

**Healing in Days of Defeat (3)**

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

Let us give account of the thorns found under us, which the Lord Jesus has allowed under us because of our weaknesses. God troubles you! You wanted the world! You have it. You have toyed with the flesh! You will have to do with the flesh your entire life. Without any doubt our earlier brethren had much less to do with it. For them it was: With God or without God! Strength or weakness! When weakness shows itself, let us recognize the reasons and condemn ourselves.

Each of us should think much about his family. It is not at all certain that each of us thinks of his or her family with true interest! True interest for a family consists of this, that everyone is led to say: "My son, give glory to God and confess, praise Him in truth, walk in truth, live in the light...no darkness, no lie!"

The Lord may ask us to open our purse. That is a small thing. However, when it is a question of opening our heart for a confession, then it becomes more difficult. That demands a deeper exercise of faith. God's speaking much about hearts and little about wallets is because He knows very well what He is doing. How much do we need to be encouraged in this respect!

The Lord Jesus directs our attention to this point. The interest of our brothers, our families, the assembly lies in this: to bring about this confession, to let this flow out: "My son, give glory to God!" Oh, may God engrave the words of Joshua to Achan on our hearts!

Who is Joshua today? The true Joshua is Christ. He caused the people to walk through death's river and enter into the promised land. If we want to withstand Satan, who lies in wait for us, who persecutes and plagues the people, then we must persevere in the truth, in the light, and in holiness. Do we think of this when we speak at home? When we are amongst ourselves talking with each other? Do we always think of the *truth of God* and the *holiness of God*? Are these dear to us? God searches all things, God hears all things, and knows all things. Profitable brothers and profitable sisters are those who *talk much to God* and at the right time speak to their brothers and sisters in *the right way, in the light*.

When God's people suffer or are defeated, as is often, sad to say, the case, the cause is something cursed or forbidden. "If ye bite and devour one another, see that ye are not consumed one of another" (Gal. 5:15). "Everyone that hates his brother is a murderer" (1 Jn. 3:15). Hatred equals murder!

Do we encourage each other to love one another? Do we pray for each other? When we pray, does a particular name cause us to halt? Can we freely name in our prayers all the names of those whom we meet with? Without reserve, right now too? Can we do this? It is time to hear what Joshua says: "My son, give glory to God..." Oh, it is not easy, we know. God did not say that the way of a Christian is an easy way. It is a way on which one must begin to humble oneself. Who has ever seen that one does so gladly? But, thanks be to God, such behaviour brings joy. It gives fellowship with God such a value that one forgets the bitter things; and this, after all, is the secret of spiritual progress.

How much do I wish that the Lord Jesus would bless this verse (Josh. 7:19) to us all! Brethren are exercised. Surely there are some who are more exercised than others. But when a curse shows itself, a difficulty arises, then only one thing remains for us to do: to fall on our face before God. Do we pray to the Lord? Do we plead with Him persistently? Obviously, pleading can have various values. God's Word tells us: "The fervent supplication of the righteous man has much power" (Jas. 5:16). Two prerequisites are mentioned: The prayer must be fervent, and it must be made by a righteous man. A righteous man is someone who walks in righteousness, who sees what is right in the eye of God; someone who pleases God in his life. God hears such persons. How much should we encourage ourselves in this!

We should not think either that only spectacular, gross deeds bring about a curse. There are many insignificant matters: what one thinks of this or that brother, what one says about him. What one thinks, God knows. What one says is heard by ears, and God hears it in the first place. When it is an evil thing, then it is sin before God and before the faithful one who hears it. There are therefore widely spread sins among the people of God: a ban lies upon them! One hears for instance the reaction: "But then we will all perish!" If we want to have God with us, then the necessary exercise of faith is needed here!

It would certainly be much simpler to make human agreements, to fashion an organization, to set up a totally human steering machinery. Things would be very simple if there would be a steering committee. Such a committee would settle most cases, it would put matters in order in the best way, and we would have the teachers we like. That is how it is often done. A steering committee in the things of God! That is what is found. One wonders how one can come to such foolishness. On top of it, one heaps up to oneself teachers according to one's own lust (2 Tim. 4:3). At many places one can find teachers who doubtless have much knowledge. But God does not say: "Teachers according to their intellectual needs." No, He says, "Teachers according to their own lusts." The lusts of the scholars, the lusts of the uneducated, the rich ones, the poor ones — that is what guides and controls the scholars, the uneducated, the rich, and the poor.

Therefore... when we are exercised, let us seek the voice of God and hear it, let us give God that glory. There is another special lesson for us, so that we may be exercised and avoid all that causes a curse. We can be sure that no one lightly took a stone to cast it on Achan and his entire family. All had to pass by him. We can imagine that this did not happen without pain of souls and tears. Yet, it was God's command.

I do not make any application of this event — I do not see one; it cannot mean that we must apply this literally. The practical application we must make is: Judge evil! *An angry word, slander, evil speaking, whatever does damage to God's people in one way or another, is known to God.* Paul knew this very well: "persecuted, we suffer it; insulted, we entreat" (1 Cor. 4:13). He bore with it. But when it is a question of evil against the people of God, of disasters among God's people, then the damage is incalculable. One who speaks evil or slanders, who uses such mischief, should read Proverbs 16:28: "A false man soweth contention; and a talebearer separateth very friends." If we are not watchful then our hearts and lips are soon active in this direction. Especially the brothers should in this regard be very wise, sober in their speech, weighing their words, guarding their heart, speaking a word at the appropriate time, which is so good (Prov. 15:23).

Another verse, which I believe to be extraordinarily important in this connection, is: "Let no corrupt word go out of your mouth, but if [there be] any good one for needful edification, that it may give grace to those that hear [it]" (Eph. 4:29). When we see a brother who is sad or depressed, imprisoned by one or the other thought, is it then our great desire that he may find again the communion with the Lord? If we are faithful, our word will minister grace to this brother.

The judgment has been executed, the matter is settled. Achan with his family has been stoned without compromise. What exercises are now found among God's people? They had to encounter many difficulties, but there was a Joshua, there was strength available. They had problems with Ai because they had failed to ask God (Num. 27:21). Later the difficulties with the Gibeonites arose because once again they had failed to ask God. The Gibeonites came with moulded bread and were yet not from far away. It was a ruse that fooled Joshua and all the elders; yet they were wise men! Take note; what does the wisdom of all brothers together amount to? They did not inquire at the mouth of Jehovah (Josh. 9:14)!

We must always ask God and live near Him. God's Word can be used to underpin any matter. All sects are seemingly based on portions of God's Word. With the Word in hand one can propagate the greatest heresies. Let us be on guard! The deciding thing is the *dependence upon Him who gives the Word*, the portion or thought that is needful in these circumstances. That is not easy to realize. *Yet, without dependence upon God one can fight fights without His light shining out.* Herein lies the practical difficulty in the life of God's people.

A name remained: The valley of Achor — Tribulation, disaster. "How hast thou troubled us!" (Josh. 7:25).

Once more the nation marched out and took Ai, but with much greater difficulty than if it had marched out in faith. May the Lord encourage us to pray much for each other.

When a difficult case arises, no matter what kind, let us not say: "What do I think about this?" My thoughts do not count. Only what the Lord thinks about it counts. "Lord, what is Thy way? At any price: What is Thy way?"

May the Lord encourage us to go our way with the needed earnestness. May He grant us to pray for each other during the course of the week and not to speak against each other; yes, not even once to harbour thoughts against each other. It is very sad that such things needed to be told to the saints at Ephesus. It is sorrowful to say that one can be seated in Christ in the heavenlies and simultaneously be a liar or thief (Eph. 4:25,28). This we find in the Epistle to the Ephesians!

Let us not take these things lightly. Let us bring all into God's presence and live with the Lord Jesus, enjoying His fellowship while praying much that no accursed thing may be found in the assembly so that the Holy Spirit may not be grieved (Eph. 4:30). What are we when the Holy Spirit does not work? Miserable, stuck between Ai and the Jordan, between enemy nations here and the Jordan there. We are stuck between Satan and death, when the Holy Spirit works no longer among us. When, however, the Holy Spirit is present and works, we rejoice in the fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ and in the fellowship among ourselves.

We can pray — may the sisters pray too and plead with the Lord! — that the brothers have no preconceived ideas, but that they may be men of God, prepared for God, foremost for God — God always first of all! Does a difficulty arise, how important then that the brothers are not prejudiced... There is not one, two, or even three brothers to whom one can open his heart. It is terrible to think of this.

The Lord Jesus is with us, He has not left us. How blessed to think of this! Precisely because of this, however, because He is present, let us be exercised! When we find ourselves confronted with a difficult situation of which one does not precisely know how things will end, we should cast ourselves on our faces before the Lord. Whatever He tells us then, let us do it. But only that! It is, however, not simple to seek the Lord's thoughts impartially, without our own ulterior motives. This is anything but easy. Our heart is an abyss. Silencing, choking off all voices of our heart, can only be done in God's presence.

May the Lord Jesus give us, both brothers and sisters, to watch and pray that in our personal life, in our family, in the assembly there may not be an accursed thing. And if an accursed thing is present, let us then say: "Lord, put Thy finger on the wound. What have I done? What have I done in the family, in the assembly?" Let us not continue our way with accursed things that we attempt to keep hidden from our God!

*"My son, give glory to God, confess to Him, give Him praise!"*

*The End*

## **God's Mourning People (2)**

### **A Meditation on The Third Book of the Psalms.**

—J. van Dijk

Psalm 78

*Give ear, O My people, to My law; incline your ears to the words of My mouth. v. 1*

Now the Lord speaks through the psalm writer, giving instructions for their walk. What follows is part of His leading them. The help is in reviewing what God has done in the past. It is a spiritual history lesson. Stress is laid on the importance of recounting what God has done. Future generations need to know this if there is to be help for the days to come.

*For He established a testimony in Jacob. v. 5*

This is the first lesson. God is the One who established the testimony. He appointed it, He commanded the fathers to make it known to their children so that also the future generations would continue to tell it to those who follow. That is the importance God attaches to the recounting what He has done. Has God done a work in past days? Are we then obedient to tell it forth? We are eager to speak of the work God did in the sanctuary, the work of our salvation. We see the importance of it. But do we see the importance of speaking of the testimony God has raised up? Of His way in the sea? The things He has done here on earth? Or are we inclined to say, we should not speak about ourselves? That can become the false excuse when we realize that we, by God's grace, have received the benefit of God's work. We do not want to speak about ourselves, so we do not speak of God's work whereby He has blessed us. No wonder we experience difficulties, for no longer do our younger generations know the great works of God. Our lack of speaking of these has resulted in a general impression that we think that we are the great ones. Yet, we are nothing but the unworthy recipients of what God has wrought.

*That they might set their hope in God. v. 7*

That was to be the result of a faithful recounting of the mighty works of God whereby He established a testimony. What do we see today? We have failed in recounting God's mighty works, having stressed rather the do's and don'ts of gathering around the Lord Jesus, and the result is that the new generation fails to place their hope in God. Instead they hope in new methods, in new ways of doing things. They seek to make the meetings attractive to outsiders, and to diminish, if not remove altogether, the difference in the function of sisters in the things of God. Yes, today our hope is in such things, but not in God's Spirit which in days past was the One who convicted and brought about a testimony that surprised the very ones who formed part of it. Then they knew, it was not they who did this, but it was the mighty work of God.

*The sons of Ephraim, armed bowmen, turned back in the day of battle. v. 9*

This is what we experience today. Gone are the days in which by faith in God the strong ones stood and faced the derision of the enemy who confronted us, saying: "How can you show the unity of the body when you separate from other Christians?" Then we knew, and now we don't, that separation is needed when our brothers and sister in Christ continue on with things that are dishonouring to God. Today we see a refusal to walk in these ways. We have forgotten that God taught us these necessities from His Word through the practical issues He placed before us. Yes, like Ephraim we have forgotten God's marvellous works.

*They tempted God in their heart, by asking meat for their lust. v. 18*

The writer recounts the journey through the wilderness. How it gave occasion to God to show His marvelous deeds. In spite of these great works they tempted God. How like ourselves. God gave them manna, but they thought it not good enough. God gives us meat when we are gathered, waiting whom He will use to feed us. Yet we rather decide ourselves who should feed us and appoint our own speakers. How like them we are! We say the Lord is in our midst, but do not come. When a brother we like to hear visits, then we are present. What an affront to our Lord! Is it any wonder He sent leanness into our souls?

*Therefore Jehovah heard, and was wroth. v. 21*

Should we be surprised to experience the Lord's displeasure like they did? We have so much greater responsibility for much more has been entrusted to us. We should be the first company on earth that relies fully on God, for we have His Holy Spirit indwelling both in the individual and in the Church. Yet we seek strength and help in the ideas of man. In Israel's days, God gave them their desire, while also punishing them for it by smiting their chosen men. Has God changed? Now that we have something more precious received from God, will He act differently? Don't we experience in our days that our chosen men have been smitten? Don't we see God's hand upon us? All this recounting of Israel's history was meant as a reminder and help to cause them to long back to what God had for them.

*When He slew them, then they sought Him. v. 34*

If we are willing to see God's hand in our present circumstances, we, too, will long to return to Him. But let it be a genuine return! Israel flattered God with their mouth. Is it not flattering God when we say that we are gathered with the Lord in our midst and do not come? Is it not flattering God when we say that we are a dependent people, but we do not come to the prayer meeting? Is it not flattering God when we say that we need to learn from Him, but we do not come to listen when He gives us the food He has for us that week? And what to think of it when we do come to praise, but not to pray or to listen? Are we not saying loudly and clearly with our deeds: We are able to give to God, but we have no need to receive? Is God in need of our gifts, our sacrifices of praise? Our behaviour does not agree with our speaking, thereby making our claims to be nothing but flattery. How thankful should we be that God does not stir up all His fury!

*They remembered not His hand v. 42*

So is our history! Forgotten is the mighty way in which God went before and brought many to the place where He had caused His name to dwell. He did guide us as sheep through the ecclesiastical wilderness; He brought us safely there where He longed to dwell. Yes, it was His grace and His mighty hand that gave us what we cherished so much, but which we are now in danger of losing through our own unfaithfulness.

*They drew back and dealt treacherously like their fathers. v. 57*

Is this something that can be said of us? Did we turn back like a deceitful bow? How do we present ourselves in denominational circles? Do those who are full time in the Lord's work claim the privileges of the "ministers" in the denominations? Do they act as if they are the appointed pastors in "The Assemblies"? We claim not to be a sect or denomination, but often act as if we are. Our weddings, our baptisms, our funerals must be performed by full-time workers. We come to the meetings when full-time workers visit, but at other times we are often missing. These are the

realities of those who claim the Lord is in their midst. Is it wonder if God would also say of us: I heard, and abhorred? Once He forsook the tabernacle at Shiloh, one day He will spue assemblies out of His mouth. In Israel it came to a total calamity; will it come to this among us, or has it already come to this?

*Then the Lord awoke. v. 65*

The Lord did take note and judged in Israel. Will He do so again? He took care and built His sanctuary. He then had His man, David, but how will God act today? Oh, that God may raise up Davids among us, who can skilfully lead us with integrity in the paths that God so greatly loves to see His blood-bought people walk. Walking that path makes nothing of them, but everything of Him who charted that path, a path that speaks of the total dependence of man upon God. There He will feed us, and there cause us to grow.

Psalm 79

*O God, the nations are come into Thine inheritance. v. 1*

Yes, right in the midst of the blood-bought company there is the activity of one who does not belong there, the working of the flesh. How destructive and "successful" it is! The young in the faith are made a prey and what is precious to God is made a spectacle for derision among the onlookers.

*How long, O Jehovah? v. 5*

It is indeed God's anger against us that has caused things to develop in this way. He has found cause to deal thus with us; the cause was our own heart condition, our own superficiality, our own pride.

*Help us, O God... and forgive our sins, for Thy name's sake. Wherefore should the nations say, Where is their God? vv. 9-10*

How good in God's ear must it be to hear the cry for help, the pleading for forgiveness. It speaks of acknowledgement of failure, of sin. Are we ready to approach God this way? Can we honestly ask: "Forgive me"? Not: "Forgive my brother, my sister." No, it has to be an honest admission of my own guilt before Him. But what can we plead as a basis for forgiveness? Our own sorrow? How imperfect, how puny is it in God's sight! How little do we really know the seriousness of our behaviour! No, the only ground for pleading forgiveness is God's name. His name is at stake, and until He forgives He cannot change our circumstances; as long as these are not changed, His name is dishonoured by those who look on, by the outsider who says: Where is their God?

May it be that God still grant us such undeserved deliverance. How would we praise His name, for as matters look today, it seems far from possible that relief would come.

Psalm 80

*Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; Thou that sittest between the cherubim, shine forth. v. 1*

What an appeal! God is addressed as the leading Shepherd, the loving, caring One. Yet, at the same time there is the acknowledgement that He sits in that holy place, between the cherubim. Oh, that we might know what this means. How often do we think we can approach God without changing our ways: For after all, God is love! Yes, true enough, but God is light also! Only where there is a reverent balance of these two thoughts can there be a profitable calling for restoration.

How does the appeal to God increase in its intensity throughout this psalm! First the author appeals to God. Yes, but then he increases his appeal, calling God the God of hosts. He is indeed the God of the individual, and that is where our plea begins, but He is the God who commands the mighty angels. Soon the plea increases further and becomes: O Jehovah, God of hosts. God's covenant name is introduced, the name whereby He made Himself known at the time of deliverance out of Egypt. Yes, deliverance is once more needed, but it is an inward one, we need restoration. Only so shall we be saved from the enemy within.

Meanwhile the psalm deplores the utter devastation seen there where God's blessing had been promised. The place once so beautifully displaying God's character was uprooted by boars and its fences broken down. The fire of the energy of the flesh has consumed it, and God's people perish in the place where comfort and blessing should have been experienced. O God, cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be saved!

#### Psalm 81

*Sing ye joyously unto God our strength, shout aloud unto the God of Jacob. v. 1*

How can this be? How can we suddenly begin to sing? Is it possible to sing in the midst of so much observed misery? Yes, for the God we serve is the God of Jacob. One could hardly think of a person who failed more than Jacob. Yet, God is Jacob's God. That alone causes each one who knows himself, and knows this God, to sing. For where there is such a God, there is hope; there is a glorious end, as it was with Jacob.

*He ordained it in Joseph for a testimony, when He went forth over the land of Egypt, where I heard a language that I knew not. v. 5*

The reason moreover is simply this: God has ordained praise. He has ordered His own to sing His praises. Not because of what and whom they are, but because of whom He is. For Israel He was the Deliverer out of Egypt; for us, the One who *has* wrought an even greater deliverance. Yes, He is to be worshipped and none else. Yet, now, as then, His people failed to listen to His voice. Rather than searching His Word to learn how He wanted to be served, they counselled among themselves and sought out what was most effective, what pleased them best. They forgot that their service was to please Him, and that His taste was not theirs. They forgot that He wanted to choose who should speak to them, but thought that they had to carefully select whom would best speak on God's behalf. They listened not to His voice.

*Oh that My people had hearkened unto Me, that Israel had walked in My ways! Oh that My people had hearkened unto Me, that Israel had walked in My ways! I would soon have subdued their enemies, and turned My hand against their adversaries. vv. 13-14*

A glance into the heart of God! What a sigh of longing flowing from His compassionate heart. How is He set to bless us! How ready to forgive and deal with the enemy, even the enemy within. Did you, too, hear the complaint about dryness of ministry, of lack of food? Here is the answer, it is because of a lack of listening to Him whose sole purpose it is to bless His people. If they but listen to His voice, He will feed them with the finest of wheat, yes, with honey out of the rock. And that to satisfaction!

#### Psalm 82

*God standeth in the assembly of God, He judgeth among the gods. How long will ye judge unrighteously, and accept the person of the wicked? Selah. vv. 1-2*

Yes, this requires a moment of reflection, a Selah. There was no listening to the voice of God then, and there is not now in our midst. Therefore God reminds us that He it is who stands in the assembly and judges in the midst of the gods. Yes, He may have given authority in the place where two or three are gathered unto the name of the Lord Jesus, but He is still the One who judges among the gods! He still reviews the actions and decisions, and He does so with holy integrity. And what does He see? Acceptance of those who do wickedly?

No wait a minute! Could that be among those who are the Church of the living God? Well, the apostles anticipated it. God is the One who judges these things. He sees the motives of the hearts, He knows how righteous or unrighteous the judgments made by these lesser gods are. He who placed authority in the assemblies, retains all authority for Himself and judges among the gods.

*I have said, Ye are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High; but ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes. vv. 6-7*

This is what God says. Truly, I have given you a place of authority, and you are My children, but seeing the way you have handled your responsibility, you will die like men. Your puny little person will be shown up for what it is. Does this bring about a response of objection? Do the hearers now protest against such a judgment of the Judge? No, because a work has been done in their heart they recognize the justness of God's doing, for they surely have failed in their charge. Their response is rather:

*Arise, O God, judge the earth; for Thou shalt inherit all the nations. v. 8*

They acknowledge, only One is worthy, only One has not failed, only One can be the possessor of the inheritance: their God. These same things are true of us. Do we now object, do we protest against the Lord's judgment? Or do we, too, cry: Lord Jesus come, knowing that we have failed.

Psalm 83

*O God, keep not silence; hold not Thy peace, and be not still, O God v. 1*

Here is the response from the heart that yearns for God. It pleads with God to deal according to what He has found in the midst of His people. God has seen the efforts of the enemy who, in every possible form, is seeking to take God's dwelling place for himself. Yes, the enemy in his subtle ways is even able to use the very ones who belong to God to do his work in God's house. The end result is that it becomes a den of robbers.

*They say, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, and let the name of Israel be mentioned no more. v. 4*

This is always the enemy's attempt: to remove any distinction between God's people and those surrounding them, either by removing that which separates them, or by obliterating the whole nation.

*The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites, Moab and the Hagarites; Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek; Philistia, with the inhabitants of Tyre; Asshur also is joined with them: they are an arm to the sons of Lot. Selah. vv. 6-8*

All demonstrations of the flesh combine to bring about the end of God's people as a separated entity. It may come in the form of despising the God-given blessings, the mocking by those who are carnal, the ease the flesh likes to take, the worldly desires dwelling within, outright evil, neglect of God's Word, and even violence. All of them combine to seek the downfall of God's nation. One becomes silent at the sight of such an effective multitude. Selah!

*Let them be put to shame and be dismayed for ever, and let them be confounded and perish: That they may know that Thou alone, whose name is Jehovah, art the Most High over all the earth. vv. 17-18*

O God, fight our battles and deal with these enemies! He pleads with God to frustrate the enemy's efforts. Not that we may be exalted, but so that it may become apparent that God is the Most High.

Psalm 84

*How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Jehovah of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of Jehovah; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. v. 1*

The longing heart goes out to the place where God can dwell and longs to dwell there itself. But it fails to find the place that even such an insignificant creature as a sparrow or swallow can find. How blessed would it be to dwell in the place where God dwells!

*Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee, — they, in whose heart are the highways. Passing through the valley of Baca, they make it a well-spring; yea, the early rain covereth it with blessings. v. 5*

There is blessing to him who finds his strength in the Lord even in the midst of such dreadful circumstances. If the heart is in tune with God, it will, in the midst of the circumstances, find the way God takes. This is more than knowing where God is going. This we often do, while we are so ignorant of His ways. If we only had His way in our hearts, we might, in tears, pass through the present circumstances, but in the end we will appear in God's presence.

Did not the Lord Jesus say: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for *theirs* is the kingdom of the heavens. Blessed they that mourn, for *they* shall be comforted. Blessed the meek, for *they* shall inherit the earth. Blessed they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for *they* shall be filled. Blessed the merciful, for *they* shall find mercy. Blessed the pure in heart, for *they* shall see God. Blessed the peace-makers, for *they* shall be called sons of God" (Mt. 5:3-9)?

*Jehovah Elohim is a sun and shield: Jehovah will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. Jehovah of hosts, blessed is the man that confideth in Thee! vv. 11-12*

Knowing things like these, the psalm writer consoles himself in the knowledge that God is his shield. He asks God to look on the Lord Jesus, the Anointed One. Himself, he will be satisfied to remain in the court, for that is far better than to be in the den of robbers. There, in the court, in the proximity of God, though not in His house, Jehovah is both sun and shield to him. Jehovah will supply all his needs. Yes, it is blessed to dwell there, in the court, simply trusting in Jehovah in the midst of devastating adversity in the very house of God.

#### Psalm 85

*Thou halt been favourable, Jehovah, unto Thy land; Thou hast turned the captivity of Jacob: Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of Thy people; Thou hast covered all their sin. Selah. Thou hast withdrawn all Thy wrath; Thou hast turned from the fierceness of Thine anger. Bring us back O God of our salvation, and cause Thine indignation toward us to cease. vv. 1-5*

The author recognizes that God, from His side, has been utterly gracious. Now a work is to be done in the heart of His people. "Bring us back, O God of our salvation." If there is to be revival, God has to bring it about. Though there is a heart's longing within, no strength is found to revive ourselves. The prayer for the Lord's mercy and salvation rises from the depths of the heart

*I will hear what God Jehovah, will speak; for He will speak peace unto His people, and to His godly ones: but let them not turn again to folly. v. 8*

To receive the requested mercy, however, the ear must be attentive to what God is saying. The character of God's message, as always, is peace. To benefit from it requires the continued turning away from folly. The salvation is near enough, and God is eager to give it so that it may characterize the land. God's peace does not come at the expense of His righteousness either, they are in complete balance with each other. In this way God's righteousness will be seen in the way He goes, in each step He takes.

#### Psalm 86

If then the ear needs to be attentive to God's Word, the author can only cry to God to make it so. He prays: *Incline thine ear, Jehovah, answer me; for I am afflicted and needy. v. 1*

How dependent has he become through the affliction that he has endured. His prayer rises continuously up to God. Yes, he asks God to hear his prayer, while he expresses God's greatness.

*Teach me Thy way, Jehovah; I will walk in Thy truth: unite my heart to fear Thy name. v. 11*

Not just satisfied with the deeds of God, he now longs to know God's ways. Ready to promise that he will walk in them once he knows them, he realizes his lack of ability and asks that God will bind his heart to Himself. That will surely have its effect in praise and worship. Then the enemy may come, but he will come without success. And Lord, He asks, please give a token that Thou are with me so that the enemy will be ashamed.



## Psalm 87

*His foundation is in the mountains of holiness. Jehovah loveth the gates of Zion more than all the habitations of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Selah. vv. 1-3*

He now proclaims the basis upon which the Lord can show mercy. All is based on holiness, but presented through grace. That is, as it were, His dwelling place. That is His city of which one can only speak glorious things.

There are many other places that may characterize a person: Egypt, Babel, Philistea, Tyre, Ethiopia. God takes note of the basis on which each person stands, be it worldliness, religious confusion, modern well-stoppers who deny the Word of God, those who make business their god, and even the complete Gentile who does not know God. How glorious it is then, and how rejoicing to the heart of God when He can say, But this person's place of origin is Zion, the basis of which is grace. All those who will ultimately praise God will be able to say: That is my birthplace too! Grace! God's grace!

## Psalm 88

*Jehovah, God of my salvation, I have cried by day and in the night before Thee. Let my prayer come before Thee; incline Thine ear unto my cry. For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draweth nigh to Sheol. vv. 1-3*

Now the writer returns to the circumstances that caused these meditations. He tells God how these circumstances have caused him to cry night and day. The essence of all he lived for seems to disappear and he feels himself close to death. Yes, his opposers consider him to be so indeed. Like a dead man, he has no strength to deal with what oppresses him. He recognizes that it is God's hand that is upon him for chastening.

*Thou hast put my familiar friends far from me; Thou hast made me an abomination unto them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth. v. 8*

Yes, God's hand has even caused those who used to be his friends to be far from him. How heavy he must have felt noticing that those to whom he was close are now on the other side of the argument, of the controversy. Tears run down, his eye is consumed, but his hands are lifted up in expectation to his God.

He pleads, O God are those circumstances really a basis from which praise can come to Thee? All I can do is pray, pray, pray. In such a situation, he feels cast off by the Lord Himself. He feels completely abandoned. And all is experienced as being brought upon him by God Himself. Obviously, there is no hope when looking at the practical circumstances surrounding us.

## Psalm 89

How strange the sudden glorious change in the next psalm!

*I will sing of the loving-kindness of Jehovah for ever; with my mouth will I make known Thy faithfulness from generation to generation. For I said, Loving-kindness shall be built up for ever; in the very heavens wilt Thou establish Thy faithfulness. vv. 1-2*

He lifts up his head and looks into heaven. From that perspective all looks different, and a song rises from his lips. Jehovah remains faithful, and that is worth proclaiming. Loving-kindness will indeed triumph, but it is based on what God has found in the Man after His heart. That Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, will be the One who will be established, who will triumph. But He will not be alone, God's faithfulness will be declared in the midst of the congregation.

*For who in the heaven can be compared to Jehovah? who among the sons of the mighty shall be likened to Jehovah? v. 6*

Then he sings of God's greatness in creation, God's strength. His throne will be founded upon righteousness and judgment. But there will be those who rejoice in this, and they will be blessed. They no longer glory in their faithfulness, their not denying His name, but solely in Him. He is their shield. If there is any strength found with them, it comes from Him and Him only.

*Then Thou spakest in vision of Thy Holy One, and saidst, I have laid help upon a Mighty One; I have exalted One chosen out of the people. I have found David My servant; with My holy oil have I anointed Him. vv. 19-20*

A beautiful description of the Lord's Anointed follows. He is the One in whom God can find pleasure, in whom all God's promises are yea and amen. He and His seed will endure forever.

*But Thou hast rejected and cast off; Thou hast been very wroth with Thine Anointed. v. 38*

But suddenly the tone changes again. Even this One, in whom God takes pleasure, has experienced God's wrath. Oh, we know why it was: He took the place of those who had failed, paying for their sins. But here the writer looks at the result in the world. The passers-by plunder Him; His enemies rejoice. He is covered with shame. Is not this what we experience? Even those who wish to do His will, become, through their own shortcomings and through the craftiness of the great opposer, instrumental in bringing shame to His name. And here the author ponders again, saying: Selah

*How long, Jehovah, wilt Thou hide Thyself for ever? shall Thy fury burn like fire? Remember, as regards me, what life is. Wherefore hast Thou created all the children of men to be vanity? What man liveth, and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? Selah. vv. 46-48*

Once more he sighs: "How long." Is there no end to this rejection? Is there no change in this demonstration of man's vanity? Would there ever be a man who is different, who, because of being different, would not see death? Has it not been sufficiently demonstrated that man cannot help himself? How long before all this has been sufficiently proven? It is something on which he meditates, saying: Selah.

*Where, Lord, are Thy former loving-kindnesses, which Thou swarest unto David in Thy faithfulness? Remember, Lord, the reproach of Thy servants—that I bear in my bosom that of all the mighty peoples — Wherewith Thine enemies, O Jehovah, have reproached, wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of Thine Anointed vv. 49-51*

Then he pleads once more with God, bringing four points to God's attention. First he asks where God's mercy is that He swore to His Anointed. Then he reminds God of the reproach experienced by His servants. Next, he reminds God that the enemies are reproaching. And finally, how they even reproach the very way God's Anointed takes in the midst of this situation.

How can a sigh like this ever turn into a song of rejoicing? Does it all have to end on a note like this: one big, continuous sigh of despondency? No! It does not! Ever mindful of who God is and how He, in wisdom, goes His way, as he has so often spoken of before, the writer suddenly halts. Nothing more needs to be said. Yes, one more thing:

***Blessed be Jehovah  
for  
evermore!***

***Amen, and Amen.***

*The End*

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

**171. Paul On Malta And. At Rome. His First And Second Imprisonments. — Acts 28; 2 Timothy 4:6-18**

### *Outline*

1. Paul on Malta                      Acts 28:1-10

2. The journey to Rome Acts 28:11-15
3. Two years at Rome Acts 28:16-31
4. Paul's last years.

### *Explanation*

1. Paul arrived on Malta as a beggarly, shipwrecked prisoner. How could a man like this be for blessing? God intervened; by means of some sticks and a viper, He made Paul a blessing to the island-dwellers. What the Lord Jesus had promised was fulfilled (Mk. 16:17-18).

2. Upon his arrival in Italy, Paul's heart was encouraged when he saw the brethren. In Rome he was treated well; it must have been evident that his arrest was only a matter of Jewish fanaticism.

3. Again Paul turned first to the Jews, but it soon became evident that here, too, God's covenant people had hardened their hearts. For the last time they were reminded that, as a result of their rejection of the Messiah, the judgment announced by the prophets would come over them. It had been postponed at the Lord's request upon the cross: "Father, forgive them." Now also the Holy Spirit, who had seriously spoken to them through Peter, Stephen, and Paul, was rejected. These were very solemn words coming from Paul. God's boundless grace, however, will last. In the end God will intervene and all Israel will be converted; God will give them salvation and glorify Himself in them (Zech. 12:10; 13:1; 14:10-11,20).

4. From other Scriptures we learn that after two years Paul was released (Phil. 1:25; 2:24; Phm. 22). He always wanted to go to Spain in the western part of the Empire (Rom. 15:24,28). On that journey he had hoped to see the saints in Rome. A letter from Clement of Alexandria, a so-called apostolic church father living about 100 AD, mentions that Paul reached the most westerly parts of Europe. For this, however, there is no absolute proof. Some Scriptures speak about the time between Paul's first and second arrest (1 Tim. 1:3; Ti. 1:5; 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:13,20). From the places mentioned — Crete, Macedonia, Ephesus, Troas, Miletus, Corinth — we conclude that Paul also travelled in the Eastern part of the Empire.

Then he was arrested again and imprisoned in Rome, from where he wrote Second Timothy. He did not expect to be released, but to be executed (2 Tim. 4:6-8). Despite disappointments, he remained strong in his faith (2 Tim. 4:10-16). All in Asia had turned away from him (2 Tim. 1:15). Yet, two did comfort him in his imprisonment: Onesiphorus and Luke (2 Tim. 1:16-18, 4:11). Still, one thing rejoiced his heart above all: "The Lord stood with me... and shall preserve me for His heavenly Kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:17,18). And he concluded with praise: "To whom be glory for the ages of ages. Amen."

### *Lesson*

Acts relates how the Holy Spirit worked through various witnesses after the death and resurrection of Christ, both among Israel and among the Gentiles. We also see that the Jews were set aside as God's testimony, and that, on the grounds of the death and resurrection of Christ, the Gentiles have been called to share in God's blessings. No longer is there a difference before God between Gentiles and Jews once their sins have been washed away by the blood of the cross (Eph 1-3; Rom. 11:17ff; 11:33-36; 1 Cor. 12:13). Together they form the body of Christ, and, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, they are connected with Him, the glorified Head, in heaven.

## **172. Prediction of Peter's End. John on Patmos. — 2 Peter 1:14; John 21:18-23; Revelation 1:9-20**

### *Outline*

1. Peter 2 Peter 1:14; John 21:18-23
2. John Revelation 1:9-20

### *Explanation*

1. At the sea of Tiberias the Lord had foretold how Peter's life would end. When the time came near, Peter wrote about it (2 Pet. 1:14). During his life he had pointed the believers to the Lord Jesus Christ and by means of his epistle he wished to do so after his death. He knew that whosoever has his eyes upon Jesus shall not waver nor falter.

2. John, the disciple, reached a very high age, outliving the other disciples. Even in his old age he remained steadfast in the faith. With undiminished love he witnessed of his Saviour and with the old fire he spoke God's word (Rev. 1:9). This caused him to be banned to Patmos. His persecutors meant it for evil, but God used it to reveal the future to John. What a glorious Person is revealed to him! Once, on the mountain of transfiguration (Mt 17), he had seen the majesty of his Master. Now he saw Him again, but now as Judge. This made a tremendous impression upon John; he fell at His feet as dead (Rev. 1:17). But one who loves the appearing of the Lord Jesus need not fear. John heard the lovely words: "Fear not!" and felt the loving hand of Him who bore his judgment (Rev. 1:18).

### *Lesson*

In Revelation 4 and 5 John sees the Church in heaven while the judgments take place on earth. And the remaining chapters show how in the end Christ is: The great Conqueror, the Faithful and True, the Word of God, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. (Rev. 19:11-16). To Him, be blessing, and honour, and glory, in heaven and on earth (Rev. 5:11-14).

*The End*