

OUR RESOURCES IN THE HOLY SPIRIT (Romans 8)

—A. E. Bouter

INTRODUCTION

The experiences described in Romans 7:7-25 show us clearly that within ourselves there are no resources whatsoever to help us to be acceptable to God or to live acceptably to Him. The flesh, even the "well-disposed, religious" flesh cannot produce any good for God; even our best intentions (that is, our desires to accomplish something from within) are not acceptable to God. All our expectations to please God, so cherished by the flesh, lead only to disappointment and failure. The flesh, our own *I*, the old nature, is disqualified from the start even when it has put on its "Sunday best." All this labouring, expecting, hoping is nothing but unbelief, a denial of what God has expressed about us through the substitutional and redemptive sufferings of Christ.

Before embarking on our actual subject, it may be good to make a few remarks about the chapters that precede Romans 8. In the epistle to the Romans, we are seen as people who, while living on earth, are responsible before God; this contrasts with the epistle to the Ephesians, which pictures us as (morally) dead and presents God's work in sovereign grace in connection with this condition.

(1). It is true of all men that, seen in the first Adam, they have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (3:23). *They are under judgment* (3:19).

(2). But they are, so the writer adds, "justified freely by His grace"; as seen by God in Christ. It is an indescribable privilege; and what a price God had to pay for it! *Showing forth of righteousness*.

(3). Romans 4 shows that faith is needed on our part to make this justification ours, so that we may then see ourselves to be in the favour of God: "Therefore having been justified on the principle of faith, we have peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:1). *Free from guilt*.

(4). Not just the problem of our sins and trespasses (4:25 — the fruits) has been solved to the glory of God, but also that of our condition; the source from which all that evil proceeded (the tree) is taken care of in a divine manner, and God's righteousness is glorified thereby. Thus we are placed under a *New Head* (Christ, instead of Adam), as a *New Race*, under a *New Master*, who opens a *New World* (eternal life) for us. *Freed from death*. The following chapters draw the conclusions that flow from this, each seen from a different perspective.

(5). Having been brought under a new Master on this earth by baptism, we should walk in newness of life (6:4). Instead of as bondmen serving sin (the old master) with (the members of) our body, we live to God to bear fruit to Him, as bondmen to righteousness. Set apart in this world by God, we may now, after having been freed from sin, serve Him as His bondmen, for the "wages" of eternal life. *Freed from sin*, the old master and oppressor.

(6). Besides having become God's bondmen, we have also been brought into a relationship of *love*. We now belong to "another man," to Him "who has been raised up from among [the] dead" (7:4). *Clear from the law* (7:6).

Romans 7

However, love is jealous. How could Christ bear it if we continued to put our members at the disposal of our old master? But it goes even deeper than that: how could He accept a hidden affection in us for this old master? Romans 7 provides also the solution for this question. As long as we try to serve God and to be acceptable to the Lord in our own strength, with our best intentions, we practically deny our new link with the resurrected Lord Jesus!

When Romans 6:3,6,9 makes an appeal to our *faith*, *love* begins to "reckon" (6:11) — that is the relationship in which we are seen in Romans 7 —, the *Holy Spirit* giving us power to serve God as bondmen (for more details see Rom. 8).

In other words: the experiences Paul describes in Romans 7:13-24 demonstrate a lack of faith, love, and hope (hope too, for the man described there still hopes for good from the flesh), instead of these there is a searching for resources within oneself, or in the law, the old master.

What is described here, is divine instruction given to form a new mind within us, a new spirit as it were, that teaches us to put our trust entirely upon God and to depend upon Him, to find all resources in Him. These lessons are hard to learn; often bitter experiences are required to bring us to value and use the resources that God has put at our disposal.

We find Christ presented here as the true Boaz, who puts all that He has done (Rom. 8:1-4) and all that He is today as our risen Lord (7:4) at our disposal, so that we might make use of His resources as long as He leaves us here on earth.

The Root of Evil Within Us

Romans 7 looks in more detail at the root of the evil within us. In the history of our soul's relationship with God, this lesson follows upon the various lessons of Romans 3-6. So it was with the people of Israel, whose experiences God has recorded for us (1 Cor. 10:6,11).

- (a). First of all, the blood of the Paschal Lamb provides the basis (for faith) for deliverance from the guilt of sin.
- (b). Then the death of Christ (in the type of the Red Sea) is the way to deliver us from the old master.
- (c). But only much later we learn that "the serpent" ever finds something within us that he can get hold of, and that we ourselves are apt to use our own strength to lay hold of the things God has given us.

Then, after realizing that we are totally unsuited to do even the least for God, we give up and, again by faith, our eye is directed to CHRIST: "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Here is a deliverance that is inward, and which also links us to the resources that can be found in Christ. The Holy Spirit especially uses these resources to bring us ultimately to the song of praise that speaks of Christian deliverance, so that we may respond to God the Father as sons of God.

Thus we see how God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are occupied to do a work *within* us after we have been placed on the basis that He has found in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 8 shows us that it is God's special counsel to make us conformed to the image of His Son. In this connection we see how far reaching the liberty God has wrought goes, what a blessed result it will have for the entire creation (vv. 21 & 23). *Deliverance of the open presence of sin.* (Note: I think that Jn. 1:29 goes further yet, there we see that the Lord Jesus even removes sin from the world — kosmos —, that is, sin as the source, as evil power, will be removed entirely).

SEVEN RESOURCES

Now let us briefly review the seven *resources* that have been put at the disposal of such redeemed and saved sinners. These resources are all found in and become effective through the Person and work of the Holy Spirit who lives within us while we are left on earth. God closes the exposition of the way of salvation with a presentation of these resources; He takes us along from the deepest depths and He leads us already to the highest heights though we are still on earth.

Once again there is the distinction with the epistle to the Ephesians where we find God's counsel from before the foundation of the world, His eternal purpose, and where our position in Christ is presented as being *in the heavenlies*.

While speaking of our resources in the Holy Spirit it is good to realize that we will ever find a contrast with the resources that we used formerly.

1. A New Law

Along with his being placed on earth in a new position before God, "in Christ Jesus," a new law is introduced into the life of the Christian. This new law, this new principle, is called: "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (8:2). The same verse says that this new principle "has set me free from the law of sin and of death." Here is, therefore, a new experience described which contrasts with that of Romans 6 and 7! In this short study we cannot enter into all the details, but let us meditate on each word and let it have its effect on us under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This new law of the Spirit of life lifts us up above the power of sin and death (just as a bird has the ability in itself to conquer the law of gravity). It brings us into, and keeps us in a living relationship with Christ in glory while we journey through this world (the wilderness).

2. A New Life

But there is not only a new principle or law introduced into the life of the Christian, but also a new life: "The Spirit [is] life on account of righteousness" (v. 10). The life-giving power of this new life is extremely great, as verse 11 proves to us. Well, just as the Spirit will act in a life-giving power to our mortal bodies to quicken them, so this new life works even *now in us*. It will be clear that the purpose of this particular resource is to help us walk the way through the wilderness. How much do we need this life in a land of death, drought, dearth and demons!

"The mind of the Spirit [is] life and peace" (v. 6). Here we find the practical result of this active life within us. What He thinks is in agreement with God (for He is the Spirit of God). No longer will there be warfare, as in Romans 7, but peace. And here it is not merely peace as far as our position before God is concerned (that was presented in Rom. 5:1), but a practical peace, connected with our path here below.

He is also the Spirit of *Christ*, which wants to bring us, while we are in this world, into practical conformity with Christ, the anointed One, and maintain us in that condition. Could He accept anything of the flesh? No, He wishes to identify us with Christ in our entire walk. How marvelous that we have the Spirit of Christ while we walk here on earth where He was rejected as the lowly Man of Nazareth and as the glorified Man in heaven, and where He now gives us life by His Spirit for the support and strengthening of His own. This new life is Christ Himself, but it is through His Spirit that we possess it and enjoy it; for this reason it is called here the Spirit of "life."

None of this violates God's rights, for the Spirit's giving us life and being life for us is entirely in agreement with God's righteousness. Even more, God's rights are maintained through the life of Christ that the Spirit gives us; God now sees Christ in us. What a glorifying of His rights!

3. A New Guide

The world has become a wilderness for those who have been delivered from the present world-system, from the power of Satan, and the power of sin as master over us and within us. This is why we are in need of a reliable and capable Guide.

Because of the value that we now have to God as "sons of God" (v. 14), He has given us His Spirit to *lead* us. This is presented here in a very practical manner: "For as many as are led by [the] Spirit of God, these are sons of God." We better be sure to ask ourselves in all that we do or think whether we are indeed led by the Spirit of God. What a joy for the heart of God when He sees at least the desire with us to live thus as sons for Him.

The Holy Spirit accompanies us and will bring us to the end of our Journey. But He also leads us *in* the wilderness, just as He did with the Lord Jesus (Lk. 4:1). Undoubtedly, in doing so, He directs our attention to the Person and walk of "Jesus the Leader and Completer of faith" (Heb. 12:2), who has already reached the goal and draws our hearts to Himself.

4. A New Witness

There has been one Man who answered perfectly to God's desire to have a Son for Himself in this world. Even in the most difficult moments of His life there was the response from the true Son who said: "Abba, Father" (Mk. 14:36). (Note: Here we speak of course especially of the Lord Jesus as Man, although He was at the same time the Son of God (Mk. 1:1); and as the (eternal) Son He was and is always in the bosom of the Father.)

Although there is of course always an infinite difference between us and the Lord Jesus, it is nevertheless true that we, through grace, may even now occupy the place of sons on earth. Again the Spirit comes to help us to actually occupy this privileged position. How does it satisfy the heart of God when He hears our responding hearts and lives crying: "Abba, Father"! (8:15).

God really longs to find His own "character traits" in us, His children on earth. Therefore He gave us His Spirit, so that we might represent Him as His children by spreading light and love.

Such testimony implies suffering; it brings opposition and oppression. It is remarkable to notice how the Greek word for "witness" can also be translated by "martyr." Just as the Lord Jesus suffered on earth as the true Witness for God, so the Holy Spirit suffers in a certain sense today (within us) because of the testimony He gives, and He sustains us in this testimony (see later).

In the Old Testament we find a whole list of witnesses surrounding us as a cloud (Heb. 11 & 12:1). Afterwards the Lord Jesus came as the "faithful Witness" (Rev. 1:5); this He still is to this very day. Especially in the midst of the Christian testimony, He is the "faithful and true Witness" (Rev. 3:14). But now it is *our* turn as children of God to be witnesses for Him with the help of His Spirit. In Numbers we find all kinds of illustrations that help us to understand and realize the place of God's witnesses.

5. A New Hope

In connection with our place as His children and witnesses, God not only gives us effectual support, but He also gives us a sure hope as encouragement for us to go on while looking ahead. This fifth resource is just as effective as the previous ones. Surrounded by a creation that is subjected to vanity, we ourselves still share in this suffering as long as we are in a body on earth: we "groan in ourselves" (8:23). As those who have "the firstfruits of the Spirit," we are strengthened by the hope of the coming glory (v. 18), of the revelation of the sons of God (v. 19), of the liberty of the glory of the children of God (v. 2:1), and of the redemption of our body (v. 2:3). What a contrast with the "hope" that formerly characterized us when we were sighing under the law, not to speak of our position before our conversion, when we were without hope.

When Paul speaks of the glory that will be revealed to us, someone could say that it is just a mirage (to stay with the type of the wilderness). Therefore God has given this certain hope *within* us that shows us this future as a reality the inheritance God has prepared for us, belongs rightfully to the "firstborn among many brethren" (8:29), but He will share it with us. We have already received the foretaste of this inheritance in the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. He comes from that land and represents the glory of it within us. He causes us to enjoy all the fruits of that land just as Joshua and Caleb in days gone by did by bringing the beautiful fruits of the land to the people of Israel in the wilderness. It is the inheritance of the firstborn. What a grace that God has given us the firstfruits of His Spirit. (Perhaps this may also cause us to think of the fact that we, the believers since Pentecost — Acts 2 —, are the first ones who have received God's Spirit, sent by the glorified Man, Christ, from heaven).

6. A New Helper

All this does not diminish the fact that we are certainly still in the wilderness, a fact that makes itself felt in all kinds of difficulties, sufferings, groanings, and weaknesses. Although our salvation is now nearer than when we first believed (Rom. 13:11), we still may have to cover a good part of the journey. Who then will help us in our expectation, who keeps the presented hope alive, who meets us in our weakness? It is the Holy Spirit (8:26). (It is certainly remarkable how many characteristics and workings, which are elsewhere found in connection with Christ, are in this portion ascribed to the Holy Spirit).

Just think of Paul and Silas in jail, with bleeding backs, in miserable circumstances. The Spirit came to their aid so that they could pray and sing the praises of God during that night.

Even today the same Helper is at our side, especially when we don't know what to pray for.

7. A New Advocate

This brings us to the last and seventh resource available to us through the Holy Spirit. He is the Comforter whose coming had been announced by the Lord Jesus (Jn. 14:16). He comes as it were to stand beside the one who is in need of help. In this way we have a Help and Advocate *in heaven*, our Lord Jesus Christ, and a Help and Advocate *on earth*, the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. We have already seen how this divine Person identifies Himself with the Christians here on earth, how He leads the sons and the children of God, helping and supporting them. It is specially striking to read in this portion how He applies Himself on our behalf. Creation groans, we groan within ourselves (this is not a thankless sighing and murmuring, but an expression of our link with the present creation to which we, through our body, still belong) and then we read: "the Spirit itself makes intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered" (8:26). In this sense God the Holy Spirit within us here on earth makes Himself one with us in this situation, while God in heaven, who searches the hearts,

knows the mind of the Spirit because He intercedes according to God. What a remarkable link between earth and heaven, and that on our behalf!

But there is something added to this: He intercedes "for saints." How could He stand at our side when we purposely join the world, even the Christian world, when we allow sin in our lives and refuse to judge it? By God's calling we have been set apart for Him in this world, in this sense we are holy; but He also wants this to be a reality in our lives. For this reason these seven resources are available to us through His Spirit whom He has given us and who dwells within us.

What grace! Romans 8 is a song of praise to the grace of God who, through His Spirit provides all our needs, so that we may arrive safely at our final destination.

"If God be for us, who can be against us?"

The End

OUTLINES FOR BIBLE TEACHING (27)

55. BIRTH AND CALL OF SAMUEL. — 1 Samuel 1-3

Outline

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|------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Hannah's Prayer | 1 Sam. 1:1-13 |
| 2. Hannah and Eli | 1 Sam. 1:14-18 |
| 3. Samuel's Birth | 1 Sam. 1:19-28 |
| 4. Hannah's Song of Praise | 1 Sam. 2:1-10 |
| 5. Eli's Sons | 1 Sam. 2:11-26 |
| 6. Judgment over Eli and his House | 1 Sam. 2:27-36 |
| 7. Samuel Called | 1 Sam. 3:1-21 |

Explanation

1. In Israel childlessness was considered a reproach; hence Hannah's bitterness.
2. The ark of the covenant stood in Shiloh. God heard her prayer of faith (Jas. 5:16).
3. Hannah dedicated her son to the Lord (Mt. 19:14).
4. Hannah's thanksgiving to the Lord contains the prophetic announcement of the coming King.
5. Eli himself was a devout man, but he was weak and did not bring his sons up in the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:8; 22:6).
6. God rejects the house of Eli, and announces judgment over them to Samuel.
7. Samuel's calling. God was pleased with Samuel's faithfulness (Ps. 31:23; 119:9); therefore judgment was revealed to Samuel and not to Eli.

Lesson

In 1 Samuel 1 Eli lacked spiritual discernment, in chapter 2 the moral courage to deal with evil. Eli could not govern his own house well. Because of this he ended up forgetting what God's holiness required from him.

Note: In lesson 8 we found some of the names of God. In 1 Samuel 1:3: "Lord of hosts" (Jehovah Sabaoth). Sabaoth means hosts and in this particular case hosts connected with warfare. The heavenly hosts (angels — saints in glory) or the warriors of Israel if they were willing to submit to His purposes and be where He could use them to help His people. (A

type of heavenly warfare). In Psalm 24:10 the psalmist uses the name: "The Lord of hosts, He is the King of Glory". (The Lord in the manifestation of all His power). Samuel means asked for of Jehovah or heard of Jehovah.

56. DEATH OF ELI AND HIS SONS. THE ARK TAKEN. — 1 Samuel 4-7

Outline

1. The Philistines capture the Ark 1 Sam. 4:1-11
2. Eli's Death 1 Sam. 4:12-22
3. The Ark with the Philistines 1 Sam. 5:1-12
4. The Ark Returned 1 Sam. 6:1-7:1
5. Israel's Victory 1 Sam. 7:2-17

Explanation

1. Israel's defeat was the result of unbelief and idolatry (1 Sam. 7:3; Ps. 78:58-61).
2. God's judgment over Eli and his sons was executed.
3. God defends His own glory in the land of the Philistines.
4. God brings back the ark to Israel.
5. Upon repentance, God once again gives victory.

Lesson

Samuel instituted schools for prophets in Ramah, Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho, where young men were taught, in the law and sacrificial rites, and thus in God's Word. As a prophet, Samuel was the mouthpiece of God. Israel had a revival during Samuel's faithful service, it shows what a blessing one faithful man can be to the people of God. Samuel was a man of prayer (1 Sam. 7:5, 8, 9; 12:23; Jer. 15:1; Ps. 99:6).

57. SAUL ANOINTED KING. — 1 Samuel 8-11

Outline

1. Israel Demanded a King 1 Sam. 8:1-9, 22
2. Saul Chosen and Anointed 1 Sam. 9:1-6, 15-17; 10:1
3. Saul Installed as King 1 Sam. 10:9, 17-27
4. Saul's Victory over the Ammonites 1 Sam. 11

Explanation

1. The departure of Samuel's sons caused the people to ask for a king. Their request grieved both God and Samuel.
2. God gave the people a king after the fleshly desires of their heart; he was young, handsome, tall and warlike.
3. Saul was diligent and religious, but his heart was not renewed (born again). The Holy Spirit came temporarily upon him because of his anointing (Hos. 13:11).

4. Jehovah's name was not mentioned when the people were called up to battle against the Ammonites. Saul did not act in faith but in his own strength (Ps. 147:10-11).

Lesson

According to Deuteronomy 17:14-20 God allowed Israel to have a king but by asking for one the people made themselves like to the heathen nations and rejected Jehovah as King (1 Sam. 8:7, 20). Ingratitude and unbelief are the roots of departure from God (Heb. 3:12; Ps. 146:3).

There was no spiritual strength to look to God for one who would judge righteously. The people looked upon the outward appearance (blinded). Just as the people, so did their king rely entirely upon his own strength and skill.

58. SAUL'S SACRIFICE AND JONATHAN'S VICTORY. — 1 Samuel 13-14

Outline

1. War with the Philistines 1 Sam. 13:1-7
2. Saul's Self-Willed Sacrifice 1 Sam. 13:8-14
3. Jonathan's Victory 1 Sam. 13:15-14:30
4. Saul and Jonathan 1 Sam. 14:31-52

Explanation

1. When Saul was tested, he showed unbelief and self-will, wherefore God rejected him.
2. Here we find the flesh at work. It caused Saul to take the place of the prophet, disobeying the ordinances of God (1 Sam. 13:9). God responded by rejecting Saul.
3. In the face of the strong enemy, Saul showed the foolishness and weakness of the flesh (1 Sam. 1:1), whereas Jonathan had the wisdom and power of faith (1 Sam. 14).
4. Saul's lack of faith causes him to become the direct opposer of the victor, his own son Jonathan.

Lesson

Since Saul did not trust God for the outcome of the war, the people that followed him trembled. How differently had they followed the faithful Joshua! Saul used the language of the Gentiles when addressing the Lord's people by the name Hebrews (13:3). He saw the battle not as one against God, but rather as one against himself, he therefore forbade the people to eat until *he* was avenged of *his* enemies. Jonathan saw things from God's perspective; he saw the "uncircumcised" and relied on God to save even by few. As always, the whole episode ends with a direct confrontation between unbelief (Saul) and faith (Jonathan).

To be cont'd

THE MINOR PROPHETS (15)

—R. Been Sr.

Hosea 9

The Fowlers Snare

vv. 1-4

These verses continue the thought in verses 11-14 of chapter 8. Supposedly, Israel had always offered to God, but in reality all had been for themselves; their bread had been for themselves. Whenever they had sacrificed an animal, they had only brought the flesh so they themselves could eat of it. The corn and the wine, products of their own efforts would not be able to feed them, the harvest of wine would be disappointing to them. Instead of it, they would eat unclean things in Assyria. All that they would offer the Lord would be unclean, God would not accept it, and they would defile themselves with their unclean products. Their bread would not enter the House of the Lord as showbread. It was all a corrupted circle, proceeding from themselves and returning to themselves. There was nothing but uncleanness.

This is a phenomenon of all ages. Never mind how beautiful the works of religious people may appear to be, they are performed for the sake of profit; they serve God through the performance of religious duties out of sheer self-gratification. They don't seek to please God, but to prompt God to give them something.

Verse 1 shows that the joy found with the people of Israel was to be sharply rejected. And certainly not because God despises all joy. One who believes that God loves cheerlessness only proves that he doesn't know God. Often remarks of this kind are made. Many people are averse to God and His service, for they think it spells the end of all joy and cheer, but this is a foolish notion. Cheerlessness has nothing to do with God and His service. In the parable of the prodigal, the father says, after the son's return, "let *us* eat and make merry" (Lk. 15:2 3), not, "Let *him* be glad." The father and his whole house shared in that joy. More than once God is in Scripture referred to as "the God of joy."

But there are two kinds of joy! That of the world, and that of God. There was a time that Nehemiah and Ezra encouraged the people who had returned from Babylon to rejoice, for the joy of the Lord was their strength (Neh. 8: 10-11). And the Psalmist says, "Thy countenance is fulness of joy" (Ps. 16:11).

But the joy of the world is entirely foreign to this sanctified joy. The eldest brother in the parable of the prodigal wanted to be joyful with his friends. Where joy of God is found, it is foreign to the world. Conversely, God's children don't find pleasure in the joys of this world.

Israel might rejoice exultingly, as the peoples, but God declares that He has no part in it. Their joy found its origin in prosperity attributed to the favour of idols. But God declares that the threshing floor will not feed them and that the vintage will be disappointing. And then what? Will they nevertheless exult, because their joy is in the Lord? Will they rejoice in the God of their salvation? (Hab. 3:17-18). No, then they will lament and cry upon their beds.

Israel's defiling itself with the abominations of idolatry left no other way than the removal of the people from the land. Israel would once more return to Egypt, in Assyria they would eat unclean things. This means that they, the very people who had once been delivered from the bondage of Egypt, would return into bondage, this time to Assyria.

vv. 5-10

In these verses the prophet speaks suddenly of Judah. And indeed, later, after Gedaliah — the governor appointed by Nebuchadnezzar over the part of the people that had been left in the land — had been murdered, Judah went to Egypt. There, but for a few who escaped, it found its grave in Moph (Memphis). Whatever was left of the Jewish possessions they had taken with them into Egypt, was also swallowed up in the disaster that came over them there.

How poor would the people be in the foreign land to which it would be taken! Far from the sanctuary, what would they do on the feast-days of Jehovah? How could they observe such days in a foreign land? This poverty still characterizes the Jews who seek to cling to God in our days. They cannot bring the sacrifices proscribed by the law which they — since they do not accept the perfect sacrifice brought by Christ — are obliged to bring. Hosea could well direct the question of verse 5 to the Jews in our days. It shows that the judgments that Hosea announced over Judah have indeed come.

But the end of verse 7 and verse 8 speak yet of another matter to be experienced by the people. The prophets, those inspired (spiritual) men, would no longer be the link between Jehovah and the nation. The word of the Lord would no longer come to the people. Instead there would be false prophets which are called foolish and senseless. The office of prophet that in former days had been a means to direct and enlighten the people would now become a cause of confusion and fall. In contrast with the former prophets who had been appointed as God's watchmen among the people, these false prophets would become a fowler's snare to the people. What degeneration! The most excellent, the teachers of the people, they who should have led the people of God back to Him, they who functioned as God's watchmen, they who — seeing their calling and position — should have lived in communion with God, they are called foolish and senseless. They

were a fowler's snare to the nation; they led the people into corruption through the hateful idolatry they brought into the house and among the people of God.

It is a terrible condition, when there are no longer prophets of the Lord. Then there is no longer knowledge of God, and this in turn leads to the destruction of the people (4:6). But the condition is even worse once false prophets enter the scene, senseless fools who only hasten God's judgment. Don't we find many of these senseless fools in Christendom as well?

Consequently verse 9 says that Judah has corrupted itself deeply, as in the days of Gibeah. Terrible, scandalous deeds were committed in those days (Jud. 19), Hosea had reminded them of this before (5:8). In those days, the whole nation had at least turned itself against Benjamin (Jud. 20). But now the nation rallied around the perpetrators of unrighteousness. God may be long-suffering, but once He will remember their unrighteousness and visit their sins upon them.

Verse 10 really refers to the whole nation of Israel, to the twelve tribes. How soon had Israel departed from God, even in the wilderness, despite all the care that Jehovah had bestowed upon them! At the very first, Israel had been as grapes in the wilderness to Jehovah (see also Jer. 2:2-3), their fathers had been as the first-ripe fruit of a fig-tree. But soon, their idolatry had spoiled it all, for they linked themselves to Baal-Peor.

vv. 11-17

Once more the prophet addresses here particularly Ephraim, the ten tribes. In verse 2 of this chapter, hunger had been mentioned as a judgment of the Lord, followed in verse 3 by the exile of the ten tribes in Assyria, and as far as Judah was concerned, in Egypt. Now verses 11-17 announce to Ephraim the additional judgments of unfruitfulness and the death of their children.

To Israelites, children were proof of God's favour. Children were an inheritance given by the Lord, they showed a man's strength and determined his position (Ps. 127:3-5). A summary of blessings ends with: "And see thy children's children" (Ps. 128:6). Well, this blessing, called the glory of Ephraim, would be taken away. Verse 11 says, no birth, no pregnancy, no conception.

In verse 12 the prophet continues to say that any children who would yet be born would not reach the adult age. The Lord would rob them of children even after He had departed from Ephraim, after they had been exiled to Assyria. The end of verse 13 adds that their children would not die on the sickbed but at the hand of murderers, and verse 14 speaks of miscarriages and the absence of mother milk. Surely, it was an all-encompassing judgment. And then to think that this would come over Ephraim which God had once seen as a rich, blooming city in a beautiful and fertile district, similar to Tyrus.

In verses 15-17, after a further reference to their terrible idolatry, Ephraim is said to have its roots dried up. If it would still give any sprouts, the Lord would slay them. A terrible judgment! It is a judgment that had not yet been mentioned in the preceding chapters. How deep must this nation have sunk, how corrupt must it have been, to be so severely judged.

The Lord Jesus pronounced a similar judgment over the fig-tree, a type of the Jewish nation. "Let no one eat fruit of thee anymore for ever." A day later, the disciples saw that the fig-tree was dried tip from the roots (Mk. 11-14,20). This was the only miracle of judgment performed by the Lord.

The first part of verse 17 we may perhaps apply to Ephraim. Hosea's God rejected them because they did not listen to Him. The ten tribes have disappeared without a trace; God alone knows who and where they are. At His coming, however, the Lord Jesus will gather His elect out of the ten tribes from the four corners of the earth to Palestine. The second part of verse 17, however, is more applicable to the two tribes. Of them, everybody knows that they have been wandering among the nations for centuries, even today this is still largely the case.

To be cont'd

JUDE (15)

—H. L. Heijkoop

These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaks swelling words, admiring persons for the sake of profit. — Jude 16.

The Greek word for murmurers occurs only here in the New Testament. Elsewhere related words are used (Mt. 20:11; Lk. 5:30; Jn. 6:41,43,61; 7:12,32; Acts 6:1; 1 Cor. 10:10; Phil. 2:14; and 1 Pet. 4:9). In general it doesn't refer to an open, pronounced kind of dissatisfaction, but rather to an undercover, smouldering kind, as was found among the Israelites in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:10) and the Jews in John 6:41-43, when the Lord said that He was the bread that had come down from heaven. This sin is much more serious than we often think it to be. How serious, we can see in Numbers 16:41. On account of their murmuring, God wants to destroy the people. And although the judgment has been stayed by the priestly interceding of Aaron, some 14,700 people died. For us the danger of murmuring is also great when everything is not just the way we want it to be, be it in our personal lives or in the assembly.

They are also complainers about their lot. They wish to be something more and greater than what they really are. Their seeing others with the things they want, makes them jealous and causes them to pity themselves. In Numbers 11 we find what God thinks about this: "And it came to pass that when the people murmured, it was evil in the ears of Jehovah; and Jehovah heard it, and His anger was kindled, and the fire of Jehovah burned among them, and consumed [some] in the extremity of the camp." And in Numbers 12:2-10 and 16:1-35 we find what God thinks of our being jealous of the position He has given to others.

So far we saw mainly what these people thought and did; their characteristics in connection with what they were for others. Now we find their moral condition. It is the spirit that dominates in this world, the surest proof that they have no link with God. Either they fail to see the hand of God in their circumstances, or they rebel against this hand. It is good that we are well aware of this. God never refers to tools of Satan as good men, nor speaks of them as having many good qualities. Their corrupted mind demonstrates that they are the tools of Satan, no matter how well they seek to hide this by surrounding themselves with a beautiful appearance. The truth is that they are:

walking after their lusts

This shows the root of all things. It is the condition used by God's Word to depict the total lost condition of man (Eph. 2:3). It means, that the creature's first obligation, obedience, has been completely set aside, and that by men who *confess* to have accepted Christ as *Lord* (see verse 4 and our comments there), but they cannot do otherwise, for God will not give them what their lust desires; He will not further their lust. To the contrary, in His mercy He will thwart the lusts of their natural heart. And when He does not do so, things are even worse for them, for then He allows them to experience the results of their wickedness.

When we read of lusts, we should not just, or primarily, think of rude things. 1 John 2:16 doesn't only speak of the lust of the flesh, but also of the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. These latter two are more refined. It is for instance ambition, the effort to get a higher position than God has given. That was Satan's sin (Ezek. 28). Pride and vanity belong to it as well.

their mouth speaks swelling words, admiring persons for the sake of profit

Peter writes that they speak proud words of vanity. Since they fail to take God into account, man must have a place in their thoughts, be it *I*, or other men. In their words they are more virtuous, more spiritual, more zealous than others. Though they are completely independent from God, they are the slaves of men: they admire persons so that they may profit thereby. It is ever the same. The fear of God dispels the fear of men, while departure from God leads to replacing God by man as motive of all one's doings. Self-interest is the basis of all. Their flattery and admiration speculate on the pride and vanity of the persons involved. The danger of this is recognized by all who have their eyes open. There are very few people, even very few believers, who are not sensitive to flattery and praise, as long as it isn't overdone.

What a contrast with God's thoughts! God doesn't accept man's person, and He wants to bring about the same in us. How humiliating that all these things are found among believers; yes, we better be well aware that God's Word tells us that these persons are in our midst. What insight does this give into our own hearts. We cannot thank God sufficiently for keeping us from most of these things, and that He will keep us from them all if we go our way entirely with Him. But we do see that our heart itself is capable of all these things. How humble does this awareness make us, how does it make us feel our dependence upon the Lord.

Oh Lord grant me, whate'er betide,

SACRIFICES IN A FUTURE MILLENNIUM?

—J. van Dijk

How can some Christians expect that bloody sacrifices would once again be presented during a future Millennium? Though Ezekiel 44 speaks prophetically of such sacrifices, shouldn't they be understood in a spiritual sense rather than a literal one? Haven't the sacrifices lost *all meaning* since the true Lamb of God has been slain? Surely, Hebrews would settle the matter! Let us take a closer look at this.

When God gave the sacrifices — by His example to Adam and by command to Israel — the sacrifice was not the real basis of His forgiveness; it derived its value from Him who one time would be the true Sacrifice on Golgotha. By faith, David realized this when he said: "Sacrifice and oblation Thou didst not desire" (Ps. 40:6). That his words expressed the mind of God is very evident from Hebrews 10:5 where they are shown to have been prophetically spoken by the Spirit of Christ. As a man of faith, David realized this. Others, who lacked faith, saw no more than the sacrifice itself and obeyed God's commandment (if they did even this much).

In the days before the cross, to God the value of sacrifices lay in their anticipating the great and only true sacrifice to be brought by His Son and the joy it gave Him to have communion with man on the basis of this Sacrifice. Since God is ever the Same, the value of the sacrifice before Him does not change. To Him it ever speaks typically of Christ, and to Him it is a sweet savour.

It is different for man. In days past, the awfulness of his sin and guilt had to be impressed upon his conscience as was the desire of God to forgive upon the basis of blood that was shed. Since Christ had not yet died, the sinner could not yet consider the price He would once pay on Golgotha, but he could and did experience the awfulness and costliness of shedding blood. Having done the will of God, the sinner was, on the basis of God's promises, assured of forgiveness. Not all realized, however, that this forgiveness did not come to them on the basis of the slain animal, but on the fact that it presented God's perfect sacrifice, Christ.

Now the Lord has died and has ascended on high, but the believer can only see Him with the eye of faith. God now wants him to put *all* his trust and faith in his Saviour and His work on Golgotha. If under these circumstances bloody sacrifices would be permitted, the people would quickly say: "These are your security" (cf. Ex. 32). To a degree many have even done so with the memorials of Christ's death, the bread and the wine. But the believer of today must have nothing but Christ before him (Rom. 5: 1; Eph. 2:14a).

In a coming day, the Lord Himself will be present. Then there will be no danger of assigning to the sacrifice a value that belongs to Him who will then be Priest upon His throne, for He will be seen by all as the One who gave Himself. Then faith is changed to sight, He himself will be there as the bodily evidence of what took place. Then the bloody sacrifices will speak more than ever of the great price paid for atonement, for death will be rare in those days and will only come over those who openly rebel against the Lord.

The above shows that sacrifices do not lose *all meaning*, neither to God, nor to man. In the day of grace, when they would supplant in man's mind the one true Sacrifice, they are improper. When that danger is gone, their remaining significance, the speaking of the price of atonement, is once more allowed. We trust that these thoughts will help those who object to a literal explanation of Ezekiel 4:3. Their objection is not supported by the argument that sacrifices have lost *all meaning*. True, they are not for today, but to God they will ever be a memorial of the greatness of the work of His beloved Son, our Lord and Saviour.