is a result of the fact that not every commentary can have the same authority to us. So it is in daily life – some people's advice is more important to us than that of

others. John Calvin and Matthew Henry are both respectable and professional exegetes. Yet I believe that Calvin carries a little more weight. What I mean by weighing the arguments will be become clear in chapter 5, which deals with the practice of exegesis, illustrated by a number of examples.

- How many commentaries are we to use? Not too many. As the saying goes, it is not the *quantity* but the *quality* that counts! When you have consulted two or three biblical and skilled exegetes who share the same opinion about the interpretation of a text, it is wise to follow them. Stubbornness is not a praiseworthy characteristic of an exegete.
- Sometimes we have to dig even deeper. There are things that commentaries do not discuss. When you read the name of an animal or a plant, it is wise to refer to specific works about this subject. What does the Lord Jesus mean by "eagles" in Matthew 24:28? Are the "willows by the water courses" in Isaiah 44:4 identical to the willows we are familiar with? What is the lily in the Song of Solomon? Thankfully, there is much literature about these subjects.

4

Ever New

The Practice of Exegesis

Now the question will be addressed how the theory must be applied in the practice of dealing with the Holy Scriptures. This chapter contains sixteen examples, in most cases Bible texts or passages, whose interpretation is more or less disputed. We will always attempt to look for the right interpretation of each Scripture passage by "weighing" the arguments. Of course, this book does not pretend to be decisive. Every reader is free to draw other conclusions. Ultimately, it is only the Holy Spirit who, as the primary Author of the Scriptures, can lead us into His truth and can bring us to understand "the mind of the Spirit." The annotations to the Dutch Authorized Version are instructive on this point, since in several difficult cases we can read that the "sensible reader" may judge for himself (see, for example, the annotations to Genesis 7:11, Numbers 35:5, and Judges 12:4). Thus, the following sections are intended to illustrate the practice of interpreting the Scriptures. They do not make any scholarly pretensions. Neither should the reader expect to find meditations, even though some personal elements are present.

a. How are we to interpret the "mark" that the Lord set upon Cain?

Appearances Are Deceptive

In Genesis 4:15, we read that the Lord set a mark upon Cain, "lest any finding him should kill him." At first sight it appears that these words express some kind of mercy of God upon Cain the murderer. Cain is afraid after he has killed his brother. He is scared of God and the people. He expresses this fear with the words, "I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that everyone that findeth me shall slay me" (verse 14). Apparently, the Lord comforts him by assuring Cain that whosoever kills him, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. Also Cain is given a mark by God, the purpose of it being, "lest any finding him should kill him." Indeed, this is what it seems to be at first glance. However, the truth is very different!

A Cursed Man

Let us take a closer look at this history. It is remarkable how rudely Cain answers God's question: "Where is Abel thy brother?" (verse 9). The first murderer answers his Creator with the words which would become very well-known, "I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?" (verse 9). Then God directly confronts Cain with the evil of his crime. Abel's voice may be smothered, but the "voice" of his brother's blood still cries to God from the ground. Then the murderer hears the dreadful words, "And now art thou cursed from the earth" (verse 11). *Satan* had already been cursed (Genesis 3:14), the *ground* had been cursed (Genesis 3:17), but now Cain himself is cursed. It says that Cain is cursed *from* the earth. The Lord means to say that the earth has become Cain's opponent, loathing him and wishing to cast him out. No matter where Cain will try to cultivate the earth, it will never bear him good fruits. As a fugitive he will have to wander around miserably, having no home anywhere on earth. Forever he will be pursued by a plagued and anxious conscience, and never would the murderer find any rest.

Now Cain no longer dares to answer God rudely. On the contrary, he is terror-stricken. He groans, "My misdeed is greater than to be pardoned" (Dutch Authorized Version). What does he mean? If he only meant to say that his sin was *so* great in his own eyes, that he realized that it would be *too* great a miracle to be forgiven by God. If he truly felt sincere sorrow for sin, it would cause him to humble himself before God! But it is nothing of the sort. It is only the fear of *punishment* that makes him cry so desperately. He is afraid of everything, which is a telling characteristic of people with a troubled conscience. He is afraid of the punishment, afraid of God, afraid of the earth, which is against him, and afraid of man. "Everyone that findeth me shall slay me!" Everyone that findeth me? Who is Cain talking about? Weren't there scarcely any people on the earth in his days? He was certainly referring to the future descendants of his parents Adam and Eve. He also must have married a daughter of Adam and Eve (Genesis 4:17). The Holy Scripture does *not* confirm the idea that other families lived on the earth besides the family of Adam and Eve. Thus, Cain fears the vengeance of his family, who for the most part were still to be born.

Many Opinions

But then the Lord says that this will not happen. Anyone who dares to kill Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. "And the LORD set a mark upon Cain" (Genesis 4:15). Much has been written and said about this mark. What was it? I will list several opinions. Some people say his body started to tremble. Others say he became leprous, or he received a wild and savage appearance, terrifying everyone who saw him. A mark was burnt in his body, or he received some kind of tattoo on his forehead. And so forth. Other exegetes are of a different opinion, and they believe that Cain did not *bear* the mark in his body, but that it was *given* to him by God, just like the Sign of Immanuel that the

Lord gave to wicked King Ahaz (Isaiah 7:14). This would mean that we should consider this mark a guarantee from God to Cain that he would never be killed by another person. I have to admit that the words "the LORD set a mark upon Cain" do not exclude this interpretation. Yet it seems strange. What seems best is to follow the opinion of the annotators of the Dutch Authorized Version, who wrote, "What kind of mark that was is unknown, but it made him known who he was, and what he had done, and that none should adventure to kill him." This seems somewhat disappointing, but the exegete will have to be content with the conclusion, "We don't know."

What Purpose did it Serve?

However, it does not mean this Scripture passage is not instructive at all. It is more important to ask *what purpose the mark served* than to wonder what it consisted of. There does not need to be any uncertainty about this: Cain must not be killed! This may surprise us. Isn't there only one suitable punishment for a deliberate murderer? Doesn't the Lord Himself say to Noah, after the Flood, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man"? (Genesis 9:6). However, we should realize that God in these words describes the responsibility and function of the *government*. In Cain's days there was not really a government. Legal authority rested with the patriarchs. Presently, God forbids man to kill Cain, not to mitigate his punishment, but in order to show that one day, He Himself would carry out this punishment. Vengeance is His; He will repay! But why didn't God carry out this punishment *immediately*? Why did Cain have to wander the earth like a hunted animal until he, as a hardened enemy, would finally fall into the hands of the living God? Calvin says, "because He would consult for posterity, in order to the preservation of human life," and "in order that the fury of others be restrained." The Dutch

annotators give an addition: In order that Cain might have more time of repentance, seeing that hitherto he was only troubled at the punishment. This is a serious warning! Cain had grown up under the admonitions of God-fearing parents. He knew so well how he had once been brought forth from God's hands in his father Adam. He knew so well what had caused all misery and what had happened when man fell in Paradise. How miserable was his end. While his brother, the first martyr, had been taken up into glory, Cain wandered as an outcast in exile. He found no rest. Why not? Because he did not bow under God, grieve over sin, resist evil, and loathe himself.

Another Mark

In Ezekiel 9:2, we read about another mark, the mark of the Man clothed with linen, which had to be set upon the foreheads of the men that sighed and that cried for all the abominations that were committed in Jerusalem. Remarkably, it was forbidden to kill them too! However, for them, it was not true that God would once take vengeance upon them, but rather that their sins had been laid upon the shoulders of the Man clothed with linen, who would one day come. Think of this enormous contrast: Cain, branded by the mark, and God's children safe behind the mark. Cain, lost because of his own guilt; God's Church, saved for Christ's sake!

b. What were the Urim and the Thummim?

Uncertainty

Everyone knows that the Urim and the Thummim are mentioned in the Bible, but their meaning cannot be easily determined. When we read the *Christelijke Encyclopedie* (Christian Encyclopedia), the words of Dr. J. Schoneveld are not encouraging: "Since no details are given, it is not possible to determine the nature of these objects

and their use." The annotators of the Dutch Authorized Version are reserved too, and averse to any fantasy. "Nevertheless, what they were is uncertain. We read nowhere that God commanded Moses to make the same, much less how and whereof they were made," is what they say about Exodus 28:30. Yet the annotators add something to it, even though it is not much, but they actually hit the very mark. I will say more about this later.

Scripture Passages

Let us first look and see where and how the Word of God speaks about the Urim and the Thummim. There are only a few texts, as the expression occurs only seven times in the Bible. *Exodus 28:30* states that Moses has to put the Urim and the Thummim in the breastplate of judgment, in order that they be upon Aaron's heart. The word "in" is very important. Some people believe that the Urim and the Thummim were *attached to* the high priest's breastplate. From this viewpoint, it does not take much to accept the belief that the Urim and the Thummim can be identified with the twelve precious stones that the high priest wore *on* his breastplate. On the basis of the Dutch authorized translation we reject this view, which has been defended by the exegete Rev. C. Vonk (*De voorzeide leer*, volume Ia, page 476).

In *Leviticus 8:8,* we read once again that Moses put the Urim and the Thummim in the breastplate. The next instance is *Numbers 27:21*, where we read that Joshua was ordained to be Moses' successor. In difficult cases, Joshua must stand before Eleazar, the high priest, who shall ask council for him "after the judgment of Urim." Here only the first word of this expression is mentioned. In *Deuteronomy 33:8,* we read that Moses blesses the tribe of Levi with the words, "Let Thy Thummim and Thy Urim be with Thy holy one, whom Thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom Thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah." It is striking that this text speaks about *God's*

Urim and Thummim. The next instance is in *1 Samuël 28:6*. There we read that King Saul inquired of the Lord, but that He did not answer him, "neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." Again, it is remarkable that we only read about the Urim and not the Thummim, and that the Urim appears to be able to remain *silent*! Finally, *Ezra 2:63* and *Nehemiah 7:65* can be mentioned. These texts are almost identical. They deal with the priests that have returned from the Babylonian captivity, but who have lost their genealogies, which is why they cannot prove that they belong to Israel's house of priests. Who was to decide in this case? It was decided that they should wait "till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim." There *was* a high priest in those days after the captivity, by the name of Joshua (known from the night visions of Zechariah), but apparently, he did not have the Urim and the Thummim at his disposal. Had these objects been destroyed in the destruction of the temple? Whatever the case, this is the last instance in the Scriptures where we read about the Urim and the Thummim. Thus, we have looked at the Scripture passages (seven in total) which speak about these things. However, it is necessary to note that also the texts which speak about *asking for the ephod* in order to inquire of the Lord, probably refer to the Urim and the Thummim, which were closely connected with the ephod (part of the high-priestly robe). For example, in 1 Samuel 23:9 we read that David, in difficult circumstances, asks the priest Abiathar, "Bring hither the ephod." Then David receives very clear answers to his questions. Something similar to this can be found in Samuel 30:7.

The Will of God

We may conclude this examination by saying that the Urim and Thummim are used in the Scriptures when *God's will must be revealed.* It always concerned things which could not be solved in any other way – that is clear enough. A much more difficult

question is *how* God answered by the Urim and the Thummim. This question is so difficult to answer, because we still do not exactly know what the Urim and Thummim were like. I will give the reader some suggestions that have been proposed throughout the ages. As we have seen, some people were of the opinion that the stones were attached to the high priest's breastplate. Much can be said against this view. Others thought that it was a moveable image that gave positive or negative answers by way of nodding or shaking. Again, others considered it to be a piece of parchment, hidden in the breastplate. We could go on and on like this. But Calvin is very reserved in his opinion: "I will not mention any other interpretations, which are just as ridiculous. Neither will I take any effort to find out what they looked like."

Luther and Calvin

Perhaps the solution for this difficulty can be found in the *name* "Urim and Thummim." Luther translated these words as "light and justice." The translation of the first word as light or luster is a plausible one. But we do not know for sure if Thummum really means "justice" or "truth." Calvin translated the word as "perfections." In any case, these words indicate a plural form. Calvin associates them directly with Christ and says that he believes that Urim or luster refers to the light of knowledge, which the true High Priest radiates upon all believers. He alone is the Light of the world! Calvin believes that Thummim (perfections) means the symbol of pure and perfect cleanness, which can only be found in Christ. According to the Reformer, this inquiring of the Urim and Thummim was practiced because of the childlike condition that God's people of old were still in. Thus Calvin does not answer the question of what precisely must be understood by the Urim and Thummim and how they were used in practice.

Lights and Perfections

Personally I believe much can be said for the view which is

defended by Rev. I. Kievit in his work *Het boek Jozua* (The Book of Joshua)(pages 177-181). He believes that the Urim and Thummim were actual objects which were hidden in the high priest's breastplate. We will never know what they looked like. However, we cannot simply assume that they were used as some kind of stones to cast lots. Israel was familiar with the holy custom of casting lots, but they did not need the Urim and Thummim for this. We must assume that the Urim and Thummim were objects which served as signs and pledges for the high priest to assure him that the Lord would not allow him to lack light and wisdom in difficult decisions. Again, I would like to remind you of the annotation to Exodus 28:30, which says, "These words might be rendered, *lights* and *perfections*: God was pleased by them to impart His clear and perfect answers to the high Priest: Nevertheless what they were, is uncertain." Therefore, we endorse what the German theologian Otto van Gerlach (1801-1849) has said, namely, that "the high priest … possessed the divine pledge, which ensured him of the fact that, in all important cases in which the justice and wealth of all Israel were at stake, upon his faithful prayer, the Lord would never leave him in uncertainty as to what He desired from Him people." Urim and Thummim – lights and perfections. They belonged to the Old Testament high priest. Thus, this high priest had something of the three offices, although of course he only fully bore one office. But when Joshua, for example, desired light upon the path that God wanted him to go, then he needed to go to Eleazar, the high priest. There he received Urim, light upon his path. When Joshua or the people were guilty, then they had to go to the high priest, whose service spoke of the blood of atonement and whose breastplate spoke of priestly intercession. If justice was to be done and they did not know how, then they were to go to the high priests, who possessed royal power of decision in legal cases. It has been justly pointed out that these

three aspects diverge after the time of David: the prophetic office develops in Israel, the high priestly office remains, and the kingly office develops independently in the house of David. It is no wonder that the Urim and Thummim are no longer found in the Scriptures after David. They were not necessary anymore! The lesson for us is that a blind person who has gone astray, a condemned sinner who is unable to pay, a slave of sin who has always served the wrong king, can find everything that a destitute sinner ever needs in the Person of Christ, the great Prophet, Priest, and King: prophetic Urim (light), priestly atonement and intercession, and kingly Thummim.

c. Did Jephthah vow rashly and did he really sacrifice his *Daughter?*

The history that now calls for our attention has been widely discussed. On the eve of the battle with the Ammonites, who had oppressed Israel for eighteen years, Jephthah, the judge from Gilead, makes a vow to the Lord, namely, "Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering" (Judges 11:31). We all know how the story ends. When Jephthah returns as victor from the battle, his daughter comes forth to meet him, with timbrels and with dances. After two months, in which Jephthah's only child bewailed her virginity upon the mountains, he "did according to his vow which he had vowed" (verses 38-39). I will attempt to reduce the questions relating to this history to two.

Rash?

The first question is: *Did Jephthah vow rashly*? This is what many people often say. Some believed that Jephthah, who was willing to give anything to win the battle, vowed a vow in the

heat and tension of battle, not realizing what the consequences might be. He never thought for the slightest moment of the possibility that it might be his child who would come forth to meet him from his house. Perhaps he thought that it would be an animal – a dog or a lamb – or perhaps a slave, but he probably never fully considered the consequences. This is what many exegetes have written and continue to write. If this is true, the lesson that we are to draw from this history would be that we have to be careful with rash promises or oaths. The main proof put forward by these exegetes is the great terror that strikes Jephthah when he sees that it is *his daughter* who comes to meet him. It is only natural that many exegetes, who reason in this way, also believe that Jephthah literally burned his daughter. However, is this a plausible interpretation? Did Jephthah really vow rashly? I do not think so. He fully realized what he said. Why? Firstly, he did not vow his vow in the heat of battle, but in peace and quiet, on the preceding day. Secondly, it is very improbable that Jephthah, when vowing his vow, never thought of the possibility that his daughter would come to meet him first. Did he really think of a *dog* – an unclean animal – as a burnt offering? Did he really think of a lamb? What vow would that be, to promise only a lamb to the Lord as a demonstration of his thankfulness! How meagre a sacrifice would that be! We often read about saints in the Bible who slaughtered multitudes of animals after miraculous deliverances by the Lord – and would Jephthah really promise only *one* animal? Would this really be worth recording in the Holy Scriptures? It does not sound very convincing. No, Jephthah fully realized what he said! He seriously reckoned with the possibility that it might be his child who came forth to meet him. Would Jephthah have been able to think about his house without thinking about his child, on the eve of the terrible battle with the Ammonites, with death staring him in the face? I dare to put it even stronger: Jephthah thought about his

daughter in the *first* place!

A Bastard

Here, on the eve of the battle with Ammon, he does not do anything rashly, but he is actually close to his God. It should be realized that Jephthah was a bastard, a harlot's child. The Lord had said about such people that they would never be allowed to enter into the congregation of the Lord, not even to their tenth generation (Deuteronomy 23:2). Jephthah had carried this with him as a heavy burden, all his life. Now, in one of the most crucial moments of his life, he places the future of his family in God's hands. If the Lord wants Jephthah's family in Israel to cease, so be it. In his vow, he says as it were, "Lord, it is up to Thee. If it is Thy will that I come back a victor from this battle, tell me what will happen to my family in the future. Wilt Thou be so good to me, a poor bastard, as to grant me the victory to the glory of Thy Name and for the well-being of Thy people, then I will give all that I have into Thy hands and will resign myself to it, yea, even approve of it if the memory of my name be removed from the families of Israel."

The Burnt Offering

Jephthah, the hero of faith! Isn't that how he is described in Hebrews 11:32? It is impossible for me to answer our first question differently. It speaks for itself that this answer also affects the answer to the second question. The second question is: *Did Jephthah really burn his daughter?* When we read the text literally, this seems to be the only correct inference. Jephthah literally says about that which will come to meet him from his house, "I will offer it up for a burnt offering." Luther wrote about these words in the margin, "Some people say that he did not sacrifice her, but the text is clear enough." In all honesty, I have to admit that almost all church fathers took Jephthah's burnt offering literally. In more recent times, several Reformed exegetes

followed this line of reasoning. I only mention Dr. M. Noordtzij in his *Gods Woord en der eeuwen getuigenis* and, following him, well-known Rev. H. Veldkamp is his book *Dubieuze posten*. However, I cannot agree with such interpretations. Now it becomes clear that the first question that we asked (did Jephthah vow rashly?) is decisive for our second question. Those who believe that Jephthah in making his vow gave his case, his life, and his family into the hands of the Lord, cannot possibly support the view that this judge literally burned his child. Does the Lord take any delight in human sacrifice? Human sacrifices were an abomination in ancient Israel. Even many pagan nations shrank back from it. The Lord had forbidden it explicitly in His law; think of Leviticus 18:21 and Deuteronomy 12:31. Jephthah's dealings with the king of the Ammonites before it came to the battle (verses 12-28) reveal that Jephthah was *very familiar* with the law of God, as laid down in the five books of Moses! And to mention nothing else, would the apostle actually have included Jephthah with David and Samuel among the heroes of faith (Hebrews11:32) if this judge were guilty of sacrificing his daughter? Jephthah *consecrated* his child to the Lord. The offering was a spiritual burnt offering, which is also found in other Scripture passages (e.g. Romans 12:1). As an unmarried virgin, Jephthah's daughter would be bound to the service of the Lord near the sanctuary for the rest of her life. Carefully take notice that Jephthah did not make a *promise*, but a *vow*. What does this mean? By means of a vow, one could consecrate himself or one of his loved ones to the Lord. If one wanted to undo such a vow after a while, this could be done by paying a certain amount of money to the sanctuary (think of the "shekel of the sanctuary"). However, there were also vows which were not temporary, but which lasted for one's entire life. It was such a vow that Jephthah made. But why then does he speak about a *burnt offering*? Because in Israel the burnt offering was an *entire* offering. Most offerings

were burnt only partly, and another part was for the priest or for the person who offered the sacrifice. But the burnt offering was entirely for the Lord; it was a "whole burnt sacrifice" (cf. Deuteronomy 33:10). Therefore, Jephthah's daughter would be withdrawn from society and serve the Lord at His sanctuary for the rest of her life, which could never be undone. There were more women like this in Israel (cf. 1 Samuel 2:22). Jephthah's daughter would never be able to marry. His family would die out. However, the name of the father and the frame of his nameless child would forever be recorded in the annals of God's Word. Is it surprising that Jephthah is moved when his child comes forward to meet him from the house? It is no wonder, considering what has been mentioned above. However, it *is* a wonder how this girl submits to the will of the Lord in her life, which would cause her to be deprived of marital love and children, a great sorrow, especially in Israel. She submits to the Lord. It only remains to be said that her father did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: And she knew no man (verse 39).

d. Only by accident? About cities of refuge

Someone once asked me a question after a meeting. It was about the meaning of the cities of refuge in the Bible. The person who asked the question said that only an unintentional killer was allowed to flee to a city of refuge. But, the question was, Christ (to whom the cities of refuge pointed) did not only die for sins which were committed unintentionally, did He?

Symbolic

The question is clear. I hope my answer will be clear too. There are three Scripture passages which deal comprehensively with the cities of refuge. These chapters are Numbers 35, Deuteronomy 19, and Joshua 20. Moses was still alive in the book of Numbers, and this chapter especially deals with the three cities of refuge

in the country on the east side of the Jordan. In Deuteronomy 19, we find part of Moses' farewell sermon in the fields of Moab where this man of God once repeated what the Lord had told him concerning the cities of refuge. Finally, in Joshua 20:2, God comes back to what He had spoken to Moses and we read, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying, Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses." No other city in Israel was allowed to serve as city of refuge save only the six cities which God had appointed. The Bible passages about the cities of refuge belong to the "shadowy" texts of the Old Testament. Perhaps we could better call them symbolical texts, because there is so much symbolism in these texts. They point to Christ and also call for the fulfillment in Christ. The cities of refuge are an image of the redemption which lies ready in Christ for a poor, lost sinner. A telling image! Just as the murderer, full of fear and sorrow, fled to the city of refuge with all his might, so a sinner learns to flee to salvation. Thus, a guilty sinner should not find rest in his life until he has taken refuge in Christ. Every image is incomplete. We cannot and are not allowed to transfer each feature of this image to Christ. If we tried to do this, we would drift into absurdness. To mention just one example, there are six cities of refuge, but there is but one Saviour. There are not six saviours! The Scriptures give us the names of the cities of refuge. Let us follow the map counterclockwise (an atlas is indispensable for an exegete!): *Bezer* lies far in the southeast, where Reuben lives, in the middle of the inhospitable desert. Situated somewhat to the north, on the east side of the Jordan, is *Ramoth-Gilead*, in the territory of the tribe of Gad, near the Jabbok River, where God wrestled with Jacob during the night. Even further to the north is *Golan*, in the territory of Manasseh. The name Golan is still known from the Golan Heights, a well-known area. On the west side of the Jordan was *Kedesh*, in the mountains of Naphtali, near

Dan, in the far north of Israel. Further to the south is *Shechem*, in the mountains of Ephraim, near Ebal and Gerizim. The last city of refuge was in the far south, in the mountains of Judah: Kirjath-Arba, which is better known as *Hebron*. These are the six cities of refuge!

Whom?

Now the question for us is: *For whom was the city of refuge?* Who were allowed to flee to them? The Lord has accurately revealed this in His Word. We read in Joshua 20:3, "That the slayer that killeth any person unawares and unwittingly may flee thither." In legal terms we distinguish between murder, manslaughter, and accidental death. In cases of *murder*, the killing was intentional. The murderer may have been waiting for his opportunity for months or for years. Then an opportunity comes and he takes his neighbour's life intentionally. The Bible calls it "wittingly." Was such a person allowed to flee to a city of refuge? No! What happened to a murderer? He was to be killed by the avenger of blood. Another type of killing is *manslaughter*. What do we mean by this? For example, two friends have a night out. They drink too much and have a fight. One friend strikes the other, and he dies. Was it his intention to kill him? No. The killer is baffled. He did not mean to do this. Such an act is not called murder. It may have been his best friend. Was such a person allowed to flee to the city of refuge? No, because this cannot be called an accident. It was a deliberate act, even though the killer was drunk, but yet, also such people had to be killed by the avenger of blood. There is yet another type of killing. For example, a nurse works in a hospital. She takes the wrong medicine or administers an overdose to a patient who dies. Terrible! A moment of inattention. We call such events *accidental death*. And for such people the cities of refuge were intended. Thus it was actually limited to real accidents. The Scriptures give an example in Deuteronomy 19.

Two men are chopping wood in the forest. They did not hate each other "in time past." Suddenly, the head slips from the axe and hits the other person on his forehead. He falls down and dies. The cities of refuge were only for cases like this. We are apt to say, "But there is no need at all for such a person to flee to the city of refuge! Look at this distraught man! He has accidentally killed a good friend! He is not guilty at all, is he? Isn't this just an accident without any guilt? He could tear his hair out. Does he really have to be punished by locking him up in a city of refuge, perhaps even for decades?" Yes! It was an accident, but a *life* has been taken on earth. Blood has been shed. Can this remain unpunished? No, it cannot. God watches over human life. He considers it so precious that, even in the cases of such sad accidents, it must be avenged by the avenger of blood.

Blood Feud and the Avenger of Blood

The *avenger of blood*! This word needs some explanation. It may make us think of blood feud, but it has nothing to do with it. Blood feud works as follows. Someone is killed. The avenger chases the killer and kills him. Then another person chases that avenger and kills him. An endless spiral of avenging and avenging goes on and on. There are countries where blood feud has continued for many years and where one family is systematically killing another family. An endless spiral. But that is not the intent of the Scriptures when they speak about the avenger of blood. When we read the term "avenger of blood" in the history of the cities of refuge, we should never think of secular blood feuds. What then is the difference? It is this: Blood feuds never stop. But when the Scriptures speak about the avenger of blood, the original language actually says the *goel of blood*. The goel! We are familiar with this word. The goel is the kinsman redeemer. What was a goel's responsibility in Israel? He had to restore and redeem what had gone wrong. If by poverty someone had been

forced to sell his field, the goel had to buy it back. If someone had been forced by poverty to sell his children into slavery, then the goel had to redeem these children, to buy them back. And if someone had killed his neighbour, then the goel had to redeem that life by killing the killer! But that was also the end of it. He was allowed to kill only the killer. It was forbidden to kill the goel of blood himself afterward. One life for one life. This is how the holy justice of God demands satisfaction for our guilt. Do we understand this? When we hear about the goel of blood, we should never think of some malicious or bloodthirsty person who likes nothing better than killing and avenging. The goel of blood may have considered his job a terrible one, but he *had to* do it! His responsibility was to redeem the life which had been taken, because divine justice required it. Divine justice demands redemption by satisfaction!

Only by Accident?

This brings us to the question that this section is actually about, namely, if we apply this image to Christ, we become stuck, don't we? We consider the Scripture passages about the cities of refuge as symbolical texts which portray something of the salvation in Christ. Should we therefore conclude that the Lord Jesus is only a Saviour for sins which were committed *by accident*? If this were true, the comfort of the cities of refuge would have been very poor, if a sinner were only allowed to flee to Christ with the sins that he committed by accident. Yes, we have all committed sins by accident and unintentionally, but what about all the evil that we have done on purpose? We have often sinned willingly and wittingly, against our better judgment, against the warnings of our parents, against the calls of our conscience, against the clear prohibitions of the Holy Scriptures. Has Christ not given His blood for such sins? No, this is not true. If this were true, Manasseh would never have been saved, and neither would Levi

and the Samaritan woman. Who actually *would* have been saved? Nobody! However, the Lord still wants to teach us something even with this feature of the image of the cities of refuge. What is the lesson?

The Great Distinction

Let us now compare and contrast the intentional murderer, who watched for an opportunity to kill his neighbour for months, who seeing his chance, killed the other person with one stroke of the axe, and fled to the city of refuge – and on the other hand the man who accidentally took his friend's life. They both fled to the city of refuge. Do you see them both fleeing, in your imagination? Well, are these two people fleeing in the same way, or is there a difference? True, they are both scared. True, they both run fast. They both hope to find safety in the city of refuge. Yet there is a difference. What is it? It is in their hearts. The intentional murderer does not have any *sorrow*. He is only afraid of the avenger, the goel of blood. But the other man could cry out in anguish. He has killed his friend! This is the lesson that the Lord teaches us in the history of the cities of refuge. Those who sincerely flee to Christ, who are "tossed with tempest," who are not comforted, who seek life outside themselves, who especially have *sorrow* in their hearts – not fear, in the first place. God's sincere children can be recognized by their sorrow. They have sinned against a good-doing God. This causes so much grief. The poet of Psalm 116 says, "I found trouble and sorrow." Godly sorrow that works repentance to salvation is characteristic of the sincere fleeing soul. *This* is the lesson that the Lord teaches us when He says that the slayer who kills any person unawares and unwittingly may flee to the city of refuge. God, as it were, means to say such a soul is sad! He comforts those who flee to Him *in sorrow*. He is nigh unto them that call upon Him *in truth*. For such poor, uncomforted souls, the gates of the

heavenly city of refuge are still open.

e. Shut up and left

Difficult Expressions

Sometimes when we read the Bible with our family, we encounter expressions which are not immediately clear. We often hesitate a little and continue reading. But often the words remain unclear. It is recommended to use a Bible with annotations when we read with our family. Often the annotations clarify the text in a few words. This was also the explicit task that the editors of the Dutch annotations received at the Synod of Dort (1618/19): "That they add some short explanations, which clarify the translation in obscure places."

An Expression

One of these "obscure places" is undoubtedly found in the expression *shut up and left* in Israel. What do these words mean? The expression occurs five times in the Scriptures. This is not very often. For the sake of completeness, I will list these instances: Deuteronomy 32:36, 1 Kings 14:10, 1 Kings 21:21, 2 Kings 9:8, and 2 Kings 14:26. In Deuteronomy 32, the Dutch annotations give an explanation. There we read in annotation 76, "This seems to have been a proverb." Indeed, this seems very plausible, considering the Hebrew words. In Hebrew these are two words that look very similar and also rhyme a little. They are connected by the word *we*, which means *and*. The complete expression in Dutch is *aatsoer we-aadzoef*. The word *aatsoer* has been translated as "shut up" and *aadzoef* as "left."

So Many Men

But now for the interpretation! Those who dig into this matter will get dizzy because of the great number of interpretations that exegetes have given of these words. I will only list a few. *Luther* translated the expression into beautiful German and

managed to retain part of the word play in his language. He translated the words as "verschlossen und verlassen." In Luther's opinion, that which is "shut up" refers to that which is valued and therefore is carefully locked away and kept. And he believes that which is "left" to be that which is hardly considered. With this interpretation Luther followed the footsteps of the skilled Jewish exegete David Kimchi, who lived around 1200 and who undoubtedly had a deep insight in the words and structure of the Hebrew language. However, sometimes Luther believed "shut up and left" not to refer to things, but to people. Then he understood the words to mean "the prominent and unimportant." My old Hebrew dictionary by *Gesenius* gives a summary of the opinions in a few lines. I will present them briefly here. The words can mean slaves and free men, or those who are lawfully unclean and clean, or tribe members having a right to protection and unprotected strangers. The skilled German exegete *C. F. Keil* follows the interpretation of L. de Dieu, who believes "shut up" to mean a man who is bound, e.g. married. "Left" then refers to a bachelor or widower. In this interpretation, the words "shut up and left" simply means everyone. In agreement with the Dutch annotators, Keil believes that the expression must have been a proverb. Incidentally, he is careful enough to observe that the meaning of the words cannot be ascertained. Looking over all these opinions, we have reason to say so many men, so many opinions!

Conclusion

We will attempt to come to a conclusion. It is striking that the five instances in which the expression "shut up and left" occurs in the Bible are without exceptions cases of *emergency and judgment*. Repeatedly the text says that God will exterminate every male person and those who were shut up and left. I believe that the

Dutch annotators have come very close to the deepest meaning of the words in what they say about the aforementioned text in Deuteronomy. I quote, "This seems to have been a proverb, signifying the utmost distress and desolation. The meaning is, that they were at a *non-plus,* both those that hid themselves in cities, upon hope of escaping, or were shut up and starved in prison by anyone through pity or favour, and also those that in the wide field were let go or fled away, conceiving that none would think of them anymore, that they seemed to be quite left and forgotten of the enemy." The only other text for which the Dutch annotators have given an explanation of the words that we are discussing is 2 Kings 9:8. There we read that the message from God comes to King Jehu, who has just been anointed, "I will cut off from Ahab him that is shut up and left in Israel." There annotation 17 says, "I will let none remain." I do not dare to confirm that this is the right explanation, but if I had to choose, I would follow this line: "shut up" is him who seems to be safe – voluntarily or forced – and is hidden somewhere, while "left" is someone who thinks he is safe in solitude, seemingly forgotten by the enemy. How limited our knowledge remains! Thankfully, this is not about things which are indispensable for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are perfectly clear about these things. I have already mentioned this earlier in this book. However, the fact that we have to search for the meaning of two little Hebrew words must certainly humble us. For that matter, several other difficult word pairs are found in the Bible. What do you think of Crethi and Plethi? And we have already discussed the Urim and Thummim.

f. What figures of speech are found in the first six verses of Ecclesiastes 12?

The passage Ecclesiastes 12:1–6 clearly illustrates how different figures of speech – as they have been discussed in chapter two –

can stand together in one exegetical unit. Annotation four to the Dutch Authorized Version is remarkable, "This verse, and some more that follow, contain a description of old age, after the manner of the poets, and there is a continual allegory prosecuted until the seventh verse." Let us follow the passage verse by verse. We read in verse one: *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.* This verse is an exhortation directed to young people. This is an example where the division of chapters is not very well thought out. The context makes 11:9-12:7 an exegetical unit. The words "while … not" are very important. They are repeated in verse two, and in verse six the word "ever" is used in a similar sense. The Hebrew plural noun is striking, which has been translated as *Creator*. According to G. Ch. Aalders (*Commentaar op het Oude Testament*), this is a *pluralis excellentiae* (comparable to the "royal we").

In verse two we read: *While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain.* This verse is the beginning of a long subordinate clause, depending on the "while not" in verse one. The evil days are described! But how? Are the stars indeed not darkened, but does it refer to an old, half-blind person (Dutch annotation 5)? Are the clouds a metaphor of "one misery coming after another" (Dutch annotation 6)? It is probably better to consider this a metaphor taken from the winter season in Israel. Winters in the land of the Bible are not characterized by frost, but by repeated and often heavy rains. At night the celestial bodies are hardly visible and after each shower the clouds return! This season is a striking image of the evening of man's life, and that is what we find in this verse. The objection of F. Delitzsch, who says that the allegory does not start until verse three in his explanation, is a weak one, since the allegory is not even consistently continued after verse three.

In verse three, we find metaphors which are continued throughout the verse: *In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened.* The Dutch annotations also consider these to be metaphors, and I fully agree with the explanation of the metaphors: The *keepers of the house* are the arms of man in old age, the *strong men* are the legs, the *grinders* are the teeth, and *those that look out of the windows* are the eyes. The exegesis which also accepts imagery in this verse – in analogy with verse two – here sees a depiction of the condition of an oriental house and its residents during the night. The keepers are trembling because they are tired. The women, who otherwise look inquisitively out of the windows, are absent because of the darkness, and so on. However, in our opinion, this interpretation sounds forced and artificial. Rightly, Delitzsch asks a little mockingly, "What kind of keepers are they that start trembling and what kind of strong men are they who crouch down at night like children with a stomachache?" Then we read in verse four: *And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low.* This verse contains four stanzas, the first two of which clearly contain some metaphors. But how can they be explained? Are the *doors in the streets* the two lips, the oesophagus (Dutch annotation 13-14) or the rectum, and does the *low sound of the grinding* refer to digestive disorders (Talmud and Midrash)? Considering the dual forms in Hebrew, I believe the *doors in the streets* refer to the ears. When the text says *the sound of the grinding is low*, a metaphor of a poorly operating mill is used, and the poor operation of an old man's teeth are signified. In the third stanza (4c), we do not find any imagery or metaphors anymore, but rather a depiction of reality: Old people often do not sleep very well and wake up early in the morning, when the birds start singing. The fourth stanza

(4d) may refer to a decline of the voice, or hardness of hearing, or the declining pleasure of elderly people in music and singing. Verse five begins with a depiction of reality: *Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.* Elderly people are usually *afraid of that which is high*, as climbing becomes more difficult! And not uncommonly, there are *fears* for them *in the way*. As we would say in English, they always see bears along the way. We consider the *almond tree* to be a metaphor of grey hair (in line with the Dutch annotations!). Other people believe that the *almond tree*, *grasshopper,* and *desire* refer to the coming spring that the elderly person will not live to see. Aalders, however, is right when he says that statements about nature are not fitting in this context (op cit, 247). This exegete calls the words about the *grasshopper* "an old crux." Maybe the Dutch annotations give the best interpretation: The old man, who is grown as lean, crooked, and withered as a grasshopper. The rest of this verse is another depiction of reality, although the "long home," of course, is a metaphor for the eternal destination of man after the moment of death. We read in verse six: *Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern*. These words are about dying, just like verse seven. The question is again: Is this allegory or imagery? The older exegeses opted for allegory. In Delitzsch's opinion, for example, the *silver cord* is the spinal cord, the *golden bowl* is the skull, the *pitcher broken at the fountain* is the heart, and the *wheel broken at the cistern* represents the lungs. The Dutch annotations opt for a similar interpretation. They also consider the silver cord to be "the marrow or pith in the backbone" that is "white like silver and is extended from the brain all along the back-bone, like unto a cord or rope." They consider the golden bowl to be "the

same thin membrane or skin, wherein the brains lie, or which is of a gold colour." The fountain represents the "main blood vessel of the liver." They consider the wheel at the cistern to be "the lungs, which by their continual motion do at one time thrust out the breath from them, and at another time draw it again." More recent commentaries give a different interpretation. They see here a twofold image in the text: A lighting lamp and a fountain, both as symbols of life (Aalders, op cit, 249). In this interpretation, the falling lamp that was hanging on a silver cord and the breaking wheel are telling images of death – the moment when the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. In this interpretation, the mention of precious metals like silver and gold must be explained as an expression of the high value of human life. In my opinion, the author also seems to introduce a new element in verse six. He does not only describe death, but especially an *unexpected* death. Isn't this a warning to the youth, that not everyone reaches the "evil days"? The choice between simple imagery and allegory is not that simple here. I fully agree with Aalders when he rejects an allegory because the only criterion that can be used here is subjective arbitrariness. If the allegory is clear (such as in verse 3), then the interpretation will often be unambiguous too. A metaphor must be *clear*, in order to be convincing! These verses from the book of Ecclesiastes clearly show the importance for exegesis to distinguish carefully between different figures of speech, on the one hand to prevent it from ending up in allegorical interpretation, but on the other hand enabling us to interpret the allegory conscientiously without being blamed for unlawful spiritualization.

g. The Wise Men from the East

Three Questions

The history of the wise men from the East has its own special

place among the other witnesses of the birth of the Lord Jesus. It is always moving to read the story of some unknown magi from an unknown country, who took great pains to make such a long journey to worship a royal Child, who was unknown to them. The exegesis of these verses from Matthew 2 has raised three questions throughout the centuries.

Who Were They?

The first question is: *Who were the "wise men from the East"?* They were probably astrologers from ancient Persia or Babylon. In the Greek text they are called *magoi*, "magicians," which reminds us of the "wise men" we are familiar with from the book of Daniel, who were especially occupied with the interpretation of dreams and with astrology. Since Origenes (third century) an ancient legend has been common, which states that there were three of them, probably on the basis of their presents: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Since the sixth century, tradition even seems to be able to give their names: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar! It has also been believed since those days that the wise men were kings. This is how the Roman Catholic feast came to celebrate the "Day of the Holy Three Kings." It will be clear that this is another example of the frequent phenomenon that human curiousity has tried to fill in what the Scriptures are silent about. Calvin in no uncertain terms puts such fantasies behind him. He says the fact that people believe there were three wise men, on the basis of the three presents, is an "error that should be called childish." Calvin says it is ridiculous to believe that they were kings, because Psalm 72 speaks about kings from Tarshish, from Sheba, and from Seba. What ingenious artists are those Roman Catholics, he mocks, who are prepared to change the entire world to make these wise men more than common people. The places mentioned in Psalm 72 are in the west and the south, while the wise men actually came from the

east! Therefore, we need to conclude that we should be very reserved in answering the questions as to the identity of the wise men. They were probably astrologers from Babylon or Persia. Other than that, we will have to suppress our curiosity. After all, several *other* things in this history are important.

The Star

The second question which is raised all the time when the wise men from the East are discussed is this: *What was the star that they saw?* According to Matthew 2, they saw the "star" twice. Before they came to Jerusalem, they saw it "in the east" (verse 2) and when they travelled from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, the star guided them "till it came and stood over where the young child was" (verse 9). Apparently, they did not see the star between these two events. What are we to think of this star? Dr. F. W. Grosheide in his *Commentaar op het Nieuwe Testament* offers three possibilities; the same can be read, somewhat condensed, from his hand in the *Christelijke Encyclopedie* (Christian Encyclopedia). The first possibility he mentions is that God lighted a new star at the birth of the Mediator. The second possibility is that it was a shining comet, the tail of which disappeared behind Bethlehem, where the Lord Jesus was. The third option he mentions is a conjunction or culmination of several planets, for example, Jupiter and Saturn. The majority of Reformed exegetes seem to opt for the first possibility. The Dutch annotators say "that it was no ordinary star of the heaven; but a light peculiarly created, like as was the fiery pillar, which led the children of Israel through the wilderness." This is a plausible explanation. Isaac da Costa elaborates it when he, in his expressive language, states that this star was an extraordinary one, "a spark from the Shekhinah, a gleam of the uncreated glory of God that appeared and disappeared and lowered itself deep into the atmosphere to be a guide." Calvin thinks this is not something to argue about. He believes it was an

extraordinary star that looked like a comet. We shall leave it at that. Another question in this context is more important, namely, how the wise men in Mesopotamia could possibly conclude from the appearance of a star in the East (not in the West, where Palestine was!) that the "King of the Jews" was about to be born. Did God, who clearly forbids astrology elsewhere in His Word, use this means to reveal the coming of His Son to these heathen people? Calvin believes that the art of astrology by itself couldn't have possibly been able to relate the birth of Christ. He says that a special, hidden revelation of the Holy Spirit was necessary to make the wise men understand the meaning of the star. This seems to be a plausible explanation. True, the Lord clearly forbids astrology in His Word, but these magicians did not know the Word of God. Therefore, God used a special phenomenon in nature to move their hearts. It is important for us to notice that it was not the star, but the prophetic word pointed them to Bethlehem! (verses 5 and 6). As for the special revelation by the Holy Spirit that Calvin speaks about, isn't it quite possible that the work and writings of Daniel had not been forgotten in Babylon? Might not Daniel have made a deep impression on the magicians of his days? Perhaps some parts of the Old Testament were known to these highly educated men. Maybe they knew about the ancient words from another heathen, Balaam, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel" (Numbers 24:17).

Secondary Characters

There is also a third question. *Were the wise men children of God?* In other words, did they see more in this Child than an eminent prince? Was their journey to Bethlehem a fruit of the drawing love of God the Father or only the leading of God's providence? There are different opinions about this. The Dutch annotators do not say anything about it, but Calvin does. He writes that the

wise men have not come to render to Christ such pious worship as is due to the Son of God. In his opinion, they only intended to salute Him, according to the Persian custom, as a very eminent King. He even mentions the possibility "that they wished to gain His favour beforehand, that He might treat them favourably and kindly, if He should afterwards happen to possess dominion in the east." Calvin certainly deserves our respect as a commentator of Scripture. Yet I think his opinions are a little feeble here, even though Reformed exegetes in later centuries have shared his opinion. Others, however, have had a more positive opinion about the wise men. They have pointed out that God the Father made sure that at the birth of His Son, "secondary characters" came to the manger, who were the first spectators of Christ's glory. We are familiar with them: the shepherds, the wise men, Simeon, Anna. We have reason to assume that all these people were not only guided by God's general providence, but by the drawing love of the Father to the Mediator. There, with Christ, the newborn Child, was a place for the rich of the earth (the wise men) and the poor of the earth (the shepherds), for the true Israel (Simeon, Anna), and for the first Gentiles (the wise men). But it was true for all of them: "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him" (John 6:44). This is how the wise men have come, drawn by the Father's love out of the power of darkness into His marvelous light. How humiliating was their coming for the religious, pious Jerusalem and Bethlehem! *There* they knew the entire Old Testament including all Messianic promises, but hardly anyone felt their need of Him. *There* the people heard the rich preaching of the shepherds, who could not remain silent about that which they had heard and seen, but nobody believed that message. *There* the people lived near the stable, but they did not make any effort to find it. And here come the wise men. They did not hear any shepherds preaching and hardly knew the old prophecy; they only saw one

star; they had to endure a difficult journey of several weeks – but they came. Why? Cannot The only right answer to this question can be that it had pleased God to choose them to be the first heathen people to witness the glory of the Word incarnate? This is why they came; this is why they sought. This is why they found the Child with Mary, His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him.

h. Where does the Old Testament say that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene?

The words that we are now going to consider do not belong to those Scripture passages which are often misinterpreted, but to the texts which are difficult to interpret. I am talking about the words in Matthew 2:23: "*That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.*" The question is not only what the name Nazarene means, but also what Matthew meant when he wrote that the prophets called Christ a Nazarene. The context of these words is clear: Joseph, the Child, and His mother have returned from Egypt after the death of the murderer Herod. Apparently, he intended to settle in Judaea, but he is referred to Galilee by divine revelation. He moves to Nazareth, to his and his wife's old hometown.

Prophecies

Matthew considers the Child's moving to Nazareth a fulfillment of old prophecies! This is characteristic of Matthew. In Matthew 2 alone, we find the expression: "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken" three times, albeit in different words. Here we encounter a characteristic feature of the Gospel according to Matthew. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he wants to demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ of Scripture! And he does not just want to say that the Old Testament spoke about Christ, but especially that the council of God, as it was revealed in the Old Testament,

was fulfilled in Christ's ministry on earth. We should always bear this in mind when reading this gospel. But exegetically speaking, this is where the difficulty starts. Matthew makes a clear connection between Nazareth and Nazarene. Apparently, he interprets Nazarene as someone from Nazareth. This is also how the Jews used this name in connection with Jesus. They called Him a Nazarene because he came from Nazareth. This much is clear. But on what basis can Matthew state that the prophets have already foretold this? The name Nazareth does not occur in the Old Testament at all! Generally speaking, three solutions have been presented by different exegetes.

Three Solutions

Some people believe that Matthew refers to prophetic writings which were known to him, but which are not known to us anymore, because they were lost in the course of time. This is what the church father Chrysostom said in the fourth century. Calvin, however, says that this solution "has no likelihood." The second solution has been mentioned by Calvin and others. He sees a connection between the name Nazarene and the Hebrew word *needzer*, which means diadem or crown, derived from a word that originally means to separate, to consecrate. Thus, Calvin links Nazarene with Nazarite. Calvin thinks that Matthew refers to a prophecy found in Judges 13:5. This is, of course, about Samson, but Calvin believes that he is a type of Christ there. Calvin has borrowed this opinion from Bucer. It is probably via Calvin and Beza that this interpretation found its way to the annotations to the Dutch Authorized Version (see annotation 21). Yet this interpretation is subject to several objections. Firstly, Dr. F. W. Grosheide pointed out in his *Commentaar op het Nieuwe Testament* (Commentary on the New Testament) that it is hardly possible to connect the word *needzer* with the name Nazarene. We will spare the reader the details of this difficulty. Moreover,

the most serious objection to this solution is the question whether Christ may be called a Nazarite. John the Baptist was a Nazarite, but did Jesus never drink any wine? And finally, apparently also the annotators to the Dutch Authorized Version have felt some weakness in this explanation, because it is immediately followed by another one, which they assume to be "the most probable one." This leads us to the third possibility. This interpretation connects Nazarite with the Hebrew word *neetser* (in Hebrew only one letter differs from the word *needzer*). *Neetser* means little branch, sprout, twig – a small green shoot that may even appear from the earth or a branch in the middle of winter. Now it becomes clear. It is well-known that Christ in the Old Testament is compared with, yes even bears the *name* of BRANCH, a rod. We may think of Isaiah 11:1, "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch (*neetser*!) shall grow out of his roots." There is not only one text that confirms this, but there is a continuous prophetic witness, and therefore it becomes clear why Matthew can say that the prophets have said that He would be called a Nazarene. The annotators say, "It was God's will that by occasion of this His dwelling place, Christ should be called a Nazarene, as a Branch that grows up before His Father out of His place." This interpretation derives both the name Nazareth and the name Nazarene from the Hebrew word Branch (*neetser*).

Nickname and Title of Honour

As we have seen, the name Nazarene has a rich meaning. Literally, it simply means a man from Nazareth. But the Church of God has seen more in it, for her the name was a summary of the old prophecy, that pointed to the unfathomably deep humiliation of the Mediator, who thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but who became a Branch, a despised Rod, and who hid the glory of His divine splendor behind the veil of His human nature. This is the only explanation of the fact that the early disciples

assumed the name of Nazarene as an honourable title of the Mediator, although of course they were well-aware that the word Nazarene was actually a negative nickname that many people used to mock the Mediator. The devil himself started this mocking in the synagogue of Capernaum, where he cried, "Let us alone; what have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art Thou come to destroy us?" (Mark 1:24). This mocking continued throughout Jesus' ministry on earth and came to a climax at Golgotha, where Pilate wrote above the Mediator's head, "JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS" (John 19:19). But this is exactly how He, in His deep humiliation, mocked and despised, as a Sprout without any external glory, has become dear to His Church. It has not always been like this! Even the sincere Nathanael asked, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" However, by the work of the Holy Spirit, He has become dear to His Church. For the disciples, His entire humiliation was summarized in this single word: Nazarene! Therefore, they were not ashamed of this name. It sounded like a shout of triumph when Peter, after Pentecost, said to the lame man at the Beautiful gate, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6)!

1. Garments and Bottles

In Matthew 9, we find the well-known words of Jesus about the wine and the bottles: "*Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved*" (verse 17). Let us try to find out what these words mean. The context is found in verses 14-17. In chapter two, we saw that one of the most basic rules of exegesis is to read Scripture in context. Also in this case the context of the words is important. What is the situation? The Lord Jesus has called Levi, the

publican, from his sinful life. When a meal is prepared in the house of Levi, many publicans – Levi's colleagues – and sinners come to his house. Here "sinners" refers to those who are publicly known to be sinners in the city. The Pharisees see it happen and are very much displeased. Do Jesus and His disciples think this is proper? Don't they have any limits at all? It is remarkable that they do not go to the Lord Himself with their criticism, but to His disciples. Listen to their grumbling, "Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" The disciples do not really know what to answer these evil religious men. However, the Lord hears them, and He defends His embarrassed disciples. His answer is sharp, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice."

John's Disciples

This conversation is hardly finished when another group of people approaches. From a distance they witnessed Jesus sitting with so many sinful people. They also have some questions, but they are different from the questions that the Pharisees asked. The answer they receive is also kinder. Who are these people? They are *disciples of John*. These men are in great difficulty. Their beloved master has been captured. He is imprisoned somewhere near the Dead Sea, in the awful caves of the fortress Machaerus, only because he had the courage and honesty to rebuke King Herod for his incestuous relationship with his sister-in-law Herodias. This little group of disciples of John that approach the Lord now consists of orphaned people. They have lost their master, they do not feel at home among pious religiosity, the government does not trust them – and they do not belong to the followers of Jesus. They actually belong nowhere! What do they have on their mind? Listen to the question. "Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?" Some

people think that the Pharisees whispered this question in their ears. Whatever the case may be, it is remarkable that both the Pharisees and John's disciples go to the wrong person or people with their question. The Pharisees criticized Jesus and went to His disciples. The followers of John had comments about the disciples, and they went to Jesus.

Fasting – Right or Wrong?

The disciples of John do fast. Even more, they fast often, just like the Pharisees. God had commanded Israel to fast only on the Day of Atonement. The Pharisees fasted 104 times as much as the Lord had commanded, twice every week, on Monday and on Thursday! It is a bad sign when one becomes more "pious" than Scripture requires. Yet we should not judge John's disciples too harshly. They did fast a lot, but very differently than the Pharisees. Why? For the Pharisees the practice of fasting had become nothing but an outward ceremonial show. When fasting is a sign of a broken or contrite heart, the Word of God does not condemn it. On the contrary! But when it is done to impress other people, it is an abomination to God. Listen to what the Lord says, "When ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly" (Matthew 6:16-18).

We Fast Oft

Let us go back to the disciples of John. They fast oft, just like the Pharisees. But when two people do the same thing, it is not necessarily the same. For John's disciples, it was no outward show. Then what was it? Just imagine; they had lived under the preaching of their beloved master – some shorter, others longer.

This preaching had changed them! Oh, how their master preached the law of God! He warned about the axe, which was laid unto the root of the trees of their lives. He had told them about Divine wrath to come, about Him who would come, whose fan was in His hand, ready to purge His floor. With what majesty and power did John the Baptist preach about the unquenchable fire! While many people had turned from this message with a shrug, it had touched their hearts. They would never forget these words of judgment. Perhaps someone asks: But didn't John preach about more than judgment? Didn't he preach about the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world? Didn't he witness about the Bridegroom, whose friend he was? Didn't these people *hear* this part of his message? Yes, they certainly did, but there was no room for it in their hearts. In fact, they understood only one side of John's message. And then they had begun to fast! This does not mean that they skipped some food occasionally. No, it means that they were actually weaned from the entire world. It no longer had any value to them. Their lives were characterized by sadness. They lived under the weight of the message they had heard from their master, which was divine judgment! Those who experience this begin to fast and to mourn. The sad and orphaned disciples of John receive a kind answer from Jesus.

The Children of the Bridechamber

There they are. Their master has been captured and is imprisoned somewhere near the Dead Sea. What a wonder it is that they understand so little about the disciples of Jesus? These quietly and happily sit at a well-provisioned table in the house of Levi the publican, together with a large group of publicly known sinners! They probably thought: Don't those followers of Jesus understand how serious things are? Why don't they even *fast*? They have already observed that they didn't. The disciples of Jesus did have times when they fasted – however, no one *saw* it. In

accordance with the words of their Master, they did it secretly. Yet, *this* is not how the Saviour replies. He has a very different message for the disciples of John: *Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them?*(Matthew 9:15). The children of the bridechamber. What is meant by this? This is an essential point. Here Christ uses a brief parable. In chapter two, we already saw that it is very important to get the image as clear as possible, in order to be able to interpret a parable. That is what we need here, too. Literally, it says the sons of the bridechamber. These are *not* the *wedding guests*. Neither are we to think of the "friend of the bridegroom," who had to guide the bride to the bridegroom. Here it is actually a group of friends of the bridegroom. It was their job to make sure everything went well during the wedding. They have a closer relationship with the bridegroom than the common guests. They may be compared to what we call a "best man" today. Well then, we cannot imagine a best man walking around with a long face on his friend's wedding, can we? Certainly, he will not mourn as long as the wedding lasts! Now the question is: Who does the Lord Jesus *mean* with this image? Who are the "sons of the bridechamber"? Look, there they are, close to Him, His disciples. Take a close look at them! They are so happy! Their faces show a joy that the world knows nothing of. They have an inward rest that they have never experienced before. Where does this joy come from; where does this rest come from? The answer is simple. The Bridegroom is with them! They are with Jesus. They are granted to drink His words every day, to see His signs, to experience His presence. Who would ever fast and mourn under such circumstances? We would like to ask what the difference is between these disciples of John and the disciples of Jesus? Also the latter knew what it means to experience the judgment of God. We read about two of them, John and Andrew, that they were among the disciples of John themselves. But this discipleship had come to an end when

they, under the preaching of their master, had come to see the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world. They had left their master John and followed Jesus. Then other times had begun in their lives. Good times! Every day they were with Jesus, saw His miracles, and drank in His words. Perhaps they thought that this would never end. In a word, they had become *children of the bridechamber*! Hardly any other term can be found which is so suitable to describe the happiness of God's children. No one is as happy as a child of the Lord who lives in Jesus' presence. This is what Christ means to say with *children of the bridechamber*. Perhaps Jesus' disciples thought that these happy days would last forever. However, they were wrong!

The Bridegroom Taken Away

Listen to what the Lord says: "But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast." What does Christ mean here? Of course, every wedding will come to an end. The disciples were well aware of this. The time will come when the bridegroom will leave. Then the wedding is over. But *this* is not what Christ means! He says that He, the Bridegroom, will be *taken away* from His disciples – it actually says, "torn away." It will happen when the wedding is in full swing – suddenly violent attackers will appear who immediately carry the bridegroom away. The wedding guests are left behind bewildered and amazed. The bridegroom has been taken away! It is clear what Christ means with these words. They are actually an announcement of His suffering. The Lord is not referring to the time of His ascension! Then the Bridegroom will *leave* indeed, but He will not leave the children of the bridechamber behind in sorrow! They will return with great joy, and they will continually be in the temple, praising and blessing God (Luke 24:52-53). But leaving is very different from being *taken away*. The latter is what we see on Good Friday. How puzzled, bewildered, and

amazed the disciples were! Their Bridegroom had actually been torn away from them. On Thursday night they had celebrated the Lord's Supper with Him in the upper room – and on Friday night a number of disheartened disciples stand near His dark grave. How moving was the fulfillment of Christ's words, *then shall they fast.* It is in this context that Christ tells the two short parables of the clothes and the bottles.

Clothes and Bottles

For those who listened to Christ, the image must have been clear immediately, but it isn't for us. "No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse." There we have an old garment. The Lord does not mean rug, but an article of clothing; we would say a coat. This garment is old, exposed to every kind of weather for years. The old coat is torn. Whoever tries to mend the tear by sewing a piece of new cloth to the old coat will be disappointed. The new cloth will start shrinking, affected by humidity and warmth; and it makes the rent even worse than was the case in the old garment! Then Jesus uses another image. Imagine some old leather sacks. Originally, these were animal skins that had been sewn up and were used as containers for the wine that was taken along on their journeys. The old "bottles" are weather-beaten and have become hard in the course of time. They cannot shrink or expand. Now someone pours new wine into them. The wine is still actively fermenting. What happens to the old sacks? They are not elastic anymore and they burst due to the expanding wine. The foolish man who did this lost the wine as well as the bottles. He should have been sensible and put his new wine into new bottles. Then the bottles would have stretched a little, but they would not have torn, and the owner would have preserved both his bottles and his wine. This is the image.

Not Mixing Old and New

Even though the *image* was clear to the people who listened to these parables, this does not mean that they actually understood the *meaning* of Jesus' words. What does the Lord mean to say by these parables about the garments and the bottles? He intends to teach John's disciples that old and new things should not be mixed. They, as it were, still lived in the old dispensation. Their master John stood on the border between the old and the new. Among those born of a woman under the old dispensation, he was undoubtedly the greatest. No one had ever seen so much of Christ as he. But the least in the kingdom of heaven – the least of God's children in the new dispensation – was more than John. The least of Jesus' disciples would see more than John had ever seen. In actuality, John's disciples still lived under the old dispensation. They also lived with the old ceremonies, to which the strict practice of fasting belonged. They more or less reproached the disciples of Jesus for neglecting the practice of fasting and did not understand the joy that radiated from them – because their Bridegroom was with them! Christ means to say that His disciples, who were so happy in His presence, should not be forced into the shackles of the old ceremonies. If this happened, both the fasting and the joy would come to nothing. These words contain a lesson not only for John's disciples, but also for us. The life of grace has its growth and its conditions. No one can expect an unhappy person, with a godly sorrow for God and sighing under the load of his guilt, to be joyous. He is *fasting*! But neither may anyone expect a child of God, who is experiencing the time of first love, to realize that this will all end one day and that he had better mourn. Thus, this word of Christ is another wise word, which shows that He adjusts Himself to the experience of His children.

J. How can we make ourselves friends of the mammon of

Easy?

It is a common misunderstanding to think that parables belong to the easy parts of Holy Scripture. Many people think Paul's letters are difficult, but the parables are easy. Much may be said to dispute this view. Firstly, the words of the Ethiopian are true for the entire Bible: "How can I understand, except someone should guide me?" The Holy Spirit, the Author of the Scriptures, must enlighten the eyes of our understanding. The parables belong to the most mysterious parts of the Word of God. It is a misunderstanding to think that the Lord Jesus told the parables to make difficult things easy to understand – see His own words from Matthew 13:10-17! The parable of the unjust steward (Luke 16:1-13) which we will now consider, has been called a "cross of interpreters" (*crux interpretum*). Throughout the centuries, Pontius Pilate, Judas, Paul, and Christ Himself have all been understood to be the steward. People have puzzled their heads over the question how Jesus could possibly ever make such an arch deceiver an example to us. The Emperor Julian the Apostate (361-363) mentioned this parable as one of the reasons why he wanted nothing to do with Christianity and the Bible. Through the ages, not only many interpretations of this parable, but also many objections to it have been heard. Let us briefly look at the parable and see what Christ meant by it.

A Steward

A certain rich man had a steward. This steward (it actually says economist) was responsible for and supervised the receipts and expenditures of his master. He managed his goods. In order to understand the parable, we need to get the image as clear as possible – see chapter two! We need to realize that such stewards had been given a very wide mandate, as he was barely monitored by his lord. He was even entitled to determine the rent of the

estates. Of course, he was not allowed to tamper with things or to steal from his lord. In this parable, we read that this steward "wasted" the goods of his lord. He used them as if they were his! We should not think that this man had a secret pot which he filled for himself. Later, when he is dismissed, he appears to be penniless. No, for days on end he lives his easy, irresponsible life of pleasure and joy using another man's goods. He is an image of man, who uses the precious gifts of God as though they belong to *him*.

No Care for the Future

On a certain day, accusations are brought against the steward before his lord. Remarkably, his lord does not only call him to account, but he also tells him beforehand that he will no longer be steward! Apparently, the accusation has been clearly proved, and it is so decisive that further examination is not necessary. "Thou mayest be no longer steward." What is he to do now? In the short time that remains, the steward searches feverishly for an escape. Digging? Becoming a farm worker? He, who used nothing but a pen for years on end, is totally unsuited for such work. Begging? It would be a shame for him. He is willing to do anything but that. Now it appears that he has never *taken thought for his future*! This is the key to the interpretation of the parable. At the very last moment, the steward starts to take thought for the future. How? By cunning and guile, or in a way which is barely permissible. The exegetes do not agree upon this point.

Deceit or Shrewdness?

Some people believe that we are to read in verses four to seven that the steward is about to commit public fraud. He summons his master's debtors and forces them to tamper with the statements of debt. In so doing, he ensures both the gratitude of the debtors and his own future, because from now on his master's debtors will certainly offer him room and board for the rest of his life! These

exegetes base their interpretation on the fact that the steward is called the *unjust* steward! However, this interpretation is highly questionable. How is it ever possible that the steward's lord, who soon finds out about his actions, commends the steward because of his prudence? Moreover, would the debtors really be so grateful to this man for this single act of tampering, that they showed him their gratitude for the rest of his life? That is really far-fetched. Another interpretation seems a better one. It assumes that the lord's debtors were tenants, who were obliged to pay their lord a certain rent at the end of each season – in this case an olive gardener, whose annual rent was a hundred measures of oil, and a farmer, whose rent was a hundred measures of wheat. Now the steward, who was fully warranted to define the rent and to change it as long as he was a steward, summoned the tenants and drastically decreased the annual rent for each of them. Thus, the "bill" that we read about in verse seven is the lease. When we consider the parable in this way, the actions of the steward are no longer mischievous, but they remain extraordinarily shrewd and cunning. In fact, he injures his lord, but he remains within the confines of the law. Now verse eight is also to be understood, where we read that the lord commends his steward. True, the rich man realizes that he is again injured by his steward, but as a man of the world, he does have a certain sense of esteem for the way in which the steward has assured himself of the tenants' permanent gratitude. These exegetes state that the steward is called unjust just like the judge in Luke 18:6, who eventually does what the widow asks, and who is still called the *unjust* judge, even though his last action (doing justice to the widow) cannot be called unjust. The name "unjust" refers to his earlier life and to his character, rather than his final action. This is the situation in this parable. The steward is, of course, a crook. Yet his dealing with the tenants does not necessarily have to be illegal. The parable calls his action "wise" – in other words, cunning, clever, and sophisticated.

Making Friends

Now for the application. Of course, Christ did not tell this parable to make an example of the steward's shrewd actions, as if we should also go about our business in natural life with cunning and guile. No, the hinge on which this parable revolves is *taking thought for the future*. Christ says to His disciples that the children of light (God's children) can learn a lot from the children of this world, for example, unconverted people, with respect to caring for the future. We should notice that Christ is especially talking about how God's children should deal with their money here on earth. In verse 10, Christ calls this dealing with money "that which is least," so it is the least important. Take notice: The *least*! Not many people will agree with this. For natural man, money and goods are the most important. But for God's children, these things should be the least. Well then, he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much, says Christ; however, he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. Therefore, verse nine exhorts: "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness." This means making sure that you use your money in such a way that you will always realize that you are a steward. It isn't *your* money; it is *God's* money. Then, make good use of it. Make friends with your money! No, not with cunning and guile, nor in order to earn a lot, but like the steward who made friends among his lord's tenants, that they might receive him with gladness in their homes. In such a way, make friends among God's children. Then the poor among His people, who are not so well-off materially, will later, when you *fail* (when you die) receive you into *everlasting habitations*, thus in the heavenly regions.

Of course, the Lord does not teach us in this parable that we can earn heaven with our money. Every sinner who is received into everlasting habitations, only enters there by merit of the blood

of the Lamb. However, the Lord wants to teach His children how to deal with their money. In such a way that they, also when dealing with this "mammon of unrighteousness" (what terrible injustice is often committed with money!), should always look forward to the future. Blessed are those who learn to be faithful in that which is least (dealing with money), by not spending it greedily on themselves, but for the benefit of the members of Christ. I believe that not only texts such as Matthew 25:35-36 and Revelation 14:13, shed light on this parable, but also Lord's Day 21 (Answer 55) from our Heidelberg Catechism. And in this light, the "difficult" parable about the unjust steward becomes a piece of divine instruction that contains lessons and exhortations for everyone.

K. Judas too?

A Delicate Question

A delicate, difficult, and much-discussed question is whether *Judas was present at the first celebration of the Lord's Supper*. This question has many sides, also pastoral ones. It has been said that, if the Lord Jesus allowed Judas to celebrate the Lord's Supper, then also today the whole congregation must be admitted to this sacrament. Others have said that Christ did not institute the Lord's Supper until Judas had left the upper room – and therefore they believe a consistory should only admit those whom they believe to be born again. Much may be said against both these views.

Remarkably, people have often first taken their own position as a starting point, only to go to the Scripture subsequently to try and make the Bible confirm their own view. This should never be done. The question should never be, "What do we think the Scriptures ought to say?" but simply and briefly, "What does Scripture say?" Therefore, the question whether the betrayer

celebrated the Lord's Supper is, in the first place, an *exegetical* one, and I will approach it as such. We are going to do three things. First, we are going to listen to the Scriptures. What do they say about this? Next, we will very briefly examine what authoritative theologians have said about it through the centuries. Finally, we will try to define a standpoint.

The Passover and the Lord's Supper

Before we start reading the Scriptures, it is good to realize that the establishment of the first Lord's Supper was preceded by the *celebration of the Passover*. The celebration of the Passover and the establishment of the Lord's Supper more or less merges into one another, yet they must be clearly distinguished. Somewhere during the celebration of the bloody sacrament of the "old covenant," the Lord Jesus established the bloodless sacrament of the new dispensation. When He says that He has desired with desire to eat this Passover with His disciples before He suffered (Luke 22:15), we should not merely understand these words to mean that He had a heartfelt desire to eat with His disciples. What is most important is that the Saviour desires the change from the old dispensation to the new one! This Passover in the dreadful night in which the Lord Jesus is betrayed, will be the *last* Passover of the old covenant. Now he is going to consecrate the "New Testament in His blood." And *that* is what He longs for!

The Passover Meal

But *when* during the Passover meal did Christ establish the Lord's Supper? In order to answer this question, we need to know what happened during such Passover meals. We know something about it thanks to the Talmud – the written record of long-ago discussions of Jewish scholars. The Passover meal consisted of several phases: 1. First a cup of wine was blessed, a prayer of thanksgiving was said, and some of the wine was drunk; 2. Bitter herbs were eaten, dipped in a sour liquid; 3. Unleavened bread, a

bitter sauce, and the main part of the meal, the lamb, were placed on the table; 4. The father of the family told something about the history and meaning of the Passover; 5. The first part of the "Great Hallel" (Psalm 113 and 114) was sung and a second cup of wine was drunk; 6. The unleavened bread was eaten, as well as the lamb. The father of the family ate first, after having washed his hands; 7. The meal was concluded by drinking a third cup of wine, after the father of the family had given thanks. Finally, they sang the second part of the "Great Hallel" (Psalm 115 to 118). Then they sometimes still drank a few more cups of wine and sang some psalms, but this is not important to our present subject. Because the Word of God tells us that Jesus established the Lord's Supper before they sang "a hymn," we think the establishment of the Lord's Supper took place shortly before the close of the abovementioned point seven. If so, the Lord used some of the unleavened bread which was still lying on the table as well as the "cup of blessing."

What Does Scripture Say?

If we try to listen carefully to the Scriptures, it appears quite difficult to understand the Word of God in this matter. Actually this speaks for itself. If it would be clear in the Bible, we would not have to enquire whether Judas celebrated the Lord's Supper. The problem is the words that Scripture speaks about this matter are interpreted differently by different people. And again I say what has been said before in this book, that this does not mean that the Bible is an obscure book! It only means that we know in part. Let us listen to the four evangelists. *Matthew,* in chapter 26, writes how Jesus and His disciples stay in a certain place, where He celebrates the Passover (verse 20) and then establishes the Lord's Supper (26-29). During the Passover meal (!), the Lord says that one of His disciples will betray Him, which causes sadness and fear. Judas asks the hypocritical question: "Master,

is it I?" Jesus replies, "Thou hast said." After the establishment of the Lord's Supper, they sing the second part of the "Great Hallel," Psalms 115 to 118. Then they go out into the Mount of Olives (verse 30). At this point, Judas is certainly not with them anymore, but Matthew does not say when he left. We find the same in *Mark*. Only Mark adds that the Passover meal was held in a "large upper room furnished and prepared" (14:15). The rest of the history as it is told by the second evangelist is almost identical to Matthew's gospel. In *Luke*, things are a little different. *After* the evangelist has told how the Lord Jesus established the Lord's Supper (22:19-20), we read in verse 21, "Behold, the hand of him that betrayeth Me is with Me on the table"! Here the impression is given that Judas was present at the Lord's Supper. In *John,* it is not clear at all, because this evangelist does not say a word about the establishment of the Lord's Supper. In chapter 13, we read about a "supper," but the Dutch annotations say that this was "the meal in which the Paschal lamb was eaten by them, after which meal Christ afterwards instituted and held His supper." The fourth evangelist gives us the strong impression that Judas left *before* the Lord Jesus celebrated the Lord's Supper, because he says that Judas went out to do his betrayer's work "having *received the sop.*" This most probably refers to the "sop" of the Passover bread. In summary, what answer do the evangelists give to the question whether Judas celebrated the Lord's Supper? Matthew and Mark do not give an answer, Luke seems to confirm it, and John seems to deny it. Does this mean that the Holy Scriptures contradict each other? Again, we know only in part. It will not surprise us that Reformed theologians do not agree upon the answer to the question that we are discussing.

Voices from the Past

Now I would like to list some answers that several theologians have given to this question. Let us begin with Augustine. He believes that Judas did take part in the Lord's Supper. In this, he is supported by most church fathers and later by Roman Catholic theology. Incidentally, Augustine has said something instructive in this context, which is certainly worthy to be remembered, namely that the other disciples ate the Bread Christ, but Judas only ate Christ's bread. Calvin quotes these words of the church father. He reminds us of the expression that we are familiar with, namely, that he, who uses the sacrament without true faith, receives nothing but a piece of bread and a sip of wine. Calvin's opinion in the fourth volume of his *Institutes,* dedicated a long seventeenth chapter to the Lord's Supper. In this chapter, a separate section (IV,17,34) deals with Augustine's opinion. Here Calvin simply assumes that Judas did take part in the first Lord's Supper. The well-known Rev. H. E. Gravemeijer, who wrote an excellent chapter about this question in his *Leesboek over de Gereformeerde Geloofsleer* (1887), pointed out that many later Reformed theologians, such as Ursinus and Bullinger, followed Calvin. However, other equally renowned men believed the opposite! According to Zanchius, Gomarus, Hoornbeeck, Peter Van Mastricht, and John à Marck, the Apostle Judas did not celebrate the first Lord's Supper. Their main argument was that Judas, immediately after having received the "sop," left the upper room. This must have been the "sop" of the Passover meal, because there was no "sop" in the Lord's Supper! The reader will remember the difficulty that we have already mentioned, namely, that the evangelist Luke says that the Lord Jesus unmasked the betrayer *after* the Lord's Supper by saying, "But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth Me is with Me on the table." Of course, the latter theologians were also aware of this. However, they have rightly pointed out that Luke usually says things *succinctly*, often

not in chronological order. In other words, Luke is not primarily concerned with the *time* when Jesus said something, but with the *content* of His words.

Article 35

There is yet another difficulty. In our *Belgic Confession of Faith*, Guido de Brès also mentions the name of Judas. In article 35 (which deals with the Lord's Supper), he says that the ungodly indeed receive the sacrament to their condemnation, but not the truth of the sacrament, "as Judas and Simon the sorcerer both indeed reeived the sacrament but not Christ who was signified by it." Rev. G. H. Kersten also discusses this point in his *Reformed Dogmatics*. He mentions both views as well as article 35. He does not really offer his own opinion, but he does reject the opinion of Dr. A. Kuyper, who believed he could solve the difficulty by stating that Guido de Brès referred to the sacrament of *circumcision* that Judas had received. "This is not credible," writes Rev. Kersten, and I agree with this opinion. His final remark about this matter is also worthy of our attention, "If the Lord admitted Judas to His Supper, He has given us a telling example that His servants are not to judge the spiritual state of the heart, and, consequently, should not ban anyone from the Lord's Supper if they believe him to be unconverted." Yet the words of Guido de Brès are not easy to explain. The theologian Bernhardinus de Moor has pointed out that our Confession of Faith does not explicitly state that Judas and Simon the sorcerer received the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Article 35 only says that the sacraments are connected with the things signified, but that they are not *received* as such by all. According to De Moor, Guido de Brès means to say that Judas ate the sacrament of the Passover and that Simon the sorcerer was baptized. Gravemeijer says that "Judas certainly did not take part in the Lord's Supper." He adds that those who believe he did

should never suspect or trouble those who deny it. And then he says something very important. "This should especially never be done appealing to the authority of the Confession, partly because it is not even straightforward about it, and partly because it is a historical question, not a doctrinal one."

A Conclusion?

I do not pretend to be able to give the decisive word here. I would like to add a little to the last words of Gravemeijer. This is not one of the fundamental doctrines. It is not a "doctrinal question." Rather than speaking about a historical question – as Gravemeijer does – I would like to call it an *exegetical* question. This is all about the exegesis of the Word of God and this exegesis is free, according to the old Reformed standpoint – at least, as long as it remains within the borders of the clear statements of Holy Scripture itself. We have seen that it is not absolutely clear from the Scriptures whether Judas took part in the first Lord's Supper or not. Personally, considering everything, I think he did not. Especially the description given in John 13 convinces me. But again, this is an exegetical question. This does not mean it is an unimportant question. But we should realize at least one thing. There is one question which carries incomparably more weight, namely, would the Lord want to accept me and tolerate me at His holy table? Do my heart and life show the characteristics of a true communicant, as they are stated in the old classical form? If we cannot answer the question which has been discussed in this section, it will not harm us. But it will harm us if we remain strangers to true faith, which we may hear from the Lord, "whereas you should otherwise have suffered eternal death, I have … shed My blood for you"!

Organic Inspiration

We believe and confess that the Holy Scriptures are the inspired Word of God. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16). The Holy Spirit, as the "primary Author," has enlightened the Bible's authors from word to word and from letter to letter and has guided them and kept them from erring. God's Church does not understand it, but they do *believe* it.

Yet this inspiration did not take place in such a way that when they recorded God's revelation, the Bible's authors with their feelings and personality were eliminated. The Spirit of God made sacred use of the characters and talents of the prophets and apostles. We may put it like this. The inspiration of Scripture is not *mechanic* (as is the case with dead machines), but *organic*. An organ lives, is warm, and contains blood. The Bible's authors were also living organs. This can be illustrated with various examples. For example, it is obvious that Isaiah was an educated and informed man, who was well-acquainted with the political world of his days. Amos reveals himself to be a man of country life, who is familiar with the stars, and who uses plain and direct language. Also compare how Mark describes what the woman having an issue of blood had experienced with doctors (5:26) and how Luke does it (8:43). Luke was a physician himself! Both evangelists do not contradict each other, but there are differences.

The Gospel of Peter

We have just said something about Mark. Within the ancient church there was a "unanimous tradition" (I have borrowed the words from Dr. J. van Bruggen) which said that Mark recorded the preaching of Simon Peter in his gospel. The bishop of Hierapolis, Papias, wrote in the first half of the second century that Mark "was Peter's interpreter." In the same century, the

theologian Irenaeus, a disciple of the well-known Polycarp and an elder in the church of Lyon, wrote that Mark recorded the "things that had been proclaimed by Peter. "To give one more example, in the third century, Origenes of Alexandria wrote that Mark made the gospel "as Peter had taught him." Thus, the gospel of Mark is actually the gospel of Simon Peter. There was a close connection between these men, as is clear from the fact that Peter, when writing his first general epistle from Babylon, was accompanied by Mark. He even calls him "my son" (1 Peter 5:13). The connection between Peter and Mark is also clear from the gospel of Mark itself. There are only little details which reveal it, but they should not be overlooked. Only in Mark do we read that the angel at the empty grave on Easter morning commands the women to tell Jesus' disciples *and Peter* that He will go before them into Galilee. And for Peter, how much this personal message must have meant to this disciple who thought he was lost, who wept so bitterly because he had denied his Master three times! Recently I noticed something remarkable when preparing a sermon about Peter's denial. During this moving Thursday night when the Lord Jesus had celebrated the last Passover with His disciples, He also established the Lord's Supper. After the establishment of the Lord's Supper, the Lord warned his disciples that they would all be offended because of Him. Peter believed this might be possible for the others, but he made an exception for himself. He even declared himself prepared to be imprisoned with his Master and to die! Then Jesus foretold him with a solemn "verily" that Peter would deny Him thrice, even "this night," in a couple of hours. Peter was also told that the third denial would take place *before the cock crow*. Now follows what struck me as remarkable when I was preparing my sermon. *This* is what we read in Matthew, Luke, and John. But in Mark we read a little addition. There the Mediator says, "Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow *twice*, thou shalt deny me thrice"

(Mark 14:30). Why is this remarkable? Why is this yet another proof to show that the inspiration of Scripture is organic? And why does it seem to support the statement that the gospel of Mark forms the record of what Peter has told? Let us discuss this in more detail.

The Cock Crowing

The rabbis had forbidden people to have chickens in Jerusalem. However, not everyone kept this prohibition. Everyone who violated it should realize that his cock would betray him every night! For that matter, the Romans also had chickens, and they did not take any notice of the rabbinic commandment. Anyway, some cock crowing could be heard in the nights around the beginning of the Christian era in the city of Jerusalem. Abraham Hellenbroek wrote many pages about this in his excellent book *De kruistriomf van Vorst Messias* from 1737. Also the aforementioned Dr. Jakob van Bruggen provides much information in his commentary on the gospel of Mark (which he, incidentally, subtitled "Het Evangelie volgens Petrus" (The Gospel According to Peter) (1988). Some of these details have been used here.

Twice

When the Lord said to His disciple Peter that he would deny Him thrice before the cock crowed *twice*, He meant that Peter would deny his relationship with Him before the people would wake up in Jerusalem, around half past one. In other words, very soon! It was already dark on Thursday night when Jesus said this. And it was fulfilled exactly as Jesus had said. No one knew and experienced this more than Peter. He was also the one who passed it on to his "son" John Mark. That is why it is recorded in the book of our second evangelist. With a tender solemnity and in more depth than the other three evangelists, Mark has recorded how Simon Peter spoke his first denial to one of the high priest's maidservants with the words, "I

know not, neither understand I what thou sayest" (Mark 14:68). Shocked by his own words, he withdrew himself in the porch. Then Mark writes, "and the cock crew" – the first cock crowing, around half past twelve. Nobody woke up from it and – regrettably – neither did Peter. Later, he remembered that he had indeed heard it, but it did not register at that moment. The warning given to him from heaven by means of an animal (!) had no effect upon his soul. A little while later, he denied his Master for the second time. Then follows the third denial - *about the space of one hour after*, wrote Luke, the careful physician! It is half past two in the night when Jesus was betrayed and denied. Immediately (while he yet spake, says Luke), the cock crowed – for the second time. Jerusalem wakes up. Peter does, too. It is as if scales fall from his eyes. Looking through the slaves and maids, he sees his Master standing there, exhausted, battered, beaten, and humiliated. There He stands, the Surety. He is all alone. No one helps Him, not even the man who said he was willing to die for Him. The Lord turns around. His eyes search and find. No one can ever express what Peter saw in Jesus' eyes. It can only be experienced by those who are sunk just as low as Peter. The cock's crowing woke Peter up – he was shocked as if he had been fast asleep. The look of Jesus' eyes broke him. But at the same time, there was something in his Master's eyes which kept him from utter despair and from the act of bitter desperation. Here we have the great distinction between Judas' desperate remorse and Peter's bitter weeping.

M. A Miraculous Sign

Sleeping Saints

Recorded in the gospel according to Matthew, among the moving events surrounding the death of the Mediator, we find several verses which are not often preached about. This is probably because these verses are difficult to understand. I am

referring to Matthew 27:52 and 53. There we read, *And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.* When reading these words, different questions may arise. To mention some of them, who are these "saints" which arose after the Mediator's death? Abraham Hellenbroek (1658–1731), in his book *De kruistriomf van Vorst Messias (1737),* says that examining this question is fruitless. The annotators to the Dutch Authorized Version hardly say anything about these verses, so they do not answer this question either. Some exegetes have thought about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This seems very far-fetched. One thing is certain; they who arose were children of God. Is it too much to say that they were probably people who had died in the recent past, whose graves were still intact and who had been known in Jerusalem? It is clear that not all of God's children, whose bodies were buried around Jerusalem at the time, arose. Scripture speaks about "many bodies." It has been suggested that people were raised from their graves who belonged to those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem (Luke 2:38) – so people like Simeon and Anna. But who will say the last word about this?

A Holy Prelude

Another question is what the words *after His resurrection* refer to. Does it mean that these children of God arose after the resurrection of Christ? Or does it mean that they did not leave their graves until his resurrection? Or do we have to connect these words with "went into the holy city," meaning that they appeared in Jerusalem after Christ had revealed Himself alive to His own? Calvin believes that these saints did not arise until the resurrection of Christ. He thinks it is absurd to think that they remained living and breathing in their graves for three days. Rev. Hellenbroek does not give his opinion, and neither does Dr. F.

W. Grosheide in his *Commentaar op het Nieuwe Testament*. If we carefully read the Dutch Authorized Version, the impression is given that it happened as follows. Immediately after the Mediator's death, a severe earthquake took place which rent the rocks and opened many graves, touched by the finger of God. Next, many of God's "sleeping" children arose from these open graves on the morning of Jesus' resurrection. Take note that no unregenerate people, no wicked people, arose! Christ has become the *Firstfruits* of them that slept (1 Corinthians 15:20). What happened in Jerusalem is as it were a holy prelude to the last day. Then *all* children of God will arise. Even unbelievers will arise then, but their rising from the dead will not be the fruit of Christ's resurrection, but it will only happen by God's power. However, for God's sleeping children, Christ has become the Firstfruits by His resurrection. The Firstfruits, not the First one! Lazarus, the daughter of Jairus, the boy in Nain – just to mention a few – arose before Christ, but He is the Firstfruits. This means that His resurrection is a sure pledge, the fountain and the cause of the blessed resurrection of God's people. Read how plainly and aptly the Heidelberg Catechism words this in Lord's Day 17.

Appeared to Whom?

Yet another question is *whom* these saints appeared to. And what are we to think of these appearances? Did these people talk? Did those who saw such appearances recognize the risen saints? Let us refer to Calvin again! He says that these people were seen for some time, to be a mirror and model of Christ's power. The Reformer also says that they were used to confirm the living in their hope of eternal life. He believes these appearances were partly intended to encourage God's children. Calvin does not mention anything about whom they appeared to, but Rev. Hellenbroek does. He writes, "Probably they appeared to their acquaintances who, knowing they were dead and now seeing them alive, were also

convinced of their miraculous resurrection; and besides these also to some others who either believed in Jesus or who were not complete strangers to Him." It has been pointed out that the Greek word translated here as *appeared*, is never used for the appearances of the Lord Jesus. This may indicate that the Lord only *showed* the bodies of these people to some, without any words being spoken. But once again a decisive answer cannot be given. Another difficult question is the final issue that we would like to consider with respect to this text. *What finally happened to these risen people*? Where did they go? Rev. Hellenbroek gives two possibilities. These people died sooner or later (like Lazarus), or they were carried to heaven together with the Mediator at Christ's ascension. He thinks both explanations are plausible, but he warns that those who want to have an adequate answer to this question try to pry "into that which we should leave to God's omniscience and providence." Calvin says something similar. "It is not necessary to give ourselves much uneasiness about a matter which is not necessary to be known." He does not think it is probable that they continued to converse with men for a long time, and says it is not absurd to think that they died again after they had performed their task. However, he thinks that the most probable view is that the life which they received was not afterwards taken from them. In other words, they were probably carried to heaven together with Christ.

The reader will have noticed that many questions have remained unanswered. Our knowledge is in part. It is better to leave such matters open when the Word of God is not clear about them, than to pry into the hidden things of God by our fantasies and speculations. The heart of the matter is certainly not unclear. These verses are recorded in God's Word to make us understand the awesome power and meaning of Christ's resurrection. He has the keys of hell and of death! How impressive the appearances of

these unknown witnesses must have been, who showed up here and there. How fearful the enemies must have been when they heard about these things! But on the other hand, what comfort it must have provided for the small, wavering flock of Christ's disciples! As we have said, it was a holy prelude to the last day. In our days, we should not expect any such signs. Yet dead people are raised up all the time! Christ continues to show the power of His resurrection in the quickening of sinners who are spiritually dead. Perhaps in our days not many people arise, but as long as the sun shines, the Lord will have His subjects on earth. I would like to offer the reader two questions. First, have you ever met such a quickened sinner? And finally, have you experienced the power of His resurrection in your own life? Do you know the quake of regeneration, which makes the grave of our depravity split and which results in a quickened sinner appearing in the "holy city" sooner or later?

n. What did John believe?

Two Possibilities

Each of the four evangelists has written about the resurrection of Christ. They do not contradict each other, but rather they complement each other. John was the last one, who at an old age recorded the resurrection gospel. His words are strongly marked by his own experiences. In John 20, we read an expression which throughout the ages has raised many questions with respect to its interpretation. Briefly summarized, the first verses of this chapter tell us that Peter and John (here always indicated as *the other disciple*) are alarmed by the coming of Mary Magdalene early on Sunday morning. She says that the body of Jesus has been taken away. Both disciples hurry to the grave – John faster than Peter. John stoops at the entrance of the sepulchre, sees the linen clothes lying, but does not enter the sepulchre. Peter does. He sees the linen clothes and napkin lying separately. Now John also enters.

Then we read the words that I would like to discuss here, "and he saw, and believed" (verse 8). Everything still seems to be clear. But then these words follow, "For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead." How can John's *believing* be reconciled with his *not knowing* of Scripture? Wouldn't we have expected the words, "Then they *understood* Scripture"? The annotations to the Dutch Authorized Version found these words difficult too. They give two possibilities, that either John believed Christ's body had been taken away (then their not knowing of Scripture can be easily explained), or John believed that Christ was risen (then their not knowing of Scripture must refer to earlier times, according to the annotations). The former possibility is strongly rejected by Calvin, with the convincing argument that the word *believing* is never used in the Bible in this sense, at least, when it is used simply and without addition. Then Calvin rightly says, "Being now warned by the sight of a strange spectacle they begin to think of Christ as having something divine, though they are still far from having a clear and accurate knowledge of Him."

Blind

This seems to be the correct interpretation. John describes the events that happened on this early Easter morning in great detail. It is indelibly stamped on his memory and the Spirit of God gives him the grace of remembering. He hurried to the grave after the announcement of Mary Magdalene. Many thoughts must have passed through his mind during this short journey. His grief about the death of his beloved Master is inexpressible. Wasn't he the disciple about whom it is written that Jesus loved him? Never, never could he be saved anymore. Never would Jesus' voice sound into his ears and into his heart. Lost, lost, eternally lost! Even though he had not denied the Lord like Peter, his weeping and mourning will not have been any less bitter when he returned

from Golgotha to his house with Mary, the mother of Jesus. He was blind to the demand of satisfying God's holy justice, blind, therefore, to the necessity of Christ's substitutionary suffering and death.

The Message of the Linen Clothes

Finally, he arrives at the sepulchre. He stoops down and sees the linen clothes that have been wrapped around Jesus' body. John does not go any further. He thinks Jesus is lying there. Do not think that these linen clothes were neatly folded. This was impossible. They were full of ointment, and they were so stiff that they could not be folded. No, what John saw there was as it were the "cocoon" (if we may use that exptression) in which the body of Jesus had been wound. However, the shell was empty! But John could not see it. He thought that Jesus was there. Peter, however, enters the sepulchre and sees something which causes him to be shocked and surprised (Luke 24:12). What is it? The napkin, which had been wound around Jesus' head, was wrapped together in another place by itself! In other words, Peter saw that the linen clothes were nothing but an empty wrapping. Not only was the sepulchre empty, but the clothes were empty too! This was another proof of the truth of Christ's resurrection! No thief would have been able to steal the body without tearing or damaging the clothes. And *then* we read that John also entered the sepulchre… and *he saw, and believed*!

A Confession of Guilt

Suddenly, faith in Christ's resurrection, albeit just a beginning, breaks through into heart of the apostle of love. In agreement with Calvin, I do not doubt that this was true saving faith. Yet one question remains. Why does John write, when he relates this in his old age, "For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead"? Well, these words are a certain confession of faith. It is as if he says, "We, poor, blind sinners,

needed such a sign as those linen clothes and napkin, in order to make the first spark of faith in the resurrection of our Master glimmer in our souls. This while He had so often personally foretold us about His resurrection, and while the Scriptures (the Old Testament) bear such clear witness of His resurrection … It was blind *ignorance* which made us wander about so long in the dark." Which child of God should not be ashamed and bow his head with the apostle, complaining about his blindness and lack of knowledge? How often it is true in our lives, "As yet we knew not the Scripture"! How necessary it is that we personally receive what we read about Christ's visit to His disciples on the evening of Easter Day, "Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45)!

o. Is it permissible to say that the Ethiopian from Acts 8 was cursed because of his black skin?

It has been said in the past that the Ethiopian from Acts 8 was cursed because of his black skin – or, more carefully stated, that his black skin signified the curse which was upon him as a descendant of Ham. We would like to give this question some thought. Let us first consult Scripture! Those who start to think about it will discover that there are several questions which can be asked. I will mention some of them. What does the Bible mean when it speaks about an Ethiopian – or about Ethiopia? And who did Noah actually curse in Genesis 9 – and what did he mean exactly? Next, did Ethiopians have black skin? And finally, does the Scripture confirm that the Ethiopian's skin was a sign of a curse? Let us first consider the question: What does the Bible mean when it speaks about an Ethiopian?

The Sons of Ham

The name Ethiopia in the King James Version is a translation of the Hebrew word Cush. The word occurs as a proper name and

as a name of a country or nation. Let us leave aside for now the introduction to Psalm 7, which mentions a man by the name of Cush, who was a hostile courtier at Saul's court. This man's name has nothing to with an "Ethiopian," since he was from the tribe of Benjamin. It is different with a man whom we encounter in Genesis 10. There a certain Cush is mentioned as a son of Ham. Noah's son Ham had four sons, namely Cush, Mizraim, Phut, and Canaan. Let us leave aside the eldest, Cush, for now. As for Mizraim, this name is the original word for Egypt. That is why we read in Psalm 105:23, "Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham." Not much is known about Ham's son Phut. His descendants probably settled in the northern part of Egypt in a large delta, where the Nile River streams into the Mediterranean Sea. And then we have Canaan, the last son of Ham. Genesis 10 deals extensively with Canaan and his children. In Genesis 10,15-18, eleven sons of Canaan are mentioned. In order to answer the questions that we have raised, it is very important for us to realize that these eleven descendants of Canaan (who were explicitly cursed by his grandfather Noah!) went to live *in the land of Canaan*, or at least in its vicinity. Precisely *these* people had to be exterminated by Israel when they conquered Canaan. Thus Cush, one of Ham's sons, is an uncle of Canaan's children.

The Sons of Cush

As for Cush himself, six sons are ascribed to this son of Ham in Genesis 10. Let us discuss them one by one. The most well-known of these six is undoubtedly Nimrod, who the Bible describes as a mighty hunter before the LORD. The annotators to the Dutch Authorized Version say somewhat ironically that he probably did not only hunt animals, but people as well. They do not consider the words "before the LORD" a sign of piety, but of his fearless impudence. Another of Cush's sons is Seba, the father of the Sabeans. The other names are Havilah (a name which

already appears in Genesis 2), Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabtechah. In a certain sense all these descendants of Cush can be called "Ethiopians". It is important to realize this!

The Hebrew word for Cushite is *Cushi*. We know this name from Scripture as a proper name. It was the name of the runner, who Joab commanded to inform David about Absalom's death (2 Samuel 18:21). The Dutch annotators say about this text that Cushi can also be *translated*, namely as "the blackamoor" or "Arabian." However, they say, some consider it a proper name. It is interesting to notice that even today often the fastest runners of the world come from Ethiopia.

Cush as a Country Name

In other Old Testament passages, Cush occurs as a country name. Which country is it? Opinions differ on this. Now the Ethiopian from Acts 8 comes into view. The Greek text calls him an *Aithiops*. Of course, this makes us think of Ethiopia. But in biblical times, Ethiopia was *not* Ethiopia as we find it in our atlases in the continent of Africa. Ethiopia today is far to the southeast of Ethiopia as it occurs in the Bible. Biblical Ethiopia includes what we call Nubia and (the northern part of) Sudan. It bordered Egypt, as we know from Ezekiel 29:10. In the Old Testament, it is sometimes mentioned in one breath with Egypt. Think of Psalm 68:31. "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia (Cush) shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." Therefore, when we speak about Cush or biblical Ethiopia, we should realize two things. Firstly, it is not the same country as Ethiopia today, and secondly, there is good reason to assume that the Bible mentions *another* Ethiopia in Arabia. The Dutch annotators have recognized this problem. To illustrate this, Zipporah, Moses' wife, is called an Ethiopian in Numbers 12:1. Dutch Annotation 2 to this text says that Moses' wife was not from the Cushites who descended from Ham, but from the Midianites –

from the family of Shem! I quote, "It seems the Scripture doth comprehend under the name of Cushites, not only the Moors or Ethiopians, but also the Egyptians, and the Arabians, and the Midianites, and the people inhabiting southward." In annotation 21 to Genesis 10:6, we read something similar, "Cush, of whom came the Arabians and the Moors, or Ethiopians." The first instance when the land of Cush occurs in the Bible, namely, in the description of the four rivers in Paradise (Genesis 2:13), the translators of the Dutch Authorized Version think in the same line. In the eighteenth-century *Bybels Zakelyk Woordenboek*, J.G. Staringh – a minister who preached in Gouderak for more than sixty years – offers an interesting opinion. He writes that he believes Ethiopia is called Cush, because the descendants of Cush, who originally lived in Arabia, found that country too dry and moved via Egypt to Ethiopia and settled there. We should therefore realize that the descendants of Cush did not only live in Africa. To come back to the six sons of Cush once more, we see that Nimrod moved to the place which would become Nineveh (Assyria), in what is called Iraq today. We would not expect an Ethiopian there! Seba probably settled on the west bank of the Red Sea, in the east of Egypt. Havilah is perhaps the name of an area in the middle of what is now called Saudi Arabia. Sabta will have lived somewhat south of Havilah, Raamah west of it, and Sabtechah is difficult to locate. It becomes clear that only two of Ham's four sons settled in Africa (Phut and Cush) and that the majority of Cush's descendants did not live in Africa at all (actually, only Seba), but rather in Asia. The words of Annotation 20 to Genesis 10 are actually very appropriate, when it says that the descendants of Ham moved partly to Asia, and partly to Africa, some of whom lived in Palestine for a while.

Who and What Did Noah Mean?

Let us now consider another question. Who did Noah actually curse in Genesis 9? We are familiar with the history of the drunkenness of this child of God, his lying naked in his tent, and his son Ham's mockery. When Noah wakes up and notices what his son has done to him, he says the following words, "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren!" Of course, the first striking thing is that Noah curses *Canaan* – not Ham, as we would expect. What is the reason behind this? It has been commonly assumed that Canaan, Noah's grandson, followed in the footsteps of his father Ham. This is very well possible. Yet this is not all there is to say about it. It is a scriptural concept that one cannot be hurt more than in one's posterity. No texts are necessary to prove this; every average reader of the Bible will know them for himself. The annotators correctly observe about Genesis 9:25 that Noah did not only curse the son (Canaan), but also the father (Ham) *and the descendants of his son.* This is essential! Who were the descendants of Canaan? We have already seen it. These were the people who centuries later had to be exterminated by Israel when the land of Canaan was conquered. For Moses – the author of Genesis! – it must have been very moving to record this condemnation of Canaan even before the war against the Canaanites began. The question was: Who did Noah actually mean to curse? Another question is: *What* did Noah mean? He said, "A servant of servants shall he (Canaan) be unto his brethren!" The expression "servant of servants" is typically Hebrew and refers to the most extreme slavery. Considering the history, it cannot be denied that the heathen people who sprung from Canaan and inhabited Palestine were for a long while subjected to the descendants of the Canaan's "brethren" (taken literally now!), namely Cush, Phut, and Mizraim. Especially the latter nation (Egypt) was in charge in the area surrounding the Mediterranean Sea for centuries. Noah

may have literally meant that the children of Canaan would be subjected to the children of Canaan's brothers for a long time. On the basis of what we have found so far in the Word of God, it is not plausible to think that Noah meant that the black people from Africa would be subordinate to the white people for centuries. And the belief that his words served as a *justification* of the atrocities of the slave trade and slavery, is absolutely reprehensible. Honesty compels me to say that people from our reformed background used to have rather unbiblical views upon this point. They have been disparagingly called "negroes" and "niggers" by our people. It deserves our attention that the Bible often speaks very favourably about the dark "Ethiopian" in several passages. Just think of Psalm 87 and Jeremiah 39 (the Ethiopian Ebedmelech, who takes up the prophet Jeremiah out of the dungeon) – and of course the Ethiopian from Acts 8. And whoever still has a good word to say about slave trade should study the life of the eighteenth-century English preacher and poet John Newton, who was a slave trader before his conversion. Neither should we forget that the Apostle Paul was born east of what is now called Turkey and that Augustine was a North-African.

Black Skin?

Now we would like to consider the question: Did the Ethiopian, as the Word of God speaks about him, have black skin? It depends on what we consider black. Probably he was not what we would call a black person today. This name is only used for the people who live in Central Africa, south of the Sahara. The "Ethiopian" did not come from there. Perhaps Simeon, the teacher of the Christian church of Antioch (Acts 13:1), was a black person, because he was nicknamed Niger. However, this is only a guess. If we may assume the Ethiopian from Acts 8 had the same skin colour as those who now inhabit the area where

he came from, we should certainly not imagine him as a white person, or as a black person. He must have had dark brown skin. This leads us to the last part of the question. Is it true that Scripture gives reason to consider the Ethiopian's skin colour a sign of the curse that Noah uttered? More sharply, are we allowed to consider someone cursed because of his skin colour? We cannot find this anywhere in Scripture, not even in Jeremiah 13:23, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." In these words, the black skin is not a sign of an evil nature, but rather it shows the absolute impossibility to forsake sin (see annotation 44). The Word of God *does* teach us that we are *all* under the curse – not under Ham's or Canaan's curse and not because of our skin colour, but under the curse of divine law and because of the sin of Adam's covenant-breach in Paradise. The Ethiopian was under this curse as a child of Ham – but so was Philip as a child of Shem, who preached to him the message of salvation. The children of Japheth are under this curse too.

But God's Word also teaches us that those who are in Christ are saved from the curse. From which curse? If he was a bearer of the curse of Noah, he would be saved from that curse, too, but especially from the curse of the law. The question what our skin colour was here on earth will one day fade in the light of the other question, whether we will be allowed wear the white wedding garment of Christ's righteousness, or the robe of everlasting mourning.

p. What is strengthening in the inner man?

The Influence of Scripture on the Dutch Language

The Dutch Authorized Version (Statenvertaling) has had much influence on the Dutch language. This influence still continues, although it is much less than in the past. Yet many people, even

those who have radically turned away from God's Word and His service, often use expressions which are derived from the Dutch Authorized Version. Some of these expressions have assumed a life of their own and often received a very different meaning than their original intention in Scripture. The expression I would like to discuss now is found in Ephesians 3:16, *That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man*. The Apostle Paul speaks about strengthening the inner man. Many Dutch people use this expression with a very different meaning. When they say, "Let's strengthen the inner man," they mean to say let's care for our body, let's eat and drink. The scriptural origin of these words is obvious. It is striking, however, that Paul uses the words passively ("be strengthened"), whereas the expression says "strengthen." It is also evident that the expression, as it is often used among us, is very different from the sense in which they occur in Holy Scripture. It is an expression that we should not use as such. The "inner man" is not strengthened by eating and drinking!

Three Times

What does the Word of God mean by the inner man, or inward man? The expression occurs three times in the Scriptures. Firstly, I would like to mention *2 Corinthians 4:16*, "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." The Dutch annotators say about these words that the "outward man" refers to our body, including our bodily strength, health, and outward wellbeing. They interpret the "inward man" as "the soul, being renewed by the Spirit of God." Here we see that it would be better to call eating and drinking as strengthening the *outward* man. Calvin says remarkable things about this text. First, he sharply resists those who interpret the outward man as the *old* man. He rightly observes that this is something very different. Then he says it is a

mistake of the church father Chrystostom to restrict the outward man entirely to the *body*. No, says Calvin, the apostle intended to comprehend, under this term, *everything* that relates to the present life. It refers to the maintenance of earthly life and has to do with flourishing age, health, goods, honour, friendship, and other resources. Calvin says, "According as we suffer a diminution or loss of these blessings, which are requisite for keeping up the condition of the present life, our outward man in that proportion is corrupted. This is not pleasant, but this is how God "calls us back to meditate on a better life," "by taking away from us, one by one, the things that we are engrossed with." Thus the inward man grows, he continues, because "in proportion as the earthly life declines, does the heavenly life advance, at least in believers."

Does Everyone Have an Inner Man?

The second instance, in which the Bible speaks about the inner man, is *Ephesians 3:16*. This text was already quoted in the beginning of this section. The Dutch annotations to this text seem to hesitate a little when answering the question how the inner man must be interpreted. In any case, it is *not* the body or temporal life. What is it? Some people, the annotators say, take the term to mean the regenerate part of man. Others consider it the inward part of man, "namely, the soul of the faithful with all its motions, in which he wishes that they may be endued with strength and courage." The attentive reader will have noticed that the annotators speak about the soul of *believers*. They hesitate between the new man or the soul of believers, but they do not simply say the inner man is the soul! A new question now arises. Do unbelievers, unregenerate people, also have an inner man? Different answers have been given to this question. Calvin says that an unbeliever also has an outward man and that this outward man also decays in an unbeliever (just like in God's child) but that nothing replaces it. Dr. Herman Ridderbos, however, writes

in his sizeable book *Paulus,* that what Paul calls the inner man is actually nothing but what is called *heart* in the Old Testament, the inner part of man (page 123). In this sense, every man, saved or unsaved, has an inner man. Dr. S. Greijdanus shares this opinion. In *Korte Verklaring* he says about Ephesians 3:16, "Inner man is not the same as the new man. New man is regenerate man. Inner man is the inner essence of man, his heart, his soul, his spirit. It forms a contrast with outward man, i.e. that which is bodily, sensual, visible … Also unregenerate man has an inner man, but in believers the inner man is regenerated too." Considering everything, I am so bold as to have doubts about the latter opinion. In my opinion, it is an important fact that *nowhere* does God's Word confirm an unsaved person to have an inner man. Scripture *indeed* clearly teaches that God's child also has an *outward* man. I believe that God's Word limits the expression inner man or inward man to the lives of God's children.

Romans 7

This question becomes very important when we consider the third text in which the expression "inward man" occurs, namely, in *Romans 7:22*. There we read the well-known words, "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man." If it were true that everybody, including the unsaved, has an inward man, then these words of the apostle could be applied to every natural man. Another well-known question is directly connected with this one, whether Romans 7:14-25, is about the strife that the apostle experiences *after* his conversion, or whether he describes his past, when he lived without God and Christ. Many recent interpreters, one of whom is the aforementioned Ridderbos, opt for the latter interpretation. I think this is a dangerous route to follow. Arminius had already raised a scandal in Amsterdam when he, in his sermons about the Epistle to the Romans, applied this passage to the unregenerate. The crucial question is, of course, can an

unsaved person delight in the law of God? The Dutch annotation to the words "inward man" in Romans 7:22 are remarkable. It says, "Hereby is not understood mans natural reason, which sometimes also strives indeed for moral virtue: for the Scripture throughout testifies that the reason of natural man is blind and perverse in spiritual things … but is to be understood as a man as far forth as he is inwardly enlightened and regenerated by the Spirit of God." Calvin says in his commentary about this text, "many have not rightly understood [this text], and have therefore stumbled at this stone." His following statement is certainly unambiguous. "This passage is very absurdly applied to men not yet regenerated."

It is clear that the expression *the inner man* has many implications. I am afraid that the outward man is more strengthened than the inward man in our days. The rich fool's motto is believed to be the supreme wisdom: "Soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." Poor man! He did not even know that he *had* a soul. But are our lives in fact very different from the rich fool's life? Are our lives not completely centered on the outward man, health, food, clothes, money, and goods? How far away are we not from the call of homesickness that I read from John Calvin in this context, "Oh, that God gave us that this be well-founded in our hearts, in order that we will always make good progress *in the destruction of the outward man*!"

5

Through the Ages

Introduction to the History of Exegesis

In this final chapter, we would like to consider how people have read and interpreted the Holy Scriptures through the centuries. Of course, we have to limit ourselves when dealing with this subject. Thousands of years cannot be summarized in a few pages. And the subtitle of this chapter says: An *introduction* to the history of exegesis. I will have to make a selection here. The reader, who thinks that much has only been touched upon or even skipped, is right. Thankfully, there are many other books which explicitly and extensively deal with the history of the interpretation of the Bible. Those who would like to study this subject more thoroughly can examine the bibliography. First, I would like to discuss the method of exegesis in Judaism. Next, the Early Church will be dealt with, followed by the Middle Ages. Of course, the hermeneutic method of the Reformers is very important to us, especially John Calvin's. Historical-critical study of the Scriptures, as it broke through after the Enlightenment, will be briefly touched upon as well. I will also pay attention to the influence of historical-critical research in Dutch churches with Reformed confessions. Then after a summary of hermeneutics today, I will conclude with some personal comments.

Jewish Exegetical Principles – Palestinian Judaism

It is impossible to talk about *the* Jewish exegesis. It is too diverse for that. We will leave aside the exegetical methods of the Essenic

community of Qumran (commonly referred to as the *pesher*) and will limit ourselves to Palestinian Judaism. Initially, the priests were responsible for the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures – especially the Torah. An example can be found in Nehemiah 8, where we read that a number of particular priests and also the Levites "caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and *gave the sense*, and caused them to understand the reading." Later, the interpretation of the holy words was put into the hands of the "soferim," the Scribes. Ezra is the first person in the Bible who is called a "sofer." Around the beginning of the Christian era, most Scribes belonged to the religious party of the Pharisees. It is striking that, in Palestinian Judaism, among the books of the Tanakh (our Old Testament), the first part, the Torah, was much more highly esteemed than both the other parts, the Prophets and Writings. Of course, this implied that exegesis was especially focused on the Pentateuch. It is remarkable that Christ, after His resurrection, instructs His disciples differently: He points out that everything that was written about Him in the Law of Moses *and* the Prophets *and* the Psalms must be fulfilled. The Sadducees with their liberal religious beliefs in their exegesis probably preferred the literal meaning of the text (the technical term for this is *peshat*). We only know a little about their exegetical activities. Much more familiar is another category of exegetical activities among Palestinian Judaism, the *midrash*. This term refers to the – initially only orally transferred – method of interpreting the Torah used by the Scribes. These *midrashim* came into being around the beginning of the Christian era. The oral tradition ended around 500 AD. Later, these traditions were recorded in writing; they constitute a considerable part of the Talmud. This Hebrew word means "study" or "instruction." The Talmud consists of two parts, namely, the Mishnah and the Gemara. The *Mishnah* contains the work of the oldest generations

of Scribes, in which the laws of Moses are further explained. The *Gemara* offers further exposition of the Mishnah, written by approximately three thousand scholars living in Palestine and Babylon from the third to the fifth centuries. The Talmud Jerushalmi was concluded halfway the fourth century and edited in Palestine. The Talmud Babli was completed around 500 AD and is considered canonical. Orthodox Jews believe its origin to be on Mount Sinai. Groups like the Sadducees resisted the development of oral tradition and considered the written Torah sufficient. Within *midrash* literature, two types can be discerned. The *halacha* is a collective name for exegetical labour with respect to the Torah. In the halacha, the prescriptions of the law were applied to numerous situations which might occur in practice. This makes the halacha a type of ethics or customary law. It was actually esteemed more highly than the Torah itself. The *haggada* is the exegetical labour that interprets the parts of the Hebrew Bible that do not belong to the Torah. This *haggada* contains a highly diverse compilation of imaginative elaborations about passages from the historical or prophetic books of the Tanakh.

Need for Rules in Palestinian Judaism

Where people practise exegesis, the demand for rules that the exegete has to observe arises sooner or later. We already saw in chapter 2 that the natural order is first the practice of exegesis, and then the theory of hermeneutics. This was also true in Palestinian Judaism. Shortly before the beginning of the Christian era, the "rules of Hillel" were developed. Hillel was a famous scribe. Tradition considers him the grandfather of the well-known Gamaliel "the elder," at whose feet Saul of Tarsus was educated. Hillel represented a moderate type of interpretation of the law, in contrast with his colleague Shammai. G. F. Moore has assumed that this moderateness – or should we call it pliability? – may have been partly due to the fact that Hillel moved from Babylon to

Jerusalem at old age, in contrast with Shammai, who was a native Judean (*Judaism,* I, page 79). In the land of captivity, a large part of the *halacha* only had an academic significance due to the absence of a temple and temple service. Quite a well-known illustration of Hillel's "pliability" is the so-called *prosbol*, a statement that a creditor was allowed to make before a court, that he would have a right to demand payment of any outstanding debts at any time. The reason behind this was that people refused to lend money to poor people, because of the requirements of the sabbatical year. As a matter of fact, Hillel annulled God's commandment with his *prosbol*. In this context, Moore points out that one of Hillel's motives to write his rules must have been the desire to harmonize the written Torah with the oral tradition of the scribes. Seven hermeneutic rules – the *middot* – were ascribed to Hillel. In my opinion, these rules show sound exegetical insight. I will list some of them. In the interpretation of Scripture, it is important that we are allowed to conclude a *minori ad maius*, in other words, that which is true for a minor point, is also applicable to a major point. The third rule states that, if one expression occurs in different verses, the meaning which applies to one verse may be applied to all other verses. Finally, the seventh rule states that exegesis must deduce the meaning of a Scripture passage from the context; this is something we will certainly agree with!

That which usually happens with rules, also happened with these rules. They were extended. We know that afterwards there were the 13 rules of Rabbi Ishmael and even later there were no less than 32 *middot* of Rabbi Eliezer ben Jose, the Galilean. Later, Jewish hermeneutics degenerated into arbitrariness. I am particularly referring to the exegetical methods of kabbalism. This mystical Jewish movement occupied themselves with determining a deep and hidden meaning, which they assumed was behind the letters, symbols, and words of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.

The means that they used were the Gematria, the Notarikon, and the Temoerah, etc. In the *Gematria,* words from Scripture were replaced with other words having the same numerical value (traditionally, letters were not only used to signify sounds, but also to express numbers, so every word had a numerical value). In the *Notarikon,* new words were formed, for example, by considering each letter of a word from Scripture, the first letter of another word that they believed could be read there. In the *Temoerah,* letters were changed within a word. Naturally, such practice often leads to "surprising" results, but it has little to do with exegesis. We can be more positive about the Karaites, a Jewish sect which developed in the eighth century, which rejected the Talmud and aimed at searching the plain meaning of Scripture. Figurative meanings were only accepted in those places where the authors had actually intended them. We may also speak with appreciation about the exegetical principles of Spanish Jews living from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, such as David Kimchi, Isaac Abarbanel, and Elias Levita. Due to the work of these and other men, the study of Hebrew was once again practised in the Christian church after a long period in which it had been nearly lost.

Exegetical Methods in the Early Christian Church

When we consider the patristic period (ca. 100 to 600 AD), we have to leave aside many things. Only a few things can be briefly discussed. As for the Eastern Church, we will deal with the opinions of the schools of Alexandria and Antioch. As for the church in the west, we will consider the exegetical principles of the greatest church father of all time, Augustine. It would also be interesting to know something about the exegetical standpoint of Tertullian (ca, 160-220), the discerning lawyer and ardent Christian apologist from Carthage. In him we see a view on hermeneutics which has been prevalent for centuries,

hermeneutics as a whole of interpretation rules. Thus Tertullian was acquainted with the sound exegetical principles that the context, historical relationships and the views of the Bible's authors must be considered. However, we cannot discuss this in more detail here. With the names of Alexandria and Antioch, two cities have been mentioned which were considered important international centres during the first centuries of the Christian era. They were situated in the eastern part of the Mediterranean area and more or less connected the continents. Alexandria was like a gate between Asia and Africa, while Antioch in a sense connected Asia with Europe. In both cities, theological "schools" developed, with remarkable differences. This was true concerning the doctrines of faith, in particular for Christology. But it was also true regarding the practice of exegesis.

The Alexandrian School

Clemens and Origines are undoubtedly the two main representatives of the theological movement which we call the "Alexandrian school." Both men accepted the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God. That much should be appreciated. Their exegetical principles, however, are of lower value. They were strongly marked by the aforementioned Jew Philo – also an Alexandrian! Just like Philo, Clemens and Origenes seem to be desirous of harmonizing the scriptural message with heathen philosophy. Moreover, they both believed that the common rules of interpretation were not sufficient to interpret Scripture. *Titus Flavius Clemens* was a private teacher in Alexandria at the end of the second century. He can be considered the successor of Pantaenus, who had founded the Catechetical School which would later become very famous. Clemens has been called a "Christian gnostic" (J.N. Bakhuizen van den Brink, *Handboek der kerkgeschiedenis*, Volume I, page 122). His most significant work bears the title *Stramateis* (Patchwork or Embroidery),

an elaborate but difficult treatise of eight volumes about the relationship between Greek philosophy and the Christian religion. The facts of the history of redemption were not denied by Clemens, but they evaporated as a result of allegorizing. *Origenes* was Clemens' successor. The death of his father Leonides left a deep impression on him. He died a martyr's death in front of his son's eyes. The bishop of Alexandria asked Origines, who was still young, to lead the severely threatened Catechetical School. It is remarkable that this great scholar, who did not take much interest in the literal meaning of Scripture, *did* take Matthew 19:12 literally and castrated himself! Besides working in Alexandria, Origenes also laboured in Caesarea; here he supervised a famous school. His great influence, even among heathens, can be concluded from the fact that he gave lectures to the mother of Emperor Alexander Severus. Origenes died around 254 as a consequence of the torture he had experienced under Emperor Decius. Because of his deviating opinions about several Christian doctrines, Origenes was not recognized as a "pater ecclesae" (church father). According to the church father Jerome, about 2000 writings were attributed to Origenes. Several shorthand writers, made available by a rich friend, made sure that his words were recorded. For our subject, his impressive *Hexapla* (the "Sixfold") is of particular importance. This work is a sixfold Bible in which Origenes placed alongside each other in columns the Hebrew text of the Old Testament in Hebrew letters, the Hebrew text in Greek letters, the Greek translation of Aquila, the Greek translation of Symmachus, the Septuagint, and the Greek translation of Theodotion. His great interest in careful determination of the right text of Scripture moved Origenes to devote several decades to this work. He certainly deserves our appreciation for this fact. His work, *Peri Archoon*, a four-volume dogmatic work, is especially important to the history of hermeneutics. The fourth volume deals with the different meanings of the Holy Scriptures.

Origenes distinguishes three types of Scripture meanings. In his opinion, just like man consists of body, soul, and spirit, so there is an analogy of this in the interpretation of the Bible. The literal or somatic meaning, which only offers a shell of the truth, is like the body. The psychological meaning penetrates the "soul" (psyche) of the words. But it is only the pneumatic or spiritual-allegorical meaning that makes people understand the Holy Scriptures truly and decisively. There are only some elect (the "perfect") who find it.

The Antiochian School

A response to the Alexandrian school came from theologians who are referred to as the Antiochian school. I will mention three names here: John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Theodoret of Cyrus. *Chrystostom* owes his nickname ("Golden Mouth") to his eloquence. He is considered the greatest preacher of the Greek church and the clearest representative of the Antiochian school. As bishop of Constantinople, he came into conflict with the luxuriant Empress Eudoxia and became the object of the fierce envy of the bishop of Alexandria. All this resulted in his exile to the inhospitable Asia Minor during the last three years of his life – an exile deeply regretted by the people. John died in 407. *Theodore* was bishop of Mopsuestia, a city in Cilicia. He was accused of the heresy of Nestorius, who separated the natures of Christ. As a consequence, many of Theodore's writing have not survived. He wrote commentaries to nearly every book of the Bible. Theodore died in 428. *Theodoret* was a bishop in the town Cyrus near Antioch. He was also accused of nestorianism and was forced to subordinate himself to the decrees of the Council of Chalcedon (451). He has been called the greatest exegete of Christian antiquity. He also wrote commentaries on many books of the Bible. Theodoret died around 460.

It is characteristic of the exegesis of the Antiochians that they pay much attention to the historical facts which are described in the Bible and to the literal meaning of the text. Having said this, one might conclude that their exegetical practice is closer to what we would call good and sound exegesis than what the Alexandrians did. Yet we should not draw our conclusions too hastily. First, we should realize that Origenes was deeply convinced that the entire Scriptures are the inspired Word of God. We cannot say that he did not take the text seriously – on the contrary, he devoted a major part of his life to careful determination of the original text of Scripture and to commenting on it. However, he considered the *true* and profound meaning of the Word of God to be hidden under the surface of the literal sense. This caused him to allegorize, although he did not like to use this term, in contrast to people like Philo. As for the Antiochians, even though they avoided allegorizing (*not* typology), we notice that a man like Theodore of Mopsuestia had a rather critical view of Scripture. For example, he considered the Song of Solomon to be an earthly love song about Solomon's marriage, he thought several introductions to the Psalms were not important in terms of their dating, and he believed that the Old Testament prophets knew and said nothing about the Divinity of Christ. Thus, the contrast between the exegetical principles of the Alexandrian and Antiochian schools cannot be simply summarized as pathological-spiritualizing versus sensible-scriptural.

An Introduction to the Exegetical Method of Augustine

For a long time, Aurelius Augustine (354–430) had a view of Scripture which prevented him from entering the Christian church. He believed there was too much which is offensive and coarse in the holy books of the Christians. It was the allegorizing interpretation of Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, which for Augustine freed the apparently offensive facts in the Bible from

their offensiveness. The church father Hippo Regius has given us a method of hermeneutics in his book *De doctrina christiana*. This work has a remarkable history. Augustine began to write it shortly after he became a bishop, but he put it aside for many years, to finish it four years before his death. He demands philological, historical, and critical insight from an exegete. However, it is characteristic of his character that he also, even particularly, mentions *love*. The purpose of the law and the entire Scriptures is to love God and one's neighbour. According to Augustine, those who think they understand the Holy Scriptures, but who do not understand that this insight must lead to a love to God and one's neighbour, do not understand anything about it at all! Approvingly, he quotes the seven hermeneutical rules from his contemporary Tychonius – which is remarkable, because this man belonged to the donatists, a movement which Augustine fiercely opposed. Moreover, Tychonius believes that in the first place, Scripture must be taken literally. In one of his sermons, he points out that the congregation must first believe that everything which had just been read to them actually happened exactly as it was read. In Augustine's beliefs, we find no "evaporation" of the history of redemption. Only if the sense of Scripture cannot be connected with morals or the doctrines of faith must men resort to a figurative interpretation. It must be noted that Augustine, in my opinion, sometimes too easily applies the allegorical interpretation. For example, he sees a parallel between Jacob's hands covered by goatskin (when his father blessed him) and human nature by which Christ covered Himself! Moreover, the church father considers the *regula fidei* the rule of faith (see chapter 2 of this book) very important. Exegesis can never be carried out without reckoning with the doctrines of the church.

In summary, three movements can be discerned in the Early Church regarding exegesis. The Alexandrian school emphasized

multiple Scripture meanings, the Antiochian school stressed the grammatical-historical meaning, and the western church emphasized the doctrine of the church as expressed in the Apostolic Creed, in which tradition became more and more important through the ages.

Exegesis in the Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages people for a long time believed in a *fourfold sense* of Scripture. Traces of this way of thinking can be found in works of Origenes and Augustine. A rhyme has been preserved in which this principle was laid down:

> *Littera gesta docet; quid credas allegoria;*
> *Moralis quid agas; quo tendas anagogia.*

Freely translated, it means the literal (sense) teaches the acts, the events which happened; the allegorical sense says what to believe; the moral sense says what to do; the anagogical sense says what to strive for. Often Jerusalem is mentioned in books as the most well-known example of this exegetical principle. In the literal sense, this word refers to the capital city of the holy land. The allegorical sense relates it to the church. The moral sense considers it a good conscience and one may easily guess that the anagogical sense understands it as the Celestial City. It is understandable that this approach to the Word of God in practice has led to arbitrariness. Incidentally, in the Middle Ages the interpretation of the patres, the church father, had much authority. They tried to solve the problem of conflicting interpretations by different patres with the following rule, "All possible care must be taken, that we hold fast to that faith which has been believed everywhere, always and by all." This statement, in which the rule of tradition is formulated, according to which Scripture must be explained, comes from *Commonitorium* by Vincentius. This ancient Christian author lived on Lerinum, a small island near the south

coast of France. He was a semi-Pelagian opponent of Augustine. Whereas the exegetical principles from the Middle Ages must be judged rather negatively, we can be a little more positive about the work of Nicolas of Lyra, a Frenchman who was a teacher for a long time at Sorbonne in Paris in the first half of the fourteenth century. Nicolas had been instructed in Spain by the most eminent Jewish exegetes of his time. He was exceptionally fluent in Hebrew, and this was very rare in his day. He maintained the four-fold sense of Scripture, but he was very attached to the literal-historical sense. Luther became acquainted with Lyra's commentaries during his studies in Erfurt and appreciated them. However, the poem made by a Roman Catholic, "Si Lyra non lyrasset, Lutherus non saltasset" ("If the lyre had not been plucked, Luther would not have danced") gives Nicolas of Lyra too much honour.

The Reformation: A Turnabout

Even before the Reformation was a reality, the study of the Holy Scriptures and of the languages in which they were written revived. We may think of humanists such as John Reuchlin, who wrote a Hebrew grammar, and Desiderius Erasmus, who issued the first printed edition of the New Testament in Greek in 1516. The Reformation, even though it was very different in its origin and nature than humanism, benefited from the work of these and other men.

Luther

As for Luther, it is remarkable that he devoted twenty-eight years of his thirty-two years of giving lectures to the interpretation of the Old Testament. This was different in his sermons. There the emphasis was on the New Testament. In his first period, he applied the fourfold meaning of Scripture. In one of his *Tischreden* (Tabletalk), he says that he used to allegorize everything when he was a monk. However, when he had come "ein wenig zum

Erkenntnis Christi," he concluded that all this allegorizing led to nothing. From then on, this was most important: "Nicht was Christus bedeutet, sondern wer und was er ist." Luther never systematically reflected on hermeneutical rules. On the one hand, he attached much value to the literal meaning of the text, and on the other hand he left much space for what we would definitely call allegorizing. For Luther, there was one all-controlling principle for the exegesis of Scripture. The exegete must look for Christ in the Bible. All of Scripture "only deals with Christ if you look at its inner part, even though it may look and sound differently on the outside." Christ is the centre of a circle, around which everything clusters in concentric circles. He asks Erasmus the question, "If you take away Christ from the Bible, what remains?" (W.J. Kooiman, *Luther en de Bijbel*, pages 156 and 157).

Calvin

Calvin was an excellent exegete. The extensiveness of his Bible commentaries is impressive – and its quality never suffered under it! Possibly the most striking element of his interpretation of Scripture is that he combines careful grammatical exegesis with the capacity to give concise, practical suggestions, and applications. His reserve about applying Messianic prophecies to Christ is also remarkable. Calvin preferably chooses interpretations in which such prophecies are primarily related to the time in which the prophet himself lived. His aversion to allegorizing is well-known. He clearly expresses this in his commentary to Galatians 4:22: "But as the apostle declares that these things are *allegorized*, (ἀλληγορούμενα,) Origenes, and many others along with him, have seized the occasion of torturing Scripture, in every possible manner, away from the true sense. They concluded that the literal sense is too mean and poor, and that, under the outer bark of the letter, there lurk deeper mysteries, which cannot be extracted

but by beating out allegories. And this they had no difficulty in accomplishing; for speculations which appear to be ingenious have always been preferred, and always will be preferred, by the world to solid doctrine. (…) For many centuries, no man was considered to be ingenious, who had not the skill and daring necessary for changing into a variety of curious shapes the sacred word of God. This was undoubtedly a contrivance of Satan to undermine the authority of Scripture, and to take away from the reading of it the true advantage. (…) [74] "Et pour ceste cause elle engendre plusieurs sens et de diverses sortes." "And therefore it produces many meanings, and of various kinds." I acknowledge that Scripture is a most rich and inexhaustible fountain of all wisdom; but I deny that its fertility consists in the various meanings which any man, at his pleasure, may assign. Let us know, then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and obvious meaning; and let us embrace and abide by it resolutely. Let us not only neglect as doubtful, but boldly set aside as deadly corruptions, those pretended expositions, which lead us away from the natural meaning."

Pestilential Frenzy

These words of Calvin are as plain as daylight. Yet we should realize that he is speaking about allegorizing (unpermitted spiritualizing) – not about typology! When Calvin read the Old Testament, he always looked for what he called the "sensus simplex," the simple meaning of Scripture. For him this sensus simplex was the "sensus verus," the true sense. For Calvin, typological interpretation of the Old Testament really belonged to the "true sense"! According to the Reformer, the New Testament should guide us in this. "The Gospel points with the finger to what the Law shadowed under types" (*Institutes*, II, 9, 3). In this context, Calvin liked to use words such as type, shadow, figure, sign, image, and parable. In his commentary to 1

Corinthians 10:11, he discusses the words of the Apostle Paul, who says that the events of the journey through the wilderness happened to the Israelites "that they might be types to us." The Greek uses the word *tupikoos* (think of the word "typical"). Calvin fiercely opposes the interpreters, who state that everything which happened to old Israel was *only* shadowy. According to these exegetes, all benefits and punishments of Israel only foreshadowed what would happen in the Church after the coming of Christ. Everyone will understand that the historical meaning of the text may very well be neglected in such interpretations. Calvin does not mince words here! He calls these exegetes "madmen" and speaks about "pestilential frenzy." When we speak about types of the coming Messiah, we certainly do not want to undermine the historical truth, do we? Yet Calvin does not go too far in his indignation. He fully admits that the events during the wilderness journey were examples for us and are intended to admonish us, and are set before us as a picture.

Calvin's Apprehension

For Calvin, the unity of the Old and New Testaments is important. They are about the same God, the same Christ, the same salvation, and the same covenant – only the administration and dispensation are different. Sometimes Calvin seems to be very apprehensive of a typological interpretation of the Old Testament. Remarkably, in his commentary on the history of Joseph, he writes many pages without even mentioning the name of Christ. Even when Judah comes forward as surety in Genesis 44, he does not go much further than stating that it was a special indication of Judah's love that he offered to take Benjamin's place and be a slave, rather than to cause his unhappy grey-headed father to die. However, I want to do justice to Calvin. It cannot be simply stated that he did not consider Joseph to be a type of Christ at all in these passages. In his commentary on Geneses 37, he says that

"in the person of Joseph, a lively image of Christ is presented." And when Calvin comments on the history of the old Isaac blessing Jacob, he uses a statement of the church father Ambrose without any criticism, who concludes that the odour breathed from Esau's clothes (worn by Jacob), which was pleasing to Isaac, may be an allegory: "When, in the name of Christ, we enter the presence of our Heavenly Father: we receive from him the robe of righteousness, which, by its odour, procures his favour; in short, we are thus blessed when we are put in his place." It is unthinkable that any experimental-Reformed preacher today would preach about Joseph without describing Judah as a type of Christ. In this case, we go farther than Calvin – we should honestly admit it. The question may be asked: Is this wrong? Some people say so. They reject any exegesis and preaching which goes further than the Reformers. However, is this right? Didn't Calvin emphasize other things than Augustine did long before him, and that Luther did in his own days? Undoubtedly, his anxiety about the medieval practice of exegesis made Calvin apprehensive. But are we really allowed to say that we violate the mind of the Spirit if we consider Joseph and Judah to be types of the coming Messiah? This is a rhetorical question; of course not! On the other hand, we can learn from Calvin to be sensible and respectful toward the literal meaning of Scripture.

The Breakthrough of Scriptural Criticism

Let us take a large step – I promised to mention only a few things about the history of the interpretation of Scripture. The Enlightenment greatly influenced biblical scholarship. The breakthrough of scriptural criticism is unthinkable without the breakthrough of the Enlightenment (Aufklärung). This movement, which flourished at the end of the seventeenth century and at the beginning of the eighteenth century, formed the consequence of that which had begun to germinate in

humanism. Rationalism was secularizing! Man – especially human reason and human conscience – became his own norm. A well-known description is from the philosopher Immanuël Kant (1724-1804), who defined the Enlightenment as follows: "Man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the incapacity to use one's intelligence without the guidance of another." The Enlightenment manifested itself in different areas, such as natural science (the old-world view disappears), philosophy (it is no longer "ancilla,"the servant of theology), literature, and theology. The belief in the autonomy of man and human reason deeply influenced the approach to Holy Scripture. It became the object of critical research, nothing more and nothing less than any other ancient literary document.

Phases in Scriptural Criticism

We cannot give a complete overview here of the different phases in the history of what we call scriptural criticism. Still, when I describe some phases, I would like to ask the reader to consider not only that this is a limited summary, but also that not all people and publications mentioned were equally critical of the Scripture. I will limit myself to the following three terms.

1. Literary criticism

This name refers to an approach of Scripture which "critically" (from the Greek word "krinein" which means sorting or separating) considers the Word of God as any other literary product and examines its origin, development, and growth. In the first half of the eighteenth century, two men, H.B. Witter in Germany and Jean Astruc, the personal physician of Louis XIV in France, stated that Genesis was written by two authors, on the basis of the two names which are used for God in Genesis. Eventually, this hypothesis led to the development of the "four sources theory" of the Pentateuch, a construction connected with the names of the German scholar Julius Wellhausen and Professor Abraham

Kuenen from Leiden, the Netherlands. Strikingly, they change the order of the Law and the Prophets; they believed the Pentateuch was developed after the captivity, and that it was younger than the prophets! As for the New Testament, literary-critical research focused especially on the gospels. In the nineteenth century, a "sources hypothesis" was developed, in which the priority of the gospel of Mark was assumed, which would have been used by Matthew and Luke. Many versions and hypothesis followed, and always the previous ones were considered to be outdated.

2. The religious-historical school

In the second half of the nineteenth century, a new development emerged. As a result of excavation and other research, the ancient Eastern world was opened. Friedrich Delitzsch, one of the founders of Assyriology, started to give his "Babel und Bible" lectures. People started to realize that ancient Israel did not live in isolation and that the Holy Scriptures did not develop in isolation, but that these Scriptures had an "Umwelt," a world surrounding them and which influenced their development. The Bible's authors often used images from the world in which they lived. It was believed having a realization of this would only benefit the exegete. Of course, there is an element of truth in this. The Scripture is time-related in its origin. However, it is deeply to be regretted that people within the "religious-historical school" believed that nearly *everything* from the Old and New Testaments can be explained from the heathen world surrounding Israel. Thus in the opinion of many, the Scriptures lost their character as the authoritative, unique, divinely inspired Word of God.

3. Form criticism

This term refers to the phenomenon that people began to realize that an oral tradition lies behind the literary sources that we find in the Holy Scriptures. Each of these traditions has its own origin. Sometimes it originated in the worship service, or in

the personal experience of a prophet or poet, sometimes in an historical event which was passed on, sometimes in a song. As a result, a large variety of fixed literary forms developed in the Scriptures. These forms were called "Gattungen," German for sorts or genres. Each of these "Gattungen" has its own "Sitz im Leben"; in other words, its own historical circumstances in which the particular Scripture passage developed. With respect to the Old Testament, the name Herman Gunkel can be mentioned here. As for the New Testament, well-known names are Martin Dibelius and the aforementioned Rufolf Bultmann. Again, there is an element of truth in these beliefs. Of course, each Scripture passage developed in a certain situation. But the Scriptures did not *arise* from these situations! Undoubtedly, the Holy Spirit used people in their specific situations, but this does not take away from the fact that all Scripture was given of God.

Developments in the Netherlands

We have mentioned several names, in most cases, theologians from countries other than the Netherlands. Also in the Netherlands, writings have been published which breathe a spirit critical of the Scriptures. Again I can only mention a few. There is one publication that I would like to discuss in more detail in this chapter. I am talking about the report *God met ons* (God with us). This study was offered by a board from the denomination Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland to the synod of Delft. This synod appreciated it as a "clear and confessionally sound exposition of the way in which Scripture must be understood, in order to be able to hear what the God of the Word says to us." The report appeared in 1981. It is worthy to be mentioned that the synodical board of the general synod of the Gereformeerde Kerken wrote a letter to the Gereformeerde Gemeenten (Netherlands Reformed Congregations) in 1981, in which it kindly asked them to study, test, and, if necessary, comment on

the report concerned. The synodical board of the Gereformeerde Kerken states in this letter that the publication of the study *God met ons* not only "generated a broad discussion" in their own denomination, "but also in many sister churches, in which the pros and cons came up – sometimes in vehement words." Well, this is true!

A Different View of Truth

The report *God met ons* has become especially known as the report of "the relational view of truth." The authors state that different people have a different view of truth. They think they see two extremes. On the one hand, there are people who believe truth to be that everything happened precisely and exactly as the literal text says. Man must bow before it faithfully. On the other hand, there are those who only acknowledge as truth what they personally and sensibly experience to be true. According to the report, there are *objective* and *subjective* views of the truth. The authors say they have tried to rise above this contrast. In their speaking about a *relational* view of truth, they mean to say that the truth can only be discovered by man in a faithful surrender to and in the relationship with Christ. They warn against two wrong conclusions. Firstly, they did not want to make a certain philosophical choice to determine the nature of scriptural authority. Then man would once again begin to reign over the Scriptures. Secondly, they write that they certainly do not mean a relative view of truth when speaking of a relational view of truth.

Objections

Undoubtedly, it is true that only a sincere faith, which appropriates Christ and His benefits, gives true and supernatural knowledge in the heart of man which makes him understand the Scriptures and the truth. Without that, man remains like a blind man who speaks about colours. However, the question is whether *this* is the intent of the report. The main question which arises when reading

the plea for a relational view of truth is this: Are we still allowed to say that the Scriptures lying before us are absolutely reliable – also historically! – and absolutely authoritative? Or does Scripture only *become true* when we have a "relationship" with Christ? The report leads to more and more questions. For example, when we read the appreciative words addressed to historical-critical Scripture research – which rendered a "treasure of facts" which "honestly show" that the Bible's authors "dealt with history in an Eastern manner." Or when the report writes that Reformed interpreters of Scripture "have found it difficult to keep their balance when confronted with scholarly Scripture criticism" and have perhaps too easily leaned against an "almost mechanic inspiration doctrine." Or when we read that the authors were happy about the fact that the synod of Amsterdam (1967) revoked the decrees of the synod of Assen (1926) – in which the beliefs of Dr. J. G. Geelkerken about Geneses 3 were rejected. According to the authors of *God met ons*, it cannot be maintained that the Old Testament is completely free of "biased reporting." To give one example, the history of the birth of Moab and Ammon would "certainly be taken too seriously if we actually read it as *history*." It is also revealing how the report relates Scripture to *life*. It states that the acknowledgement of the authority of God's Word does not mean that we can simply apply the ethical or ceremonial prescriptions of the Bible in our day. It is considered "evident that various prescriptions were simply in harmony with the customs and rules which applied throughout the Near East in those days." Moreover, they state that the Bible does not have the same authority regarding our ethics as it does regarding the history of redemption. Although it is certainly a guideline in the area of ethics, we should not think that this is possible "by arbitrarily quoting texts that suit our purpose." Such sayings fill us with deep anxiety about the course these people intend to follow. When the report comes to mention concrete examples of this, the subjects of

divorce and the position of the woman are discussed, among other things. In the first case, the "insufferable practice" of a broken marriage appears to lead to a stretching of the biblical norm. In the second case, it is insinuated that Paul was not "entirely sure" whether his appeal to the Old Testament was a decisive argument. We discussed the report *God met ons* in more detail, because this brochure is an example of a broadly accepted view on the Scriptures in which the old standpoint of Reformed theology is changed for an approach which shows much sympathy for modern man. Modern man is so much impressed by the "achievements" of science that he "cannot do much" with the old approach of the Holy Scriptures. In the volume *Een uitgemaakte zaak* (A Settled Matter), in a chapter titled *Er staat geschreven (There is written),* J. Kamphuis wrote an objection to this report. He observed the influence of the philosopher C. A. van Peursen, from the Dutch city of Leiden, who he considers to be partly responsible for the concept of the relational view of truth which is so much present in the report. Kamphuis remarks that this is "a new belief about truth and revelation, which is in fact just as subjective as ancient gnosticism and sixteenth-century Anabaptism" (op cit, page 172).

A Turnabout in Hermeneutics

We have already observed that a different view on the *authority* of the Bible has profound consequences on our *reading and understanding* of the Bible. In other words, a shifting view on scriptural authority causes a shifted understanding of hermeneutics. Modern hermeneutics has a very different character from classical hermeneutics. For centuries, hermeneutics was the name of the theological consideration of the rules that are used for the interpretation of the Scriptures. The focus was always on the *text* and its meaning. In modern hermeneutics, the focus has shifted to the *reader* and the world in which he lives. It is stated

that there is a giant gap between the text and the world in which modern man lives. People try to bridge the gap by interpreting the Scriptures in such a way as to make sure that it is still relevant for the modern reader. Modern hermeneutics changes colours like a chameleon, depending on the exegete's subjective perspective. The liberation theologian has his own hermeneutics, and so does the feminist exegete. In fact, it is the reader who gives "meaning" to the text. One of the modern liberation theologians spoke of the task of *eisegesis* instead of exegesis. Everyone simply reads in the Scriptures what he likes. This has little to do with hermeneutics and exegesis as I have described them.

Do we Have an Answer?

The question for us is whether we have an answer from the Reformed confessions to all these developments and hypotheses. Many people say there is no such answer. They think it must be admitted that the traditional, dogmatically established beliefs about the authority of the Scriptures are superseded by the scholarly established facts and are no longer relevant to modern man. Or, as C. J. den Heyer said, speaking about historical-critical study of the Holy Scriptures, "Many – theologians and non-theologians – have experienced this scholarly approach of the Bible as a liberation of the Christian faith from the galling bonds of an age-old, ecclesiastical, and dogmatic tradition which in no way could connect with natural-scientific views which have found acceptance in large sections of the population since the Enlightenment" (M. J. Mulder and C. J. den Heyer, *Bijbels Handboek,* Volume 3, pages 584, 585). Often the work of Scripture-critical scholars is called "courageous" or "honest" among these groups. For example, these designations have been given to the writing *Klare Wijn* (Clear Wine) (1967), to *De betrouwbaarheid van de evangeliën* (The Reliability of the Gospels) (1967) by Tj. Baarda, and also to the publication *God met ons* (1981) which

we have discussed. I do not want to put all these publications on one line, but each of them more or less questions the classical-Reformed view on the authority of the Scriptures. Many indeed think this is courageous. However, it may be more courageous to make a plea for the authority of the inspired Word of God. The opinion stated by Den Heyer exists among many people, who more or less sympathize with the church. They call themselves Christians, but they think the authentic Reformed view on the authority of Scripture is so outdated that they refuse to obey them, as mature and (post)modern men. I fundamentally and wholeheartedly disagree with this way of thinking. A thorough and substantiated refutation of the scriptural-critical view from Reformed theologians is sorely needed – but it would also fill a library. Attempts have been made to write such refutations. In the Netherlands, we may think of the publication of M. J. Paul, *Het Archimedisch Punt van de Pentateuchkritiek* (The Archimedian Point of Pentateuch Criticism) (1988) and concerning the New Testament, we may think of the labour of J. van Bruggen.

I will conclude this chapter with some advice and statements.

1. Above all, we should realize that everything has a *spiritual* background. We should reckon with the power of the Prince of Darkness. He has always tried to bring the Word of the living God into discredit, ever since the first question he asked man in Paradise. The tricks used by the evil one to harm God's Word are many and various. Sometimes he makes people burn Scripture, and sometimes he causes it to be forbidden to be read by the church. Sometimes he places its interpretation under the lid of human ingenuity. Sometimes he make people forget the Word of God and he brings ignorance into the church. But most of the arrows he has placed in his bow during the last centuries were taken from the quiver of scriptural criticism.

2. Let us also realize that objective scholarship is *fiction*. Every scholar, including every theologian and every exegete, has his presumptions and principles. This is also true for him, who believes he is only guided by his good sense and who cherishes the illusion that he can only be convinced by facts. To give one example, it has often been said that famous exegetes were often guided by the forms of evolutionist thinking. This thinking, which asserted itself strongly in natural science, has also put interpreters of Scripture upon the wrong track. Israel's religion was considered a gradual and age-long development from a primitive nomad religion to the strict monotheism of the prophets.

3. It is also advisable not to be too much impressed by the argument that the acknowledgment of the absolute authority of Scripture is *not scholarly*, or at least that it does not agree with the facts proved by "research." It is a widespread and deeply rooted misunderstanding that the difference between religion and science is this, that religion is based on presumptions and that science is based on facts. Every modest scholar who is aware of his limits will acknowledge that his principles are often hypothetical. It is good to realize this. It is sometimes thought too easily that "scholars have proved it irrefutably" and that these "facts" do not agree with the doctrine of the authority of Holy Scripture. For example, one of the cornerstones of the "sources theory" of Kuenen and Wellhausen is the use of different names of God. The notion that one author cannot use different names of God in one document and that the creation is described two times in the first chapters of Genesis as being an indication of different authors is nothing but a hypothesis. The building erected on this foundation may be rational and well-constructed; however it remains a building on an unstable foundation.

4. Let us especially give no place to the suggestion that *it is no use* telling miraculous stories to man in the twenty-first century,

or to present him with an "outdated view of the world." Those who are seized in their hearts by the Word of the living God, bow before this Word – before the entire Word. He will certainly become aware of the terrible rebellion that lives in his heart against the message of Scripture, but he will also become aware of the fact that this annoyance is not only and not even especially directed against the biblical view of the world. This annoyance is especially directed against the central message of the Scriptures, the message of guilt and grace, of Adam and Christ. And Christ, who was crucified, will always be a stumblingblock to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, but to them which are called He will forever be the Power of God and the Wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:23-24).

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The bibliography below is a summary. Works which have been used in this book are listed. Other literature may be more helpful to the interested reader. Please note that not all literature mentioned below has been written from the Reformed perspective regarding the authority of the Scriptures as described in chapter 1.

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Chapter 4

A bibliography to this chapter is less relevant. I will only mention several Bible commentaries. In chapter 3, I have already mentioned the fact that the answer to the question of what a good commentary is depends on the user's education, the purpose to which the commentary will be used, and the question of what the user requires from a commentary. Here follows an arbitrary selection:

John Calvin, *Commentary on the Bible*.

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Karl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*.

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