

Healing in Days of Defeat (2)

—Ministry given L. Chaudier in Paris, France, in 1947

After Jericho we find a small, insignificant city, the little city of Ai. They just had to take it. They counselled with each other. They had estimated the apparent difficulty. The wise ones debated the matter. Wisdom weighs and reasons. They said: "Ai? Two thousand to three thousand men will do. It'll be a cinch for them. No use troubling the whole nation, the entire army, about Ai." So, three thousand men marched upon Ai. But what happened? They fled from the enemy, no one stood his ground. Thirty-six men were slain. The battle was lost; "the hearts of the people melted, and became as water" (Josh. 7:5). That was the case. A riddle, an incomprehensible matter!

They had to flee from Ai, though they had taken Jericho without great expense! Marching around it — one day, two days... and on the seventh day seven times — had been sufficient. Women and children had been among them. All had waited quietly, without speaking a word. No one had been allowed to speak. The whole nation had been present and all had had to be quiet and Jericho's lot was decided. It had been a matter of life and death, but nothing was heard. No alarm among the crowd of women and children, no sound. Then, on the seventh day, the unheard-of success in military history: according to God's instruction the priest blew the trumpets, the people raised a cry, and the walls fell..."By faith the walls of Jericho fell" (Heb. 11:30). Six days the people had silently waited for the miracle to take place. On the seventh day it finally happened. It was sufficient to take God at His word, to tell oneself: "God has spoken, therefore we wait!" As at the Red Sea, where the people had Pharaoh in the back and the sea in front, so here too, faith was not put to shame.

What a defeat, however, at Ai! We can imagine how this message travelled like wildfire throughout the camp. "Our soldiers have fled, we have been beaten!" It was terrible. They were defeated! All experienced it, and Joshua most of all. What did it mean? *God was no longer there!* However, if God was no longer there, then the position of this nation was the most nonsensical in the entire world. The sole ground of belonging to this nation, the only justification for its position was God's presence in their midst. Without His presence their situation was hopeless.

It is just the same with the life of faith. How often does God bring us into circumstances in which we are most miserable of all men without Him. With Him, all goes well; without Him, all is lost.

Joshua realizes the utter seriousness of the situation. One could have said: "Those thirty-six deaths are after all not such a great loss." However, neither the thirty-six deaths, nor the three thousand who had fled from the enemy is the reason why Joshua rents his garments and falls on his face before the ark of the covenant. It was something else entirely. He feels that God is no more with them. God had left them. That was the fateful case. That was the situation of Joshua and the people, for they had been told, "Be strong and courageous," and "He will without fail dispossess from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites" (Josh. 1:7; 3:10).

Doubtless, Joshua had not told the whole nation what was found in his heart. Rather, he went immediately to God. He does not gather the people to tell them something like: "Let us try a second time. We'll send a hundred thousand soldiers, and take the choicest of the people." No! Joshua turns to God. He seeks His face. It is a question between him and God, although it was really a question between the people and God. If they were to gather all wise men, they would not cause Ai to fall. If they gathered all strong men, it would remain without success. "God is not there. When God is not present, I must turn to God. I must seek and find God at any price!" Such an attitude is beautiful.

How often, alas, do we fail to follow Joshua's example! When we feel that an Ai lies in the way of God's people do we then, first of all, think of God, of the Lord Jesus? Do we begin by looking for all the wise ones, as many as we happen to know, or by falling on our faces, seeking God's face because He hides it from us? Is that what we do? If not, we are not faithful and fail to fulfil the service the Lord has entrusted to us. Whatever may happen for our learning, important or unimportant, we must first seek and find God's face.

It is essential for us all, to learn this — for the young, for the older ones, for the sisters, for the brothers; perhaps most of all for the brothers!

Joshua rents his clothes. "God is against us. When He is against us, then our position is untenable, we are lost." We hear the dialogue between Joshua and God. It was a burden for Joshua just as it had been a burden for Moses before. The

people numbered six hundred thousand men, besides the women and the children. Joshua ends by asking: "What wilt Thou do unto Thy great name?" (Josh. 7:9).

Then God answers. Joshua had sought God, and Joshua had found God. In the need of his soul he had not in vain turned to God.

When we feel the need, then there is already a useful basis at hand. It is very good when we are broken. With a crushed spirit we are in a good condition to find God. God does not answer as long as we are in a bad condition, not even when we cry to Him. With a crushed spirit we are in a suitable condition to find God. When God's hand curtails and breaks the driving force of our will, then we become conscious that He wants to bless us.

God says to Joshua: "Rise up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?" (Josh. 7:10). "You do not know why you have been beaten? I will tell you." Joshua did not know it. God will tell him. Nothing escapes God's eye. He sees all things that take place among His people. What had happened? They had become accursed. There is a ban among them, the entire nation has become accursed. They have dissembled, they have stolen and put it among their stuff. They have brought a curse over themselves. Note how accurately God's eye has observed everything. God could have said to Joshua: "Go and look under that tent, and you will find this and that." But no, all the people must be witnesses! Their consciences must be exercised. That is how God acts so that all is laid bare. The Old-Testament procedure is followed — the lot is cast: tribe, family, and soon this Achan, son of Carmi is pointed out. The whole nation remains under the curse, "I will not be with you. I will withdraw from you. I had told you that your enemies would despair because of you, but now you will despair because of your enemies."

For us today things will take precisely the same course. We should not think that because we are Christians, "Brethren," that these lessons are not valid for us too.

A curse! The people of God lie under a curse, there is an accursed thing, a ban, in the midst of God's people! One sin brings the curse over the *entire* people of God. One sin can bring a curse over the family, the whole family. One sin with a brother or a sister leads to a curse in the whole assembly. "But why? It's just my business, isn't it?" Achan could have argued this way. However, this is not God's thought. God does not say this. The whole nation lies under the curse: "When you do not remove Achan, then I will set you aside." That will come of it.

We know well that we live under grace, but should the glory of God shine less under grace than under the law? To the contrary — it must shine more! Not only that, but our conscience should be more sensitive than that of the children of Israel. The mass of the people was unconverted. Many of them were not believers. If there was an accursed thing among them, then under us there can rightfully be a ban for a more trivial cause.

Thus Achan was pointed out by name, having been revealed by God. How serious and beautiful is Joshua's remark: "My son, give, I pray thee, glory to Jehovah the God of Israel, and make confession to Him" [French translation of JND: "and give Him praise."] (Josh. 7:19).

One had never expected such words! "My son, give glory to God!" In what way should God here be given glory and brought praise? Should Achan sing a hymn? No, *tell the truth!* "My son, give glory to God..."

When one speaks the truth, one gives glory to God and praises Him. Let us remind ourselves of this, brothers and sisters: with the lips one does not glorify God when the heart is far removed from Him. The truth! What gives glory to God is the truth. It is as if Joshua says to Achan: "I implore you." He appeals to him as in an adjuration (see Lev. 5:1, footnote). When the Lord Jesus was adjured by the high priest, He said what was asked from Him (Mt. 26:63-64).

"My son..." Oh, Achan could no longer escape. "My son, give glory to God..." Is this form of praise to God — the truth — dear to our hearts?

"You have also dissembled," so it says. At that moment Joshua did not know any details of the affair. Yet, even if he had known them, the confession of Achan was a necessity, without any beating about the bush, completely, so that God would be glorified.

True, one cannot imitate or bring about a similar scene. Yet, we can be assured that we have to do with a God who knows precisely whether we make confession before Him, glorifying Him, or whether we fail to do so. God knows it, He takes note of it. He never treats the person who glorifies Him by making confession as if he had not done it; but among us it often happens that we hide one or the other matter. We think: "What's the difference, it will pass, grass will grow over it."

However, we have to do with God. Do we want a blessing in our families? "My son, give God the glory and confess to *Him*, give praise to *Him*."

There are various kinds of tests, and not all have the same cause. When a trial reaches our home, we should not think that all tests are punishment. That is very definitely not the case. However, our theme here is not discipline and tests. What should we do when a matter arises that causes us to feel that God has withdrawn Himself from us or our home? God says to us, "My son, give glory to God." Do we want the curse to end and the blessing to flow? Then we must give God the glory. Someone may argue: "What is the difference? Everything will come out right, one way or another." Never!

I stress this in grace — the Lord Jesus knows that it is in grace — because I believe that we often deceive ourselves on this point: the right way to honour God consists in being true before Him. We forget that nothing escapes God's eye: not what we do in our homes, not what we say, not what we think, even *when* we do not utter it. God puts a curse on our home, on our family, on the assembly, in our midst. As long as we have not opened our heart and, like Achan, say, "I have sinned, I have done this and that; yes, I have done this, that is precisely what I have done," so long we cannot count upon God's blessing!

We live too much just for the brethren, we don't live sufficiently for God. If Achan's sin had not been judged, the whole nation would have been wiped out on the spot. Also a deed in our lives that has not been judged will still exist for God after twenty years. Let us be aware of God's government.

My brethren are on my side! Yes, my brethren may well be on my side; or may be they are not. What does it matter? Is God on my side? If God is on my side, so will be my brethren; but *God ought to remain always in the first place*. We always tend to put God in the second place. Oh, may we ever live our lives saying, "Lord Jesus, whatever Thou wantst, as long as I have Thee. Whatever way, wherever Thou wantst me, I just want to be with Thee always, Lord; then all will be well." All the brethren in the world cannot give us this assurance. I say this deliberately and I am ever more convinced of it.

I ask the brothers urgently not to mislead themselves by seeking the voice of these or those supporters who would only serve you ill, since they hide God from you, since they stand between God and yourself. Sooner or later you will have to do with God Himself.

We may consider helping our brother, a brother whom we love — actually we love all our brethren more than anything in this world, isn't it? Therefore, when we see a brother ensnared in a lie, we should not help him in such a way that he perseveres in this condition of deceit. We must say to him, "My son do not err. Give glory to God and confess. Give Him praise. You want to be blessed, don't you? Here is the way. There are not two ways!

Yes, how needful it is for us to encourage ourselves in this way. We must read much in God's Word. There are very upright brothers and sisters — we must read the Word of God, to train this uprightness with spiritual understanding, so that we truly walk in God's way.

Bans, curses, there are such things. An accursed thing in a Christian's life is a terrible thing. God is no longer present! What is a Christian who does not have God with him? What is a home without the joy in God? That is a situation such as we have here: behind them the Jordan, before them the enemy! "Because our struggle is not against blood and flesh, but against principalities, against authorities, against the universal lords of this darkness, against spiritual [power] of wickedness in the heavenlies" (Eph. 6:12). Our warfare is against the devil and his angels. Perhaps you say, "Oh, I want nothing to do with the devil." He does not ask for your opinion. When you are carnal, you do not walk without him, and when you are worldly, you do not walk without him either. You don't want to have anything to do with Satan? He has, however, his rights. There is but one condition in which he has no right upon us; that is the condition of a Christian who fully makes his having died a reality, who is "always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus" (2 Cor 4:10). Such a person, who stands as a dead one in the life of this world, gives no possibility of attack to Satan. If you are worldly, however, when you are carnal, then you offer Satan points of attack. He will not overlook you; he falls upon you. He will unexpectedly take hold of you and hurl you into defeat. Do we know something about this? Yes, or no?

Let us take a look at the Church's history — without dwelling on the total two thousand years — at its recent history, even at the youngest condition. Does it not prove to us the actuality and correctness of these remarks? Does it not show us that Satan falls unexpectedly upon us? If we don't watch, he falls upon us. He has rights over the flesh. Why? Because man has fallen and God allows this governmental discipline that He has put in Satan's hand. Satan has the power of death and all rights over the flesh; that is how things are.

People in the world laugh about Satan and make jokes about him. They take his name on their lips and do not know that they are his servants when they do so.

The Christian who is taught by God's Word, however, shudders. "But Michael the archangel... did not dare to bring a railing judgment against him (the devil), but said, The Lord rebuke thee" (Jude :9).

I am convinced that we often forget this side of our Christian life, yes, that we have failed to appreciate it: the side of warfare. Whether we want it or not, we are soldiers, fighters. We have been enlisted for army service. In 2 Timothy 2:3 the Christian is portrayed as a soldier. There are fighters and deserters, as well as betrayers. A worldly Christian is guilty of high-treason.

We know what the world does in cases of high-treason. Achan, who has opened his heart, stands before us: "My son, give glory to God!" We can be certain, the origin of our great weakness, our powerlessness, our being defeated in our personal life, in our family and assembly life stems from this, that a curse has settled there. How? One need not necessarily have done the same thing Achan did. What had he done? He had lied and stolen. God had said, "This city must without mercy be destroyed." We find that time and again in the Book Joshua. When you link yourselves with them in one way or another, whatever bond you may make with them, "they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes" (Josh. 23:13).

To be cont'd

Outline for Bible Study (84)

169. Paul Before Festus and Agrippa. — Acts 25:1-26:32

Outline

1. Paul before the Jewish chief priests Acts 25:1-12
2. Paul before Agrippa Acts 25:13-26:32

Explanation

1. The Jewish chief priests repeated their accusations against Paul before Festus, the Roman Governor. This man was more righteous than Felix, yet he also looked for favours from men. Though he did not deliver the apostle up to the Jews, he was willing to let him be judged at Jerusalem. This caused Paul to appeal to Caesar to escape from the Jew's deathly hatred. This was pure human calculation on the part of Paul, but God used the weakness of His servant to save him and to bring him to Rome where he had to witness of Christ (23:11). Jerusalem, the religious centre of the Jews, had rejected the testimony. What would Rome, the centre of worldly power (the fourth empire) do? As the Lord Jesus, who was rejected by the Jews and delivered up to the Gentiles, so it went now with Paul. What a privilege for Paul to have such a fellowship of sufferings with Jesus!

2. Festus had to send a report to Rome with the legal grounds for Paul's imprisonment. Since legal grounds were lacking, Festus sought Agrippa's advice. King Agrippa the Second, the great grandson of Herod the Great, was well informed about the sect called Christians. He was eager to hear Paul and seemingly not just out of curiosity. How great was God's grace in sending the apostle as a prisoner to preach the glad tidings to so many prominent people (Ezek. 18:23; 1 Tim. 2:4). Paul, the prisoner, stood morally far above his judges and listeners. Agrippa was an immoral man, and Bernice was even of lesser morals than he. She had been married twice before and was the half-sister of Agrippa. She was, therefore, not permitted to be the spouse of the King. Paul addressed himself to the consciences of the listeners with the frankness of an upright man, who walks before God. His heart is peaceful and happy in Jesus, notwithstanding the sufferings he had to endure. He speaks of his early walk, and his conversion to Jesus, the Saviour, who had become his life's sole purpose and joy. Neither prison, trouble, nor death could diminish this joy. After two years of imprisonment, he stood with unbroken strength of faith before Agrippa (Ps. 84:7) and did not speak about his sufferings. Around him he saw a world of splendour and pomp, but it did not attract him in the least (2 Cor. 4:16-18; Phil. 1:21; 3:7-10, 2 Cor. 3:18).

He desired, that his hearers might turn to Christ to become as he was: happy in the Lord, full of peace, but without his chains. What a happy heart, what a zeal for God, and what tender love to the lost! He spoke these unique words for their wellbeing and salvation (Isa. 61:10; Ps. 23). Since his audience was still bound by Satan, he could wish nothing more fervently for them than full salvation, and that they might share the happiness which he possessed so abundantly. Agrippa, who was certainly deeply moved and touched in his conscience, tried to hide the unpleasant feeling brought on

by Paul's appeal on his knowledge of the law and the prophets, with a demeaning answer. The world and its lusts kept him from becoming a Christian. How many today are almost persuaded, almost saved, and yet never make the decision! In Festus we see a man who is spiritually dead; he takes Paul to be a fanatic (1 Cor. 2:14).

The innocence of the apostle was recognized by his judges and acknowledged before the world (Ps. 37:5), yet, as with the Lord, they don't let him go. Pilate acknowledged three times: "I find no guilt in Him," yet let Him *be* crucified. Notwithstanding this similarity there is a difference between Paul, the servant, and Christ, the Saviour and Lord! Jesus, who offered Himself to the glory of God for redemption towards all, appealed only to God. Paul appealed to Caesar, to his human rights which had value for men who had granted them. Paul used them and God fulfilled His counsel to bring him to Rome. The Lord of Glory spoke only when He had to testify of the truth; this truth was the glory of His Person, He was the Son of God (Jn. 19:7). Paul spoke to confirm his innocence and freedom.

Lesson

There is a great difference between Paul and the Lord. The Lord, who was perfect in everything, was sent to the Jews. Until the end, He remained in Jerusalem, which meant the cross for Him (Phil. 2:8). Paul, on the other hand, was sent to the Gentiles and, though often warned not to do so, returned to Jerusalem, instead of going to Rome.

170. Paul's Voyage to Rome. The Shipwreck. — Acts 27

Outline

1. Paul's journey to Rome Acts 27

Explanation

1. The apostle's freedom for service had ended, yet between him and God is peace and joy. Everything shall turn out for him to salvation, that is the ultimate victory in his battle against Satan (Phil. 1:19-20). To magnify Christ was his purpose in life.

Though bound, Paul was, as it were, lord and master of the ship during the voyage to Rome; he received messages from God through which he could give advice. The captain and centurion did not heed the apostle's warning, but trusted their own experience and the circumstances. A gently-blowing south wind lured them to the open sea. They supposed that they had gained their object, but a hurricane, so severe that even the sailors became afraid and desperate, disturbed their plans. In the midst of it, Paul was full of confidence in God, and remained filled with peace and joy. The dark nights, the dangerous waves, the roaring hurricane, could not frighten him, because he lived in fellowship with God. What a difference between Paul on his tempestuous journey and Jonah who fled in disobedience to God's command (Jon. 1:3; Ps. 46:1-5; Prov. 12:28; 18:10; 28:1). Since the compass was still unknown, they had to navigate by the stars, but the clouded skies made it impossible for the sailors to sail a proper course.

How beautiful was Paul's confession and public prayer. Throughout the ages, the faithful righteous were always used to reveal the thoughts and ways of God in the midst of difficulties. Joseph did so before Pharaoh, and Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar. Now God's Word and His Spirit guide the believers through an ever-increasingly dark and stormy world (Ps. 119:105; Jn. 14:26; 15:26; 16:7,14).

Lesson

The sea voyage of Paul to Rome can be considered as a picture of God's ways with the Church. Under persecutions and dangers, threats from the secular Roman Caesars, from the religious inquisition, and today from many false doctrines and cults, the Church is watched over by God and carried in safety. First her ability to navigate a proper course, and finally even every trace of her outside form, the visible unity, has been totally lost. Yet, those that belong to it (the believers) will all be saved; they surely will land safely in the Father's eternal house above (Mt. 16:18; Jn. 10:28,29; 17:9ff, Jn. 17:20-24).

God's Mourning People

A Meditation on The Third Book of the Psalms.

—J. van Dijk

Introduction

We live in a time in which serious questions are raised about matters many had long taken for granted. We experience this from our own particular perspective. Yet, it is a phenomenon that happens throughout Christendom's denominations. In one place the question of homosexuality brings disturbance, in another the role of the woman in church services. Elsewhere unrest results from the degree to which local communities exercise their God-given authority without accountability to their brethren. And among ourselves a new generation has sprung up questioning the doctrines undergirding the long-cherished practices regarding the assembly testimony that most, they themselves included, had at one time assumed to be beyond question. That those from outside did doubt these doctrines and practices, we always accepted as an inevitability that brethren experienced from the early days. Today, however, those who once held these views, and even strenuously defended them, are doing the questioning. They do this, believing that they merely seek to return to what was received from God in the last century. All this has brought much tension and restlessness. What do we make of this?

We are obviously faced with one of two things.

Either: those who have gathered unto the name of the Lord Jesus alone have over the years drifted from what their fathers once received from the Lord.

Or: new thoughts, not from the Lord, are seeking to make themselves felt among those who confessedly want to walk solely by the instructions of God's Word.

Without seeking here to establish the truth of either possibility (or perhaps the partial truth of either) we want to consider the third book of the Psalms (Psalm 73-89) in view of our present condition. This is not easily done. There is, perhaps, no one who has not a preference for either the one view or the other in the present circumstances. So easily then do we associate the "arrogant," "the wicked," "the enemy," of whom we read in these psalms with those with whom we do not agree. If these considerations are to be of blessing to all of us, we need to rise above this. The enemy is none other than the great opposer of all ages, Satan. He is the one who seeks to disturb. In his efforts he makes use of those who belong to the Lord, that is true, but in his clever skill he makes use of persons on either side of the controversy. The evidence of this is seen, or rather heard, in the tone used in discussing the matters and persons involved. If, however, there is to be profit for us in reading these psalms, we need to realize well that the enemy, the evil one, is none other than Satan, no matter how much he may use either me, you, or our brother with whom we don't agree.

One other important thing to remember is this: God allows the enemy to disturb us, because we have not lived up to what we claimed to understand from God's Word. In short, our practices have not been in keeping with our profession. In essence this is hypocrisy, a thing that God hates more than all else. It is our spiritual condition that has prompted our God to allow troubles to beset us. Yet, we ought not to forget that God allows all things over us for good. Even those things we bring over ourselves through our own failures, He will use for our good. He will have mercy, if we are but humble before Him. These things we may learn from these psalms. May God use these ponderings for our mutual blessing.

Psalm 73

Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are of a pure heart. (v. 1)

This is the opening remark of this third book — the point never to be forgotten no matter where our contemplations may lead us. Just as God's goodness stood as a banner over Israel in its days, so His goodness remains towards His blood-bought Assembly.

But as for me, my feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped. (v. 2)

In the present turmoil, we are apt to look elsewhere. Often the denominational structures seem to make for greater peace and comfort. For the greater part our brothers and sisters in the denominations have carefully selected the church of *their* choice, a place where *they* feel comfortable.

At this point we need to be careful. We might be in danger of equating our Christian brothers and sisters in the denominations with the wicked mentioned in this psalm. This goes much too far! What we can observe is this: whenever anything of man, of the flesh, enters into the things of God, the wicked one, Satan, is the prompter of it. He is the one who deceives Christians into thinking that what they do is pleasing to God. We can also say: When in these matters the spirit of man becomes active, it leads to things that ruin the essential testimony of the Church of God on earth.

Yet, that holds just as true for ourselves. To whatever degree our flesh is active within us, something of the preciousness of what God wanted to see in the Assembly is marred. The evil in our own heart is just as much to be equated with the wicked one as the fleshly actions of our brother. Our tendency to be at ease and not to take things too seriously but to just go ahead and do what is more pleasing to us, flows from the wicked one, who seeks to destroy. Also one's way of pushing one's own will in one's local assembly is an expression of the arrogant one. No, we should not merely believe these things to reside in our brothers or sisters, but first of all in our own heart. Self-judgment is needed, even if certain observations about the practices of others may be ever so true.

Truly have I purified my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. (v. 13)

When we experience the struggles to maintain godly order, to continue walking the path that expresses the unity of the body and separation from evil, we tend to get tired and ask ourselves: Is it really worth it? But to speak in this way is to be unfaithful to what God once gave. It is a grievous task. Until..., yes, until when? Until we begin to see things from God's perspective!

Until I went into the sanctuaries of God; then understood I their end. (v. 17)

We know what is the end of the efforts of man in the things of God. Both Thyatira and Laodicea are clearly described examples. The first shows the end result of man's ideas come to the full in the place where God had set His name to dwell. The other portrays man's self-satisfaction, the conceitedness, as if the beautiful pattern in Philadelphia was of his own making, as if he, man, was so special rather than God who had given it. The first we see displayed in formal religion, the other in deteriorated "assemblies," the proud offspring of Philadelphia. We know, our Lord will deal in judgment with the former, but He will spue the latter out of His mouth, showing His utter disgust. The Lord despises their image. This is what we learn in God's sanctuary.

I was brutish and knew nothing (v. 22)

When we feel tired of the struggles in the assemblies; when we are disgusted with the constant wrangling of ideas promulgated by various brethren that are ready to give up, then we know nothing. If we do not know what God's thoughts are, and if our path is not regulated by what God has revealed in His Word but by our feelings and emotions, then we do not know anything and are like beasts in this respect, for they don't know God's thoughts either.

And then we come to the concluding verses of this beautiful psalm. These verses speak of confidence in God, of the blessedness of His presence which He has promised. Thou wilt guide me by Thy counsel. Yes, the Word of God is to be my guide, and His Spirit will guide me into all truth. God is my rock and my portion.

They that are far from Thee shall perish (v. 27)

This is the end of those who follow ideas not found in the Word of God. If we allow ourselves, through pressures or out of sheer tiredness, to deviate from what God has given in His Word, the end of that path will be like that of Thyatira or Laodicea.

It is good to draw near to God (v. 28)

There is our only safety — God's presence. He has promised to be in the midst of the company that gathers unto the name of the Lord Jesus. He has declared that He will be a Father to those who separate from evil (and that means also — no, even most of all — from the evil of self-exertion in the things of God). Oh, for balanced hearts, that are not just able to see the threat of evil without, but also the even greater threat from evil within.

Yes, God is good to Israel, but God is also good to His present-day people, the Assembly. He cares and helps and provides a way for the heart that draws close to Him. When we know these things, we can go on knowing that, whatever occurs, He will see His people through. He will have a place for the ones that genuinely seek Him, judging the flesh, the arrogant, destroying enemy they find even within their own hearts.

Psalm 74

Why, O God, hast Thou cast off for ever? why doth Thine anger smoke against the sheep of Thy pasture? (v. 1)

Is that not a cry we can identify with in our day? Where is the peace once so characteristic of the assemblies that gather unto the name of the Lord Jesus in separation from evil? Why the unrest within? Is it not that God has an issue with us? Is it not He that has allowed the enemy to bring in diversity of thought there where once dwelled harmony? Are the displays of rigidity and looseness shown on one hand and the other not the result of man being left to his own notions? Don't we thank God for keeping us when all is well? Then when things are not well, is it not that He has seen fit to leave us to our own experiences? Why? In this psalm the writer does not answer the question, but points to God's own interest in the testimony His people give on earth. We know that the cause for it is found in our own hearts, our own doing, our own pride. For those who know this, this psalm is a precious plea to God that we may utter ourselves.

Remember Thine Assembly, which Thou hast purchased of old, which Thou hast redeemed to be the portion of Thine inheritance. (v. 2)

Yes, God has purchased the Assembly; and at what a price! Oh, God remember! Yes, He did so, so that it might one day be the treasure of His heart when we are with him. But God wanted a testimony on earth that showed what He had accomplished through the sacrifice of His Dearest. God wanted to show the authorities in the heavens that through that work a company had been purchased that no longer thought to do its own will, but that in all things said, like its Redeemer, "What is Thy will, O God!" (Eph. 3:10). How far, how very far from this have we strayed. O, yes, we are ready to look at each other and say: You strayed. This is not the point now. We have strayed! No longer is it to be seen on earth that there is such a place as Zion, where God loves to dwell in grace. That which claims the name is characterized by backbiting and disputes. O God, remember Thine Assembly!

Everything in the sanctuary hath the enemy destroyed Thine adversaries roar in the midst of Thy place. (vv. 3-4)

Yes, so it is. The voice of man is heard in the place where the voice of God should be the only voice heard. With it, all has been lost, nothing is left of the beauty that once characterized the place. Man has set up his own signs. Yes, those who were known for destroying the heresies of the enemy like axemen in the forest, those who brought the wood from their efforts for building, bringing blessing, are now known for using their axes for destruction of what once they built up. O Lord, the ruin is great! Human fire has entered Thy house, O God. The judgments of men have taken the place of Thy judgments and it has proven to be destructive. The sacred place is profaned. There is not an assembly on earth that remains unaffected. It seems that no one is able to lift up a clear banner, there seems to be no prophet, no one among us who is able to stem the tide. How long, O God, how long?

Why withdrawest Thou Thy hand, and Thy right hand? pluck it out of Thy bosom: consume them. (v. 11)

Yes, why does God not interfere in this terrible situation? How long will He wait? Oh, God come in and take action. But then, what would that mean? Would that mean that others would feel God's judging hand, and would we go free? Does not judgment begin from the house of God? Would He not begin with those who plead for His interference?

Things are not as simple as in the days of Asaph. Then the enemy was the other. Today the enemy is at least in part within, within my own heart. There the flesh has been active, there the self-will has begun. That was the beginning of the devastation. Only when it had become uncontrollable there, did God allow the greater conflagration to come. Yes, the judgment must begin with us, not with my brother.

God is my King of old, accomplishing deliverances in the midst of the earth. Thou didst... (v. 12)

Oh, to fall back upon God. He is the One who rules; He is the One who is able to deliver, be the circumstances ever so difficult and complicated. The writer recounts some of God's mighty deeds. We have the same God! Yes, we have seen an even greater deliverance when darkness covered the whole land for three hours. God is able! To divide the sea is impossible — but not with God! To fight leviathan (the picture of Satan) is impossible — but not with God! Fountains, rivers, day and night, they are all in His hand. How can the sun stop shining in mid-day? God sets the limits to all things, also to the havoc we create. We may have enjoyed a spiritual summer, but He knows when it is time for winter to appear. All is in His wise hand. So are our experiences, even those caused by our own failures. He will use them as He has used those of Judah (Tamar) and David (Bathsheba). He is the God of wonders!

Remember this, that an enemy has reproached Jehovah, and a foolish people have contemned Thy name. (v. 18)

No longer a call for revenge, but one to ask God to remember. Yes, God, remember our foolishness, the problems of our own making. Remember that in our foolishness we have contemned Thy name, we have acted as if Thine Assembly was ours, we have often set aside the leading of Thy Spirit, while claiming to be gathered under His direction. We have often chosen our teachers instead of receiving those Thou didst give. Lord, we have always claimed that Thou art in our midst, but how frequently did we only come to listen when brother X was known to be there? As if we were more eager to hear brother X than Thee Lord! Yes, Lord, we have acted foolishly.

If this is our honest cry to the Lord, we may also plead with Him. Lord forget not Thy turtle-dove, the troop of Thine afflicted, remember Thy promises, and, Lord, the many that have been oppressed by our actions; Lord, let them not become ashamed, as if they trusted Thy promises in vain. Cause them to sing Thy praises, Lord.

Rise up, O God plead Thine own cause. (v. 22)

Then the psalm writer turns the matter back to God Himself. It really is God's own cause that is at stake. And so we may approach our God; His interests are at stake, not ours. Like Moses on the mount, we may come to God and when God has said that He would destroy the people because they are stubborn, Moses asks God to go with them because they are stubborn. So here, Plead Thine own cause: remember how the foolish man reproaches Thee all the day. O God, there is no turning unless Thou doest plead Thine own cause, for we in our foolishness, even when we try our best, so often reproach Thee. The real issue is our own *self against* God.

Psalm 75

Unto Thee we give thanks, O God. (v. 1)

Now the writer is about to consider what God will do. When thinking of this, he gives thanks. The Lord will do marvellously. Then he begins to record words as if they are spoken by the Lord Himself.

When I will receive the assembly, I will judge with equity. (v. 2)

The Lord Himself will come in. There will be a day in which He will receive the Assembly, then He will judge a balanced judgment. Whatever is of man will be done away by Him; any pillars of testimony will be set up by Him, not by man.

I said to the boastful, Boast not. (v. 4)

So often have men thought to be able to set up, to restore, to help. Always their efforts come to nothing. When the assemblies say in arrogance, I am rich and have need of nothing, then there are those who God sends to help, using them for healing. But then they begin to see themselves as those who are God's men for the time, falling into the very same arrogance they were sent to correct. Yes, even today Jehu drives furiously! Man in his own strength, being zealous for God, is still with us today. And where does it end?

Not from the east nor from the west, nor yet from the south doth exaltation come. (v. 6)

There is no place, no person to be found on earth who can help and restore so that exaltation can be restored to the people of God. Our only Helper is God, He is the Judge, and soon He will come and judge all that flows from the flesh. He will judge both that which set itself up against God's thoughts, and that which in a fleshly way seeks to defend the things of God. His wrath will be poured out as it once was poured out over Achan but also over Nadab and Abihu. And note: the latter judgment came directly from God.

But as for me, I will declare for ever; I will sing psalms to the God of Jacob. (v. 9)

These are the words of the Lord Himself. He will be the One who will bring unadulterated praise to God. He will reestablish the strength of all that is truly of Himself, the horns of the righteous He will lift up.

Psalm 76

In Judah is God known. (v. 1)

After Psalm 75 in which the Saviour Himself spoke of what He would accomplish in the end, we now get the response from the heart that delights in Him. Judah means *praise*, and when praise is on our lips, God is known. Praise is fitting to God. The opposite is murmuring and we know how God looks on that from the books of Moses (Num. 11:1).

In Salem is His tent, and His dwelling place in Zion. (v. 2)

Yes, God's tent stands in peace, and He dwells in grace. So contrary to ourselves, peace escapes us and grace is sporadically seen among us. Yet, there is God's dwelling place. It is from there that He has the victory over all that rises up against Him.

More glorious art Thou, more excellent, than the mountains of prey (v. 4)

Now the writer considers who God is and the effect of His actions. In doing so, he begins with praising God for His character. God's majesty is far greater than that of any who have opposed Him. Anything of man found among us today is as nothing in His sight. All that is of the flesh will be as spoil to Him. The swiftness of His judgment is seen when the writer says, "None of the men of might have found their hands." When soldiers are awakened by an alarm, they need a moment to find their weapons. Here they do not even have time to find their hands, so swiftly does God's judgment come over all that is of man. It is the swiftness that is also found when we read: "We shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." Then too, all that is of the flesh will fall from us — discarded, useless, no matter how our old man may have cherished it. Yes, when God begins to deal with the enemy — even the enemy within and among us, our flesh — quietness will result. He will save us, He will be the Victor in the end.

For the fury of man will praise Thee. (v. 10)

Yes, even in all wherein we have failed, wherein the flesh, the fury of man, has been active, God will be praised. Did not God do so with the sin of Joseph's brethren, and with David's adultery with Bathsheba? The one caused Joseph to become a picture of our Saviour, and out of the evil of David sprung the Messiah, the One who brought deliverance.

Vow and pay unto the Jehovah your God. (v. 11)

From then on all centres around God. All is for Him Then He will be seen to be the One who is to be feared, before whom the ideas princes and kings, be they ever so intelligent, ever so wise, cannot stand.

These are the considerations of the psalm writer when he contemplates how all will end up. It is his encouragement and strength. In all the grief about the present situation, he can rejoice and rest in this, that God will remain victorious and will restore all things so that His name will be praised.

Psalm 77

My voice is unto God...He will give ear unto me. (v. 1)

With all this in mind, now his attention goes back to the present condition which causes him to cry to God. It was with him as it is with ourselves. Yes, there is comfort in knowing that nothing happens that God cannot deal with and will not bring to a good end. But we know that God wants to see faithfulness today in the midst of His own, and that is so sadly lacking. When this fills our thoughts, our souls, too, refuse to be comforted. God deserves better from a people that He has redeemed, for which He has paid so much.

Thou holdest open mine eyelids; I am full of disquiet and cannot speak. (v. 4)

The writer feels as if God keeps Him awake. And so it is. When our thoughts go out to God and His desires, while we are aware of our practical condition, who can sleep? We think back of days when all was different, we remember that we could sing in the night because we had seen the grace of God active among us. We ponder it all. What has become of us? Like Gideon we ask ourselves: If Jehovah be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where are all His miracles that our fathers told us of?

Will the Lord cast off for ever? (v. 7)

When our thoughts go in this direction, we begin to lose sight of what we considered before and start to ask: "Will the Lord cast off for ever?" Has it come so far that God can no longer be with us? Has the Lord spewed us out of His mouth? Does He stand at the door and cannot come in? Is He outside? Has He forgotten what we are, how inclined to sin, to self-exertion? Has He forgotten to be gracious? When we come to such thoughts, we better take a rest — Selah.

The years of the right hand of the Most High will I remember. (v. 10)

The rest had its good effect, we realize that to think this way shows our weakness. This is not what we should do. We need to remind ourselves of those times in which the Lord showed the strength of His right arm, both in the past, and in days to come. Upon these things we need to meditate.

O God, Thy way is in the sanctuary: who is so great a god as God? (v. 13)

The writer returns in thought to the great deliverance God wrought when He brought His people out of Egypt. So we may contemplate our deliverance. How did God work in bringing those who hated Him to Himself. What ways did He use? The Saviour died and all seemed lost. But in His death was the victory, for His death removed our sins from us and made us from haters of God to God's children. Yes, His ways for our spiritual well-being are hidden and holy; they belong to the sanctuary.

Thy way is in the sea. (v. 14)

But His ways with us in our practical experiences here below are also hidden. Those ways are in the sea, where none can trace them, where they are mysterious to all. God goes His way with us, using not only our victories but also our defeats to teach us, build us, and to bring us to Himself. He did so once for His earthly people, he will do so again for us.

To be cont'd