

# EVANGEL

*The Good News of Jesus Christ*



# Great is

**In this issue of *Evangel*, we continue our study in the book of Numbers and have a closer look at chapter 16:41-50. We have been writing about the need for God's people to live by faith. God's people need to trust the Lord their God. It is because they trust in God that they go to Him for help and obey his will with joy. But we saw last time that Israel did not trust the Lord and they did not obey his will with joy. In fact they opposed the Lord God. Korah, Dathan, Abiram and 250 important men of the community rebelled against Moses and Aaron whom the Lord had appointed to lead Israel.**

By opposing Moses and Aaron they were opposing the Lord God. They were upset with the Lord because there was really no future for them for the Lord had said that they would remain in the wilderness until all those over the age of 20 had died and then the new generation would be allowed to enter the promised land. Instead of directing their anger against the Lord, they directed it against Moses and Aaron, the Lord's servants, blaming them for this situation. The attitude of these men made the Lord angry, for they had refused to trust the Lord to give them the land of Canaan. If they had lived by faith, they would have repented and asked, "Lord forgive us our wrong doing; forgive us for our unbelief."

Instead they hardened their heart against the Lord, so that the Lord in his anger punished these rebellious people. The ground under

the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram split open and swallowed them alive and fire flashed forth from the Lord and destroyed the 250 men. The Lord revealed his great displeasure. The people of Israel experienced the great wrath of God. It was so great that they fled as fast as they could go, fearing for their own lives. They cried out, "The earth is going to swallow us too!"

## Shifting the blame

The Lord in his mercy did not destroy the whole nation, he only punished the leaders of the rebellion. You would think that this would cause the people to fall on their knees and plead for the mercy of their God, confessing their wrongdoing. That is not what happened. The very next day the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron and accused them saying, "You have killed the LORD's people." They just experienced the anger and wrath of God, but they blame Moses and Aaron for what happened. They are accused of killing God's people, when it was clearly the Lord who punished his people.

Here you have another example of blame shifting. They refuse to take the blame themselves. True faith acknowledges, "Lord I have sinned against you, you only and therefore I deserve your wrath and anger." Yet, true faith does not only accept responsibility, it also pleads for the mercy of the Lord. "Lord, I have sinned, forgive me my wrong doing." But that humble attitude was not present in Israel at this time. They refuse to take responsibility for their situation.

## The anger of God

The people came to Moses and Aaron and met them in front of the Tabernacle. Suddenly the cloud that

constantly led the people through the wilderness covered the tabernacle and the glory of the LORD appeared. The glory of the LORD shone out of the cloud so that the people could see that the Lord was there. And the Lord said to Moses, "Get away from this people so I can put an end to them at once." So great was God's anger that he intended to destroy the people immediately.

Moses and Aaron fell on their faces, but this time Moses is silent, he does not say anything to the Lord, for what can he say to save the people? On many occasions he had pleaded with the Lord to save the people and the Lord listened. But now there is nothing else that Moses can say to save the people.

Immediately a plague broke out among the people so that many began to die. It began to spread quickly and threatened to destroy the whole nation. Although God has been slow to anger, finally his patience came to an end with this rebellious and stubborn people. And so what could possibly turn away the wrath of God? What would cause the Lord to again show mercy to Israel? There is nothing more that Moses could say to save the people. But Moses does not give up. He knows that the Lord is a merciful God. And therefore he commands Aaron to take a censer and put incense in it, along with fire from the altar and hurry to the people to make atonement for them.

## The smoke of the incense

In order to understand what Moses is doing here, we need to understand what the censer was normally used for. Once a year Israel celebrated the day of Atonement. On that day a goat was sacrificed for the sins of the people and the High Priest would take the blood of the goat and enter into the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle where there

# God's mercy



was the ark. This was a special room that no one was allowed to enter except the High Priest once a year. This is where the Lord lived among the people, but because the Lord is holy no one is able to see the Lord and live. On that day the High priest would go into that room and sprinkle the blood of the goat on the mercy seat on the ark as an atonement for the sins of Israel. On this day, Israel celebrated the fact that the Lord took away all their sins.

But in order for the High Priest to enter into this room, he had to carry the censer with the burning incense ahead of him. Clouds of incense would rise from the censer to hide the glory of God from the High Priest, so that he would not die. So great is God's glory that the cloud of incense was needed to protect the high priest from God's holiness. Perhaps you can begin to see what Moses is doing. He tells Aaron to take this censer and burn incense in it. He hurries with this censer billowing with the smoke of incense into the crowd and he stands between those who are dead and those who are still living. And immediately, the plague stopped. Fourteen thousand, seven hundred people lost their lives. The smoke of incense covered the people and protected them from the wrath and

anger of God. As the smoke protected the High Priest from the holiness of God when he entered the Most Holy Place, so the smoke of incense covered the people and hid the sins of Israel from the view of God.

## The blood of Jesus Christ

We need to understand that it is not the smoke of the incense itself that protects the people. You need to understand that Aaron as the High Priest represents a much greater High Priest who is still to come, Jesus Christ. And so we can say that Jesus Christ, represented by Aaron the High Priest, stood between those who were still living and the Lord God. He is the mediator who stands between God and man in order to turn away the wrath and anger of God because of our sins.

You see, God's wrath is turned away because Jesus Christ covered the people with his blood that was shed as a payment for all our sins. God is merciful to Israel, for his Son Jesus Christ says, "I have paid for them with my shed blood." With his blood he covers the sin and rebellion of Israel, so that God's wrath is stilled and his mercy overshadows the people. This is a people who deserve to die, but who now

experience the wonderful mercy and love of God.

My dear friends, today we have a great Saviour, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross as the great High Priest, to give his life as payment for the sins of his people. You know, we all deserve the wrath of God because of our rebellion. As Christians we do not claim that we are better than others, that we are more deserving of God's love. Christians are people who know their unworthiness, who confess, "I am no better than the worst criminal on the earth." We all deserve the wrath of God that was shown to Israel in the days of Moses.

But the astounding message of the gospel is that God is merciful in Jesus Christ. And that is why the criminal, the murderer who was hanged beside Jesus Christ could call out to the Lord for his mercy and Jesus could respond, "Today you will be with me in paradise." He did not do anything to deserve forgiveness and life. He only pleaded on the mercy of God and Jesus Christ promised, "I will cover your sins and turn away the wrath of God."

Your life does not depend on how good you are and on all the charitable things you have done. You know, a man may give a fortune to excellent causes and yet be under the wrath of God, for his motivation may be to make himself look good rather than to serve his God. Our life is not about making ourselves look good, but it is about serving the Lord God who is merciful in Jesus Christ. And everyone who calls on the Name of Jesus, and who pleads for the mercy of God, will be forgiven. Therefore I encourage you my friends, to live by faith. Trust in the mercy of God, for He is the source of your eternal joy.

Matt Van Luik

# Poison: Do not

**If I were to ask you how you would define the word poison, what definition would you give? According to one medical handbook, poison is any substance that is swallowed, breathed in, injected or absorbed by the body and that interferes with the body's normal functioning. Some obvious examples of poisons that were listed are pesticides, animal poisons, cleaning and other household chemicals bearing printed warnings.**

Being poisoned is not a very pleasant experience. Swallowing poison or breathing it in can make you very sick. Why it can even make you die. That is why we as adults do our best not to make this mistake and we teach our children not to do so either. We keep bottles of poisonous substances out of their reach. And should they accidentally take some anyway, we know what to do. We make them drink water or milk. We call the local poison control center. We may have to induce vomiting. We monitor the vital signs and may have to call an ambulance.

However, how well do you do your best to stay out of reach of the poison called sin. A poison that also interferes with your normal functioning and is much more dangerous than breathing in pesticides, swallowing animal poison or absorbing household chemicals. For the poison of sin can not only kill the body, it can also kill the soul. And so the question presses, "How well do you do your best to stay out of reach of this poison? Do you label it for what it is: POISON? Do you do your best not to inhale or swallow it? Do you keep it out of reach of your children? And should you or your children

(accidentally) poison yourself, do you know what to do?"

## The poison of sin at work

That these questions are important can be clear from what we read in the Bible. On many pages of this great book, you will read about the poisonous effects of sin as well as what the remedy for this poison is. I would like to show this to you from one particular incident which we find recorded in the fourth book of the Bible called Numbers. In chapter 21 of this book, you will read about the people of Israel traveling through the desert. For almost 40 years, they had been in this desert. During this time, a whole generation had died off and now a new generation was about to enter into the land of Canaan (= present day Israel). One of the quickest ways to enter this land would be to take the main highway that went through a country called Edom. However, God did not want them to go through this land for it might provoke the inhabitants to war. And so, He told them to go around it. The people of Israel, however, had a hard time accepting this. They became very impatient and so they spoke against God and Moses and asked, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is not bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!"

## A poisonous well within us

Why did the Israelites become so impatient and, as a result, blaspheme God, reject Moses and spurn God's goodness in giving them the food that He had? Well, the Bible tells us that you and I are born with a sinful nature. A sinful nature that has been describes as an hereditary evil that infects us in our mother's womb, a root that produces in us all sorts of sin, a well from which streams forth

like water all sorts of sin. This means that you and I do not even have to swallow or inhale the poison of sin before we become poisoned. We are already poisoned from the moment of our conception and birth! And all the poison of sin we swallow and inhale after that only increase the poison that is already within us!

Looking at what happened in that desert in that light shows us why the Israelites became so impatient. The poison of sin that was already within them made them react in a very impatient, rebellious and unthankful way. And as such, their lives became even more poisonous and toxic than they were before.

## Poison makes you dysfunctional

You will recall that definition of poison at the beginning of this article. It stated that poison was something that interferes with the body's normal functioning. In this incident in the desert, do you see how the poison of sin interfered with the Israelite's normal functioning? Is a person designed to be impatient? Does he normally rebel? Is it normal to be unthankful? Why, of course, not! All these toxins of sin interfere with how you and I are supposed to normally function.

Perhaps, also you have experienced that. Perhaps, you are married and you regularly get into a verbal fight with your spouse. What does that do to your relationship? I'm sure you will agree it doesn't do it any good. It makes it a far cry from what it once used to be when you were still madly in love with your spouse; when you treated her with love and compassion and were willing to overlook a fault and forgive a wrong. That's the way a marriage should be. Yet, because of the poison of sin we are born with make us react in a poisonous, toxic way to disappointments and wrongs that

# inhale or swallow!



happen to us, we undermine the well-being and beauty of our own marriage. Perhaps, you are living a promiscuous life. As a result, you have contracted various sexually transmitted diseases over the years. Why do you think that happened? That happened because we were not designed to be promiscuous. It is a toxic lifestyle that interferes with our normal functioning. When we contract all sorts of diseases as a result of this, then it is simply God showing us that we have inhaled and swallowed a poisonous substance called sin. It really is not much different than swallowing some rat poison or household chemical!

## The antidote to the poison of sin

But let's get back to the Israelites in the desert. When God sees how toxic the people react to the disappointment of having to take a detour into the land of Canaan, He clearly shows how displeased He is. The narrative tells us that He sent venomous snakes that bit the people so that many of them died. Those who didn't, get on their knees and confess their sin and ask Moses to pray that God would take the

snakes away from them. Which Moses did. And then we read that God tells Moses to make a bronze snake and put it up on a pole so that anyone who was bitten could look at it and live. Which also happens. All those who looked up at the bronze snake, lived.

Remember what we said at the beginning of this article about what we have to do when our children accidentally take in poison in one way or another. We have them drink water or milk. We call the local poison control center. We may have to induce vomiting. We monitor the vital signs and may have to call an ambulance.

Well, it's much the same when we have to deal with the poison of sin in our lives. In the case of those Israelites in that desert, they had to look up at a snake in faith. They had to believe the God who had punished them for their toxic behaviour was also the One who was willing and able to rescue them from the effects of their poisonous behaviour. Today, we do not have to look up at a snake, but we look up at the Lord Jesus Christ. In the fourth book of the New Testament of the Bible, you can read about this. There we read, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man (= Jesus)

must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life" (John 3:14, 15).

## The antidote at work

You see, the beautiful thing is, when you embrace the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour of our sin, then something amazing happens in your life. You will notice that that poisonous well you and I are born with, slowly but surely begins to become purified. For when Jesus Christ died on the cross, He not only paid the penalty of sin which is death. He also robbed sin of its controlling power. All those who believe in Him, will notice that. They will notice that if they used to become impatient very quickly, that now that they believe, they increasingly become more patient. Those who used to be very unthankful people, will find that God gives them a spirit of thankfulness not only for the big things in life, but also the small. Those who used to be sexually promiscuous, find that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ enables them to resist sexual temptation much better than they ever used to. And even when they fall into sin again, they immediately go to their Saviour for forgiveness and renewed strength.

If you do not yet personally know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord, then I would urge you not to wait any longer. You have a toxic well within you that desperately needs to be cleansed and purified with the cross of Jesus Christ. Don't play with danger. Poison is dangerous. It makes you sick and can even kill you. Sin does the same. It makes you sick and in the end will kill you. Look up at Jesus Christ in faith and receive Him as your personal Saviour today. For your own health and that of your children.

Dick Moes

# God is in control

## Bible Story Based on Genesis 28

It is still a very long way to the place of his grandfather's house. Jacob will have to travel many days through the hot sun to get there. He does not look forward to the long trip. Yet he has no choice anymore. The words of his angry brother Esau still send shivers up and down his spine. "When Father is dead, I will kill my brother Jacob." It was sheer fear for his life that sends Jacob away from his father's tents. He had plotted to come out the winner. Instead he was forced to flee like the loser.

Things went well at first.

Esau and Jacob were the twin sons of Isaac and Rebecca. The older son Esau was entitled to the bigger share of the inheritance, which included a special blessing from the Lord. However, from the time they were little boys Jacob had set his heart on his brother's share. As the boys grew older, Jacob became the more determined that the bigger share was going to be for him, no matter how.

Surprisingly, Jacob's greedy attitude was not dealt with by his parents. Isaac and Rebecca were God-fearing people. They should have reminded their son of the Lord's faithfulness. They should have taught their jealous son that the Lord is in control. God himself gives each person his share. But Isaac did not seem to notice Jacob's greed. And without realizing it Rebecca even fostered her son's selfishness and envy.

Rebecca had prayed to the Lord for her children already before they were born. Answering her prayer the Lord told Rebecca two things: she would give birth to two boys, and the older child would serve the younger. At first Rebecca was troubled by these words. But before long she became glad about them. Because she started to love Jacob much more than Esau, she desperately wanted Jacob to be first. It was Rebecca's impatience which encouraged Jacob's impatience. Instead of teaching him to wait for God's time, she took matters into her own hands.

Together mother and son tricked the old Isaac into giving his younger son the blessing which belonged to the firstborn. When Esau found out, he was rightfully furious. But in his rage he made the same mistake as his mother and brother: he took matters in his own hands without trusting the Lord's control. He did not leave vengeance up to the Lord, but he shouted those terrible words, "When Father is dead, I will kill my brother Jacob!"

Rebecca understood: Jacob must leave now! Again she used trickery to get her way. She went to Isaac, her husband. "Isaac, you have seen how Esau took women who do not love God. You do not want Jacob to do the same. Why don't we send him to my father's house? There he can choose one of the daughters of my brother as wife."

Again Isaac let himself be fooled. He even called Jacob to give him his blessing. "May the Lord be with you. May he make you into a great nation. And may you one day come back to take possession of this land where we now live as strangers."

Now Jacob is on his way to his grandfather's house. His



joy over the blessing has turned into fear for the curse. He plods along, not knowing what the next day will bring. And really, he still has never learned to trust the Lord. He is so used to relying on his own wit, that he hardly knows the peace that comes from relying on the Lord.

At the end of the first day he is very tired. Jacob looks around for a safe place to sleep. Much shelter he does not find. He must be content with a stone for a pillow.

As he drifts off into a deep sleep, a very vivid dream appears on the screen of his mind. Right beside him he suddenly sees a very high ladder, which reaches all the way into heaven. On it, oh wonder, are angels, countless angels! They tirelessly climb up and down the ladder. And look! At the top of the ladder he can clearly see the Lord! The Lord found him. He cannot hide from the Lord. Then the Lord knows about his tricks too. Will the Lord condemn him? But the angels are still going up and down. They are completely ready to look after Jacob.

Listen. The Lord speaks. "I am the God of your fathers. The land which you are leaving now will one day be yours. You will have very many children and grandchildren. You will become a very large nation, which will be a blessing for all the other nations of the world. I will keep you wherever you will go. And I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you, and all my promises to you will come true!"

Jacob wakes up. Surely, this dream was a true word from his Lord. It makes him afraid to think that he has seen and heard Almighty God. Though he knows now that God is in control, he still has a hard time giving up his own control. But he wants to accept the Lord's words. As a token he takes the stone on which he slept. He puts it up straight, for a memorial to this special dream. He pours his oil over the stone, bringing honour to the Protector of his life. With fear and awe he calls the name of the place Bethel: House of God.

It will take Jacob many more years to totally unlearn his trickeries. But as he grows older he grows in understanding that the Lord loves him in spite of all his plotting. To make it even more glorious, the Lord uses Jacob's lies and tricks to bring about his plan for saving his people. Nothing can interfere with God's saving love for his people.

Jane

# Activity Page

## Angels

In the Bible Story on page 6 of this magazine you can read the story of Jacob. Jacob had to make a long, dangerous journey. But Jacob did not have to travel alone. God's angels would travel with him to protect and guide him.

Normally we cannot see angels. But they still help God's people. Many texts in the Bible tell us

how angels have helped the children of the Lord. Learn about the angels by answering the following questions. The answers can be found in the texts below. The questions are in the same order as the texts. All the answers consist of just one word. Take the first letter of these words, and you will find a word we can use to say that the Lord protects and guides his people.



### Questions

1. After we cried to the LORD, He sent an angel who \_\_\_\_\_ us out of Egypt.
2. The LORD is sending his angel to \_\_\_\_\_ his people safely to the land.
3. The angel who touched him, said, Get up and \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The king praised God for sending his angel to \_\_\_\_\_ his servants.
5. God sent his angel to \_\_\_\_\_ the lion's mouth.

### The word is \_\_\_\_\_ Texts

1. "But we cried out to the LORD, He heard us and sent an angel who brought us out of Egypt." Numbers 20:16
2. "See, I am sending my angel before you to lead you safely to the land I have prepared for you." Exodus 23:20
3. "As he was sleeping, an angel touched him and told him, Get up and eat." 1 Kings 19:5
4. "Then king Nebuchadnezzar said, Praise to God! He sent his angel to save his servants who trusted in Him." Daniel 3:28
5. "My God sent his angel to shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me." Daniel 6:22



**Dawn**

# Banging one's head against a wall

*You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this.*

*1 Samuel 23:17*

Why does a person bang his head against a wall? To break it down? No. Because it feels good? Not really. It hurts his head!

A person bangs his head against the wall when he is frustrated, and there is nothing left for him to do than to hurt himself. He just wants to do it.

Why is King Saul chasing the fugitive David?

To catch him? To put him in prison? To kill him? To prevent him from becoming the next king in Israel?

Yes . . . but deep down, Saul knows that this is not really why he is chasing David. At least, that is what Saul's son Jonathan says. Jonathan says that even his father Saul knows that David will become king over Israel. According to Jonathan, Saul knows that there is nothing he can do to prevent it from happening.

So why is Saul chasing David?

It is sheer lunacy. Madness. He will never catch him or kill him. Saul knows that nothing he does will prevent David from becoming the next king in Israel.

So why is he chasing David?

Saul is like a person who is so frustrated that all he can do it bang his head against a wall.

You cannot fight against God and win. God planned for David to be the next king. God had already had his prophet Samuel anoint David to be king. You cannot oppose God. Saul knows that. Satan also knows that. Just as Saul tried to prevent

David from becoming king (but in the end, he failed – you can read about that in the first chapters of 2 Samuel) so the Jewish leaders tried to prevent Jesus from becoming king over them. They arrested Jesus, convicted Him on false charges and had Him crucified. But you cannot fight against God and win. Jesus rose from the dead and became king over heaven and earth.

The world now tries to do to the church what Saul tried to do to David, and what the people did to Jesus. The book of Revelation (the last book in the Bible) tells us that the history of the world is a history of conflict between the unbelieving world and the church. Satan uses unbelievers in the world in an effort to destroy and disperse the church.

But deep down, even the world knows that they cannot succeed. The church belongs to God. He will make

her survive and thrive, and in the end, she will rule heaven and earth with her Lord Jesus Christ.

Jonathan was reasonable. He saw that his good friend David would be king instead of himself. So he made a covenant with David. David swore to Jonathan that when he became king, he would make Jonathan second in command. Jonathan realized that it was better to submit to David and enjoy prestige under his throne, than to oppose him.

So be reasonable. Jesus is king already, and all those who live in covenant under his dominion will reign with Him over heaven and earth. Enter into that covenant. Accept the lordship of Jesus Christ, and join his people. Anything else is like banging your head against a wall.

Paul Aasman

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