

Joel — Chapter 2

—R. Been Sr.

It hardly could be otherwise, or the people had to see God's judgment in the locust invasion, and the period of heat and dryness they experienced. The interruption of God's relationship with Israel further aggravated this judgment. No wonder the people thought that the day of the Lord¹ was near even then (1:15). Of course, that was not so, but these plagues gave Joel a vision of the future. To Joel these catastrophes portrayed the judgments that will precede the actual day of the Lord — His coming in judgment. Yet, the plagues mentioned in chapter 1 are but weak examples of it. The prophetic Assyrian will play an important role in the events that precede the establishment of Christ's millennial reign.

The day of the Lord*Verses 1-2*

The thought of the approaching day of the Lord causes the prophet to see a terrible power that will invade the land of Judah in a future day. Its army will be much worse than that of the locusts. It will be great and powerful such as there had never been and as there will never be again throughout the generations. In view of this invasion, the trumpet must be blown in Zion, there must be a loud cry, an alarm made on the mountain of God's holiness. All the inhabitants of the land must tremble, for the day of the Lord comes; yes, it is near. He says that it will be a day of darkness, spread as the dawn over the mountains of the land.

The Israelites blew silver trumpets when they, for instance, had to prepare to meet the enemy. Jehovah had promised to think of Israel when He heard the trumpets, and to deliver them from their enemies (Num. 10:9). The prophet refers to this. The terrible army of the Assyrian will overflow the land of Judah, and the Jews will not be able to resist them (Dan. 9:24). The great mass of the Jews will then have fallen away from God, ensnared by the idolatry of the antichrist, and the remnant of Judah that remains faithful to God will be weak. Yet, in the end it will become evident that Jehovah thinks of this remnant and delivers them from this terrible enemy. The Lord Himself will put this prophetic Assyrian to death and destroy his armies at His appearing.

Verses 3-11

These verses describe the awesome Assyrian army. In front of the army burns a consuming fire, behind it flames flare up. Before the Assyrian invasion Judah was a paradise, afterward a desert. There was no escape. They resembled horses, they ran fast as horsemen. They bounced as rattling wagons on the mountains, they were like crackling fire consuming brush wood. Their battle array was unequalled. Nations trembled for their power, every face displaying terror and fear. Their soldiers scaled the walls as heroes; each, keeping on his course, didn't cross another's path nor pushed another aside; they marched in tight formation and didn't allow a wedge to be driven into their ranks. They stormed the city, running upon the wall, climbing as thieves into the houses through the windows. Such an army causes the world to tremble, the heavens to shake; sun and moon became black, the stars withdrew their shining. (Verse 10 is of course symbolical. It means that the entire economic and political system is being upset, and all higher and lower forms of government removed. Rev. 6:12-14). Even the Lord raises His voice before this multitudinous army, which, as His rod of discipline, executes His word over the Jewish nation that had fallen away from God. For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible. Who can endure it?

Joel borrowed this description of the Assyrian army from the locusts he had experienced. He had seen how the whole sky had been darkened by these countless insects moving slowly and orderly, while sounding like rain. In close formation they had descended upon the fields, trees, shrubs, devouring every bit of green. They entered the houses like thieves.

¹ In Revelation 1:10 the similar expression "the Lord's day" has the sense of the first day of the week, the day consecrated to the Lord. It is parallel to the expression "The Lord's Supper," for both use the Greek word *kuriakos* rather than *kurios*.

Will the nation in those coming days pay heed to the blowing of the trumpet in Jerusalem? No! The city will trust in its covenant with the mighty, restored Roman Empire. The leaders of the people will, just as in history, say that they have taken care to make a protective covenant with the grave (Sheol). The menace of the Assyrian (the overflowing scourge) will not affect them, for they have what the prophet Isaiah called the lie and falsehood as their safety. But their trust will be put to shame (Isa. 28:14-15; Zech. 14:1-5).

Verses 12-14

It is remarkable that, although the previous verses portray the terribleness of the day of the Lord, the people are still encouraged to repent! The words give a certain connection with the preceding verses: "Yet even now, saith Jehovah."

The only thing the people can and must do is to turn to God with their whole heart. Not by rending their clothing, but by an inner, rather than an outward, formal humbling. The announcement that the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and full of love makes the path of repentance easier. At the least evidence of repentance and contrition, the Lord will repent of the intended judgment. Joel urges the people to do so, just as Hosea did (Hos. 6:1-2).

This call to repentance still holds good today. "God therefore... now enjoins men that they shall all everywhere repent, because He has set a day in which He is going to judge the habitable earth in righteousness by the Man whom He has appointed, giving the proof of it to all in having raised Him from among the dead" (Acts 17:30-31).

In Joel's day, however, the people did not repent. Some time after the introductory plague of locust came the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple by Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, and the removal of the nation into seventy years of captivity. If the nation had turned to God after the introductory judgments, then, so says the prophet, "Who knoweth? He might return and repent, and leave a blessing behind Him, an oblation and a drink-offering for Jehovah your God." Such sacrifices could no longer be brought to God because the locust plague and the great drought had removed all wealth (1:9,13). If the nation had repented then, the Lord would likely have restored their wealth, and enabled them to bring their meal- and drink-offerings again.

The great mass of the Jews in the last days will not repent either after the judgments preceding the days of the Great Tribulation. To the contrary, the greater part will give itself up to idolatry introduced by the antichrist, going from bad to worse. At the revelation of the Lord Jesus for judgment, the greater part — which according to Zechariah will be two-thirds of the nation — will be annihilated (Zech. 13:18).

Yet there will be a remnant in the last days that will follow God and serve Him. This remnant will see the sins of its people, particularly the sin of rejecting and crucifying the Messiah. At the appearance of the Lord in power and glory it will become evident that this Messiah is Jehovah Himself. Then the remnant will humble itself about this sin and turn to God in repentance (Zech. 12:10-14). The Lord will make a new covenant with them, and later also with the remnant of the ten tribes. Actually, it will be a one-sided covenant from the Lord. God's Spirit will bring about the true-hearted repentance of every person belonging to these remnants.

Verses 15-17

Before the Lord Jesus appears, however, the remnant of Judah will speak the words recorded in these verses. The Assyrian, the king of the North, will have invaded Judea, bringing Jerusalem in dire distress. Then the remnant wishes to blow the trumpet at Jerusalem, and to call a fast, a solemn assembly. They want to gather the people, to sanctify and separate the congregation. They require the elders to come. They wish the children, the babes, the bridegroom and the bride to be present at this time of contrition. All are urged to repent and to humble themselves. They even acknowledge that the babies have part in the guilt and sin of the people. A bridegroom and his bride cannot extract themselves from this moment of humbling. Also, yes, specially the priests are prompted to weep between the porch and the altar. These priests do not dare to take the place before the altar. Did not their fathers, did not their nation reject and kill the Messiah? These priests need to pray: "Spare, O Jehovah, Thy people, and give not Thine inheritance to reproach, that they should be a byword of the nations. Wherefore should they say among the peoples, Where is their God?"

We did say that these things will be found in the hearts of the faithful remnant. Likely it will not really be possible in these last days to blow the trumpet in Jerusalem, and to fast and have a solemn assembly. For in those days the remnant will be bitterly persecuted, and the antichrist, whom the great mass of the people follows into idolatry, is still in power.² It really does not matter whether the remnant expresses their humbling publicly, according to Jewish customs. It is a question of the heart, not of rent clothes but of rent hearts.

Isn't it just the same for believers today? When disasters strike the nation there is room for a national remembrance, but not for a national humbling before God about our sins. Nothing has changed since the people of Judah failed to humble themselves in repentance during the locust plague. Only a few could bring that up then, and it's still the same today. The ruin of the church, the assembly, causes very few believers to realize that they too are responsible for this, very few have humbled hearts about it.

The remnants out of the two and the ten tribes of Israel will form the nucleus of the nation Israel during the Millennium. The faithful remnant from the two tribes will repent and turn to the Lord through the judgments during the Great Tribulation that they will endure. For the great mass of unbelieving and apostatized Jews these judgments will spell annihilation, for the remnant purification. The ten tribes will be judged outside the land, for they are not guilty of rejecting and crucifying the Messiah. The purified remnant will return to the land only after the appearing of the Lord.

Nevertheless, the remnant of the two tribes, which has to go through the Great Tribulation, is aware that they are the people of God. In verse 17 they speak of "Thy people." This faith will characterize the remnant. It cannot trust in itself, and that is significant at a time when the great mass of Jews is charmed by their own knowledge and ability. Despite the judgments, the remnant will not doubt that God will remain faithful to His promises.

The unbelieving, apostate Jews and the heathen will often throw the mockery: "Where is their God," into the face of the remnant while they persecute it during the Great Tribulation. Their lament we find repeatedly in the Psalms (Ps. 42:4,11; 79:10; 115:2). With pain and shame, they will realize that their fathers threw similar words in the face of the crucified Messiah when He died for the people. Didn't their fathers mockingly say, "He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him, if He desires Him"?

It is a difficult thing to cause a person to humble himself repentfully. Had it been the result of the locust plagues described by Joel in the first chapter (1:14)? No! As we saw, there was then only one man who called upon God, the prophet himself (1:19). Did Israel humble itself about its idolatry? No! If it had truly done so it would not have been scattered among the nations for twenty centuries. God sent men to tell the people to repent about the violence done to the Messiah, but the people did not listen (Acts 3:19). Afterward, God waited for centuries for such contrition, but it never came, and as far as the great mass of the Jews is concerned, it will never come. It will be owing to God's sovereign grace alone when such a humbling, worked by His Spirit, will be found with a remnant in the last days. The words of the remnant in verses 15-17 point to true humbling, sincere repentance, a "Godly sorrow." It will be the great wail of mourning about which Zechariah speaks, a humbling that causes to return to God (2 Cor. 7:10; Zech. 12:11-14).

How often is the heart of man — also ours — rebellious, stubborn, and proud. How is it governed by a will that is unwilling to subject itself! Israel's history is that of the human race. When our conscience, which is a merciless judge, tells us that we have sinned, we don't acknowledge it, but excuse ourselves with an appeal to the circumstances. Many believers excuse themselves about their worldliness, lukewarmness, and insipidness, about their lack of zeal for the Lord's interests. The last thing they think of is "fasting," that is to say, a sorrowful humbling of self. More than once it happens that a sin, a guilt, is kept under cover in the way David did once, and that the voice of the conscience is smothered. It seems forgotten that God has seen all. Until, finally, "the great and terrible day of the Lord" bursts upon them: God allows the consequences of the sin to come down on the guilty head. Then, when there is no longer a way out, the guilty one finally acknowledges, "I have sinned, I have done what is evil in Thine eyes." Humbling is not accompanied by song and music. It is as the surgeon's knife cutting into living flesh, so that one cries out in pain. Yet, such humbling is wholesome. What is most humbling: generally true humbling occurs only after God has humbled us.

verses 18-19

² *It seems that the antichrist will flee to Rome rather than face the onslaught of the Assyrian, for Zechariah calls him "the worthless shepherd that leaves the flock" (11:17). If so, there would be a moment of respite for the remnant during which they could call for a fast because of the dreadful Assyrian invasion that looms over them. —The Editor*

After one has humbled himself before God, blessing will soon follow. If we only were more mindful of this, we would likely be prepared to bow sooner, and acknowledge and confess our sin before God, the Father. All too soon the thought that *God will now be against us* takes control of our hearts. How human! Happily Scripture says that God, when we confess our sins, "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9).

The two tribes have committed the terrible sin of rejecting their King and Saviour; since then they have persisted in this sin for twenty centuries. Still, the remnant will receive a glorious answer from God after they confess this sin.

Verse 18 says, "Then Jehovah will be jealous for His land, and will have pity on His people." It speaks of a turn for the better. The prophet says that the Lord will answer His people, the remnant, and that He will send them corn, new wine, and oil, so that they will be satisfied. No longer will He make His people a reproach among the nations.

The remnant will pray, "Spare, O Jehovah, *Thy* people." Immediately the answer will come that the Lord will have pity on His people. The relationship between the people and God will be restored, and all earthly blessings (for it concerns an earthly people) that flow from it will again be the portion of Israel. Corn, new wine, oil, meal-offering, drink-offering, yes, all they had lost through the judgment, they will receive back to satisfy them fully. The glory of Christ's millennial kingdom will be an earthly glory. The house of the Lord, then rebuilt, in which no sacrifice had been brought for half a year-week (three and a half years), will be reopened. The believing Israelites — all Israelites, for all of them will know the Lord — will again be able to approach God in His temple. Israel will no longer be subject to the reproach of the nations who mocked earlier, "Where is their God?"

To be cont'd

Remember Jesus Christ Raised From Among The Dead (4) (Some thoughts on 2 Timothy 2)

—A. E. Bouter

Paul likes to use examples from everyday life that everybody is able to understand. After having compared Timothy with a child and a soldier, he goes on to introduce an often used metaphor: the athlete.

The athlete: the test of lawfulness

This is one of Paul's favourite themes, not because he is a real sports fan, but because of the spiritual lessons he is able to draw from these illustrations.³ It is surprising what important, profound, and practical instructions he presents from the world of sports.

A chain of qualities

In order to be a true disciple of the Lord Jesus, the various qualities are needed simultaneously. They are like a chain consisting of many links. In using these different metaphors together, Paul indicates that being a good spiritual athlete (which presupposes self-discipline and submission to rules) is in itself not enough. It is also necessary to be a good, reliable soldier; a faithful and attentive child; an active husbandman; a hard-working labourer; a vessel to honour, fit for the Master's use; and a slave or bondman in serving the Lord. These different figures emphasize various aspects which we need all at the same time during the whole period of our Christian service!

Representing Christ here

A disciple should represent Christ under these different aspects in this scene of His rejection; Christ displayed them in

³ See e.g., 1 Cor. 9:26f; Phil. 1:27; 4:3; Hebr. 10:32 — *struggling as an athlete*; Phil. 3:12-14; Hebr. 12:1-3 — *running the race*; 1 Tim. 1:18; 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7 — *fighting the good combat*.

perfection. Now they are seen to some degree in His disciples. Philippians 2 records how the Lord's example was followed by Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus. Since Christ's features could be seen in Paul's own life, he became a model and an encouragement for all believers (1 Cor. 11:1). Yet, let no Christian think that the exhortations contained in these seven different aspects of a servant-disciple would only apply to a select, or advanced group of Christians!

In 2 Timothy 2:12 the principles of endurance, suffering, and waiting mentioned in verses 1-6 are summed up as applicable to all Christians. "If we endure, we shall also reign together." Let us briefly consider the context of this passage (2:11-13).

1. "If we have died together with Him, we shall also live together." We are, both positionally and in actual practice, on the same foundation as He is. We have received life from our risen Lord and belong to His resurrection world. The false teachers of 2:17-18 probably abused and misinterpreted this aspect of the resurrection.

2. "If we endure, we shall also reign together." Being associated — suffering and persevering — with our rejected Lord here and now, we will reign with Him in the new world of His dominion

3. "If we deny, He also will deny us." Although we are under grace, the principles of God's moral government are applied to us (Gal. 6:7f).

4. "If we are unfaithful, He abides faithful." The unchanging One is ever faithful to His own nature (God is light, God is love) despite our failures.

Obedience to rules

We now come to a new principle: obedience to the established rules. "And if also any one contend [in the games], he is not crowned unless he contend lawfully" (2 Tim. 2:5). The mere fact that one is in the "games," does not make one a good disciple. Similarly Timothy was not just a child: he had to be a *faithful* child.⁴ The same is true for the farmer, the workman, the vessel, and the bondman.

The same principle of faithfulness applies to workers in the Lord's service. The test is not whether their labours please men, but rather whether they please the Lord (2:4). Does the way they obey the rules meet with His approval, so that He can give them the overcomer's crown (wreath). Here too the Lord is our Model; He has already received the victor's crown (Heb. 2:7,9; 12:2).

Paul supposes that after the victory has been won, it is investigated whether the winner did respect the rules of the game from start to finish. The steroid scandal during the 1988 Olympics illustrates the point. Just as Timothy in his day, so today's disciple is confronted with this question. The sincere desire to obtain the victory (to be an overcomer) must be combined with submission to the applicable rules. This does not mean at all that we are brought back under the law. It is plainly a question of submission (cf. 1 Cor. 9:21) and obedience to the Lord, to God's "rules." Some examples of these rules are seen in 1 John 5:1-5 (His commandments), James 2 (the royal law), and Galatians 6 (the law of Christ). There is no room for selective obedience, as though it would be a matter of our choice, depending on the issue. Neither is there room for making a deal with the Lord. There is to be nothing but an unconditional surrender and obedience to His will. This is the free choice of a loving heart!

The importance of this issue

In our age man has been placed in the centre and God has been set aside. Man has been declared autonomous, as if he doesn't need to be subject to any authority outside himself. Paul calls this: The mystery of iniquity. This concept of lawlessness and the promotion of self-will which have penetrated the "Christian" world are the fruit of the flesh. How important then to judge the flesh within ourselves, so that we will not yield to such wicked influences and teachings.

If we appear to have gained the victory, but failed to obey the rules, we will be disqualified (1 Cor. 9:27). This does not mean that we lose our salvation, but rather our place in God's testimony. Now we are called to be a testimony for God in suffering,

⁴ This principle explains why the statement: "The only requirement for fellowship at the Lord's table is that one has life in Christ," is not according to God's Word. Faithfulness to the Lord in a day of ruin is also required.

but soon we will be manifested with the Lord in His glory in this scene where He is still rejected today.

For instance, when we appoint officers in the Church for the exercise of their gifts, we deny thereby the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Assembly here on earth. This is just one example of not obeying the rules. The introduction and use of carnal methods, human devices, or worldly expedients in the Lord's service is in conflict with the Lord's rules.

Paul was exercised to be, and to act, in the light of the (future) tribunal of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). Thus he avoided all methods the Lord would condemn. It also kept him from unduly criticising other servants; it kept his motives for conduct and service pure, always in harmony with his Master (Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 4:4f).

The crown

In 2 Timothy 4:8 Paul refers Timothy again to his own example. There he speaks about the crown of righteousness which he would receive from his Lord, the righteous Judge. Paul says that his faithful child will not be excluded from this reward, nor will any Christian who loves the appearing of his Lord. How glad would he be to share this crown with those disciples; and how glad will the Lord be to give such a crown! This verse shows clearly who will apply the rules, who is going to consider if we have contended lawfully. The Lord knows whether we have maintained His rights — as Timothy was encouraged to do — or have followed our own ideas. The Lord — rejected in the midst of the Christian profession, the great house — appreciates all that is done for Him (e.g., John 12:2,7). A type of this we see in 2 Samuel 23:15-17. As the righteous Judge, He will also give the right reward, taking into account our motives and actions, as we have considered. There is a reward even now (see later at 2:6) and there will be the definite, future reward (in that day) of which the different crowns speak:

- The crown of joy (1 Th. 2:19f) speaks of the joy for the labourer and for his Master.
- The crown of life (Jas. 1:12; Rev. 2:10) speaks of the life received by the tried ones and martyrs. In a sense they already possess and enjoy it now, despite all kinds of pressures. Today this life sustains them, but soon they will enjoy it as a reward in a new way.
- The incorruptible crown (1 Cor. 9:24-27) belongs to a completely different order of things
- The crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:4) is received after suffering; this is a moral principle with God (Lk. 24:26; 1 Pet. 1:11; 4:13).
- The crown of righteousness we are now considering.

In the context of 2 Timothy, we understand what this implies. The apostle Paul had much laboured in Asia Minor. Three years he had spent in Ephesus, where he had — both in principle and practise — unfolded the meaning of the grace of God, the Gospel, the Kingdom, the Assembly, and the Counsel of God. What a wonderful ministry had been his! Nevertheless, all the Christians in Asia Minor had turned away from him, with the exception of a few individuals such as Onesiphorus. Demas, a fellow-worker, had forsaken him (4:10); Alexander (in Ephesus?) may have been instrumental for his second captivity in Rome; and there all had deserted Paul (4:16). Yet he leaves everything in the hands of His Lord, the righteous Judge (see e.g., Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 Jn. 2:1,29; 3:7). Despite the general failure in the great house, Paul maintains the rights of his Lord. It must be very precious to the Lord to find those who are prepared to live and die for His rights. He will not be ashamed of them at His appearing!

The principles applied in rewarding the crown of righteousness may be found in Matthew 25, Luke 19, 1 Corinthians 3 and others places. It is a reward that is related to the measure of our faithfulness, although any faithfulness on our part is in itself a work of God's grace (Eph. 2:10). It is also to be distinguished from what we will receive according to God's sovereign grace (the rapture, the introduction into the Father's house). The reward will be enjoyed with the Lord at His appearing. What a thought: the rejected and despised Man of Nazareth will appear on earth as King of kings and Lord of lords, together with all who love His appearing! He will be seen on earth with them! Today, in a scene where He is rejected, they maintain His rights in view of that public display when His rights and glory will be established.

Stephen, the crowned one

I love to think of Stephen in Acts 7, whose name means *crown*. In him, the first martyr-witness, I see a prototype of the overcomer and his reward. Here on earth Stephen was associated with a rejected Lord in heaven, for whom there had not been a place on earth even after the cross. The Lord Himself, as the true Witness and Sufferer, had received a crown of thorns on this earth. Now in the glory, He suffers with His own (Acts 9:4) and sympathizes with them (Heb. 4:15). However, Stephen

will soon be publicly identified with the appearing Judge and Ruler.

1. Linked with the incorruptible world of God, he will receive an incorruptible crown (1 Cor. 9:25) as one who is approved before God. This contrasts with the corruptible crown given by this present world-system and the god of this age.

2. Tried by the attacks of a system of death down here, and viciously opposed by the religious world of moral death and darkness, he will receive the crown of life.

3. As a suffering witness who followed His beloved Master, he will receive the crown of glory.

4. Since he maintained the Lord's rights, he will receive the crown of righteousness.

5. Because he was filled with joy, as a vessel fit and filled, he will receive the crown of joy (cf. Phil. 4:1; 1 Th. 2:19), for he in turn has been an object of joy for His Master, who had in him such a faithful representative down here.

6. Like all faithful overcomers, he will receive the crown of an overcomer (Rev. 4:4) as a triumph for the glory of the Great Overcomer (Rev. 4:10).

7. His eye was fixed on his blessed, glorified Lord, whom he saw in heaven crowned with the glory of God. Therefore Stephen received⁵ the One who already had filled his gaze: the Lord Himself (cf. Rev. 3:11 — "thy crown"), and thus he was received there (Acts 7:59). In Philippians 3:7-14 we also see that the prize is the Lord Himself in glory; this thought parallels that of the crown.

The husbandman or farmer

In this metaphor Paul teaches Timothy and us the principle of planning, labour, perseverance, and patience. It is illustrated in the farmer's work and his qualifications. Many portions of Scripture refer to the farmer, to his work and the resulting fruits.⁶

The farmer works with God-given wisdom (Isa. 28:26), but also with perseverance and patience. His work includes plowing, harrowing, sowing, planting, watering, weeding, and providing other care. The harvest has its own chores: reaping, winnowing, storing, and preserving the fruits. Finally the fruits need to be prepared in order to partake of them.

The farmer's work and God's work; its results

The planning, labour, perseverance, and patience are the farmer's responsibility. Yet, the result remains one hundred percent God's work. In Mark 4:26-29 the Lord Himself illustrated these principles in a parable which underlines the mystery of God's secret work. The process in itself is hidden for the servant till the fruit is produced.⁷

As in other aspects so also as a faithful husbandman, the apostle Paul had given the right example (Acts 20:35; 1 Cor. 4:12; 15:10; Gal. 4:11; Phil. 2:16; Col. 1:29; 1 Tim. 4:10). Time and again Scripture confirms the principle of hard work in order to enjoy the fruits (cf. Dt. 20:7). Still, there is already this enjoyment on earth for workers like Paul. This we conclude from Romans 1:13 and Colossians 1:6. Yet, the full result will be seen in the glory (1 Th. 2:19f). The Lord's coming itself encourages us to be patient, enduring, and long-suffering. The husbandman should have these qualities, for they enable him to do what is needed to secure results (fruit) pleasing to his Master at His coming. Then he will partake of the fruits, together with Him who

⁵ *The Son of man upon whom the heavens had been opened here on earth had become the Object in the opened heaven for His own on earth. This truth, which is intimately linked with the Person of our Lord, is fully developed in Paul's ministry, but is shown here in its wondrous, practical effect.*

⁶ *Since it would go too far to review them all, I only give here some references. Gen. 1:11-13; 2:8-17; 3:17-19; 4:3-5; 9:20f; 26:12f; 27:28; Lev. 25; Dt. 8:7f; the book of Ruth; "the king's garden" in 2 Ki. 25:4; Neh. 3:15; Ps. 1; 80; 126*; Song 6:11f; 7:11-13; Isa. 5; 28:23-29; the parables of the sower; John 15; 1 Cor. 3; Heb. 6:7; Jas. 5:7; Rev. 22:2. For further study of this wonderful subject see "A Seed of God" in COME AND SEE Vol. 13 No. 3 to Vol. 15 No. 1 (Dec. 1986—August 1988).*

⁷ *This work of God is in itself an important subject, which is beyond the scope of this article. I also like to refer to the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of righteousness and holiness and similar expressions relating to the result of such a work.*

laid the foundation for everything (Ps. 126:5f; Isa. 53:11).

The coming of the Lord is also an important aspect for the athlete, as we saw before. Thus faith, hope and love work together to produce good children of the apostle Paul, soldiers, athletes, and farmers for the Master.

To be cont'd

Outline for Bible Study (52)

96: The Birth Of John The Baptist — Luke 1:1-25,57-80

Outline

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| 1. The parents of John the Baptist | Lk. 1:5-7 |
| 2. The message of the angel | Lk. 1:8-17 |
| 3. Zacharias' unbelief | Lk. 1:18-24 |
| 4. Birth, circumcision, and naming of John | Lk. 1:57-26 |
| 5. Zacharias' "Benediction" | Lk. 1:67-80 |

Explanation

1. When God sent His Son, Herod the Great reigned in Judea. Only a few, a remnant, among whom the priest Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth, looked for "the consolation of Israel." These two became the objects of God's grace. Being barren was a reproach in Israel.
2. The angel announced the coming of God's messenger, John, who would prepare the way before the Lord (Mal. 3:1). Being a Nazarite, he would not drink wine or strong drink (Num. 6).
3. Doubt, through lack of faith, brought Zacharias the instructive punishment of dumbness as a token. The people realized that an angel of God had spoken to him.
4. Circumcision (Gen. 17:10-14) was a token of God's covenant with Israel. It spoke of death to the flesh, of which baptism is a picture today (Col. 2:11,12; Gal. 5:6). Zacharias had learned his lesson, and when in faith he named his son John (meaning: Jehovah is gracious), his voice returned.
5. In his benediction, Zacharias spoke of Israel's millennial blessings. He praised God, who had redeemed His people; he saw everything accomplished in Christ, whose presence was so near that His forerunner was already born (Mal. 3:1).

Lesson

The angel's words, "Fear not!" introduce the New-Testament period. God wanted to show His grace to man. We could not approach God, but He came down to us in His Son, and John was to prepare His way, and to turn the hearts of the people, to make them ready for the Lord (Lk. 1:16-17; Ps. 85:9).

"The horn of salvation" speaks of the power of salvation. "The Dayspring from on high" ("Rising" or "sunrising" see Rev. 7:2) speaks of the Messiah who sheds light in the darkness (Jn. 1:4-9; 8:12).

Zacharias didn't speak of the law but of the hope of Israel, found in Christ (grounded on the promise, the covenant and the swearing of an oath).

97. The Angel Appears To Mary. The Birth Of The Lord. The Shepherds. — Luke 1:26-56; Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-21

Outline

1. The words of the angel	Lk. 1:26-38
2. Mary visits Elizabeth	Lk. 1:39-45
3. Mary's Song of Praise	Lk. 1:46-56
4. The birth of the Lord Jesus	Lk. 2:1-7
5. The announcement to the shepherds	Lk. 2:8-14
6. The shepherds at the manger	Lk. 2:15-17

Explanation

1. Because Mary of Nazareth in Galilee was humble, God could show her special grace. Gabriel told her the glad tidings that she would be the mother of the promised Messiah.
2. Mary went to visit Elizabeth. Since they both held a special place in God's purposes, they had fellowship with each other (1 Jn. 1:7).
3. The main theme in Mary's song of praise was: God, in His mighty power, displays His honour in procuring our salvation through what is weak and insignificant (1 Cor. 1:27-29).
4. The census served to fulfil God's counsels. Mary came to Bethlehem where "the Ruler in Israel" was to be born (Mic. 5:2) in poverty; there was no room for Him in the inn. His resting place was a manger (2 Cor. 8:9). Worse, there was no room for Him in the hearts of men (Jn. 1:10-11).
5. With a burst of praise and rejoicing the angels announced the Lord's birth to the humble shepherds. No event could ever compare with God's sending His Son into the world so that the world might be saved through Him (Jn. 3:17).
6. The shepherds believed and went quickly to see their Messiah. They told all that had been said about the Child throughout the country.

Lesson

As "a root out of a dry ground" (Isa. 53:2), the Lord was born to parents from a town of which men did not expect anything good (Jn. 1:46).

The name Jesus, like Joshua (formed from Jehovah and Hosea) means Jehovah is Saviour.

The fellowship of Mary and Elizabeth is an example for today's saints. They anticipated the fulfillment of God's promises.

It is interesting to compare Hannah's song of praise in 1 Samuel 2 with that of Mary. May our hearts be full of joy for His grace and salvation (Prov. 29:23; Lk. 1:47-54).

Because Israel had forsaken God, the Roman Emperor ruled over Jerusalem where Christ ought to have reigned on the throne of God. The census gave evidence that Israel had become subject to a foreign power.

Not the nobles, but "the poor have glad tidings preached to them" (Mt. 11:5). One angel announced Christ's birth, a multitude celebrated the event.

a. "Glory to God in the highest!" Never has God been glorified like this. His Son came into the world as a little babe to fulfil His counsels in the place where sin and the power of the enemy reigned.

b. "Peace on earth!" Christ destroyed the power of sin, which had separated man from God and his neighbour. Now perfect love settles in the heart and removes fear and enmity (1 Jn. 4:9, 11, 18) from the soul who is converted to the Lord (Lk. 7:50).

c. "Good pleasure (delight) in men!" Through Christ God now can have pleasure in men and women who have accepted God's gift of life in Christ (Prov. 8:31; Heb. 2:16; Jn. 20:17).

To be cont'd

A WINTER'S DAY

O Lord, it is a winter's sky,
And all below looks drear;
The north wind bloweth sharp and high,
No sign of Spring appears:
But I will tune my harp, and sing
Of Summer soon to come;
My soul in hope shall stretch her wing
To reach her sunny home.

The storm is rough, the rain falls fast,
But Thou my covert art;
While the fair sky is overcast,
I'll hide me in Thy heart:
My refuge, till I see Thy face,
Is 'neath Thy wings of love;
Thy wounded side the nestling-place
of Thy poor timid dove.

Faith hath no cause to shed a tear,
Faith hath no cause to sigh:
Faith owns no warrant for a fear,
Or e'en a downcast eye:
No powers of earth or hell can mar
His work, or cross His will;
Whate'er the tempest, or the war,
Faith cries, "*My soul, be still.*"

J. G. Deck

The God of All Comfort (1)

—*J. van Dijk*

Paul

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

Paul introduces this very important part of God's Word with the words "*Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassions, and God of all encouragement.*" He presents God here as the God of *all* comfort, the One who helps in difficult times. The importance of this passage is evident from the opening words. They are the same Paul used to introduce God's counsels and the blessings God's grace has bestowed on us, "*Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ*" (Eph. 1:3). Peter uses the same words when he introduces the important subject of new birth, "*Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who,*

according to his great mercy, has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:3).

These three passages are connected with three vital things. In Ephesians Paul speaks of our heavenly blessings and our position in Christ as determined in God's counsels from *eternity*. These things we possess through faith. Peter speaks of the *moment of new birth*, when God brought us to Himself, giving us *hope*. In 2 Corinthians Paul uses these same words again when he speaks of the God of all comfort. There he tells us that in the midst of *today's* troubles, we may experience the practical result of God's *love*. This latter passage is now before us. Although Paul speaks here of the difficulties and troubles which he experienced, he is able to write about encouragement. He found God to be the God of all comfort.

We often ponder why we suffer. Paul explains his own case, he says, I have been in trouble so that I can be a vessel in God's hand that can encourage others when they are in trouble. In troubles, he has experienced the love of God's heart. Now he says, "If we are in tribulation then it is for your encouragement and salvation." He had to encounter these difficulties, so that we may be encouraged. Looking at Paul, we see that God has brought him through, He has kept him, and he has come through with a thankful heart. If God can do that for Paul, He can do that for all of us." In speaking of this, Paul certainly did not underestimate the difficulties that one might encounter in life.

There is a second aspect to the question of suffering and being comforted of God. A little later, Paul says, "Whether we are encouraged, [it is] for your encouragement and salvation" (v.7). So if you wonder why Paul was encouraged? It was so that you may be encouraged. This is easier to understand than the first part. We can easily understand this. When we see that God encourages someone, we ourselves are encouraged too.

In summary then, Paul tells us that there are two sides to suffering. The one side is that if we suffer we will experience God's encouragement which enables us to encourage others. The other side is, that when others see how God has encouraged us in the midst of our suffering, they will be encouraged. So Paul says, whether we are suffering, or whether we are encouraged, both sides are for your encouragement. How good that one who has experienced suffering is able to set God before us as the God of all encouragement in the midst of tribulation, in the midst of trials. We have a great God! But we must learn to know Him. That was the case with Paul, and so it was with Job.

Job

Job 1:6-12

Let us now think of Job, especially the beginning of his story and the end. We want to include the end, because when James speaks about Job, he points to the patience of Job and "the end of the Lord" (Jas. 5:11). All that transpired is of course important and full of lessons, yet it is not really the thing to focus our attention on now. The most important thing, as in all things, is "the end of the Lord."

Job's story is instructive on several accounts. We know very little of what goes on in the realm of the spirits. There are fallen angels over whom Satan rules. The Book of Job lifts up a tip of the curtain, and shows what takes place among them. From the New Testament we know that we are to be a testimony, giving evidence of the greatness of God to the authorities in the air, the powers that are there (Eph. 3:10). That testimony is not just for the holy angels, but also for the fallen ones. They all look on and observe the behaviour of God's children, in whom they see something of God's all-various wisdom.

In Job's story we get a glimpse of how God uses Satan. Satan is ever ready to make those who are called by the Lord's name to fall and stumble, but how little does Satan understand the relationship between a soul and his God. He has no knowledge of it. Satan knows that love of possessions is a most suitable tool to use in those who belong to him. They can easily be motivated by greed, and so he expects that greed can also be used in dealing with this man of God. So in his first encounter with God, Satan says, "It is actually very simple. Job thinks that by serving Thee, he will be richly rewarded. Just take all that he has and see what happens! He will curse God." How surprised must he have been when Job didn't!

How is that with us? We may have a relationship with God, we may know Him through the Lord Jesus. Sometimes, perhaps for reasons similar to those in Job's case, God takes away something which is very precious to us, something that we feel we really cannot do without. Satan thinks that this will make us turn our back on God. True, sometimes we waver for a moment, but not Job. We read his reaction. "And he rose up, and rent his mantle (v. 20)." He showed his deep sorrow, for he was deeply disturbed. "He shaved his head," he did not seek to hide that he was full of bitterness. He was troubled to the depth of

his soul. Then he fell on the ground. Was he crying to God? No! He worshipped!

He worships! Can you do that? Can I do that? *Do I* do that? What a relationship there must have been between Job and God that he could fall on his face and worship when he had lost everything — his possessions, even his children, all ten of them! Can you imagine? Suppose you have a household of ten children, and one day the report comes that they are all gone, all! Yet, Job fell on his face and worshipped God.

Why does God record this? God knows that we need encouragement. Remember what Paul wrote? He said if there are tribulations, it is for your encouragement. Why do you think Job was in such tribulation, such hardship, such difficulty? It was for your and my encouragement. Yes, for many, many generations Job has been an encouragement. Job has been a tremendous tool in the hand of God to encourage those who belong to Him. He is a great encouragement to us. What a man, Job! No, What a God!

To be cont'd