

The Prophecy of Nahum (2)

—R. Been Sr.

Chapter 1 (Continued)

In grace God had in the past spared Nineveh despite its guilt. Its subsequent kings, however, had aroused His wrath by their unbounded pride, their continuing hatred against Him and His people, and their blasphemies. The last of these kings, Assurbanipal, had been worse and more cruel than all his predecessors, and he also excelled them in splendour and might. Most likely Nahum prophesied during the reign of this last king.

verses 3-6

These verses portray the power with which Jehovah pours out His judgments over the enemies, or the power with which He sets aside every form of resistance to His desire to bless His people. Here again, the issue is not *what* and *who* God is, *but which characteristics come to the fore in His judgment or setting aside*. At the revelation to Elijah on Horeb, He was not in the terrible storm that tore at the mountains, breaking the rocks. Nor was He in the earthquake, or in the fire. This revelation of power preceded His appearance to Elijah in grace. Who could hold back that grace? Nothing and no one. So it is here. When He wants to open a way to bless His people, nothing and no one can prevent that. Even the sea and the rivers He sets aside. All beautiful things on earth are affected so that they languish. The highest and most established persons in government (mountains and hills) tremble before Him and melt away.

verses 7-11

The Lord is good — These verses open up a new view, entirely different from the characteristics in verses 2-6. Now it is a question of *what Jehovah is for His people, even in the midst of the judgments*. What He is for all who believe, and especially for the remnant of Israel, with which the Old Testament prophecies are occupied.

Jehovah has never been anything but good for His own, no matter in what misery they may have found themselves. When they are overwhelmed by judgments, sighing under the heaviest of them, they strengthen themselves in the thought *who Jehovah has always been for His people, and still is*. When they are delivered out of their anxieties, they sing the Millennial hymn of praise: "Give ye thanks unto Jehovah; for He is good; for His loving-kindness endureth for ever" (Ps. 107:1). Throughout the Book of the Psalms we hear "The Lord is good," every time repeated for the remnant so as to sustain them in the midst of their anxieties. Or we hear it sung in praise by the remnant when it thinks of the salvation that is again and again given to them. In Psalm 136 alone, the loving-kindness of the Lord is praised twenty-six times. Just as often as that psalm has verses. These things hold also true for today's believers. In the midst of suffering in the present time, they are sustained by the goodness of the Father and the Son, kept from doubt and discouragement. They, too, sing of this goodness.

He is "a stronghold in the day of trouble." How often are these words found on the lips of the believing Israelites of olden days! It will also be found with the future remnant in the days of the Great Tribulation, the days of Jacob's trouble, when Satan will arouse the enemies to continually persecute the remnant. But the knowledge that "Jehovah is in the temple of His holiness," and therefore reigns according to His holiness and righteousness, sustains and strengthens them. They know that "His eyes behold, and His eyelids try the children of men" (Ps. 11:4). They realize that He is a witness against the persecutors (Mic. 1:2). Their idols will not be able to help them in the day of revenge (Hab. 2:20). And during the day of terrible persecution, the remnant says that He "hides them "in His pavilion; in the secret of His tent," therefore, keeping them to eventually exalt them (Ps. 27:5).

"He knoweth them that trust in Him." That is a sufficient consolation for the remnant. Is it this for us too? The enemies said of the Lord, "He trusted upon God; let Him save Him now if He will have Him (Mt. 27:43). God has preserved Him, for He trusted in Him (Ps. 16:1). A day will come in which the ungodly, who mocked with this trust in God, will be destroyed.

"*With an overrunning flood...*" (v. 8) — This verse tells us what will happen to the Assyrian (Nineveh) and to all enemies. "With an overrunning flood He will make a full end of the place thereof (of Nineveh), and darkness (no way out) shall

pursue His enemies." This verse deals with the historical and the prophetic Assyrian. And just as in the past the place of the *historic* Assyrian was destroyed by God, so it will happen to *the prophetic* Assyrian. He and his power will come to their end without having a helper. Also *all other nations* that are then in Palestine will be deluged by the "overrunning flood." Meanwhile, this judgment will also be executed over *apostate Judah*, over which the Antichrist will reign (Dan. 11:45; Isa, 10:22-23; Jer. 30:11; 46:28; Dan. 9:27; Isa. 28:22). All will be consumed by that "overrunning flood" before the Lord will establish His Millennial reign. In the expression "overrunning flood" we have therefore a presentation of the judgment over the Assyrian, the nations and apostate Israel.

The prophecy of Nahum does not only deal with the *historical*, but also with the *prophetic* destruction of the Assyrian. For that matter, this is the case with many other prophecies of Scripture. The fall of Nineveh in the past is only an *initial and partial fulfilment* of the prophetic word. The complete fulfilment comes in the last days. The modern rationalists, in their zeal to show the impossibility that prophecy determined matters so far ahead of time, deny with most superficial methods the future prophetic events. According to them, all has already been completely fulfilled in the past. That they, in making these claims, must twist matters a thousand ways does not need any comment.

"*What do ye imagine against Jehovah?*" (v. 9) — Nineveh did not ask this from those who in the past threatened the city. Such questions were simply not thought of. It is true that God had raised up these enemies against Nineveh, but they were led by their rapacity and hatred against the Assyrian. Then they did not think to imagine anything against the Lord, to fight against Him. But the prophet looks far into the future. Then the powers who first fought each other will, at the appearing of the King of kings, unite themselves to fight against Him. Then is the carefully worded question: "What have you imagined against Jehovah," totally understandable (Ps. 2:1-3). The disciples in the first days of the Assembly quote the second psalm when the persecution bursts forth over them, saying that God had spoken by the mouth of David: "Why have the nations raged haughtily and the peoples meditated vain things? The kings of the earth were there, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ" (Acts 4:25-26). And the Holy Spirit has had this recorded in that way in the New Testament. Therefore, we have here a proof *that a prophecy is fulfilled in more than one way*. The quotation of Psalm 2 in the Acts was not *the* fulfilment, but it was a fulfilment, an initial one. We see something similar when we compare Acts 13:41 with Habakkuk 7:5.

"*He will make a full end: trouble shall not rise up the second time*" (v. 9) — In the past an appropriate judgment had been executed over Nineveh, complete destruction. Then the city had been erased from the earth for good. But the word "trouble," so characteristic for the Great Tribulation of the last days, lifts our attention over the historical destruction of Nineveh to that which precedes immediately the appearance of Christ in judgment. Then He will execute judgment over the *prophetic Assyrian* (the king of the North), over the power of the *other nations*, over the great mass of the *apostate Jews*, over the *Antichrist*, and over the ruler of the restored Roman Empire; *it will be a final judgment*. But also for the faithful remnant out of Judah it will hold true that "the trouble will not rise up the second time." True, for purification they will go through the Great Tribulation, but the "waters" will not swallow them up. Just as little as Daniel's three friends in the fiery furnace, they will not be consumed by the "fire" (Isa. 43:2). There will not be made an end to the remnant, that is to say: a terminal judgment will not come over them (Jer. 5:18).

To be cont'd

The Battle of Conquerors (2)

—G. Elbers

Chapter 2

What it's all about... Don't struggle, but stand firm!

Many Christians have a difficult spiritual life despite the fact that they are conquerors 'in Christ.' This is usually caused by the fact that they still want to fight so that they themselves, in one way or another, can achieve or earn the blessings in Ephesians 1:3-14. In spite of the fact that God *has* blessed.

You know, if we read Ephesians 6:10-18 carefully, we see that though we do wrestle (v.12), *God doesn't ask us to wrestle to get a part of God's abundant and wonderful blessings or a spot in heaven*. Like I said, we already have these blessing as well as that wonderful place in heaven (Eph. 1:3-14; 2:6). All we have to do *is...stand fast*. Remember that:

If we have to stand fast somewhere,
it means we are already there!

I would like to emphasize this firmly in this study: because of ourselves we can do nothing. Do you think we could beat the devil? No! Just like in the battle with Goliath, God had to give someone who could make the impossible possible. He has done that for us too. He gave Someone to fight the battle for us. God in His goodness brought about that which was necessary. He is wonderful isn't He? In what position should we stand fast? What has been accomplished for us? As mentioned earlier, again we say, Read Ephesians 1! There is redemption, forgiveness, sealing, adoption (having been received as sons), predestination, and even more. God had this all thought out, ready, and reserved ahead of time. We only have to accept it thankfully and take possession of it, making it our own.

In order to get a better insight into this, we will look at another example in the Old Testament. It's the struggle of the Israelites when they wanted to take possession of the Promised Land in the days of Joshua. They, too, knew what it was to struggle, and they, too, had to learn to stand fast.

Joshua and Ephesians

The book of Joshua shows many similarities with Paul's Epistle to the believers at Ephesus. If you study these two books attentively, you will be surprised to discover similarities between them. In the one you will find the history of God's people Israel, which had an earthly calling. In the other, God's people today, who have a heavenly calling (1 Pet. 2:9-10; Heb. 3:1).

In these books, we find many similarities between the ways in which God *fulfils* His promises to His people, as well as between the manner in which the peoples can come to the *enjoyment* of them. Furthermore, both in Joshua and in Ephesians we come across the struggle of conquerors. Both the book and the epistle speak about wrestling with powers *which are found on the terrain of God's promises*. For Israel, these were the nations in Canaan, for the Assembly, they are the principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12).

An earthly and a heavenly people

When we study the topic of the warrior's armour and the struggle that exists, we must always remember that, although there are many similarities between Israel and the Assembly, these two are not equal to each other. Israel is *not* the same as the Assembly, and the Assembly is *not* the same as Israel.

I reemphasize this, because so many Christians want to apply the instructions and statutes that were meant specifically for Israel to themselves or the Assembly. We mention, for example, the covenant, the laws, the precepts regarding food and certain feasts, circumcision, tithes, and many more of such instructions. Because of these things, these Christians often have problems when it comes to their enjoyment of the spiritual blessings intended for the Assembly. They run the risk of underestimating the nature of the struggle as well as of overestimating the part that God asks of them in the struggle!

You say, That's hard to understand? Well, let's set a few things straight in an effort to clarify this.

Israel is an earthly people with an earthly destination. God promised Abraham and his seed 'all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession' including *earthly* blessings (Gen. 17:8; Dt. 11:11). His seed had to deal with *earthly* enemies, with *earthly* weapons (see Joshua, Judges, etc.). So, it was a fight of *people against people* with ordinary weapons in their hands.

The Assembly, however, is a spiritual people with a spiritual, heavenly destination, being blessed in the first place with *spiritual* blessings (2 Cor. 6:16; Eph.1:3-14; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:9). She also has to cope with *spiritual* enemies, and the battleground *is spiritual* (heavenly places) as well. Therefore their weapons are not earthly either but *spiritual*; together they form the armour of God, the topic of this study, described in Ephesians 6:10-18.

Other similarities

Besides these definite differences, there are also other similarities to be found. Of course we have to open the Bible to find these. God had planned and reserved great blessings — in a manner of speaking — both for Israel and for the Assembly. God promised Israel a land flowing with milk and honey (Ex. 3:8; 13:6; 33:3 and in other places). In Ephesians 1:3 we read that God blessed the Assembly with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. There is no doubt that God really wants to bless His people! But, as we saw earlier, there is still another similarity: there are enemies who want to take away and withhold the blessings which are reserved for Israel and for the Assembly. Therefore they both have to do

battle. Christians can learn a great deal from the battle that Israel had to fight. The Old Testament is often called the 'picture book of the New Testament' for just this reason. Paul, too, pointed out that Christians can learn from what happened to the people of Israel (1 Cor. 10:10).

Taking possession of...

God's earthly people, Israel, could take possession of God's promises by putting the soles of their feet on them (Dt. 11:24; Josh. 1:3). The enemy couldn't bear this and that's why there was such resistance, such a battle. But God's people could stand on God's promises!

Now let's look at the Assembly. God's Word teaches us, that we as believers *are* blessed (it is a fact) with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. Just as with the people of Israel, the enemy can't bear this and tries in many ways to rob God's people from their blessings or to get in their way.

What can believers do? Or better said: What *must* we do? We must stand on God's promises and say to the enemy, "God has redeemed, God has freed, God has forgiven, God has blessed, God has predestinated, God has..." It would be good to memorize this list of blessings of Ephesians 1:3-14! Place your feet on the *ground* for which God has destined you; then you will also experience these blessings. And don't forget, we are talking about *spiritual* blessings. Heaven is even more wonderful than the Promised Land!

Just to be certain, it is often said that the Promised Land and the 'heavenly places' can be compared with heaven. Yes, even that they speak of heaven. This thought is nevertheless wrong. Is there strife in heaven? In the Promised Land there was, and, according to Ephesians 6:12, in the heavenly places as well.

Another important difference: The sojourn in the Promised Land depended mainly on the behaviour of God's people! (Dt. 28:58,63-65). This fortunately does not apply to our abode in heaven. Whoever belongs to God's heavenly people may have to say as a result of disobedience: "Heaven is out of my heart," but his or her heart cannot be stolen out of heaven!

The Promised Land... God's people had so looked forward to it! The Israelites would be at the end of their journey, their enemies would leave them alone and they could literally pick the fruits of the blessings that God had prepared ahead of time. He had in fact promised them a land flowing with milk and honey; how they would enjoy it! But first they had to do something else. They could reckon in advance that land as their possession, even though the enemy still lived there. Taking possession of it was a real thing of obedience and faith. For the Christians of today, who want to enjoy the blessings God has promised, the same two words apply:

Obedience and Faith!

In Joshua 1:3, the Lord said: "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that I have given unto you, as I said unto Moses." Furthermore, the Lord stated where the boundaries should be (v. 4). Then we read further (v. 5) that God said: "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life."

Here we see several important points:

- "I give," the Lord said. It was therefore not a concern of people! In the same way the Lord wants to bless the believers today, but they must expect it from Him.

- "I will fulfil the promise," the Lord made clear to them when He referred them to what Moses had said. God always fulfils his promises, no matter how impossible that may seem. It will become evident that he has blessed His children with all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3).

- "No man shall be able to stand before thee," God had promised Joshua, and the people could profit from this! This is remarkable because without Joshua the people wouldn't be able to defeat the enemy. Think about this: the name Joshua translated into the Greek language is Jesus. Who then should *we* follow in order to take possession of the promises? From north to south, from east to west, God established the boundaries, where the people could enjoy the blessings (Josh.1:4). That means on the one hand that God had chosen *that* territory for His own people and the enemy had to leave it alone. On the other hand it also meant that the Israelites couldn't search for happiness in another place. God ever sought the best for them. There they would be home, within the boundaries established by God.

This is for us as Christians an important lesson as well. Let us enjoy the blessings God has prepared for us, and let us not try to find happiness and peace somewhere else, in another manner. This is because outside the boundaries established by God, there is the enemy. The 'ruler of this world' is reigning there. Enjoying God's blessings was for Israel, and is for the

Assembly, a matter of faith and obedience!

God's promises: stand on them!

"Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that I have given unto you," said the Lord to Joshua. *This was therefore a matter of faith.* The people could quietly proceed, step by step, city by city, and district by district. Blessing after blessing. They already possessed it because God had promised it to them. They had to follow Joshua and believe!

But what about the enemies? Were the Israelites supposed to pretend that they didn't exist? No, that would be misleading themselves. Weren't the enemies strong? *Yes, indeed, but God was stronger!* And He had promised them that no one would be able to stand up against His people.

Again a question for ourselves: What about us? Do we want to possess and experience what the Lord did promise to us? Promises such as: peace with God, sonship, forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and a future in the Father's house. Then we must obediently stay within God's boundaries, then we must believe that God has already given everything in Christ Jesus or in the Beloved, just as we read this so emphatically in Ephesians 1:3-14. These are promises upon which we may stand.

Again the question: Why the struggle?

Ah, the answer is obvious. Of course the enemy won't give up quickly. He tries to cross God and His people in all kinds of ways. Just like Israel's enemies constantly made things difficult for them, Christians experience opposition daily. For the Assembly this opposition does not consist of flesh and blood.

To be cont'd

True or False Religion (2)

—A. E. Bouter

6. A False Priesthood, v. 31

Jeroboam seemed to be very democratic, very jovial, by taking and establishing priests from all classes of the people. But the Word of God tells us that they "were not of the sons of Levi." Jeroboam's priesthood was but a poor imitation of the true. During the history of the Church, too, some have introduced a priesthood that may appeal to the aspirations of man ("whoever desired it" — 1 Ki. 13:33), but that sets aside the thoughts of God.

In 2 Chronicles 13:9, however, we discover another reason: Those willing to pay something could become priests; there was competition and the power of money. The payment came in a religious disguise; it was claimed to be a "sacrifice": a bullock and seven rams. This, too, we see in the history of the Church. God, however, wants to have true sons of Levi; He wants those whom He has called, and who are instructed by Him. God wants persons, a true seed of God, who will exercise God's priesthood in dependence upon Himself (cf. Mal. 2; Ezra 2:61f).

What has this to say to us in our days? Are we true or false priests? (cf. 2 Chr. 13:5-12). Thankfully, we read in 2 Chronicles 11:13-17 that there were those among all the tribes of Israel that wanted to be identified with the true centre of worship. They "set their heart to seek Jehovah the God of Israel," and left the idolatry behind to go and sacrifice at Jerusalem. Today, too, this is to characterize all who call on the name of the Lord (2 Tim 2:19).

7. The Wrong Time or Season, v. 32

In Leviticus 23 and other passages, we read how the feast of tabernacles was the crown of all the feasts of the Lord. Jeroboam, however, did not have God's interests at heart, nor those of the people of God. He opposes God's thoughts by copying the things of God, and by choosing the *eighth* month rather than the *seventh* month for this feast, though he selects the same day of the month. In this manner he competes with the pattern established by God. The enemy always opposes God by way of imitation; it has been said that the imitation that comes closest to God's truth, is the most dangerous attack. Is this not what we experience in our days as well?

8. A False Sacrifice, an Imitation of the True.

At the inauguration of the altar, the king himself presented an offering on the altar. God had forbidden that the king, or any others than those of Aaron's lineage, perform the service of the priests. The only exception is found in the person of the Lord Jesus, in whom the two offices of King and Priest are united. Thus Jeroboam imitated Solomon, type of the true King-Priest, who had inaugurated the service in the temple; and in the near future, the Antichrist will again imitate the things of God. As for us today? We have to face the mystery of iniquity that is already operating (2 Th. 2). Today, too, many imitations infringing on the rights of Christ are seen. We find them linked with the religious and political aspects in what is supposed to be the service of God.

Then Jeroboam began "sacrificing to the calves that he had made" (v. 32). This was outright idolatry! In Exodus 32 we read that Aaron proclaimed that the feast of the golden calf was to the Lord. Most likely, Jeroboam did the same thing, introducing his idolatry by declaring his sacrifice to be to the Lord. Unfortunately, despite his claims, he had put God entirely aside! He cleverly made use of the fact that what is great in the eyes of man is readily accepted as being the right kind of religion by the mass of the people (cf. the end of v. 32). This principle we saw already under point 5, and it can also be seen in Genesis 11 and Daniel 3.

9. A False Access; an Imitation of Real Access to God

Incense speaks to us of Christ's personal perfection in which He could approach God (Ex 30; Lev. 16). The worship where-with today's believers approach God is as incense that has been given them for this purpose (Heb. 10:19f; Rev. 5:8; 8:3f). Jeroboam, however, had of course no real access to God, despite the external form (1 Ki. 12:33; 13:1). A self-devised religion, which has the appearance of an approach to God, is rejected by God (Col. 2).

10. A False Source or a Wrong Origin, v. 33

Jeroboam imitated God's authority. The Spirit of God declares that Jeroboam had imagined his form of worship in his own heart. It was all in complete contrast to what God had revealed to Moses (Ex. 25-31; Lev. 16; 23 and other passages) and to David (1 Chr. 28:21). In our days, too, human inventions often replace the authority of the Word of God and the Spirit of God.

11. A False Altar; an Imitation of the True Altar

One who understands the value of the altar realizes how serious it was that Jeroboam introduced a false altar. The Lord Jesus told us that the altar sanctifies the gift, it being more important than the gift (Mt. 23:19). The altar presents us the Lord Jesus in His ability to undergo the judgment of God and to bear the true sacrifice (which also speaks of Him, but seen from another aspect), so that God would be glorified. Now Jeroboam made his false altar the centre of his new, counterfeit system. This is why the judgment of God, confirmed by the sign of the prophet, struck the altar (1 Ki. 13:2).

The Word of God refers to the altar as the table of the Lord (Mal. 1). This explains how God values the Lord's table (1 Cor. 10:14-23; Heb. 13:10). But what have we made of that table, that altar? We have changed the true character of this altar and the sacrifice. The very heart of true Christian worship has been attacked. I would like to ask especially those who already enjoy the privilege of remembering the Lord at His table: Do you appreciate this privilege¹ according to His thoughts?"

12. A false Object, v. 33

¹ This privilege is explained in 1 Cor. 10 and 11; 1 Pet. 2:4-10; Heb. 13:10-15. A detailed discussion of these passages is beyond the scope of this article. A few points are important to note however. The Lord's supper is not a sacrament through which we obtain something. At the Lord's table, our altar, we bring spiritual sacrifices — thanksgiving, praise, and worship (Heb. 13:15). The Lord's supper is not to be connected with an idolatrous system, a mixture of biblical and pagan customs. The Old Testament priestly service has been entirely fulfilled and set aside by the Lord's sacrifice (explained in Hebrews). Any service with a literal altar, incense, etc. goes back to the Old Testament shadows we are instructed to leave, and disregards the fulfillment of those shadows in Christ's accomplished work (Col. 2).

Jeroboam "made a feast *for the children of Israel*," instead of making it *for the Lord*. The Lord had given these feasts so that His people could express fellowship with God in a manner suited to their understanding of God. The seven feasts of the Lord (Lev. 23) were in the first place *for the Lord*, although in these feasts one also finds blessings that the people of God could experience. By means of these feasts the people could give a response to God, a response that varied according to the particular character of each feast.

To give an example of this: the Passover speaks of the death of Christ (1 Cor. 5:8), taking the place in judgment instead of the firstborn. It was needed to deliver God's people from Egypt, and is directly linked to the sacrifice of first fruits, which speaks of the resurrection of Christ. God wants to share all He has in His heart and in His house with His people. He must be the true Object of all the activities of God's people, as we notice at the occasion of their deliverance (Ex. 15:1). Thus the people of Israel expressed in these feasts what they experienced and realized of the thoughts of God. Of course, in all this God was to be the Object and the Centre. Applying these thoughts to us Christians: the Lord in the glory has given us "the Lord's supper" (1 Cor. 11:20-31). He is to be the Object and the Centre of our adoration. Unfortunately, the history of the Church shows us that Christian practice has, in many respects, become the object and the centre — and has, thereby, really replaced the Lord.

The feasts of Jehovah can also be seen as the various phases of spiritual growth in the people of God. God likes to see that we grow collectively in His things. The disciples at Antioch (Acts 11:26), who came together for a whole year, grew under the instruction of the apostle Paul. When we have the right Object before our hearts, we will grow. God wants us to grow in the things of the Lord every day; and from year to year, by reaching a higher level (as with a spiral), after each week, i.e., after each celebration of the Lord's Supper. This would be the best remedy and safeguard against error.

By placing man at the centre, man has robbed God of things that are precious to His heart. May we be kept (by purifying our hearts in self-judgment according to 1 Cor. 11:28-32), from self-will and the wiles and attacks of the enemy as described in this chapter of First Kings. In ourselves we are not better than Jeroboam, Israel, or any other Christian. This latter point is demonstrated in the man of God. After having announced God's pending judgment over Jeroboam's rebellion, he himself rebelled against the word of God and became guilty of acting contrary to that word, just like Jeroboam.

We can compare the humanism and liberalism of our days with the history of Jeroboam's days. God has been put aside in all areas of life. This development will reach its peak and full public manifestation under the reign of the Antichrist, who will take his place in the midst of Judaism and the Christian profession. The apostle Paul declared that the mystery of iniquity was already active in his days. This shows how much more we have to be on guard today (cf. Acts 20:30).

Conclusion

Right at the beginning of a movement against Him, God exposes the true character of the revolt. We see this in Jeroboam, and it is also seen at the beginning of the Church in Ananias and Sapphira. Although in both instances God initially intervenes in judgment (1 Kings 13; Acts 5), He afterwards leaves things to develop under the hand of man. Let us, on whom the ends of the ages have come, be on the alert and discern to what degree these principles are evident in the history of the Church at large, in the history of those with whom we express fellowship, but — most of all — in our own hearts. If we do recognize their working, may we then heed God's warning, and be kept from falling into Satan's snare, for the glory of God and for our blessing.

Wake up thou that sleepest!

Three Biblical Characteristics of a Revival

—H. Bouter

Ephesians 5:14

The context

When we look at the context of Ephesians 5:14, it becomes clear that Paul speaks here about the practical conduct or walk of the Christian. We find three key words in this portion. Our walk is first a walk in love (v. 2), but then also a walk in light (vv. 8f), as well as a walk in wisdom (vv. 15f).

In connection with our subject we are now interested in the second key word of this chapter: namely our walk in light. That is the light of the risen Christ that shines upon us, Christians, and in which we may walk as new men, as children of light. So to say, Christ is the Sun of our life, the great Light that governs us, that controls our life (cf. already Gen. 1:16). He has brought our sleep of death to an end, and as risen persons we now walk in the light.

This new walk contrasts starkly with our previous walk in the darkness of unbelief and sin, in other words, in the darkness of *spiritual death*. We have no longer anything to do with the unfruitful works of darkness, says the apostle, for the light exposes them, revealing everything.

Three ways of interpretation

We can understand the admonition of Ephesians 5:14 in a *principle* sense, but it is just as well possible to take a *practical* and *prophetical* approach. The prophetical sense of this appeal, both for Israel and for the Assembly, is supported by the reference to the prophet Isaiah (i.e., Isa. 26:19; 60:1). Here, however, the practical sense is accentuated for us Christians, though it cannot be separated from the other two ways of applying it.

First something more about the structure of this verse. The admonition consists actually of three parts, two commands and a related promise:

1. Wake up, thou that sleepest.
2. Arise from among the dead.
3. The Christ shall shine upon thee.

When we look at the verse from a viewpoint of *principle*, then it has its application to our conversion and new birth. We sinners must wake up out of our death-sleep. We need new life to enable us to rise up out of our condition of death. Christ works this new life through His Word and Spirit. Then the promise holds true that He will become the new Centre of our life, the Son in whose light we may walk from then on.

True as this is, the apostle's purpose is nevertheless most of all the *practical* application to our life as believers, the practical experience and realization of our blessings (as is already the case in Eph. 4-6). After all, Paul addresses the holy and faithful in Christ Jesus, converted persons (Eph. 1:1). They must *practically* show the renewal of life, that has become theirs, to be a true thing. Thereby they will distinguish themselves from the unbelievers, who miss this new life, still being dead in their trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1).

That is also important for us, for it is quite likely that we have a need of spiritual reveille in our life, an arising, an awakening out of sleep. In short: a revival. We can easily fall asleep in all kinds of ways: through dryness and deadness in our spiritual life, lack of food, lukewarmness, a worldly manner of thinking and acting.

Sadly, there is little distinction between a sleeping Christian and a dead "Christian-in-name-only." It is true: The Lord knows those who are His. But that is only one side of the medal. When we have fallen asleep spiritually, our life is not to the Lord's glory. Then we cannot testify of Him. Then we are no longer useable for Him.

What then is the way to restoration? How does a true revival come about? According to Ephesians 5:14 this happens in three stages:

1. Through a spiritual awakening by the Word
2. Through a walk as Christians who have been made alive, and
3. Through a life in the light of the resurrected Lord.

1. Wake up, thou that sleepest!

We must wake up, we must awake out of our sleep. To make it clear that this admonition is most certainly also meant for true Christians, I point to the somewhat similar verses in Romans and 1 Thessalonians. So Paul writes, It is not now the time to sleep for us who are Christians (Rom. 13:11f). For we are children of light, sons of the day. We are not of the night and of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep as the others do (the spiritually dead, who have no life from God), but let us watch and be sober (1 Th. 5:4f).

This is a personal warning: Wake up (singular)! Waking up is a personal matter, even when ever so many persons may be

involved in it. All ten virgins in Matthew 25 had to wake up. Another example that may speak even more to our imagination: the dry bones of dead persons in Ezekiel 37 joined to each another just as they belonged together, and therefore to *individual* persons.

Such a personal awakening is brought about by the working of God's Word, just as the dry bones did not join together as a result of sheer human activity but because the Word of the Lord came to them. God's voice speaks to us and then it is powerfully active through the Holy Spirit. For that reason I prefer the rendering of the Authorized Version and the New Translation (Wherefore *He* says) as well as the New King James Version (Therefore *He* says) over the rendering of the New International Version (This is why *it is* said) and the New American Standard (For this reason *it* says). I prefer those renderings over these more neutral forms. God Himself must become involved to awake us out of sleep. Only His call is life-giving. He restores the fellowship with Him that we could not, or hardly, enjoy during our sleep.

This then is the first important characteristic of an awakening according to God's thoughts: God's Word is being restored as a candle on the candleholder, and thereby God's Spirit rouses individuals. Thus we read for example in the seven letters to the seven assemblies again and again the refrain: "He that has an ear, let him *hear* what the Spirit says to the assemblies" (Rev. 2-3).

Do we have an open ear for the Lord's calling? If so, His Word will have the same effect on us as the midnight cry in the parable of the ten virgins. The call: "Behold, the Bridegroom! Go forth to meet Him!" will arouse us and renew our view of the Christ's glory. For the focus is on Him, on His relationship with us, on His love which in turn demands consecration and responding love from our heart. His glory, His imminent return, and the practical consequences this has for us, are what is important.

*My Beloved spake and said unto me,
Rise up, My love,
My fair one, and come away (Song. 2:10).*

2. Arise up from among the dead

It is the voice of the Lord who loves us and has washed us from our sins in His blood. It is "Jesus, Lover of my soul," as a hymn refers to Him. It is the voice of the *Bridegroom*, who awakens us. He wants us to get ready to meet Him. What does that involve? It involves that we, once we have woken up, cannot remain lying on our easy couches. We must in actual fact *get up* and go to meet Him.

That is, therefore, the second characteristic of an awakening after God's thoughts: a renewed consecration to Christ, a new way of life in which the risen Lord is formed in us, therefore having the place in our life that is due to Him. For ourselves that is also nothing less than a rising from among the dead, as the apostle expresses it here. We will then clearly distinguish ourselves as Christians from the people around us who are still dead in their trespasses and sins. We are entirely different and we will also conduct ourselves entirely differently (The Dutch NBG-version renders Eph. 4:20 thus: "Ye entirely different: ye have learnt to know Christ"). We have received new life in Christ, and that makes us new people who keep themselves unspotted from the world (Jas. 1:27).

Paul hints here at a few statements by the prophet Isaiah, of which one very clearly refers to the resurrection of the body: "Thy dead shall live, my dead bodies shall arise. Awake and sing in triumph, ye that dwell in dust" (Isa 26:19). Soon we will share *in the first resurrection*, that is the resurrection from among the other ones who are dead (Phil. 3:11; cf. Mk. 9:10). But in our life, here and now, it is a question of what I would like to call a *practical* application of the truth of the first resurrection. For haven't we (figuratively spoken) been risen with Christ to a new life? It will be seen that we are renewed persons. We have left our "grave of sin" and now live and walk in the light. This "rising from among the dead" marks the beginning of a walk with God.

However, when we think of the prophetic application of this verse, it is not only important for ourselves, but also for the future restoration of the nation Israel — also in the light of the references from Isaiah. The spiritual and national restoration of Israel will also be nothing less than a resurrection from among the dead. And that is how Paul says it literally in the Epistle to the Romans: "For if their casting away [be the] world's reconciliation, what [their] reception but life from among [the] dead?" (Rom. 11:15).

Ezekiel prophesied about Israel's resurrection in the well-known prophecy of the valley of the dry bones (Ezek. 37). Notice that the "resurrection" he describes is the work of God's Spirit. It is the Spirit that makes alive: "And I prophesied as He had commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great

army will put My Spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I will place you in your own land" (vv. 10, 14). But when we look at this from the viewpoint of our own responsibility, it is of course very important whether we can be used of God as a prophet, as an instrument of the working of God's Spirit. An awakening is on the one hand entirely God's work, but on the other hand it is the work of men that He can use as His voice.

3. Christ will shine upon you

Now we come to the last part of our verse, which contains a beautiful promise for all who have been raised out of sleep by Christ. This third characteristic of an awakening according to God's will we could typify as a Christ-centred life, a being directed towards Christ as the great Centre of the new life (for us personally, but also for us as Assembly).

Obviously the apostle hints here at a few passages out of Isaiah 60 which speak of Israel's future restoration. In the first verses the prophet says to Zion: "Arise, shine! for thy light is come, and the glory of Jehovah is risen upon thee. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples; but Jehovah will arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen on thee. And the nations shall walk by thy light, and kings by the brightness of thy rising" (vv. 1-3). This theme returns once more later in the chapter: "The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but Jehovah shall be thine everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for Jehovah shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended" (vv. 19-20).

It is very beautiful to see how these prophetic passages are applied by the apostle to the believers of the present dispensation. For us it is the glory of Christ that rises upon us: Christ shall shine upon you. We are illuminated by the risen Lord, who, by triumphing over death and the grave, has rung in a new day for all who belong to Him.

From the spiritual aspect, so we may conclude, the day of the kingdom of peace has already dawned on us. The Christ, who is the shining Centre of the coming kingdom, is already now our Light. Therefore the apostle admonishes us to walk even now "as in the day" (Rom. 13:13). The darkness and obscurity of judgment, of the night of sin, has been driven out forever. With Him we walk in the full light. In times of revival, of spiritual awakening, this is experienced anew.

The fact that these things have already found their fulfilment today does not mean that thereby the contents of the prophecy are exhausted. The spiritual and practical application of it to ourselves may not curtail the full reach of God's promises. The first fulfilment in the present time is the earnest of the last and definite fulfilment in the future.

The prophecies of Isaiah retain therefore their concrete value for Israel in the coming Millennium. Indeed, also for the Assembly it contains a further prophetic meaning, as is evident from a comparison with Revelation 21. There we read about the New Jerusalem descending out of heaven (not the earthly Zion, but Christ's bridal Assembly): "And the city has no need of the sun nor of the moon, that they should shine for it; for the glory of God has enlightened it, and the lamp thereof [is] the Lamb" (Rev. 21:23).

Meanwhile: Let us not forget to truly walk as children of light, until the day dawns and the shadows flee.

From Communion to Ritual

—J. van Dijk

In the night before He gave His life for us, our precious Lord gave us the emblems of bread and wine by which to remember Him. Remembering Him, we may think of Him, of His life here below, of His death and resurrection, and of His glorification and soon return; yet most of all of His death, for of this the emblems speak especially.

True remembrance of the Lord by means of these emblems involves a most intimate communion with Him. Those who truly commune with Him know and respond to His deep heart's desire to be in the midst of those whom He has bought at such a great price (Mt. 18:20). They know that He also longs to be in their midst to teach them, and to hear their requests. He desires full and intimate communion that flows from Himself to His own and back to Him: a heart to heart communion.

The early Christians realized this and as a result "they *persevered* in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in breaking of bread and prayers (Acts 2:42). Note how fellowship is linked closer to the teaching of the apostles than to the breaking of bread, although in the latter it finds undoubtedly its most beautiful expression. Note, too, how the breaking of

bread did not take the prime spot, but the teaching. Out of their being taught flowed fellowship, the breaking of bread, but also their prayers. True fellowship can only be based on an intimate understanding of what lives in the heart of the one with whom we seek to have fellowship. So the Lord Himself showed in John 13 how the washing of water was an imperative for those who want to have part with Him. It is therefore essential that listening to His Word precedes, and forms the intimacy of our fellowship with Him.

It has ever been so. The first man who thought he could give to God failed to take note of God's thoughts. When the point was brought home to him that man cannot give to God, but only return to God after receiving from God what God has given in the sacrifice, he became so irritated that he slew his brother through whom this truth was revealed to him. He failed to see that God needs to speak to our hearts before we can give to God!

How serious then if today some come to *give* to the Giver, but fail to be present when the Giver is in our midst to tell us what lives in His heart and to supply our needs. It is as if their actions say with Cain: "It is more important that man gives to God, than that God gives to man; we are quite capable of giving to Him, and have no need of asking or receiving from Him."

Thankfully, there are times such Christians come to hear the Word. But often things are even worse then, for some only come when brother X, whom they appreciate so much, will address them, while they stay away when *just* the Lord is present! How offensive this must be to Him who longs to have us around Himself! Yet these same Christians sing, "It is our greatest joy on earth that Thou art with us here." Can anyone who sings this with his or her whole heart stay away when He has promised to be present? It isn't an indication that we merely go through the motions, is it; that we sing, but do not think about what we sing? It would be better to be silent than to sing such words to the Lord and then fail to come when He invites. Once the Lord spoke these words: "How often would I have gathered thy children as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, *and ye would not!*" (Mt. 23:37). Would He say this, perhaps in a somewhat different sense, to some today?

It is often said: The breaking of bread is the most important meeting. For a healthy Christian, who has a daily intimate communion with His Lord, the breaking of bread is indeed the highlight of the week. However, for the spiritually ailing Christian, the one who does not feel the need to be with His Lord for prayer and teaching, this statement is not true! For such a one the prayer meeting is much more essential, for his need is great, as evidenced by his lack of consistency between his talk and walk. Such a person needs to confess his coldness of heart and ask the Lord to open his heart for the desires of the Lord. Next of importance for such a person is the ministry meeting to hear from the Lord those things that will build up his understanding of his Lord. Least important for him is the breaking of bread, for he is in great danger of going through the motions, making that which is most precious to the Lord into a mere ritual (1 Cor 11:27).

There are of course circumstances that genuinely hinder some to attend the other meetings; the Lord knows this. But I fear that those who spurn these moments in which our Lord promises His presence as the gracious Giver and Hearer indicate that their attending at the breaking of bread has become a ritual without a heart-felt communion with Him who loves us and gave Himself for us. Why otherwise would anyone respond to just one request of His, rather than to all His heart's longings? How else to explain the neglect of two desires of the Lord while this one is heeded? How does the Lord see this? How do our children interpret this? What has caused communion to become a ritual in so many circles; isn't it just this behaviour on the part of those who should respond to *all* their Lord's desires?

Has your communion become a ritual too?