

**John, The Beloved Disciple (2)**

—H. Bouter Jr.

*In the first part of this series the author first dwelled on John's character. He then looked at some of the passages that show us the love of Christ for His own. He finally presented the events in the upper room that demonstrate the intimate relationship between the Lord and John. Now the author takes us to the cross.*

*By the cross of Jesus (Jn. 19:26)*

After the Lord Jesus was taken prisoner and sentenced to death, we meet the beloved disciple again by the cross. A mere handful of the Lord's followers are left there — the others have fled. John is among those few faithful ones (John 19:25-27). Unlike Peter, who denied being a disciple of this Man of sorrows, John faithfully followed his Master on the path of suffering. At first after the Lord's arrest, Peter had followed Him with John (who in ch. 18:15 is mentioned as "the other disciple"; according to some this must have been Nicodemus or someone else). Apparently Peter lacked perseverance to follow the Lord on this path of humiliation. This shows both his weakness and the truth of the words the Lord had spoken to him, that he could not follow Him now (ch. 13:36-38).

John remained faithful, however, and sided with the Lord even in this hour of unspeakable reproach and deepest suffering. What made him do so? Probably it was the happy hours spent with the Lord in the upper room that gave him the strength to meet the test of suffering. Now it became apparent how strong the ties between the Lord and His beloved disciple really were. Of course, John's example contains an important lesson for ourselves as followers of Christ. A life in intimate fellowship with the ascended Lord is an absolute necessity if we are to follow Him in the world that has rejected Him. Our fellowship by the power of the Holy Spirit with the ascended Lord — "in the upper room" — enables us to follow the rejected Saviour in His footsteps here on earth and to stay close to Him.

Indeed, it is very important to take our place by the cross of Jesus, for there we can learn a great deal. There we see Him hanging as the Sin Bearer, the One who died for our sins bearing them in His body on the cross (1 Pet. 2:24). There too, He was made sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21). The big questions of our sins and of indwelling sin were settled there; for by Christ's offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3). So by the cross we were delivered, both from our sins and from the power of sin. Now, set free from the law of sin and death, we walk according to the Spirit. Our sinful flesh was condemned in the death of Christ, and met its definite end there. The old self was crucified with Christ, that our body of sin might be done away, that we should no longer be slaves to sin (Rom. 6:6).

This means that to a considerable extent, the cross determines the position of a Christian. By the cross we also learn that we have been released from the law; we have died to the law, and are now joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead (Rom. 7:4-6). This does not mean, of course, that a Christian is a lawless person, for he is under the law of Christ, and fulfills the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2). His rule of life is Christ, who by the Spirit enables him to meet this high standard. The law of Sinai demanded from the Israelites to love their neighbour as themselves. The law of Christ — the law of love — asks us to follow in His steps, and even to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 Jn. 3:16).

Reading Galatians, we see that the cross has brought a fundamental change in our relationship with the law, our own sinful flesh, and the world in which we live (Gal. 2:19-20; 5:24; 6:14). The believer is crucified to the world, for by the cross of Christ the world and the powers of darkness that rule it were judged (Jn. 12:31; 16:11; Col. 2:15). The cross also laid the basis for reconciliation, not just of the redeemed but of all things in heaven and on earth. By the blood of Christ the whole creation will be brought back to God (Col. 1:20-22).

By the cross we also learn that, as disciples of our crucified Lord, we are not alone in this world. We are linked with one another, and can support each other. This is clearly shown by the example of Mary and the beloved disciple. On the cross, Christ made a new bond between His mother and John: "Jesus therefore, seeing His mother, and the disciple standing by whom He loved, says to His mother, Woman, behold thy son. Then He says unto the disciple, Behold thy mother. And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home" (19:26-27).

These words remind us of the Lord's words to Mary at the outset of His service. How different these were: "What do I have to do with thee, woman?" (Jn. 2:4). On that occasion He had to admonish her, because in His service He could solely

depend on the will of His Father. Now, having fulfilled His task and having reached the end of His path, He wanted to comfort her and to alleviate her sorrow. While going through the most severe sufferings Himself, He yet paid attention to her and eased her pain. The awareness that death was going to part them must have pierced Mary's soul like a sword (cf. Lk. 2:35). Therefore the Lord desired John, the beloved disciple, to take the vacant place. By taking care of Mary from that hour on, he fulfilled this wish of the dying Saviour.

These new family ties illustrate our mutual ties as disciples of a rejected Lord. Believers are linked with each other through the accomplished work on Calvary's cross. There the Lord knit us together in love and created very close ties of fellowship between His redeemed. We make up one family, one household, for the Father calls us His children, and the Son calls us His brethren. It comes as no surprise that John, in his first epistle, has so much to say about the household of God and the relationships within this new family. Being children of God, we are born of God and have to reveal Him in a world that does not know Him. Our relationships should be marked by the Divine features — God is light, and God is love (1 Jn. 1:5; 4:8). Within this household there are different relationships, both with one another and with the Lord. John speaks of all the believers as children of the Father, but he also distinguishes between fathers in Christ, young men and little children (1 Jn. 2:12-27). Within these relationships that the Lord has given, we are to take care of one another and help and support each other. In dying, the Lord not only linked us with Himself but also with one another.

#### *By the empty tomb (Jn. 20:1-10)*

John, the beloved disciple, witnessed not only Christ's crucifixion but also His resurrection from the dead. By the empty tomb of Christ we again meet John and Peter together. Mary Magdalene had come with the news that the body of the Lord had been taken from the tomb. Then Simon Peter, together with the other disciple whom Jesus loved, had set out for the garden tomb. Peter, I assume, did so timidly, for his relationship with the Lord, whom he had denied, had not yet been restored. This was to happen later when the Lord appeared to him personally (Lk. 24:34, 1 Cor. 15:5). Some time after that he was also publicly restored before the disciples as a servant of the Lord (Jn. 21). Therefore Peter was slower than John, although both of them, curious as they were, ran to the tomb. John — driven by his love for the Lord — was the first to arrive (v. 4). Stooping, he saw the linen wrappings lying there (v. 5). The original Greek wording suggests that he looked sharply to see whether he could discern anything, since there might be something important to be seen (cf. Jas. 1:25; 1 Pet. 1:12). Yet, the only things he saw were the linen wrappings; the body of the Lord was gone.

However, John did not enter the tomb but waited for his companion. As soon as he had arrived, Peter — ever the impulsive man — entered the tomb. He saw not only the linen wrappings lying there, but also "the handkerchief which was upon His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded up in a distinct place by itself" (v. 7). This was a clear proof of the Lord's resurrection. As someone else remarked: "After His resurrection the Lord rolled up the linen wrappings and the face cloth, and laid them in separate places, not hurriedly but calmly and deliberately, just like a person neatly folds away his nightclothes after a good night's sleep." Still, this was not sufficient for Peter to believe that Christ had risen; he only marvelled at what had happened (Lk. 24:12). Here again, we see the contrast between Peter and John, for of the latter it is said that he believed after entering the tomb (v. 8).

Then even John failed, for he did not stay and wait to meet the risen One. Leaving the tomb, he and Peter went away to their homes. Here Mary Magdalene surpassed even the beloved disciple in her dedication to the Lord, for she stayed by the tomb. She did not want to go home but to see her Lord, although she could only think of Him as the One who had died. Her dedication was rewarded, for Mary was the first to have the privilege of meeting Christ, the risen One. She came to know Him in this new character, as the One risen from the dead, who would soon ascend to the Father (v. 11-18).

It is important to consider these experiences of the disciples as they show the resurrection to be a historical fact and also paint a picture of the disciples' spiritual growth. Their growth in the knowledge of the Lord is an illustration of our own growth in faith and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). It is one thing to see Christ as the crucified One and to side with Him. It is another: to know Him as the risen One and to be aware of being linked with Him in this new capacity. To be saved I must first focus my eyes on the crucified Christ and accept in faith that he died on the cross in my stead, bearing the judgment of my sins. Secondly, I must believe in my heart that God raised Him from the dead (Rom. 10:9). Christ was delivered up for our offenses and has been raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25). That is why Paul says that Christ died for us, but what is more, that He was raised and is now at the right hand of God (Rom. 8:34).

Now what makes the resurrection so outstanding? The cross was necessary to put away our sins and to judge sin in the flesh. This, in fact, is a negative thing, although the cross has also a positive aspect: the manifestation of God's love and grace. The resurrection, however, is clearly positive, since something completely new came to light — leaving death behind for ever, Christ entered a new world. After He, by His death, had solved the problem of sin, He rose as the great

Victor over sin, death and Satan. As such, He became the Head of a new creation of which the believers are the first fruits (Col. 1:18; Jas. 1:18). While Christ is the First-born from the dead, His own are united with Him as first fruits. We were crucified with Christ; we died with Him and were buried with Him. With Him we were also raised to a new life and even seated in the heavenly places (Rom. 6:4-6; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:4-6; Col. 2:11-12). Being the rich fruits of Christ's work, now we can say as new creatures: "The old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). In the light of this we can, so to speak, take our place by the tomb of Christ with Peter and John, in the awareness of being one with our Lord who died. The two disciples even entered the tomb, which is exactly that of which Christian baptism testifies:

*I have died and have been buried,  
Did descend into Thy grave.  
To a sheltered haven carried,  
Now I'm one with Thee, and safe.*

We were baptized into the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3), which means that we have been united with a dead and buried Saviour. Yet, this is not the full truth about the Christian's position — there is more. Just as Mary Magdalene, we too, can learn to know the Lord as the risen One, who defeated death and the grave, and has now returned to the Father. Now we are also united with Him in His new position; He calls us His brethren, and we may call the Father our Father (Jn. 20:17). What a tremendous privilege!

Newly converted people who put their trust in the Lord Jesus will not immediately realize the scope of these things. We need spiritual growth to understand how closely we are linked with the dead and risen Lord. The story of these disciples illustrates this. How much did they experience with the risen Lord, and how fast did they grow during those fifty days between Easter and Pentecost! First, they learned to know Christ as the true Paschal Lamb. Then they knew Him as the true Sheaf of the first fruits. He rose from the dead on the first day of the week, on which the sheaf of the first fruits of the harvest was offered to God. After many appearances of the risen Lord, they witnessed His ascension forty days later. They realized that He took His place at the right hand of God as the heavenly Man (Acts 1). Ten days later, on the day of Pentecost, they learned to know Him as the One who baptized them with the Holy Spirit, thus building His Assembly (Acts 2).

Reading further in the book of Acts, we can only be amazed at the powerful testimony of the apostles concerning the risen and exalted Christ. They knew that they were united with this heavenly Lord, and had accepted the obvious consequences of this. They had come far in the knowledge of His Person and the results of His work. Although they used to know Christ according to the flesh, they did not know Him thus any longer (2 Cor. 5:16). Christ had entered a totally new order of things, the basis of which He had laid through His work on earth. In his ministry, Paul explains to us these new and heavenly things, and teaches us more about our union with the risen and exalted Lord. It all begins with us taking our place — like John did — by the cross and by the open tomb of Jesus.

*To be cont'd*

## **Leviticus — Approach into the Holiest**

D. Hayhoe

### *Outline*

The five Offerings and their Laws	Ch. 1-7
The Consecration of the Priests	Ch. 8-10
Regulations for the Priests	Ch. 11-15
The day of Atonement	Ch. 16
Regulations for the People and the Priests	Ch. 17-22
The Seven Feasts of the Lord	Ch. 23
The Lamp, the Year of Jubilee, Blessings	Ch. 24-27

### *Summary*

Many people with a sincere desire to read through the whole Bible start in Genesis only to get bogged down completely in Leviticus. This happened to a young technologist recently emigrated from the Far East. His parents were Buddhist, but one

of his sisters was a Christian. And so he started reading through the Bible in order to know what Christianity was all about. But by the time he had finished Leviticus, he wasn't sure it was worth the effort!

Just at that time he attended a Bible study where 1 Peter 1:16 was read, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." It was pointed out to him that this was the key theme of Leviticus, and in fact, of all Christianity; a holy God and His holy people. For, as Hebrews 12:14 reminds us, we must follow "holiness, without which no one shall see the Lord." Likewise, in His sermon on the mount, the Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mt. 5:8). Leviticus is devoted to this important theme. Holiness is one of the essential characteristics that sets Christianity apart from other religions.

When we first start reading Leviticus, however, we find that the question is not one of our own holiness, but of the provision God has made for us to have access to a holy God: "And he shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt-offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him" (1:4).

The first seven chapters present us with the details of the burnt-offering, meal-offering, peace-offering, sin-offering, and trespass-offering. All these, with their details, speak of the Lord Jesus in His life and death. Everyone who truly loves the Lord will delight to study these details (with the help of a useful commentary, perhaps). The proof, if we need one, that these sacrifices together with their details all prefigure the Lord Jesus is given us in Ephesus 5:2, "Christ loved us, and delivered Himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." These last two words, "sweet-smelling savour," are a direct reference to the burnt-offering, which was "an offering by fire... of a sweet odour" (1:9). The New Testament is full of references, direct and indirect, to these five sacrifices being types of the Lord.

Following the offerings and their laws, we have the consecration of the priests (ch. 8-10). Again, there is nothing more instructive for us than to really understand these details, for are not we a "holy priesthood," a "kingly priesthood," and "priests to His God and Father (1 Pet. 2:5,9; Rev. 1:6)? And, just as the priests were seen together with Aaron, is not Christ with us today in our worship (Ps. 22:22)?

In the third section of the book (ch. 11-15), we find for the first time the key phrase "Ye shall be holy; for I am holy" (11:44-45). This section gives the priests instructions on how to discern between clean and unclean foods, harmless and fearful diseases, and daily defilement. This was essential enough at the time for Israel, but how much more for us today, who live in a world of unclean foods, spiritual diseases, and defilement of all kinds (especially through the media). I well remember the late author and missionary to China, C. G. Willis, speaking to a large group of young people on Leviticus 11. Using the details of this chapter about the laws of clean and unclean foods, which many have considered to be of no importance to believers today, brother Willis held our attention while he applied them to the very practical parts of our lives.

The climax to the book of Leviticus comes in chapter 16, which describes the day of atonement. Few chapters in God's Word are as comprehensive as this one in its significance. William Kelly has written, "The atonement has incomparably the deepest place of all truths in Scripture, save only Christ's person, in which all the fullness dwelt bodily." The details concerning the two goats, the role of the High Priest, and the garment of glory and beauty, are all highly significant.

The following chapters (17-22), present further regulations for both the people and the priests. Again we see that holiness is essential for people that have to do with a holy God. So the phrase, "Be holy, for I... am holy" is repeated twice more (19:2; 20:7— KJV). Another important principle is also brought out here. The people were not to eat the blood of animals, "for the life of the flesh is in the blood." Most of the problems in our society come from not following the moral and ethical guidelines set out in these six chapters, for they are not just for the Jews. Although the apostle Paul told the Gentile believers that it was not necessary to be circumcised or to observe the law of Moses, he nevertheless reminded them that they "abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from what is strangled, and from blood" (Acts 15:17-20), things mentioned in these chapters.

The seven feasts of the Lord, described in chapter 23, have a beautiful prophetic significance. They consist of three feasts in the first month, one feast in the third month, and three in the seventh month. The Passover was fulfilled in the Lord's death. Closely connected with it was the feast of unleavened bread. Our feast of unleavened bread, too, is closely associated with the remembrance of the Lord in His death (1 Cor. 5:7-8). The Lord in resurrection is typified in the sheaf of the first-fruits (1 Cor. 15:23). These are the first three feasts. The two wave loaves of the third month are clearly associated with the day of Pentecost. This was fulfilled in Acts 2.

Before the next feast, the harvest takes place. In Revelation the harvest is connected with the judgments that come over the earth before the Lord returns in Revelation 19. For this reason the last three feasts represent the future. First we have the feast of trumpets, the regathering of Israel to the land. Next comes the day of Atonement, the time when Israel will

see whom they have pierced; then they will afflict themselves (Zech. 12:8-14). Finally comes the feast of Tabernacles, the Millennial reign of the Messiah. All is one great prophecy of the things to come.

The remaining four chapters of Leviticus (24-27) give many interesting types and principles. First comes the service in the holy place of the tabernacle; then instructions regarding the sacredness of the Lord's name and the need for equity in judgment among God's people. In chapter 25, God shows His care for the land by giving it its sabbaths, and for the people by giving them the year of Jubilee every 50th year. The land was not to be sold for ever, and the poor were to be cared for. Chapter 26 warns against unfaithfulness towards God, Israel would be scattered if they did not serve God, but God will bring them back when they repent. The book closes with the laws regarding vows and tithes. In all things, the great care of God for His people and His land is evident.

Throughout the book we hear God's message: "Be ye holy for I am holy."

## **The Prophecy of Amos (2)**

—R. Been Sr.

*In the previous issue, the author gave a short overview followed by a look at the first chapter. Amos was a simple shepherd, called by God. His prophecies did not, as some others, have the last days in view. The author drew our attention to the similarity and the distinction between the words of Amos and Jeremiah. Now he continues to compare Amos words with those of Joel.*

### *Chapter 1 (continued)*

In Joel 3:16 the prophet said: "Jehovah will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem." Amos uses the same words, but Joel continues: "And the heavens and the earth shall shake: and Jehovah will be a shelter for His people, and the refuge of the children of Israel." He announces the judgments of the far future that will introduce the Millennium of Christ, the true Son of David. The Lion of Judah will rule at Jerusalem over the whole earth. The result of the Lion's roaring in Joel is, therefore, entirely different from that in Amos. The latter speaks of judgments that will be executed because of the righteous reign of God. Joel, however, shows that the present righteous government of God does not conclude His ways with the nations. In the last days the final judgment will be meted out over the nations. For instance, the Lord Himself shall execute the judgment over the King of the North, the prophetic Assyrian, by destroying him for ever after having used him as a disciplinary rod on Israel.

Now we will first make a few general remarks about the remaining verses of chapter one and those of chapter two. In this part of Amos the judgment is announced over six nations and over Judah and Israel. Eight times we read: "Thus says Jehovah." When God has said it, it is certain and unavoidable that the judgments will come, even if men do not know when. Because He is merciful, God may delay announced judgments for a shorter or longer time. Still, with God, forbearance is never acquittance; He will not revoke His sentence. To Him, time has not the least influence on the holiness and righteousness of His ways — these remain unchangeable. Indeed, most of Amos' prophecies were only fulfilled about one hundred years after Amos had spoken them.

First, the six different nations that surround Israel (the twelve tribes) are threatened with judgment. The Philistines in the West, Tyre in the North, Syria in the northwest, Ammon and Moab in the east, and Edom in the South. Except Moab, these nations are told that they will be judged according to the manner in which they have treated God's people.

Today, God still acts according to this principle. God has given, or will give a righteous recompense to those nations who have oppressed or persecuted Israel, no matter how guilty Israel itself is. Even today there is still a righteous government of God in this world, which stands in contrast to the government of men. King Saul had died long ago, yet God had not forgotten the unrighteousness of his killing the Gibeonites (2 Sam. 21). Joshua and the chief men of Israel had in days gone by sworn in the name of the Lord that they would not kill the Gibeonites (Josh. 9:15-21). Saul had ignored that oath. Then the house of Saul, on which the blood guilt rested, had to be destroyed, though David spared Mephibosheth.

God does not only deal according to this principle when it concerns nations, but also when it concerns persons. Committed unrighteousness will eventually be revenged. He waits in His wisdom perhaps a whole lifetime before revenging some unrighteousness committed toward others, even toward His children. When it is a question of eternity, God does no longer hold believers accountable for their sins; yet in His ways on earth with His children He does not forget anything. "For whatever a man shall sow, that also shall he reap" (Gal. 6:7). David, the man after God's heart, didn't see any consequences during the days shortly after his crime against Uriah. Yet, at God's predetermined time the judgment

came. In the case of David's counting the people it was just the same. Then, God's grace stopped the judgment in its course (2 Sam. 24). Many of God's children have experienced the same. They have done one or the other evil without any apparent consequences, but suddenly, sometimes after years, these came.

In all cases mentioned in these chapters, the judgment was not only announced over the government, but also over the people. Those in authority — kings, princes, and other leaders — bear the greatest responsibility, therefore they are affected personally. When a nation comes under the Lord's judgment, we can be sure that it has agreed with the unrighteousness of their leaders. God's recompense is always righteous. The people themselves had been led by hatred toward the Gibeonites. This is why there was first a famine and only later the judgment over Saul's house. After David committed his misdeed toward Uriah, there were no consequences for the people.

The human mind finds it hard to understand why there is no immediate punishment when a nation has committed unrighteousness. God's ways, however, are not our ways. We see in the prophecy that God first allows the unrighteousness to bear the fruit intended by the one who commits it. The Lord uses this fruit to bring about His plans. Yet the recompense certainly comes sooner or later.

The powers by which God judged the unrighteous acts of Israel, Judah, and the other nations, are not mentioned by Amos. His prophecy is not concerned with these instrumental powers, but with the direct intervention of God, called for by the moral condition of these eight nations. Amos speaks of a consuming fire that is kindled by the Lord. He says this seven times. From other prophecies we know that especially the Assyrian and Nebuchadnezzar were used as instruments. Isaiah mentions the same nations as Amos. In describing the judgment they receive because of their behaviour toward Israel, he mentions the Assyrian as the instrument (Isa. 14:28- ch. 23). Jeremiah points to Nebuchadnezzar as the instrument for judgment over these nations because of their behaviour toward Judah (Jer. 46-49). No matter which powers God used as instruments for judgment over Israel, Judah, or the other nations, whenever these instruments had served their purpose, they themselves were broken and perished. Their fall was deeper than that of the nations that they had trodden down.

The judgments in Amos' prophecy — whether executed by the Assyrian, Egypt, the kings from the East, or Nebuchadnezzar — are but a result of God's government in this world, and of His recompense. They are not the judgments of the last days. All the nations in Amos 1 and 2 will again exist in the last days, so that they may receive their final national judgment. Several nations will have a remnant that will be restored. This is not true, for instance, for Edom. The national judgment over nations should never be mistaken for the personal judgment of each individual before the Great White Throne.

When, during its history, Israel gave itself over to idolatry, leaving Jehovah and transgressing the law of the Lord, the Lord used the nations mentioned in Amos 1 and 2, besides some others, to chastise His people. It was soon evident, however, from the abominations perpetrated by these nations, that they all too gladly used the chance to conquer Israel. They rejoiced that the Lord was no longer a wall around His people, and did no longer protect them, allowing Israel to be defeated. These nations pursued their own interests and sought to increase their territory. This in itself was logical enough, and it is not laid to their charge either. It is because they committed terrible abominations in Israel, that God's judgments would come over these nations. They piled sin upon sin until the cup overflowed.

Eight times the prophet says, "For three transgressions of..., and for four I will not revoke its sentence; because...". This way of expressing an undefined number occurs more often in Scripture (Job 5:19; Prov. 6:16; Eccl. 11:2). God would not revoke His judgment over those nations, not even over Israel and Judah. Among these eight nations not one had not caused the cup of its transgressions to overflow. This is why, in God's ways, judgment would, and has come over them.

Yet, this does not mean that thereby their national existence found a definite end. As far as Israel is concerned, God will deal again with His people at a later date. His counsels regarding Israel are irrevocable; He never forgets His people. A remnant out of the two and the ten tribes will be restored. Some Gentile nations will be eradicated in the future, of others a remnant will remain (e.g., Egypt, Moab, Ammon, Elam — Jer. 46:26; 48:47; 49:6,39).

The oppression that came over Israel in earlier days may come over the Christian nations in our days by means of wars, revolutions, and such. These are to be seen as a chastisement of these Christian nations owing to their condition of ruin and departure. When, however, the oppressors become guilty of horrible deeds, then God will not forget this. They will receive their due reward for it, according to what they have done. This may be through nations that appear on the world scene that are stronger than the oppressors.

Often it is not possible to establish the time at which the nations mentioned by Amos invaded Israel or Judah. Such attacks have taken place time and again with shorter or longer intervals.

After these general remarks regarding Amos 1:3 through chapter 2, we will continue with a look in more detail at these verses in our next issue.

*To be cont'd*

## ***Seven Certainties***

—M. M. Saleh

### *Introduction*

In His matchless wisdom, the Holy Spirit postponed the writings of the apostle John until the end of the first Christian century. God knew beforehand all the false doctrines that appeared in that period. He also knew that they would be the starting point for all heresies appearing afterward till the rapture of the Church.

Therefore we find in the First Epistle of John seven searching tests introduced by the words: "We know." In these words we have also seven certainties that fill every aspect of the true believer's life. They will be mentioned here in the order of the Christian's experience with the Saviour.

### *Life*

By nature we are all lost sinners, threatened by an eternal just judgment and a terrible destination. Thus nothing can calm our souls except a divine — fully divine — assurance. He, our God and Saviour, has translated us from that circle of sin, death, condemnation, confusion, and suspicion to the circle of love, holiness, and life, having full assurance that there is no condemnation for us. Therefore our hearts rejoice in this first statement: "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:14).

### *Understanding*

We acknowledge that a serious question arises from the four thousand religions present in today's world. Not a single religion from these can give the least assurance concerning eternity and the final destination for the soul. (You will know this if you have read the books of Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed, etc.). So all will cry, From where, and how, could you receive such full assurance?

"We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding that we should know Him that is true; and we are in Him that is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life" (1 Jn. 5:20).

Here is the key for all the truth revealed by the all-loving, eternal God to the poor, ruined human race. The only foundation for all the blessings lies in the heart of God. We have "believed in the witness which God has witnessed concerning His Son... He that has the Son has life: he that has not the Son of God has not life" (1 Jn. 5:10-12). We believe that He came from the Father and was manifested in the flesh. In that holy spotless body He accomplished the redemption of our souls. Thus we can rejoice in the One "in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offenses" (Eph. 1:7).

### *A Divine Nature*

Then we hear the following question from these many religions: What happened to you when you received this full assurance in your hearts? The answer is found in the third wonderful statement: "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the wicked one" (1 Jn. 5:19). This means that within us, a new, holy nature has been created that has the same moral features as God; it loves what He loves, and hates what He abhors. For this reason the apostle Peter says to the saints, the true believers in Christ Jesus: "He has given to us the greatest and precious promises, that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Pet. 1:4).

Through this new creation, through the new man created in us by Him, our hearts rejoice: "We know that we are of God." It is very evident that everyone who has not yet received this nature lies in the wicked one.

### *A Sinless Nature*

Is this new nature subject to sin? "We know that everyone begotten of God does not sin, but he that has been begotten of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him" (1 Jn. 5:18).

As mentioned, God created this new nature within us, therefore it hates sin and it cannot even sin, and the wicked one cannot touch it (1 Jn. 3:9). Yet we should never forget that the old sinful nature is still present in the believer. For this reason there is a continuous warfare (struggle) inside the believer. But thanks be to God for the gift of the Holy Spirit which abides in this new nature. In Him is the guaranteed power to defeat the movements of the old sinful nature. "If by the Spirit, ye put to death the deeds of the body [old nature], ye shall live" (Rom. 8:13). The victory of the believer depends on his being so occupied with Christ that he immediately recognizes any stirring of the old nature. Whenever it stirs, the believer can cry to the victorious Man seated at the right hand of the Majesty. Right away the Holy Spirit will put to death the deeds of the old nature (Rom. 8:13).

### *A New Confidence*

After receiving this new holy divine nature, what about our circumstances, our financial and other needs? Here comes our fifth full assurance: "And if we know that He hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of Him" (1 Jn. 5:15). We notice that the first four certainties dealt with our eternal, spiritual condition, and our moral behaviour, which should be to the glory of our God and Saviour. Now we have a certainty addressing our physical, present needs. "All these (present, physical) things the nations seek after; for your heavenly Father knows that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and these things shall be added unto you" (Mt. 6:32-33).

### *A New Hope*

What about our hope, our expectation after being born again? From the moment our souls became truly acquainted with our beloved Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, we have only one hope. We long for it and wait for it daily. We find it expressed in this wonderful, amazing statement: "We know that if it [or: He] is manifested we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 Jn. 3:2).

"For our citizenship [or: commonwealth] has its existence in the heavens from which also we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory" (Phil. 3:20).

### *A New Insight*

After these various definite assurances have you any idea about the times and seasons? "According as ye have heard that antichrist comes, even now there have come many antichrists, whence we know that it is the last hour" (1 Jn. 2:18). Yes, wherever we go today, we smell the very prominent and offensive odour of the enemy. It fills every aspect of the atmosphere with the spirit of the antichrist, even in the so-called Christian countries.

May our Lord and Saviour give every reader of these words to possess these full assurances, which surpass all comprehension, before the time and season of grace ends.

## **Outline for Bible Study (56)**

**113. The Nobleman at Capernaum. Jesus at Nazareth.** — John 4:43-54; Luke 4:16-30.

### *Outline*

1. The royal nobleman John 4:43-54



2. The Lord Jesus in the synagogue Luke 4:16-21
3. His preaching and the result Luke 4:22-30

### *Explanation*

1. The nobleman was serving at the court of King Antipas (son of Herod the Great), tetrarch of Galilee. In vain John the Baptist had preached in Galilee (Mk. 6:20), unbelief and sin prevailed there. The courtier, in his trouble, sought the Lord (Isa. 26:16), the true, great Healer and Helper. The Lord rebuked unbelief that sought after a sign (Jn. 2:18; Mt. 12:38-39). The courtier humbled himself under this rebuke (Ps. 119:67). Distance was no hindrance for the Lord to help. The nobleman believed even if he did not see (Jn. 20:29), and so he became a blessing to his whole house.

2. After the Babylonian captivity there were synagogues in almost every place in Judea. On Sabbaths and on feast days after prayer, a portion of the Law or Prophets was read. In every synagogue there was an overseer (spiritual), a servant (or minister) and a reader. Anyone could explain the Scriptures, and so they invited the Lord to speak.

The Lord stopped reading in the Prophet Isaiah in the middle of the sentence. (Cf. Lk. 4:18-19 with Isa. 61:1-2). This was because the second part of the sentence in Isaiah (v. 2) speaks about vengeance during the Kingdom, which was not yet fulfilled. First the time of grace, the time in which we now live, the time of the Church, had to come. Similarly Isaiah 52:7 is only quoted in part in Romans 10:15. This is because the calling of the Church is a parenthesis in God's dealings with Israel.

3. After the Lord had read a portion, He introduced Himself as the Messiah, who had come to bring salvation. They were offended by His origin (the son of Joseph, a carpenter) and, therefore, rejected His offer of grace. Because of this, the Lord could not do the wonders in His home town that He had done elsewhere. He told them that nothing had changed. As in the past (Jn. 1:11), the blessing would therefore go to the Gentiles just as it had once gone to Naaman and the widow of Sarepta.

The reminder of this caused them to try to kill the Lord. He turned in their midst and walked away. Before the Lord could rule on earth, He first had to be rejected, to suffer and to die for us (Lk. 24:26). "I have listened to thee in an accepted time, and I have helped thee in a day of salvation: behold, now is the well-accepted time; behold, now the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).

### *Lesson*

The Lord offers salvation to everyone. Today, just as then, the Lord saves those who are of a contrite spirit (Ps. 51:17; 34:18) and gives sight to the spiritually blind. He still preaches glad tidings to the poor (2 Cor. 8:9). He still sets at liberty those who are held captive by Satan, just as Mary of Magdala and the two Gadarenes (Jn. 8:36).

**114. The Man With an Unclean Spirit. Peter's Mother-in-law. The Draft of Fish. The Cleansing of the Leper. — Mark 1:21-45; Luke 4:31-41, 5:1-16; Matthew 8:1-4,14-17**

### *Outline*

1. The man with an unclean spirit Luke 4:31-37
2. Peter's mother-in-law Luke 4:38-39
3. Healings Luke 4:40-41
4. The teaching Luke 5:1-3
5. The draft of fishes and its results Luke 5:4-11
6. A leper cleansed Luke 5:12-16

### *Explanation*

1. A man bound by Satan was freed through one word of the Saviour. "Hold thy peace and come out of him." (Mk. 1:25). Wherever the Saviour came, His presence, His power, His Word was sufficient to heal the sick and to cast out demons. (Lk. 4:40-44).

The Lake of Gennesaret lies on the great trade route from Damascus via Capernaum (a garrison town), along the lake, to Judea. Many people, Jews, Romans and Greeks, passed through it. It, therefore, was a suitable center for the Lord's Galilean ministry. Here the Lord called the disciples, who had followed Him already for some time, to serve Him.

2. The Lord showed that everything was at His command, He could act where man was powerless. Even a fever left at His rebuke.

3. He healed the sick and those possessed by demons. The demons knew Him, and cried out that He was the Son of God. The Lord did not want the testimony of the enemy and told them to be silent.

4. From the ship, the Lord had a natural made amphitheater in which He could address the people who sat on the gently sloping grass fields along the lakeshore.

5. Fishing during daylight in the deep is not natural. Yet the Lord told Peter to let down his nets. Peter believed the Lord and, disregarding the troubles, let down one net. The haul was so great that the net broke and, though other ships came to help, they were still in danger of sinking. Thus the Lord displayed His power and glory. Confronted with the power of the Creator and Ruler over land and sea, Peter humbly confessed his sinfulness (Isa. 6:5, Job 42:5-6).

6. Again the Lord showed his grace toward a leper. This man believed in the ability of the Lord, but wondered if the Lord would be willing to show him grace. Whoever comes to Him, finds in Him a heart full of compassion and receives according to his faith. So also did this leper.

### *Lesson*

Sickness may come from Satan if God permits it (e.g., Job) or directly from God (e.g., Lazarus — Jn. 11). The Lord's rebuking the sickness of Peter's mother-in-law shows that this sickness came from Satan, who tried to prevent her from serving the Lord.

Peter's confession made him fit to receive the mercy of the Lord and prepared him for service. The Lord told him, "Henceforth thou shalt be catching men."

By means of the great catch, the Lord tested their faith. On the one hand their ships were loaded beyond capacity; on the other hand there was the calling to follow the Lord (Mt. 4:22; 9:9). Following requires self-denial and separation from all worldly wealth (Mt. 16:24).

*To be cont'd*