

Bartimaeus, the Blind Man

—H. Bouter Jr.

Mark 10:46-52

Jesus of Nazareth passes by

The Lord Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem to suffer and die there. Already three times He had announced that He would be delivered up to the chief priests and scribes. They would condemn Him to death and deliver Him over to the nations; they would mock Him, spit upon Him, scourge and kill Him. But after three days He would rise again (vv. 33-34).

It was, therefore, the last journey the Lord would make to Jerusalem during His sojourn on earth. It was also Bartimaeus' *last* chance to meet the Lord and to receive healing. He lived in Jericho, the city that, though once destroyed and cursed by Joshua, had been rebuilt in the days of Ahab (Josh. 6:26; 1 Ki. 16:34). Jericho lay along the route the pilgrims from Galilee and Trans-Jordan followed when they journeyed to Jerusalem to celebrate the passover. This way one could, via a detour through Perea, avoid the land of the Samaritans, for Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans.

Only Mark mentions the name of the blind man. He was the son of Timaeus (highly valued). Apparently he came from a well-to-do family, but what benefit was this excellent descent to him? He was blind and his sickness had reduced him to beggary (v. 46).

Here we see a picture of the natural condition of every person. Man has a lofty origin: created in the image and likeness of God. But he has fallen into sin through the deception of Satan, the god of this age. Thereby his thoughts are blinded (2 Cor. 4:4). He lives without God and without hope in the world (Eph. 2:12). He is but a poor blind beggar.

But Jesus of Nazareth passes by! That meant deliverance for Bartimaeus. That is *our* deliverance too. God sent His son to this world, to the place that was cursed on account of man's sin. He came to open our blind eyes and to shine upon them with divine light. He descended into our poverty to make us rich.

Perhaps today the Lord Jesus passes by you too. He comes to you in the preaching of the gospel. It is perhaps your last chance to be saved. Take hold of that chance and call upon Him as your Saviour and Lord. He hears your voice, even when you are poor and blind. He especially came to seek and save that which is lost.

The Son of David

Bartimaeus didn't address the Lord as 'Jesus the Nazarene,' as the crowd had referred to Him. Instead he cried: "Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me" (v. 47). While the people were blind for the glory of the Lord, there was, in contrast, spiritual insight and discernment with this blind beggar. He saw in Him much more than the despised Jesus of Nazareth. He acknowledged Him as the great Son of king David, the promised Messiah. 'Son of David' was a common designation for the Christ (cf. Mk. 12:35-37).

In this last-mentioned portion we see, however, that the Son of David is also David's Lord. That is the secret of the Messiah. He is the *root* and the *offspring* of David. He is God and Man in one Person. Therefore He could become our Saviour. His true manhood finds expression in the name 'Jesus' (*Jahweh saves*), which Bartimaeus used as well. With Him, the Man Christ Jesus, the lowly Servant, he had come to the right address for finding salvation and healing for time and eternity.

Have mercy on me!

He was well aware that he could lay no claim on the Lord's help. He was dependent upon mercy. That is so with us too. It is God's goodness and grace, His mercy, His searching love, that has come to us in Jesus. On this divine mercy we may fix our hope.

Sadly, the bystanders stood in the way of poor Bartimaeus. They warned him to be silent. Perhaps they figured that the

Lord was not to be disturbed at that moment. Wasn't He just passing through toward Jerusalem where He would make His entry as the Son of David? It happens today as well that people by their wrong behaviour, or even by a wrong sermon, hinder others to come to Jesus.

Bartimaeus did not allow himself to become confused. He continued crying: "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (v. 48). Soon it became apparent that the Lord was willing to help in this situation as well. Yes, we have a mighty Saviour who always thinks of us. He notices us when we call upon His name. The Lord stopped and had Bartimaeus brought to Him. His call has not escaped His attention.

Rise up, He calls thee

Promptly the attitude of the bystanders, who were now put into motion to help Bartimaeus, changed. They called the blind man and said to him, "Be of good courage, rise up, He calleth thee" (v. 49). That is how we, too, may pass the Good News on to others, leading them to the Lord (cf. Lk. 18:40). Don't be afraid for the judgment day, be of good courage. Don't remain in your poverty and misery, in your spiritual death, but rise and go to Jesus. Listen to His Word. He calls you. He wants to save you.

The Lord calls us through His Word and Spirit. His voice is living and powerful. The call proceeds from Him (Rom. 8:28,30; Eph. 1:18). In doing this, He also uses men to pass on His Word to us. God calls by means of the preaching of the gospel of grace.

What is our reaction to God's call? Do we listen to it? Have we quickly fled to the Saviour? In this respect we may be able to learn something from Bartimaeus. "Throwing away his garment, he started up and came to Jesus" (v. 50). He didn't let the Lord wait very long. He hastened to come to Jesus. He discarded his coat, that could hinder him in walking. "Let us also therefore... laying aside every weight, and sin which so easily entangles us, run with endurance the race" (Heb. 12:1).

What wilt thou that I shall do to thee?

What did Bartimaeus want from the Lord? Why did he call forth His pity? Was it perhaps for an alms? This latter was not too likely. Bartimaeus expected more from the Son of David. But now he had to publicly express this expectation, this longing of his heart. Bartimaeus saw more in Him than a benefactor. He hoped to find healing with the Son of King David, Israel's Messiah. The Lord asked him, "What wilt thou that I shall do to thee?" The blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, that I may see [again]" (v. 51).

This is an important question that the Lord puts also to us when we come in faith to Him. What do you want Me to do for you? What do you expect from Me? Why do you actually call upon My name? Do you perhaps want to become a Christian so you yourself may profit from it, have more success in life, more prosperity, or wealth? Or is there more in your heart? Do you recognize Me as Saviour and Lord, as Redeemer? Do you long for your eyes to be opened so that you may live in God's light from now on? Yes, that is what the Lord wants to bring about when we genuinely ask Him for it. For He is still mighty to open the eyes of the blind:

To the blind He gave new sight
And the lame He set upright.

Thy faith has healed thee

The Lord granted Bartimaeus what he asked of Him. He gave him his sight back. This healing was also a proof that He was Israel's Messiah, as Isaiah had prophesied: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened" (Isa. 35:5).

We don't know if Bartimaeus had been blind from birth. The same verb for "to see [again]" is used in John 9 for the one born blind. When it is a question of spiritual blindness, we are all *blind from birth*. Only Christ can cause us to see. He shines in our darkness and opens our eyes for the glow of His glory. Who follows Him will in no wise walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (1 Jn. 1:5,9; 8:12).

Through faith in the Son of David, Bartimaeus was saved. Through faith in Christ, we are healed of the 'blindness' that clings to us from birth. That faith is not a feat from our side, it is God's gift. It is the absolute trusting in the Lord Jesus, the complete surrender to Him.

The expression, "Thy faith has saved thee," has a double meaning. It encompasses both Bartimaeus' bodily healing as well as his eternal salvation, the forgiveness of sins (cf. Lk. 7:48-50). Now he could freely depart. His eyes were opened and he saw all in a new and glorious light.

And he followed Him in the way

But Bartimaeus did not want to leave the Master (Rabboni = my Master). As redeemed ones we follow our Redeemer. Just like the healed Bartimaeus, so we may consecrate our life entirely to Him who has loved us and has opened our eyes.

Only Mark mentions that Bartimaeus followed the Lord *in the way*. These few words also contain a lesson for us as followers of the Lord, for we follow Him on the way that He has gone ahead of us — a way of suffering, self-denial, and humiliation. Shouldn't the servant of the Lord be there where the Master is? (Jn. 12:26).

Still, we do not need to go that way after Him complaining and sighing. For it is good to be with Him and to follow Him where He leads us, isn't it? One thing is for sure: the end of our way is the heavenly glory. The Lord Himself has endured the cross, despising the shame, for the joy that lay before Him (Heb. 12:2).

The author of the gospel of Luke, tells us that Bartimaeus followed the Lord, "glorifying God." That is our charge, too, to magnify God and to praise His name under all circumstances. The way of obedience after the Lord is the best way. On that road we can glorify God. And then, others will join in and praise God for His wondrous works: "And all the people when they saw it gave praise to God" (Lk. 18:43).

True or False Religion

—A. E. Bouter

A Short Meditation on 1 Kings 12:26-33

Introduction

The histories of the Old Testament have been given for our instruction, exhortation, encouragement, and correction (2 Tim. 3:16). They will keep us dependent upon God, and help us to function according to the plan that He has *for* us and *with* us. Under the reign of David and Solomon, God in His sovereign grace had fulfilled (although provisionally) His plans, as predicted by Moses in Deuteronomy 12 (cf. Ps. 132). Similarly, in the days of the apostles, God gave all that was in His heart (Acts 20:27; 26:18). The complete purpose of God had been made known through the apostle Paul, especially in the epistle to the Ephesians.

However, all that God entrusts into the hands of man implies responsibility on the part of man, and is linked with failure since Genesis 3. That is to say, as far as man's responsibility is concerned, for from God's side all remains always perfect. Therefore failure was anticipated by Moses and later by Joshua and Samuel. And the decline among God's Old-Testament people began indeed quickly, as it always does after a new phase in God's ways has begun. Immediately after Solomon's death, a counterfeit religion was introduced among God's people.

Paul, too, foresaw the introduction of evil into the Church and thus predicted failure, as one can read for example in Acts 20:29f (cf. 1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim 3). Now God warns us today by way of the history of Jeroboam (1 Cor 10:1-13) in several points which we will summarize briefly. It will be helpful to connect the lessons we learn from this history with 2 Timothy 2, since that chapter fits well with the applications we hope to make throughout the study of part of 1 Kings.

Positive examples are of course far more encouraging to us than negative ones; but since we are living in a world where all sorts of dangers surround us, we can learn a lot from the negative examples. They teach us how we should *not act*; we can draw many valuable lessons from examples that we should not follow!

1. A Wrong Condition of Heart

Jeroboam is presented to us as a very gifted man and capable (1 Ki. 11:28). Without doubt he could be compared to a man like king Saul. However, we also read that he was a rebellious man, just as the first "leader" we read about in Scripture,

Nimrod, who introduced idolatry after the Flood¹ (Gen. 10:8-12; 11:1-9). Thus, Jeroboam was rebellious towards his master (Solomon), towards God, towards the man of God, and towards God's people. Moreover, he had put himself under the influence of Egypt, where he had been instructed in the ways of a world characterized by independency from God. Like Saul, he had a hardened heart that stood under the influence of demons, which led him to introduce idolatry among God's people (cf. 1 Sam 15:23).

Like Jeroboam, we, too, are prone to backsliding. In 1 Corinthians 10 we see five phases of backsliding, beginning with covetousness (which is behind all evil — Gen. 3; 1 Jn. 2:1-5), and ending with full-blown rebellion! Though we should first ask ourselves, what is our own hearts' condition?—for each is responsible to God for himself first — we should also inquire about the condition of today's so-called Christian leaders. True, we cannot judge their motives, but we have to judge their actions and their fruit. Meanwhile we should personally walk in the presence of the Lord, with a pure heart and a simple eye. We should be well aware that from Genesis 3 to Revelation 20:7, man has always put God aside! This awareness will alert us to see evil coming when someone says something "in his heart," for from the heart are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23)!

2. A Wrong Argument and Wrong Intentions

Having come back from Egypt after Solomon's death, Jeroboam succeeded in getting ten tribes to follow him. God, who allowed this in His governmental dealings with the whole nation and with Solomon's son, Rehoboam, said, "This thing is from Me" (1 Ki. 12:24). After Jeroboam had established and fortified his kingdom, his evil heart, full of pride and jealousy, suggested to him, "Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David." He must have realized that the heart's condition of the ten tribes was better than his own! Therefore, to avoid the imagined problem, he introduced idolatry. Thus we observe another principle: The leaders of God's people are often the first to introduce evil! We see this in Exodus 32, in Numbers 25, and in Acts 20:30.

In the history of the Church, too, one can see in each new phase how the things of God were mixed with things of Caesar, of Satan, and of this world. By means of such idolatrous mixtures, leaders often seek to satisfy the people (1 Cor 10:5-10) so that they themselves might have better control over them. We see this too in Daniel 3.

3. Wrong Influences

Jeroboam followed the advice of his own heart (cf. Gen. 6:5), and perhaps the suggestions of others (v. 28). Seemingly the ideas of this world, a system independent from God, promised success. This was so with Israel. After they had just been delivered out of Egypt, they readily accepted Aaron's proposal. Why was this so? They had lost sight of Moses (they forgot him in their hearts), the man on the mountain with God, who is a type of our Lord Jesus who is now in the glory. Similar bad influences have penetrated and leavened God's people throughout the Church's history; and it is still so today.

Again and again the influences of the various aspects of this world-system (be it political, economical, religious, or any other aspect) have been accepted by the people of God, those who confess the name of the Lord. By accepting these worldly influences, however, they have rejected the authority of the true Son of David, our Lord Jesus.

As for Israel, their idolatry continued until the Babylonian captivity and the influence of Jeroboam remained until the ten tribes were dispersed among the nations. Thus the idolatry in the Christian profession will persist till God's judgment will be executed (Rev. 17-18). Rather than acquiescing in this, however, are we not (each individually) urged to separate from evil (1 Cor. 10:16-22; 2 Cor. 6:14-18) and to leave such a system (Rev. 18:4)? So the question for us is: Where do we find ourselves before God? Inside or outside such a system?

4. A False Centre; an Imitation of the True Centre of God

The truth of the universal unity of God's people (both as the body of Christ and as the House of God) should be propagated and realized. The enemy, however, opposes God's truth and wants to divide and destroy, either by open attack, or by way of imitation. In the history of the Church we can notice these attacks. First in Smyrna and then in Pergamos. From God's viewpoint everything remains under control and intact despite man's failure and the bankrupt condition of the Christian profession. From the viewpoint of man's responsibility, however, God wants us to implement His thoughts so that our conduct, our associations, and our testimony would be in agreement with Him, expressing His

¹ Probably together with his wife, as we know from secular history.

designs.

Jeroboam introduced two centres. The enemy ever appeals to the heart of man by presenting things that suit men well, attractive things, but things that are *alternatives*, deviating from the will of God as revealed in Scripture. It is as if the enemy (through Jeroboam) said: If you do not want to serve God in His manner, you may do it in another, more convenient way. Their chosen way spoke of their indifference towards God's revealed way and their independence from God's thoughts.

According to Deuteronomy 12 and others passages, God had indicated what would be the true centre of worship where sacrifices were to be brought. Still the people had to search for that place in the promised land. Although we live in a time of grace and are not under the law of Moses, this principle remains ever the same morally. Today it is still the Lord who shows the place (Mt. 18:20) as well as the manner of worship and of free access to God (Jn. 4:24; Heb. 10:19f).

The false centres invented by Jeroboam, the two golden calves, were based on the principle of idolatry, even the very fact that these calves were made of gold spoke of this. He apparently tried to imitate the glory and the righteousness of God, but it was the work of man who can never rise to the height of God's thoughts. The golden calves were placed in Dan, where idolatry had first been publicly introduced (Judg. 17f), and in Bethel, the place where Abraham had worshipped God (Gen. 12f). There, too, God had introduced Jacob to the true knowledge of the God of the house of God (Gen. 35).

The *use* of gold might have appeased those who might otherwise have objected. Also, the fact that one centre was at this famous place, Bethel, would have silenced other opposing voices. Yes, it was (and still is) exactly at this place — the place which speaks of the God of God's House! — that the enemy introduced idolatry. Is this not rivalry and competition with God?

5. False Methods

As said, God expected His people to inquire where the place was of which God had spoken in Deuteronomy 12. For many years they had failed to do so and through their unbelief the ark (speaking of the Lord Jesus) was no longer at the altar, their place of worship. Rather, they had placed the altar at Gibeon, the great high place which speaks of elevated things that appeal to the heart of the natural man. In 1 Chronicles 21:29-22:1 we read how God showed David where the place was of which God had spoken; it was at Jerusalem. Solomon, too, had to learn this lesson (cf. 1 Ki. 3:4,15). Now Jeroboam built "a house of high places," a thing that always appealed (and still appeals) to religious people who fail to know and inquire after the will of God (cf. 1 Ki. 15:14).

Compare this now with Colossians 2 where we see how the enemy wanted to introduce things in the Church that were "elevated." A beautiful appearance, enjoyable doctrines, appealing liturgies — all attract the heart of the natural man. These things speak to us of the efforts of man, who, in his natural strength, seeks to please God, just as Cain had already tried to do by following his own ideas.

To be cont'd

The Battle of Conquerors (1)

—G. Elbers

Chapter 1

Who is who?

The thoughts of most Christians turn immediately to Ephesians 6 when they see the Words 'Armour of God.' And they know that this has everything to do with the struggle they themselves are confronted with daily. The Armour of God has been the subject of countless Bible studies and conferences, needless to say, to the great displeasure of the enemy! He doesn't like to see that his tricks and methods are made known. Even less, that there is something we can do 'against' them.

Christians

In order to understand the following study, it is necessary to discover what we mean by the word 'Christians,' because the

struggle and the armour that are mentioned in Ephesians apply only to them. Furthermore, according to Ephesians 6:12 the battle takes place in heavenly places. And who are to be found there, apart from the (evil) principalities and powers? It is the Lord Jesus Christ and those who have been made alive with Him and have been given a place with Him: the Christians! (see Eph. 1:3,30; 2:5-6; 3:10).

In Acts 11:21 and 26 we find a clear answer to the question, 'What are Christians?' In the city of Antioch many people had repented towards God and received the Lord Jesus *Christ*. Very quickly they were named after Him: *Christians!*

These were people who had received the Lord Jesus, thereby being made children of God (1 Jn. 1:12; 3:1), and thereby receiving the Holy Spirit (Jn. 7:38-39; Rom. 5:5). They even became partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4) and have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places (Eph. 1:3). What these blessings comprise is further explained in Ephesians 1:3-14.

It is advisable to read the above mentioned passage thoroughly. It may at first seem a little difficult, but you will find it really is not. It's about such wonderful things that it is almost incomprehensible for men. But if you, after reading it, think this is not for you, I want to ask you: "Why not?"

Blessings, for whom..?

A few years ago I led a weekly Bible study in a village fifty kilometres from Paramaribo. A few young people came week in, week out to listen to a story and afterwards we dug into a portion of God's Word in order to obtain more insight. When we studied Ephesians 1 more closely, there was a young Amer-Indian boy who asked in astonishment: "Is that all for me too? That there is forgiveness, that you are saved, that you are sealed with the Holy spirit? Those are great things!" Now, I hadn't known this pleasant young man very long, but I did know that he wasn't yet converted. "No," I had to answer, "these things are only for Christians! Just look in Ephesians 1:1. There it says that this letter is addressed to the 'saints and the faithful in Christ Jesus,' these blessings have been set aside for such people. Not just for anybody."

This answer set him thinking and a week or two later he declared with a shining face that all these, blessings in Ephesians 1 also applied to him. "I could barely sleep," he said. "I kept thinking about those things I could see, but which yet passed me by. I have prayed and asked the Lord Jesus if He would come into my heart, in order to become a child of God. And I'm so glad that the Lord never says no. Now I'm a Christian too. That is right, isn't it?"

Together with the other students of the Bible class we then thanked the Lord for this wonder, this young man, who as yet didn't know much about the Bible, had understood that conversion is necessary before one can have a share in the exuberant blessing of God!

I do hope with all my heart that you also have taken this step and asked the Lord Jesus into your life. That's called conversion... *drai joe libi!* (*dri yu leebee*)²

When I'm talking about how *we* are blessed, how *we* are involved in a battle, how God has thought out an armour for *us*, then it absolutely applies for you too. For you as a Christian, as a child of God!

The enemy

It will be clear that Christians do have an enemy. Because he who has, through grace, been made a child of God, has been delivered from the mighty enemy of God and man, from the power of Satan. And Satan doesn't let his prey go easily! If he did, he would have to admit his defeat and acknowledge the Lord Jesus as the great Conqueror. No wonder then that there is a battle! Ephesians 6 teaches us that the warfare of the Christian (and now you do know what a Christian is!) is not a struggle against flesh and blood. It concerns a *spiritual* battle: a battle against principalities, powers, against rulers of the darkness of this world and against spiritual wickedness. And that requires a very special armour. We will study it closely in Ephesians 6. But first let us look at several Biblical examples of battle. Because, if we are talking about an enemy, we want to know at least something about him — who he is, how strong he is, what his intentions are, what methods he is using.

David and Goliath

² *drai joe libi (dri yu leebee) = to turn your life around, conversion.*

In 1 Samuel 17 we find a striking example of battle that has a lot to do with our subject. There we read about David and the giant Goliath. Goliath is a picture of Satan, and we see that he is out to absolutely terrify God's people. This Philistine even challenged the Israelites to fight, because he felt that he was supreme; and in a sense he was. There was, namely, not one soldier in Israel who was prepared to take up the battle with him. Goliath cried, "Choose you a man for you and let him come down to me... give me a man, that we may fight together" (1 Sam. 17:8,10).

Alas, as we can read further in this chapter, the spiritual strength to take on this heathen, was totally lacking amongst the people of God!

God's choice

Then David appeared on the battle scene! He was, as we read in 1 Samuel 13: 14, a man after God's heart. He was a brave hero, a warrior. And what was of greater importance, he trusted completely in the Lord, his God (1 Sam. 17:34-37). In all this David is a beautiful example of the Lord Jesus. Goliath asked for a fighter and God pointed out someone who would wage the fight in His name for *the salvation of the people*. We know how it ended. Goliath had to recognize David as his superior. He lost shamefully and... David even beheaded him! This last point is of great importance, because now Goliath, the enemy, could never be of harm to the people again. He was absolutely finished.

Just think about the history of David and Goliath. Had the Israelites done anything themselves to bring about their salvation and deliverance? No, *David had done everything*. He had risked his life and defeated the enemy. Nevertheless the Israelites could act as conquerors, and they did so too! They pursued the enemy and even plundered their army camp (Sam.17:52-54). In fact, they became conquerors *'in David.'* Now if we read Romans 8:37, we discover that the believers are conquerors *'in the Lord Jesus Christ,'* even more than conquerors! This example is of great importance for us, because conquerors may, and can, go through life without fear. They may enjoy the peace that has come. That is the comparison that we can make if we think about the work of the Lord Jesus. *Through Him* we are delivered and *in Him* we have become conquerors.

A big difference

Naturally the comparison with David is not perfect. This is because David could stay alive whilst our Lord gave his life. David stayed alive and bestowed just a *temporary* deliverance. The Lord Jesus had to deal with a much stronger enemy. And He gave His life, poured it out into death and bestowed therewith *eternal* redemption (Heb. 9:12). He died on the cross of Calvary.

Thereby, it has to be noted that the Lord Jesus defeated the enemy with his own weapon: with death! That was made apparent through His resurrection. Death had no more power, and those who belong to the Lord are no longer slaves to the fear of death (Heb. 2:15). On the contrary, according to 1 Peter 1:3, through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, believers are reborn unto a living hope. His work went, therefore, immeasurably further. Therefore the results are much greater and more wonderful. In Colossians 2:15 we read that through the work of the Lord Jesus the principalities and powers have been openly disarmed and exposed, they have been triumphed over.

Yet there is battle

We can ask ourselves how it is possible that there is still so much warfare. We notice all too well that Satan is still busy trying to draw us away from God. Time and time again we have to confess our sins and acknowledge that in ourselves, that is in our flesh, dwells no good thing (Rom. 7:18). Yes, John even wrote that we deceive ourselves if we say we have no sin (1 Jn. 1:8).

Isn't Satan defeated then? Must another battle be fought before this is the case? Yes and no. The fight is fought and as we saw earlier, the Lord Jesus is the conqueror. It is true that Satan has no more claim on God's children. They are eternally safe, and nothing and no one can separate them from the love of God. They have received eternal life and, as it is said in the Epistle to the Ephesians, they have a place in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:6). The final settlement with Satan shall take place later, as we read in Revelation 20. Until that day the world sighs *under* his yoke and the results of sin, and creation has to bear and experience the results of the fall.

And the believer? Because he's part of the creation and materially and physically still bound to this earth, the 'sighing'

applies to him as well. But as regards to his soul, he is saved, delivered from the fear of death and judgment (Heb. 2:15; Rom. 8:1), he has eternal life and has received God's Spirit (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:5-6). He is no longer a slave to sin, no longer in the service of unrighteousness, quite the reverse (Rom. 6:17-18).

That's something the devil can't take. He knows that he has been defeated, but will try and take as many people down with him in his downfall. And his assault is directed at the believers above all. If it's not possible to pluck them from God's hand (Jn. 10:28-29), then he'll do everything possible to disturb the relationship between God and His children. He does this with evil tricks and plans. He just loves it if the brothers and sisters can't bear with each other. He likes it when parents and children don't get along. It is his goal that people fall into such sins as adultery, addiction to alcohol or drugs, coarseness, and godlessness. His main target is the Christian, to bring God's name into disgrace thereby. That's where our battle lies, in the things of every day. It was not for nothing that the Lord Jesus called the devil a 'murderer from the beginning' and the 'father of lies' in John 8:44. What a strong enemy, we could easily become disheartened...

Hold fast to the fact!

We have now seen what a Christian is, that there is an enemy, that there is a battle, and that there is a Conqueror. Let us hold fast to the fact that we are already delivered. It is not 'yet to come,' it is not 'still in development,' it is not 'a future story'...we *are* delivered. Satan is the loser and we may stand on the side of the Conqueror. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places, just as we read in Ephesians 1:3.

To be cont'd

The Prophecy of Nahum (1)

—R. Been Sr.

Introduction—Chapter 1:1

This short prophecy is only introduced by the words: "*The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.*" He came, therefore, from Elkosh, a small village in what was later called Galilee.³ Nothing is mentioned in Scripture about the time when Nahum uttered this prophecy. There are plenty of assumptions which, however, contradict each other. We are better off not to venture into these speculations when Scripture has left something out.

We can, however, consider this prophecy to be a sequel to the Book of Jonah. From this it follows that Nahum pronounced this after Jonah's days. Jehovah had sent this latter prophet to Nineveh, the capital of the great Assyrian empire, to preach against this city because the wickedness of its inhabitants had risen before the face of the Lord. At that time, however, the threat of overturning the city was not executed since its inhabitants turned from their wickedness, listened to God, and called upon Him for mercy. Later, however, Nineveh returned to its former sins. Then the prophet Nahum pronounced the burden of Nineveh, the divine words over the city. The judgment was sure to come; and so it happened.

In the past, the Assyrian had always been the great enemy of Israel, especially of the ten tribes. Finally, the ten tribes were taken captive to Assyria when, according to God's judgment, the measure of their sins was full. The Assyrian, however, had never succeeded to conquer Judah and Jerusalem, the two-tribe nation. In Hezekiah's days his armies were utterly defeated by an angel of the Lord. Thereafter, the Babylonian power suppressed the Assyrian more and more. In the future, however, the prophetic Assyrian, the King of the North, will indeed turn himself against the two tribes, who will then have returned to Palestine, and conquer Jerusalem, be it only for a short time. *In this Assyrian we can therefore rightfully see Israel's chief enemy, comprising other hostile powers.*

The name "Nahum" means "consolation," or "comforter." His prophecy is a consolation for Israel in so far he announces the destruction of its enemy.

Nineveh was a very old city, built by Asshur. The city is mentioned as early as Genesis 10:11. Historians tell us that the city had walls reaching thirty meters high, and sufficiently wide that three wagons could be driven on it side by side. On those walls stood fifteen hundred towers for defence, each sixty meters high. Jonah went one day's journey, about a seven-hour walk, into the city and then he had gone only one third of the way into the city. The city had a population of about 600,000 souls, a fabulous number for those days. Great riches and luxury, squander, pride and all sorts of sensuality dominated in

³ *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands places Elkosh on the eastern bank of the Jordan, 10 km south-east of Gilgal.*

the city. It was full of violent impiety.

The heathen nations, and Assyria especially, have been the instruments in God's hand to chasten His people on account of their sins. Of course, these nations had not been aware of this, but were driven by their greed of conquest and gain, their hatred towards Israel, towards God, for which Assyria, more than any others, was notorious. They used force and cruelty beyond measure and persisted in their terrible idolatry and sins. However, after God has used those nations as disciplinary rod for His guilty people, then He breaks that rod and casts it aside.

Of this casting aside, Nahum prophesies. Now, the city will not be spared, as in Jonah's days, but will be wiped from the face of the earth. This has indeed happened. Nineveh's fall meant the collapse of a mighty empire with its entire political and religious system, with its culture and all its associations. Everything was so deeply covered over in the earth that only with the greatest efforts could the city's ruins be uncovered in later centuries. Two hundred years later, a ten-thousand-man strong army could encamp upon the ruins of Nineveh without anybody suspecting that a mighty nation, with all its artwork, and refined culture and science, lay buried under the dust. What has happened to Nineveh will in the future happen to the great Babylon, the apostate Christendom, the system that will rule over all kings and powers of the earth. It will be remembered before God and receive from Him "the cup of the wine of the fury of His wrath" (Rev. 16:19). Three times it is said that in one hour destruction will come over her (Rev. 18:10,17,19). She, with all her blasphemous religious, social, and commercial power, will perish shortly before the appearance of the Son of man (Rev. 18:21). Babylon in the Book of Revelation is not a real city, such as the Assyrian Nineveh or the Chaldean Babel, but rather a structure, a system.

Chapter 1

Wrath of God against the Assyrian.

The first chapter contains a threat against Nineveh and a consolation for the two tribes of Judah; the restoration of Israel is one of the great subjects of prophecy in the Old Testament. At the occasion of the paralytic's healing, the apostle Peter, in his discourse to the Jewish people at Jerusalem, had called the nation to repentance and conversion so that the times of refreshing could come through Jesus Christ, whom heaven had to receive till the times of the restoring of all things (Acts 3:19-21). If the nation had at that time been converted, the times of the promised refreshings would have come: the restoration of the nation. The appearing of the Lord Jesus did depend, and still does, upon the conversion of Israel as a nation.

Verses 2-5

In verses 2-5 we are given a revelation of God's characteristics in relation to His judgments. Here it is seen in the judgment over Nineveh. The issue here is not who and what God is in Himself, light and love, but *how He reveals Himself in His government*. In days past He had made the principles of His government known to *His chosen people*, at times by means of a nothing-sparing judgment over that people. Would He then not make the principles known to the *nations*?

The idolatrous nations are inexcusable, for they have "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into [the] likeness of an image of corruptible man and of birds and quadrupeds and reptiles" (Rom. 1:20,23). That they are inexcusable is shown through:

1. The witness of creation.

God's eternal power and the divine character are perceived, being apprehended by the mind, understood, through His works of creation (Rom 1:20).

2. In the beginning men did know God.

From Adam till the Flood, a period of 1600 years, we do not read of idolatry.

3. They have a conscience (Rom. 1:21; 2:14-15).

And as far as Israel is concerned, this nation is a thousand times more guilty, for God has especially revealed Himself to this nation. Yet, Israel did worse than the nations even as far as idols are concerned. To them God had directed the definite commandment: "Thou shalt not make thyself any graven image, or any form of what is in the heavens above, or what is in the earth beneath, or what is in the waters under the earth" (Ex. 20:4).

The wrath of God comes over such idolatry committed by the nations or by Israel. He used the services of the nations to pour out that wrath over Israel. Both the ten tribes and the two were eventually led captive out of the land. But after He has used the services of the nations, those nations themselves are being judged. In the Book of Nahum it is the Assyrian,

who was a tool in God's hand for discipline over the nation Israel. Nebuchadnezzar was such a disciplinary rod over the two tribes. Such are God's governmental ways, not just towards *nations*, but also towards *persons*. In this dispensation of grace, too, God sometimes uses the services of others for meting out discipline over His children. *Those governmental ways of God do never change and are applicable to all persons and during all dispensations.*

The idolaters bring the judgment over themselves and no one will be able to plead ignorance when the judgment is executed.

In verse 3 we find still other characteristics of God's governmental ways, namely:

1. The Lord is slow to anger;
2. He is great in power;
3. He does not at all clear the guilty.

Nahum mentions these three characteristics in connection with God's governmental ways towards the nations. It is of course true as well that these characteristics can be applied to Israel, *just as His slowness to anger has been even more so towards Israel than towards the nations*. What happened after the nation had set up a golden calf, which it declared to be its gods who had brought them up out of Egypt, is proof of this. After Moses at the time had pled for the nation, Jehovah made Himself known as "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy unto thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but by no means clearing [the guilty]; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, upon the third and upon the fourth [generation]" (Ex. 34:6-7). The entire nation had deserved to perish as a judgment from God. But God still shows mercy and grace to the many thousands. This, however, should not cause the people to think that the evil has *no consequences*. God does by no means clear the guilty. That is a basic principle. That in which the fathers transgress will, through their fault, be seen in their children. The Lord, however, restricts the results to the third and fourth generation. Else the results of the fathers' sins would be like an oil patch on the water — ever-spreading further and further.

As observed already, Nahum mentions these three additional characteristics of God's governmental ways with a view to the *nations*. What a relief for the conscience that is convicted of sin to know that God is slow to anger. The same God who keeps His anger towards those who show themselves to be in enmity with Him is slow to anger towards those who with converted hearts turn repentant to Him. Nineveh could testify to this. At the first sign of repentance God had spared the city in Jonah's days, being mindful of the 120,000 little children in the city.

The Lord is slow to anger.

Never will any person, however daring or mocking his attitude towards God may be, succeed in moving God to an untimely act or an outburst of wrath. God will not be changed through the sin of any person. He always remains the Lofty One, full of majesty. When, in Hezekiah's days, Rabshakeh, the Assyrian officer, scoffs and publicly blasphemes the Holy One of Israel, then God says that He will put his hook in the nose of this against-Him-ranting officer, and His bit and bridle in His mouth. Thus he will be reined in to his own shame.

He is great in power.

With one word He can cause the judgments to cease or to give them free course. The Pharaoh of Moses' days could testify to both.

He does not clear the guilty.

In His governmental ways God will never clear the guilty, whatever the dispensation may be. The issue here is the *characteristics of God's governmental ways*, His holiness in those ways. These are quite apart from *the work of God's grace, who justifies the guilty by virtue of the sacrifice*. Human justice could fail, declaring an innocent one guilty, or a guilty one innocent. With God neither the one nor the other can occur.

To be cont'd

Two Tables — A Question and an Answer

—J. van Dijk

Q. I have heard (though not recently) 1 Corinthians 10:21 applied to denominational gatherings, which may or may not comprise born-again Christians. Don't you agree that Paul is there speaking of the pagan temple services: Astarte, Diana, and others?

A. Like you, I must admit that I have heard some very unfortunate statements related to this verse. Generally, however, these come from brethren who are zealous for the path in which they walk, without being well-versed in the things of God. What they fail to see is that Scripture often gives principles that may be applied to similar circumstances, although the occasion that gave rise for the apostle to cite the principles is not at all the same as what we find today. Let me explain.

When Paul says, "Ye cannot partake of the Lord's table, and of the table of demons," he uses the *principle that one cannot be associated with two tables that are in conflict with each other*. In his particular case the contrast was as clear as could be. There was the table of the Lord, and there was the table of demons. That Paul used that principle in this severe case does not mean that the principle he used — of 'not being able to be properly associated with two tables of contrary character' — would not hold true in less severe situations. So we find today some Christians who have a table at which they serve the Lord, but they do so according to their own ideas, not as given in Scripture. On the other hand, there are those who have seen what is the proper setting for the Lord's table. Here, too, we have two tables. The *principle* of 1 Corinthians 10:21, that one cannot partake of two tables of contrary character, still holds true. That verse is therefore properly applicable.

But then, some who do not think these things through, conclude that the table they cannot partake of must of necessity be a table of demons. That is a horrible and objectionable conclusion. A Christian walking in harmony with his Lord can never make such a statement. For help in this let us look at some Old Testament examples. In 1 Kings 3:2-5 King Solomon sacrificed a thousand burnt-offerings on the high place at Gibeon although God had shown his father David that the threshing floor of Araunah was the altar of burnt-offering (2 Chr. 22:1). Had the altar at Gibeon been an altar of demons (it was, after all, not the altar — the table — of the Lord), God would not have been able to speak to Solomon that night. Yet, God spoke to him, and God's presence caused Solomon to realize what God's will was regarding God's altar. He immediately went to Jerusalem and offered sacrifices there, now not just burnt-offerings, but also peace-offerings, which speak of intimate fellowship (1 Ki. 3:15).

Much later, in Hezekiah's days, we find that the people still sacrificed on the high places (2 Chr. 33:17). Yet, God says expressly that they did so only to Jehovah their God. Obviously there, too, God did not consider these altars to be altars of demons. Nevertheless, any true-hearted Israelite would have gone to Jerusalem and stayed away from the high places.

Those who have understood God's desire regarding the setting in which the Lord is to be remembered in His death cannot partake at a table that is set up on other principles. They realize that this is so, because of 1 Corinthians 10:21, but, if their relationship with the Lord is good, they also realize that their applying the *principle* set forth in that verse does not at all mean that, therefore, the other table is a table of demons. When brethren began gathering unto the name of the Lord Jesus some 160 years ago, they never referred to the tables in the various denomination by such terms. You correctly observed that such a label is only fitting for a table where idols are served, and not for a table where the Lord is served, even when that is done on a basis that is not according to the Lord's mind.