

The Battle of Conquerors (3)

—G. Elbers

Chapter 3

More than earthly blessings!

The previous chapter ended with: Just like Israel's enemies constantly made things difficult for them, so Christians experience daily opposition. For the Assembly, however, this opposition does not consist of flesh and blood.

We made a comparison with the people of Israel, who, under Joshua's leadership "took possession of" the promises of God. The people marched into the Promised Land and all that they came across tallied perfectly with what God had said. It was truly "*a land flowing with milk and honey,*" and "*a land of mountains and valleys, which drinketh water of the rain of heaven, a land which Jehovah thy God careth for; the eyes of Jehovah thy God are constantly upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.*" (Dt. 11:9, 11-12).

Carefully read this description again, looking at it through the eyes of a people who have wandered through the wilderness for forty years. The people were used to drought, scorching heat, and unfruitful plains. That everything would change now was almost unbelievable!

You see, this is also the case with those who accept the Lord Jesus. Until their conversion, their lives had been fruitless, parched, and without hope. Now and then there had been a very temporary high point, but without further prospect. But Ephesians 11-14 teaches us that God gives in abundance to those "who are in Christ Jesus." It says that those who are converted are blessed (not *shall be*, but *are*) with every spiritual blessing. They have received the spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Christians may feast their eyes upon all that God has given them, just as the Israelites did.

The Dutch NBG translation of 1951 uses the words "with *various (allerlei)* spiritual blessings" in Ephesians 1:3. This is not correct. In the original it states "with *every* spiritual blessing." That is a big difference! You can lay the table with *various* delicacies, that is with all sorts, but if *everything* is laid on the table, then it is complete. Now God doesn't give us a bit of this and a bit of that, not *various* things, but He gave *everything* there was to give! Yes, God is good!

Shall we read exactly what this blessing is composed of? What can *we* feast our eyes upon? If we examine it closely we'll really be impressed!

So let's read Ephesians 1.

verse 4: Christians have been chosen by God before the foundation of the world. They are called according to God's purpose and for them also all things work together for good (Rom. 8:28).

verse 5: Christians are predestined to become accepted as sons of God. This was God's plan; there was no pre-requisite of human righteousness, or any effort of self.

verse 6: Christians are pardoned — they are not counted guilty — because the Lord Jesus (the Beloved) bore their punishment.

verse 7: Christians are redeemed and Christians have received forgiveness through the work of the Lord Jesus (cf. Col. 1:13-14)

verse 11: Christians have received an inheritance (eternal life) and a future in the glory (cf. v. 14; Col. 1:12 and 1 Pet 1:3-5).

verse 13: Christians are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise; they have — with all due respect — been stamped with a "mark of guarantee," a "proof of possession."

Yes, these are more than earthly blessings!

Do you see how long the list of blessings is? These are the spiritual blessings, which by far exceed the earthly ones. Isn't it a shame that so many Christians are still occupied with the things of this world without appreciating the things of eternal value above all else? Not a few organizations with fancy Christian names are more worried about creation, the environment, and social benefits than about the spiritual blessings in heavenly places. I'm not saying that all these other

things are worthless. But in their efforts these organizations mix heavenly matters with matters of this world which, without question, will fall under God's irrevocable judgment (Rom. 8:20-21; 2 Pet 3:7,10).

Many unconverted people who suppose they can use Biblical statements in and out of context to support their own ideas participate in such organizations. Thereby they unscrupulously put non-Christian and political values above what God's Word teaches. This is a serious matter that shows us that the Christians involved in these organizations are really victims of the spiritual battle that confronts us. Let us keep as far away as possible from these things.

Genuine Christians or...?

If we take another look at the list in Ephesians 1:3-4, we see that Christians are chosen, destined, redeemed, forgiven, pardoned, and sealed with the Holy Spirit. They are not Christians because their parents were Christians, nor because of their good works or their faithful going to a certain church or assembly, neither because of a particular membership.

It is extremely important to know this. Therefore I ask you again: Are you a Christian, or do you just *call* yourself one? Are you really converted? Can you say that through grace you are a child of God? The answer to this question is a matter of life and death!

If the answer is "No," then you are the most pitiable of all people. Then perhaps you have Christ only for this life here on earth (1 Cor. 15:19). Then you're not even ready for the earthly blessings of Israel, but you are under God's judgment (Jn. 3:18). That's terrible! Please let the seriousness of this fully penetrate you; it is a serious matter.

If the answer to these questions is truly "Yes," then you've every reason to thank God for His great mercy, to thank Him for the fact that the reconciliation, salvation, and redemption came from His side (2 Cor. 5:18). Then you have reason to be thankful that He, through the working of His Spirit in your heart, brought it about that you have accepted the Lord Jesus. You can thank Him for "every spiritual blessing in heavenly places." They all have become your portion. "To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen (Rom. 16:27 KJV).

Let's look back for a moment

We will, for a moment, take another look in the book of Joshua. We have seen that the time had come for Israel when they could take possession of the promised blessings. Once more the Lord went before His people! He drove the heathen nations out from before them. He gave His people victory upon victory. As we said before, *all they had to do* was to set their feet upon the promised land (Josh. 23:3-5,9-11; Acts 7:45). When things nevertheless went wrong, it was one hundred percent the fault of the people, not of God! Just as it was, for example, in the cases of Achan, Ai, and the Gibeonites (Josh. 7 & 9). In these cases in particular, we can somewhat "see through" a few of Satan's dangerous tricks and temptations for which Ephesians 6:11 warns us.

The struggle of temptation

Very soon it became clear that the people of Canaan couldn't hold out against the people of God. The history written in the Book of Joshua is very clear about this. God had *promised* the land, and thus He also *gave* it. At the end of his life Joshua called the elders of the people together to acknowledge this (Josh. 23:14). From His side God had certainly fully fulfilled His promises.

The Israelites unfortunately couldn't say that about themselves. With clever tricks the enemies had been able to hold onto certain parts of the land. At first that didn't seem too bad, but later it became apparent that the "little enemies" caused many problems.

For example in Joshua 15:63 we read that the children of Judah were not able to drive the Jebusites out of their city, Jerusalem. This was not due to the power of the Jebusites, but due to the lack of spiritual power among God's people. Similarly, we read in chapter 16:10 that the Canaanites continued to live in the portion of Ephraim. The same thing happened in the regions of Manasseh. (17:12).

Once again: Was it because God's strength was inadequate? No! God's people, including Judah, Ephraim, and Manasseh, had become sluggish after achieving a few victories (18:3). *With this they opened the door for the one who is behind all*

this opposition and battle, for Satan. He immediately used the opportunity to break the power of God's people by means of various tricks and temptations.

It has never been any different. Christians also have to deal with this, and therefore, they must be sober and vigilant, *because Satan is always searching those whom he can devour!*

To be cont'd

Take to you the panoply of God,
that ye may be able to withstand
in the evil days,
and,
having accomplished all things,
to stand.
Stand therefore!

A Lesson from Numbers 30 for our Days.

—J. van Dijk

This chapter, as all others in God's Word is to be of help to us in our days, and this help will come essentially from its typological meaning. The vow of an Israelitish man stood irrevocably before God. The vow of an Israelitish woman, however, would only stand when either her father or her husband established the vow. We all know that in Scripture the relationship between a man and his wife speaks of the relationship between Christ and His Church (1 Cor. 11). The typological application of this passage, therefore, has to do with this relationship. There are situations in which the Church solemnly binds or looses a matter. Yet, the Church's authority to do so is not her own, but rather an authority delegated to her by the Lord, under whose control she ever remains. As with the woman in Numbers 30, the Lord may disallow the "vow," the binding or loosing done by the Church. The question arises: By what means would the Lord show this?

Some say that the local assembly is the highest authority found on earth. This seems a rather pretentious statement. In the first place it is not well to speak of the authority of the assembly, since its authority is a delegated one only. It is, and ever remains, the Lord's authority exercised in the midst of the two or three gathered unto His name. In Matthew 18 the Lord conveys this authority, giving it to "the Assembly," *not to "the local assembly."* Since it is practically impossible for the Assembly to gather in one place, its local representation, *acting on behalf of the whole under the Lord's headship,* may decide matters locally, the Lord retaining the right to disallow the solemn declaration. A decision taken by a local assembly ought therefore to carry the consciences of the entire Assembly worldwide. In this, the decision-making assembly cannot *demand* that the surrounding assemblies be satisfied with its decision, but rather the onus is on the decision-making assembly to take care that the character of the decision is such that the whole can be satisfied. *They* must see to it that their own behaviour does not cause disturbance. This is the simple outflow of mutual love among brethren.

But, supposing an assembly fails to have the Lord's mind in a certain decision it has taken, how does the Lord disallow this "vow" taken by this assembly? In situations in which doubt arises in surrounding assemblies, the decision-making assembly ought first of all to realize that the onus is on it to satisfy the other assemblies. They ought to be prepared, and perhaps even take the initiative, to open the case to their brethren, who, merely for reasons of geography, could not be present when the decision was taken. Together they ought to review the matter in the presence of the Lord, who will then either let the matter stand or disallow it.

Other Scriptures speaking of the use of this delegated authority are in harmony with this. Corinth had to act on behalf of the whole, for he who was put out in Corinth was put out where Paul was. Paul's encouraging them to receive again the previously wicked person shows that what they decided would hold sway where Paul was. *They* had to act, true, but, had they acted in a way that had not satisfied Paul's conscience, other steps would have followed. Though not spelled out, this is clearly conveyed in Paul's writing. Though Paul wrote with apostolic authority, the Lord instructed him, and the Lord would not instruct us differently than He did Paul; He remains the same Lord, even though we lack apostolic authority. On the one hand Jerusalem had an open door for the brethren from Antioch, and on the other, the brethren who had accompanied Peter to the home of Cornelius did not protest against the inquiry of the brethren at Jerusalem. The Assembly is one!

In practice we do not review every local decision because there is loving trust among us. But trust works two ways. If brethren elsewhere have doubt about a decision — and that can be even where there is trust — trust will also cause the

decision-making assembly to willingly open their doors for a review of the matter. An assembly that refuses to open its doors fails to realize the justified limitations to the entrusted authority it has received from the Lord. It fails to act as a representative of the whole to which the Lord gave this authority in first instance. It also fails to display the characteristics of the Lord, in that the Lord will always see to it that our consciences can be at peace. He knows that at times matters need inquiry merely because from a distance they do not look the same as from close up. Besides, it is not beyond possibility that even an assembly fails under the influence of one or more that are more interested in having their own way than in doing what is right before the Lord (3 Jn.). This does not mean that the mere request for an opportunity of inquiry is a declaration of suspicion. Refusal to open the doors, on the other hand, legitimately would give rise to such suspicions, for it is not of the Lord to refuse honest inquiry while at the same time holding the whole accountable — as He does indeed — for what one assembly does (Josh. 7, Rev. 2-3).

To help those who have difficulty seeing this, I would like to draw a parallel to personal responsibility before the Lord. Personally each one of us is directly responsible to the Lord in all we do or say. Still, the assembly has the responsibility to see to it that one acts indeed righteously before God and man. If doubt arises as to this, brethren have every right — no, even the obligation (Dt. 13:14; 1 Th. 5:14) — to enquire, and the one so approached has the obligation to answer to His brethren and to take note of their consciences. Love would lead each one to act properly in his own sphere. Love leads to enquire, love leads to open the doors. It is not different in Assembly matters.

If we now return to Numbers 30, we see that by means of the inquiry among assemblies, the Lord may exercise His right to either disallow the decision, or to cause it to stand. In Israel, God let some wrong declarations of His people stand. Just think of their statement: All that the Lord says we will do! (Ex. 19:8). Seemingly a very godly declaration, for it declared precisely what the Lord wanted from His people. It was made, however, in disregard of their own inability to do what they vowed they would. Or think of their vow to the Gibeonites (Josh. 9; 2 Sam. 21). It seemed to be such a good idea at the time, but it was made in a moment of weakness, while failing to seek the Lord's mind, which they thought they knew so well. How serious were the consequences! Is any assembly beyond failing in this way? How good then if we seek, in care for each other and for the whole, to inquire where inquiry seems to be needed. It remains then to see who are the ones that should inquire.

Some say that the nearby assemblies are the ones that should inquire, and that inquiries by those at a distance can be ignored. They base their argument supposedly on Deuteronomy 21:1-9. Let us read this portion and see who does the inquiring there. It is the elders and judges of the nation Israel, not specifically those of the nearby city. The ones from the nearby city are held more responsible in the matter than any others in Israel, but they are not the ones who inquire. Also in Deuteronomy 13, which we mentioned above, there is no indication as to who is to inquire. There too, the burden there is upon the whole nation. Neither of these Scriptures can be used as an excuse to refuse an inquiry by others than those from the nearest assemblies. Once again, such unfounded pleas will only arouse suspicion that matters are not truly in order and cannot bear inquiry.

Meanwhile, all need to see to it that both the inquiring and the opening to each other be based on love and mutual respect. Each assembly has to see to it that it respects the other. It's a sad day when one says: He does not respect me and therefore I do not open up to him. One opens up because one does personally respect the other, even if the other does not give respect in return. We are not called to only respect those who respect us. All is simply Christian conduct. How far have we strayed from this, often personally, but seemingly also as assemblies!

Their Hearts Turned back to Egypt

—H. Bouter Jr.

Acts 7:39

In his discourse before the Jewish council, Stephen tells us a secret that is not told us in the Old Testament, namely the real reason for the idolatry of the Israelites at mount Sinai. The source of their worship of the golden calf was in the first place the sinful human heart: *in their hearts* they turned back to Egypt. Their heart was not right before God, just as later Peter says of Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:21). When our heart is not directed toward God, we stand exposed to the deception of idols. Therefore we must keep our hearts above all that is to be guarded, "for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).

But in the second place their failure was caused by the fact that in their hearts they turned back to Egypt. That is remarkable, for in Exodus 32 we don't read anything about this. The Israelites asked Aaron only for gods who could go

before them (in the wilderness), for Moses stayed on the mountain and it was not clear what had become of him — by chance he had perished. This, however, was only an excuse to give room to the desire of their heart. They wanted to serve the idols that they had served in Egypt! There, worship around an ox was very common: the ox Apis was considered to be the god of fertility. Therefore their hearts longed for Egypt, for the gods of Egypt which they obviously had not really left behind. So is our evil heart.

Simultaneously, it was of course true that they turned their backs on Moses. They left the living and true God, but they also rejected Moses, their leader and saviour. The reproof of Stephen was therefore completely justified. "They thrust him from them" (Acts 7:39). They rejected their saviour. We may apply this to ourselves, realizing full well that the actual issue *is apostasy from the faith*. Rejection of Christ, and losing sight of the Man in heaven, will lead to idolatry! One will turn to the gods of this world, and to this present evil age from which we have been saved. We can also turn this principle around: Where idols are served, a living Christ is unknown, as is a risen and glorified Lord in heaven. Neither is there a longing for a heavenly homeland, but one feels quite at home at the fleshpots of Egypt.

Here in Acts 7 Stephen paints in glaring colours the rejection of Moses, the redeemer of the nation, their prophet — a type of the Messiah, the great Prophet, who would be betrayed and killed by His people. This rejection would only reach its summit in a later stage of the wilderness journey, as the book of Numbers shows us. We may then think of the insurrection of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in Numbers 16. But another important passage we find in Numbers 14, where the Israelites murmured against Moses and Aaron saying, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! or in this wilderness would that we had died! And why is Jehovah bringing us to this land that we may fall by the sword, that our wives and our little ones may become a prey? *Is it not better for us to return to Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return to Egypt*" (Num. 14:2-4).

These verses are very important for our subject, because the rejection of Moses is here openly connected with the declared desire of wanting to return to Egypt. If at Sinai it was only the longing of their hearts that went out to Egypt, after spying out of the land of Canaan, the majority of the people wanted to suit their action to the word and really return to the land of slavery. Their heart did not go out to Canaan, the land of God's promise, but to Egypt. They did not want to ask after the living God, but after the vain idols. They did not want to listen to Moses, the man of God, but to a "head" that they could appoint for themselves.

What a sad situation! Not only was Moses' leadership put in question or criticized, this was a case of open rebellion, an uprising against the God-given leader: "*Let us make a captain.*" In other words: Let us choose our own leader, someone who suits us better than Moses, one who will answer to our wishes! That looks very much like the protest of Korah to the address of Moses and Aaron a little later: "Why do ye lift up yourselves above the congregation of Jehovah?" (Num. 16:3). But our own heart is no better than that of the Israelites. Is not the history of the Church a clear witness that Christ as the heavenly Apostle and High Priest of our confession has been rejected time and again? Has there not been the ever-recurring threat of returning to "Egypt," the realm of the wicked one and his demons?

It is remarkable that this longing to go to Egypt raised its head again many ages later, namely at the time of their going into captivity in Babel. After the Chaldeans had taken Jerusalem, a remnant remained behind in the land with permission of the occupying power. But after the murder of their leader Gedaliah, this remnant of the people, out of fear for the revenge of the king of Babel, wanted to go to Egypt where they imagined to be safe. They still asked the prophet Jeremiah for prayer on their behalf and for advice, but in their hearts they had already decided to go into Egypt. Jeremiah unmasked this plan of their hearts, this wish to turn to Egypt, but his warnings were cast to the wind. It was pure disobedience, just as it had been with the Israelites in the wilderness. They first said in their hearts, but later also aloud: "No; but we *will* go into the land of Egypt" (Jer. 42-43).

Let us therefore watch, that there may not be with anyone of us "a wicked heart of unbelief, in turning away from [the] living God, but let us encourage each other each day, as long as it is called 'Today'" (Heb. 3:12-13).

The Prophecy of Nahum (3)

—R. Been Sr.

Chapter 1 (Cont'd)

Though they be tangled together [as] thorns, and be as drenched from their drink, they shall be devoured as dry stubble, completely (v. 10).

The prophet Micah uses the comparison with dry stubble for the great mass of the apostate Jews, and Isaiah uses it when speaking to the prophetic Assyrian (Mic. 7:4; Isa. 10:17). Yet, a similar judgment will be executed over other nations. The image of dry stubble, which is completely consumed by the fire, points once more to the finality of this judgment.

Out of thee is gone forth one that imagineth evil against Jehovah, a wicked counsellor (v. 11).

Long ago Asshur had left the land of Shinar to build Nineveh (Gen. 10:10). The kings of Assyria often left their country at the head of their mighty armies to expand their power. The person of the Assyrian king Sennacherib during the days of king Hezekiah shows us all too clearly, not only what spirit of satanic pride filled those kings, but also their hatred against God and His people. In the same way, the *prophetic* Assyrian, the king of the North, will leave his country in the last days, to make a conquering excursion (Dan. 11:40-45). He, too, is possessed by pride, and filled with hatred against God and His people. He contrives devilish plans. The prophet Daniel sketches the corrupted character of this king for us (Dan. 8:23-25).

What a contrast exists there between this prophetic Assyrian and the *true* King, the Lord Jesus Christ! He, who will reign over the whole earth, has not come forth from the mighty city Nineveh, but from Bethlehem, a small city in little Judah. But His "goings forth are from of old, from the days of eternity" (Mic. 5:2). "The Spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon Him" (Isa. 11:2). In the past, the Assyrian finished his course. Also in the last days he will once more finish his course. But He who came from Bethlehem will see His throne established for eternity (Ps. 45:6). He who came forth from Nineveh will be debased; He who came forth from Bethlehem will be highly exalted and have a name which is above every name. For Him every knee shall bow (Phil. 2:9-11).

Verses 12-15

Thus saith Jehovah: Though they be complete in number, and many as they be, even so shall they be cut down, and he shall pass away (v. 12a).

These words refer to the Assyrians in the days of the prophet Nahum. It was still in its full power and very numerous, although the destruction of Nineveh and the entire Assyrian power was already being prepared in secret. Babel was in these days still a vassal state in which time and again resistance flared up. It would still be a few years before the destruction of Nineveh would take place, and with it the collapse of the entire Assyrian power.

But prophecy of Scripture teaches that with the historical collapse of Assyria the last word about this usurper had not yet been spoken. This tremendous Assyrian power, strengthened by the power of another nation (Russia—Dan. 8:24), will in the last days once again appear on the world stage. Then it will serve as chastening rod for the great mass of apostate Jews under the reign of the Antichrist. Then, however, will be fulfilled to the Assyrian king and his people what is written here: they "shall...be cut down, and he shall pass away" (cf., Isa. 28:19; 30:31-33).

Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more. And now will I break his yoke from off thee, and will burst thy bonds asunder (v. 12b-13).

These words are suddenly and unexpectedly directed to the remnant of Judah in the last days. The Lord's judgment over (among others) the Assyrian means salvation and blessing for the remnant. To rightfully understand the significance of these verses we must remember the history of king Manasseh, son of the pious Hezekiah.

Manasseh's history can be divided into two periods. In the first period he acted worse than all his predecessors. He introduced a terrible idolatry at Jerusalem; he even caused his children to pass through the fire. He resorted to witchcraft, appointed soothsayers and necromancers, placed an idol in the Lord's temple, and filled Jerusalem with the innocent blood he shed. Don't we recognize in this all the features of the Antichrist? All these evils of Manasseh are collectively referred to when it says that he led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray, to do more evil than the Gentile nations (2 Chr. 33:1-10).

Then the Lord spoke through the service of His prophet that because of the sins and abominations of Manasseh, whereby he had caused Judah to sin, an evil would come over Jerusalem and Judah; it would, like Samaria, like the ten tribes, be led into captivity. Jerusalem would be wiped away (2 Ki. 21:10-15).

In the second period of Manasseh's history, he is taken captive to the vassal state Babel by the king of Assyria. The pressure of this misery brought about a total change in Manasseh. The anxiety caused his eyes to be opened for the many abominations he had committed. He humbled himself before God without excuses, and prayed to Him. And the Lord heard his pleading and brought him again to Jerusalem, to his kingdom. Then Manasseh acknowledged that the Lord Jehovah is God. Manasseh becomes an illustration of the repentant remnant of Judah, to whom the prophet Nahum says: "Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more." The tribulation comes only once over the remnant. Soon after, God will speak to His people, this remnant, of comfort. Their struggle is fulfilled, their iniquity atoned; it has received double retribution for its sins from the Lord (Isa. 40:2).

When Manasseh turned to God, the yoke upon him was broken and his bands burst asunder. But this deliverance went only so far, for, although he returned to his kingdom, he remained the rest of his life under the yoke of the Assyrian and tributary to this king. For Judah as a nation, it was the same thing. When Nineveh fell, it came under the even heavier yoke of Babel. But when the future remnant will be delivered of the yoke it will be *a total and permanent deliverance*.

And Jehovah hath given commandment concerning thee, that no more of thy name be sown: out of the house of thy god will I cut off the graven image, and the molten image: I will prepare thy grave; for thou art vile (v. 14).

Here, suddenly, the Assyrian is once more addressed. He will be totally ruined and have no descendants, his idols will be destroyed, his grave prepared. Doubtless, this all took place at the fall of Nineveh. Other prophecies of Scripture, however, give us a further view, and teach us that in the last days the prophetic Assyrian, the King of the North, will be brought to fall with his entire might, and that forever, at the appearance of Christ. Simultaneously, the great mass of the apostate Jews will be judged, as will the Antichrist and the assembled power of the restored Roman Empire.

"Thou art vile." That is as it were the last word of Jehovah regarding the Assyrian, who, full of pride, had thought to measure up against the strong God. All pretention of the greatest celebrities among men — their name which they thought would never be forgotten, their craving for honour, power, pride — all will be trodden under foot of the true King, Jehovah Himself, for whom it is no more than one simple move to destroy His enemies and to take hold of the reign over His kingdom.

Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth glad tidings, that publisheth peace! Celebrate thy feasts, Judah, perform thy vows: for the wicked one shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off (v. 15).

These words have been applied to the announcement to Jerusalem and Judah of the fall of Nineveh. But from a political aspect, no tidings could be worse for Judah and Jerusalem than the fall of Nineveh. For the power of Assyria was even then already greatly diminished and surpassed by that of Babel. This latter kingdom would, now that Assyria was eliminated, have its hands free to enforce its power on other nations, as it also happened. In these circumstances, Nineveh's fall was bad news for Jerusalem and Judah. Yet, from verse 15 it is evident that it deals with joyful news. A lack of prophetic insight, and the fact that this good news follows immediately upon the announcement of the eradication of the Assyrian, has led to this explanation.

To be cont'd

True, Repentant Humility (1)

—C. B. Beekhuizen

In this time of confusion, apostasy, and decay it is our Christian duty to reflect on the question as to where we actually stand as witnesses of the living God in this world.

When the apostle Paul showed something of his own feelings to Timothy about the time in which he lived and which he anticipated in the days ahead, he sketched a picture that certainly ought to stir us. What we are shown is a film that could well be shown in our days. Relations between persons and nations become more tense by the day, what is still found of love among the people becomes ever more self-serving and cooler. The economy is governed by the craving for more while less is available. And above it all we hear the cry: "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die."

It appears all too real that death stands at the door. The great world-conflagration approaches with leaps and bounds, while people prepare themselves by divesting themselves of the sting of death by means of suicide, drugs, and other

means. Animal instincts are aroused, and what is worst of all, love in the Assembly of the living God cools down more and more!

Conformity to this world, and worldliness are terms that offend many, yet many do not know that they entail much more than merely a behaviour that offends believers and the world. It is *the* influence on our thinking that causes us to become conformed to this world. In the assemblies at Laodicea, Sardis, and Ephesus, there was a worldliness that was not discerned. A Babylonian confusion had become visible and only a few were concerned about it. Especially in these last days the call of the Faithful and True Witness comes therefore to those who still hear, making our worldliness known by placing us in our total nakedness in His light. The result is that we learn to exclaim with Isaiah: "Woe unto me! for I am undone!" And not only me, but also the other one! And then we are silent (Dan. 8:27).

The results of disobedience and unfaithfulness to godly principles were bound to come. Faith in God's love and faithfulness no longer functioned with the mass of the people, only the individual realized what was going on. False prophets raised false hopes among the people. Lustful enjoyment and worldly prosperity had blinded the eyes of God's people, just as it blinded the New Testament assembly at Laodicea. There was a carnal zealotry after God, an active occupation in religious affairs, but without spiritual understanding and true faith.

Babel, a country full of religious contradictions, was the country to which God's people were taken captive. A small remnant, poor and miserable, was allowed to stay behind. At an early age the princely descendent, Daniel, had to experience what it meant to be held co-responsible for the sins of the fathers. Thus, we find ourselves in spirit beside Daniel when he is studying the "Books" that the prophet Isaiah (and later Jeremiah) had left for him.

Though this prince enjoyed some degree of prosperity, being entrusted with an office that bore authority, yet he was not pleased with the present situation. He thought of his God. How He had been dishonoured by unbelief and disobedience. He realized that there was a reason for the captivity and the humiliation. Already a few times his faith had brought him into a dangerous situation, but his trust in God proved to be stronger than the wiles of the enemy and according to His promise in 2 Chronicles 16:9, God delivered him out of them.

That is how we find him at the end of his life during a serious study of Scripture — deep in prayer and wrapped in sorrow. According to the charge in Jeremiah 29:7, he had faithfully exerted himself to seek the peace of the city and to pray for her, so that the people would be able to lead a quiet life in searching after God's will (1 Tim. 2:2). Many false prophets had veiled God's Word, but Daniel saw through this and fed himself with the promises that God had given by means of the true prophets.

So he had come to the place we find in Jeremiah 29:10 and what follows after that. We imagine that, for a moment, he must have kept his breath by seeing so much love and grace for an ever-rebellious and disobeying people! Full of worship he had sunk on his knees and in speechless amazement he had accepted the promise and presented it to the Lord.

Now let us review, point by point, how the feelings of this "greatly desired man" had developed: In the first place we see something that ought to be found with all of us if we wish not to miss the blessing of Scripture study. We see a genuine desire in the heart of this man to really set time aside for the Word of God, so that he may understand it "And I set my face unto *the Lord* God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes" (Dan. 9:3). We see, therefore, that plenty of time was taken for this, and that the prayer was not just a quick encounter with God, but a true relationship and contact by means of the Word. Years of Scripture study had transformed the young man who refused to partake of defiled food into a ripe elder. How do we miss this sober-minded and well-considered judgment in this time of haste, superficial contacts, and lack of patience and loving sympathy for that which is lost! How many do really long back for that which was "from the beginning"? How many have the courage to execute a charge such as Zerubbabel once received, seeing how "Jerusalem" is so greatly defamed?

Daniel was of royal blood, a prince in Israel from the seed of David. He was well aware of his lofty descent, and it kept him standing in the midst of intrigue and slander. How many are aware today that they are kings and priests? Often it is either proud presumption, or misplaced humility that causes Christians to remain or become powerless. How much can we learn from this man of God, and how humble did he remain in spite of the pure life he lived in true separation from evil. It was not just a welling up of emotion that stirred Daniel. No, it truly proved to be a Spirit-led encounter with the living God that took full hold of him, causing him to fall powerless to the earth. Do we know this experience when we see how far we, as the people of God, have departed from the simple principles of faith?

Daniel was well aware of his responsibility for his people Israel. This honest awareness strengthened the feeling of consternation that came over him, when he realized how the nation had failed in the face of so much grace and love! We think of David, standing in front of his jealous brothers with food and victuals from his father. Full of justified wrath and

loving sympathy towards his poor perplexed people he had engaged in battle against an enemy of superior power with only a few small stones from the brook and a great faith in God's faithfulness and love. There was a reason for Saul's and the people's lack of power (1 Sam. 19:27). Earlier, Saul had indeed saved the people (1 Sam. 14:18), but he had left the path of obedience. Then the Spirit of the Lord, who had trained him for battle, had departed from him and come upon the weak and insignificant David, because this one trusted upon God alone and on His Word.

For the same reason, God could reveal Himself to this faithful servant Daniel, who had humbly bowed under the general judgment, while acknowledging the sins of the people, taking them upon himself as his own (Dan. 9:5). Yet, he was not despondent. He knew also how, in his good days, Solomon had bowed himself in the sanctuary, claiming God's promises in times of apostasy and chastisement. Later, the prophet Ezekiel would clearly express God's grace for the wicked with the promise of restoration when the ungodly would repent and the righteous one would turn to his previous uprightness when he still took God's will into account (Ezek. 33:11f). God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live.

Then we see that the time of Bible study in separation was filled with the recognition of God's majesty and authority. May the potter use the clay the way it pleases him? Daniel was aware of the experience of his colleague, Isaiah, how he, when confronted with the glory of the Lord, had despised his own impurity and that of his people (Isa. 6). The failure of the princes of Judah and Israel had to be confessed as a *collective* evil. That is a principle that many confessors find difficult to accept. When Achan had secretly taken and hidden the gold of the cursed city Jericho, thereby identifying himself with the curse, the entire nation had come under the curse and became powerless for battle. Though Joshua was filled with the Spirit of the Lord (Num. 27:18), and was officially recognized as its leader (Dt. 34:9), yet he too was powerless through the sin of one disobedient Israelite! How much more will we experience the results of conformity to the world when we identify ourselves in a similar manner with the world and its pleasures. The curse that lies upon the world we will experience as hindrance and lack of power in the Lord's service and battle in the heavenlies. The Babylonian confusion of tongues in the Christian arena will not leave us undisturbed, and we must, with the prophet Daniel, humble ourselves about this rather than withdraw from it like a recluse into a little corner that would still be "pure."

After Isaiah had humbled himself, there was room for the prophecy announcing the coming of Immanuel (Isa. 7). Truly a rich lesson! And so we see Daniel lying on his knees before God, powerless, helpless, left to the Word of God. Helpless? When we study this chapter further, we notice the infinite grace of God and come to worship, regaining courage. In Hebrews 12, Paul admonished us that we, after a time of chastening and acknowledging of our own failure, should nevertheless not continue to look at our guilt. We should rather strengthen the tired and powerless hands like Nehemiah of old. This Nehemiah did after having reviewed the destruction with a sober, businesslike eye, but with a heart resting in God's grace which he had experienced when he rent his garments before God's face (Neh. 1:4-2:13).

So, there is hope! Just as Nehemiah and Ezra were permitted to rise up before God's holy face, so Daniel, this man of God, was also allowed to rise up and be strengthened to receive further instructions for the future. *There is hope for the future!* And we, who have humbled ourselves about our failure and unfaithfulness, may also call this out to each other. We have nothing but God's gracious offer, there is *nothing* on which we could boast even in the least; but God is tremendous! Praise Him with all that is within you, for God is faithful, *even* when we prove to be unfaithful.

Once more the prophet stresses how much God's people had become despised in the eyes of the world's rulers of his time (Dan. 9:7-9) due to the unfaithfulness of the leaders and the disobedience and conformity to the world of the people. Even so, he still dares to plead for grace on the basis of God's righteousness and faithfulness (Dan. 9:16-19). The motive of this attitude of humility is the fact that *God's name* has been called out over God's people (v. 19).

How quickly does Daniel obtain an answer to his prayer! Seldom does God cause us to wait, and if He does, it is with a specific purpose (Jn. 11:6). It isn't for nothing that the prophet mentions so precisely the time at which he received an answer. It was precisely the time of the evening sacrifice that normally was brought at Jerusalem according to the custom. God's faithfulness is based on the sacrifice. The true burnt and sin offering is our precious Lord Jesus Christ, who allowed Himself to be made sin to thereby glorify God and to draw a people out of darkness to His wonderful light. The believer living in 1981 [the year this article was first published — the Editor], too, has been drawn out of that darkness to proclaim the great deeds of God and to confess and obey the Lord Jesus as Lord.

The man Gabriel, an angel with a very special service for God and men, may instruct the man of God further in God's governmental ways. Paul teaches us that angels are ministering spirits sent out to serve those who will inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14). Then the prophet begins to get some really good instructions. Now God's Spirit throws light on many dark passages, and the soul of the prophet becomes warm just as the hearts of the two on the way to Emmaus got warm when they were taught by the Lord Jesus Himself. Now he admires God's infinite goodness, grace, mercy, and patience even more. His wisdom is beyond measure, and His faithfulness is immensely great, so the psalm writer says. Because he had

not claimed his own righteousness, but rather God's faithfulness, a tip of the veil covering the future was lifted before his amazed eyes. Jerusalem would be rebuilt though in troublesome times. Suffering would not be spared his people, nor would tribulation, but God's mercy would not fail but remain forever.

Then comes a moment of grace and love far beyond understanding. The Man who would deliver and lead the nation would be killed, cut off (Dan. 9:26). The sanctuary would again be destroyed and a mighty prince would enslave his people and the world. Is it a wonder that Daniel, despite all the good things he has seen and heard, becomes yet somewhat depressed? (Dan. 10:2). There are many things in God's governmental ways that are beyond the comprehension of us, insignificant children of man. When we seek to explore these, our normal intellectual capacity fails us. May God keep us from the results of this evil deed of pride and self-will! Even Satan does not know in what way God's government will develop; he only knows that he has "a little time." The things that are revealed, however, are for us, human creatures, and with this we have to be satisfied, otherwise we will end up in a home for the mentally disturbed. If we want to explore God's counsel with our normal intelligence, we commit sacrilege and dishonour God Himself.

Daniel sought the loneliness at the river to ponder all his experiences and what he had been told. It is good to seek quietness for a while when God has clearly spoken to us. People don't understand us anyway at such moments — those nearest to us possibly least of all! Time is needed to digest God's Word and to ask God what we have to do with it in practice.

When God speaks, we and others must be silent, otherwise the Holy Spirit cannot do His work in us. This work characteristically seeks to humble us and fit us for service in all humility and lowliness.

When Daniel sits there deeply in thought at the river, he suddenly sees a man clothed in linen standing before him! The vision is so overpowering and gloriously impressive that he loses his own strength and glory and is left without comeliness. His companions had fled, having experienced the event as something that spelled doom, but there was not much left of the prophet either. Just as Saul, who fell to the earth before the face of the Lord of Glory, so also Daniel was greatly disturbed by this experience. Though the angel Gabriel had prepared him for this meeting, still the shock of standing eye to eye with the glorious God of heaven and earth, who showed Himself in the form of a Man, hit hard! (Think of 1 Tim. 3:16 and Jn. 1:14). Did you already have such a glorious meeting? If not, then you have missed really something!

The human spirit is able to grasp divine things only to a degree. Our spirit is too much bound to the flesh and the material to properly digest heavenly things. Only the touch of God's hand will keep us, insignificant creatures, from ruin and death at the sight of God's majesty and light. Just as the disciples did in Gethsemane and on the mount of transfiguration, so we often fall into some kind of slumbering condition between sleep and watchfulness at the most holy moments. Just as a shock after an overpowering experience that the spirit cannot digest, so it keeps the soul for emotions that are too great for it.

To be cont'd