

The Prophecy of Nahum (4)

—R. Been Sr.

Isaiah 52 shows much similarity with the words of Nahum 1:15. There too the Assyrian, who so greatly oppressed Israel, is mentioned. But in verse 6 of the chapter the Lord reveals Himself and says to His people: "Here am I." After the judgment over the Assyrian and other powers, the kingdom of Christ is proclaimed. The feet of those who announce this proclamation on the mountains of Judah are beautiful, for they bring messages of goodness, speaking of peace. They announce: Thy God is King. That is therefore the time at which the Lord restores Zion, and comforts the nation, the remnant. The good tiding of Nahum 1:15 and Isaiah 52:7 is therefore not the past fall of Nineveh, *but that of the establishing of the Kingdom of Christ in the future*, after the judgment over all His enemies. Under Christ's blessing of peace Judah will be able to celebrate its prescribed feast days, especially the feast of tabernacles (Ezek. 45:21-25). Also the remnant of the Gentiles will take part in this latter feast (Zech. 14:16-19). No one will any longer disturb these solemnities. The man of Belial, the Assyrian, the devil's servant, will no longer cover the region as an overflowing flood.

Who will be the messengers of these glad tidings of which verse 15 speaks? Scripture says that this message, this testimony, will be entrusted to Jewish disciples. A comparison with Matthew 10:23 sheds light on this. There the Lord Jesus says to His disciples that they will not have completed the announcement of *the gospel of the kingdom* to all *cities* in Israel when the Son of man would already have come. He considers the testimony of His disciples and that of the Jewish disciples of the future remnant as one testimony. The entire dispensation of grace has been removed from thought. The same gospel of the kingdom that was preached by John the Baptist, the Lord Himself, and the twelve apostles will again be preached in the days of the Great Tribulation by the Jewish disciples. While announcing this, they would be hated by all for His name's sake, but if they would endure to the end, they would be saved. This means that if they would persevere in announcing, despite all opposition and persecution by the great *mass* of the unbelieving and apostate Jews, they would enter the blessing of the kingdom (Mt. 1:22-23). These Jewish disciples will also preach to the nations. Finally, these Jewish disciples will also be the messengers who bring on the mountains of Judah the tidings of *the establishment of the glorious reign of the Messiah*.

Chapter 2

Nineveh called to account... vv. 1-13

In the NW the first verse of this chapter reads: "An attacker advances against you..." In the NASB it reads: "The one who scatters has come up against you." Whereas the KJV and the New Translation have: "He that dasheth in pieces is come up before (against) thy face..." We believe that the latter translation presents the meaning of this verse better. Nineveh will not merely be attacked, and not at all be scattered, but broken into pieces. He, God who dashes in pieces, comes up to break the might of the Assyrian for good. *It is, therefore, judgment*. The prophet Micah says: "The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the LORD on the head of them" (Mic. 2:13). In Micah it is the *Shepherd* who clears the way from all hindrances to deliver His sheep. *That is, therefore, blessing*.

After the Lord's consolation of Judah in the closing verse of the previous chapter, the Lord suddenly turns to the wicked Assyrian, king of Nineveh, and calls him unexpectedly to account. *This sudden turning*, be it to the Assyrian, be it to His people, is a characteristic, outward, peculiarity in the prophecy of Nahum.

Now we come entirely on the terrain of history. The tool that God uses to destroy Nineveh is the power of Babel allied with the Medes. Later, God will make use of the Medes to cause the demise of Babel.

All these powers that think to be acting independently for their own interest are nevertheless mere tools that are not conscious that they, in the hand of the Lord, execute His plans. Also in our times of democracy, of government by the people, this is the case, and it is well to keep that in mind. Today, God may exalt a nation, but tomorrow He will bring it low.

Today He makes use of a nation as a disciplinary rod for another nation, and tomorrow He raises up another rod, which at His time will break and pulverize the first.

The arrogance of the Assyrian is brought low by the pride of Babel. But the pride of Babel will at God's time be destroyed by the Medes and Persians. Rising, shining, sinking is the "law of nature" for all the rich and all authorities. In the days of *Nahum*, Babel, which was a vassal state of Assyria, had repeatedly rebelled against the power of Nineveh, but it had also experienced the all too bloody results of this. Now, however, the hour had come in which Jehovah, though slow to anger, would give free reign to this rebellion.

When God took away the rule from unfaithful Israel, it was entrusted to Babel, which He wanted to make into the "golden head" of the four gentile world-powers. Quite apart from the iniquity of Nineveh that has reached its summit, an end had to be made to the claim by the Assyrian that he would receive the preeminence. Assyria did never possess such prominence. When a world-power of a certain nation is mentioned, it does not mean to say that there are no longer other kings, but it does mean that such a world-power will no longer meet another nation that can oppose it. Those other kings will to a greater or lesser degree be vassals. So it was with Babel, the first world-power, and also with the subsequent world-powers. So it will also be in the last days, when the Roman world preeminence *will again come* to life in the form of "the beast." All human kind will with amazement follow that "beast" (Rev. 13:3; 17:8).

With the giving of world-power into the hands of Babel, the period called by Scripture "the times of the Gentiles" began for Israel. Never did Israel, even though none of the four worldwide kingdoms existed any longer, come from under the rule of the nations, until nearly 50 years ago. Now, after some 2600 years, an independent state of Israel exists again. At the time that was a sign of prime importance. But when, after the rapture of the Assembly, the events on earth come to a head, Israel will once more come under the influence of the ruler of the Roman empire. The false king of Israel, the Antichrist, is then no more than a vassal of this ruler.

How full of irony are the words in verse 1 directed to the king of Nineveh: "Keep the fortress, watch the way, make [thy] loins strong, fortify [thy] power mightily." It means: Have you taken all precautions? You personally better take care of everything. Assign to your men the proper place. And you, yourself, be strong, very strong!

For Jehovah hath brought again the glory of Jacob, as the glory of Israel; for the wasters have wasted them, and marred their vine-branches (v. 2)

This verse has been translated in various ways. The KJV says: "...turned away the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel." But the significance of the word in the original is "restorer" and not "turning away." It is therefore a restoration in *glory*.

This agrees with the course of the entire prophecy, and goes beyond a mere historical significance. When the prophetic Assyrian will be judged, his power entirely destroyed, just as it happened to historical Nineveh, then has also come the moment of Israel's restoration.

In history there is no mention of such a restoration. The Bible critics and those who reject long-term prophecies may in this connection point to the restoration of Judah in the days of the pious king Josiah, but that restoration was very partial and far from complete. For a short time the Lord then raised Judah from its humiliation, although the character of the people had not changed in the least. That is very evident from the prophecy of Habakkuk. The apostasy had then, under the kings after Josiah, once more resumed its course. The best proof of this is that Judah was taken captive to Babel. *Was it a restored nation that went into captivity?*

In the last days, however, it will not be like that. Then the glory of God's old people will again be seen, and the character of that nation, the new Israel, will be totally changed. All will know the Lord, all will possess the new life from God, brought about during the deepest need and humiliation. God's law will be in their hearts (Isa. 31:31-34). When, at the appearing of the Lord, all enemy powers, also that of the Assyrian, will have been destroyed, then the moment of Israel's restoration will also have arrived.

In the second part of verse 2 it says that wasters have wasted Israel and marred their vineyards. The prophet Jeremiah says regarding this: "Therefore all that devour thee shall be devoured... and they that spoil thee shall be for a spoil; and all they that prey upon thee will I give to be a prey" (Jer. 30:16).

When Nineveh was destroyed, Israel was greatly impoverished. For centuries Israel has been as a tree trunk without branches, being robbed by all nations. But all this will change when the rule of Christ will be established. When Israel speaks about its King, it will call Him "Our Glory" (Ps. 3:4). Israel, beaten by the Assyrian because of their sins both in the

past and in the future, will also be restored by the fall of the Assyrian. The fall of Nineveh in the past is only a weak example of the terrible things that will take place at the end of the last days.

"The shield of his mighty men is made red, the valiant men are in scarlet: the chariots [glitter] with the sheen of steel, in the day of his preparation, and the spears are brandished. The chariots rush madly in the streets, they jostle one against another in the broad ways: the appearance of them is like torches, they run like lightnings" (vv. 3-4).

The tools the Lord uses to destroy Nineveh are here called "mighty men" (see also Isa. 13:3). Here the Babylonians are meant. The prophet Joel thinks of other mighty men when he prays, "Thither cause Thy mighty ones to come down, O Jehovah," he thinks of the heavenly hosts that will descend with the Lord to execute judgment (Joel 3:11). King David had many mighty men as well (2 Sam. 23:8-39). This description speaks of the streets and squares of Nineveh, and not of the cities of Assyria, as so many expositors claim. Nineveh's fall means also that of all of Assyria.

The rest of the verses of this chapter describe further details of the collapse of Nineveh. First the thought is still present that the city can resist the mighty men of verse 3. But in vain! God has determined the time of judgment over the Assyrian and who could prevent or delay it? The defenders of Nineveh, likely drunk, hasten to occupy their assigned fortifications on the walls, but they stumble in their stupor (v. 5). The rivers that protected Nineveh against enemy attacks, that caused it to be deemed impregnable, now served as a means of entry for the armies of Babel, because their bedding had been diverted. It is remarkable that later the fall of Babel was achieved by the same means, in that king Cyrus caused the Euphrates to flow in another direction. The palace of the Assyrian kings, having been set on fire, collapses, and nothing but a ruin remains (v. 6).

Nineveh (in the KJV referred to by the name Huzzab), here portrayed as a queen robbed of her clothing, will be led away captive with her female slaves, who, weeping, beat their breasts. Because the judgment pronounced by the Lord was so irreversible, so determined, the declaration is given as if it had already taken place, although it was at that time still prophecy (v. 7).

Surrounded by rivers and canals, Nineveh was, since its founding by Asshur, a favourably located city. On the one hand these waters presented the inhabitants all that they needed; merchant ships could reach the city; the number of merchants in Nineveh was greater than that of the stars (3:16). On the other hand, these waters presented a hindrance to attack the city, which was for that reason considered to be impregnable. At Jerusalem the pools and water basins had to be kept in order at great effort, because they were artificial. But the water supply of Nineveh was obtained by her situation. Yet, what benefit was that when the defense and inhabitants of the city were overtaken by panic? A few still tried to motivate others to stand firm, but no one listened any more (v. 8).

Everywhere looting took place; the conquerors could lay hold of the tremendous riches that had been amassed in the city (v. 9).

What a disaster! The description of the fall is so vivid, as if the prophet had been present at its collapse. History tells us that a siege of three years preceded the conquering of Nineveh. The prophecy, however, is silent about this. It presents the sudden, unexpected, definite character of the judgment over this city, by the tools that God had destined for it, whereby the proverbial pride of the Assyrian kings was destroyed in one mighty swoop. Who would be able to withstand a God-given judgment? The same fate that the Assyrian had brought over other nations, the impetuous character of the attacks, the reign of terror, his tremendously predatory greed, all are now returned on its own head. When in the past the Assyrian approached another nation, all faces fell; that is how much he was feared (Joel 2:6). Now, however, all inhabitants of Nineveh had fallen faces (v. 10).

Verses 11-12 are metaphorical. The Assyrian rulers were well acquainted with the image of a lion. Their monuments testify to this. From the days of Nimrod, the mighty hunter, onward, the hunting of lions had been the recreation of their kings (Gen. 10:9). But what was of greater importance: the power, the fierceness of this beast of prey that would not let anything scare it, that tears its prey to obtain food for itself, its lioness and its cubs, its thirst for prey to fill its dens therewith, all this characterised the Assyrian ruler.

To be cont'd

True, Repentant Humility (2)

—C.B. Beekhnuizen

How great is our God, that He is willing to make Himself known as the I AM and the I SHALL BE! Yes, how great is God's grace to finally address humanity in THE SON OF HIS LOVE (Heb. 1:1)!

When we have to experience moments of great tension that press the soul to the limit, burdening and overwhelming it, how encouraging it is then to our troubled soul to experience that, without words, someone gives a firm handshake or an encouraging look. The shaking of a hand, or the putting on of hands, may not be done lightly, but when, at the proper time, it is administered as medicine, it will have the effect of Isaiah 50:4,10. The sympathetic tear of pity will not miss its effect in cases in which the soul has to undergo an overpowering experience. The tears at Lazarus' grave had a true effect upon friend and foe and the hand upon the apostle John has the effect of life from among the dead (Rev. 1:17).

So it was with the despondent prophet Daniel. He alone was left with the vision from heaven. A hand touched him so that he moved upon hands and knees (Dan. 10:10). On Patmos it was the same hand engraved with the tokens of the crucifixion that strengthened John. In the spirit it was the same hands the prophet Zechariah saw, tokens of love but also of the hatred of men who would put the Messiah to death!

Such a hand lies now upon you and me, when we humble ourselves because of our condition with a longing for restoration. What a glory and grace! Pierced by nails that sinful hands of men had driven through them, a hand that full of grace wants to reach to each of us what we are in need of here on earth! Can you understand this? I can't!

Still shaking throughout his body, Daniel rose up to listen further to God's encouraging words. "Fear not!" How he needed those words! Ever again these words are filled with a glorious power — at sea in a raging storm, in jail with the back ripped open, during shipwreck, and while giving account before kings and dignitaries. Ever again these words echo in the soul of the believer who puts his trust in Jesus Christ.

Isn't this the case when the visit is announced of someone important whom we value and highly esteem? Does it not greatly shock us, so that we quickly set all in order that otherwise could hinder the visitor? What a mess we suddenly see that at first did not hit our eye at all! How much more is it therefore essential to have our life in order and to restore relationships amongst us. "And by so much the more as ye see the day drawing near" (Heb. 10:25).

How amazed was Daniel that he was allowed to hear such encouraging words! "Man greatly beloved"! Involuntarily we sit up straight at such words; do we hear it rightly? And what about our shortcomings, our failures, our weak revealing of God's love? All kinds of questions that bombard our soul at such a moment, asking for an answer. We often don't hear the answer but experience the infinite, warm loveliness within and around us which causes us to kneel down in silent worship, while our eyes fill with tears, and our mouth is unable to express the feelings that overflow us at that moment. So it was with the prophet. And how is it with you?

In Daniel 10:15 we see this event. Daniel is struck dumb, just as the prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel 3. Then words do not become us and the waiting is for Him who touches us again in His patient, healing love (v. 16). As soon as tongue is loosened, the prophet presents his great need. He really longs to have a normal conversation with his God and thank Him for His love! No, when he came to the number seventy, he did not jump up for joy that now, finally, the chastening had come to an end. He did not call out, "Maranatha," when he got hold of the vision about the last days. No, he fell as dead before Him who in all His majesty revealed Himself!

But God wants to dwell among men, even if they are ever so loveless and unmerciful! He wants to bring them into a relationship with Himself in the form of the Saviour Jesus Christ, so that His creatures may learn what is love and grace with patience!

"Then there touched me again One like the appearance of a man, and He strengthened me." Thus Daniel was instructed in God's plan of salvation for this earth and His people Israel. What an experience! Like Paul in Romans 11:33, we call out: "O depth of riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable His judgments, and untraceable His ways!"

From the moment in the life of each believer who has seen God's glory in the Son of God's love, there is nothing left of one's own strength. One's own wisdom stops to function, one's own love runs from before God's power. What a difference with what was before! When Isaiah thought to begin to execute his charge on behalf of his God toward his own people, he saw much evil. When he acted as an "admonishing man" he had used the right words, and yet... there was nothing in it that revealed something of the glory of Immanuel! Only after *he* had seen himself in God's light, and, like James in the mirror of God's law, had discovered himself to be completely unclean from head to toe, only then could God reveal to him His plan of salvation, full of grace and truth!

May I ask you, do you see the evil in the midst of the believers and do you say something about it? No one will prohibit you to do so if God has revealed it to you. But unless you have seen it in the divine mirror of James 1:23, the effect of your message will be nil.

May God give a vision of the glory of Him who loves us and of whom we want to sing so much in our meetings, but who is so little seen in our relationships among each other. How much would then change in our lives; what an upright and warm interest would there be for the needs of others. Then the sufferings of Paul and Daniel have not been for nothing (Dan. 10:16, Gal. 4:19), and then the prayer of the Lord Jesus will be answered (Jn. 17:24, 20-24).

"I have made known to them Thy name, and will make it known; that the love with which Thou hast loved Me may be in them and I in them"! (Jn. 17:26).

The End

The Battle of Conquerors (4)

—G. H. Elbers

Chapter 4

"For-Profit" Faith — A Perilous Faith

Until now we have drawn several comparisons from the battle between David and Goliath. We have also compared the warfare of the people of Israel under Joshua on the one hand with that of the Assembly of God on the other.

In the latter two cases we are talking about a people that is formed (put together) to show forth God's praises and to speak of His great deeds (Isa. 43:21 and 1 Pet. 2:9). We also see in both instances a people which has to cope with strife, with enemies. And, just to put it clearly once more, Israel fought with flesh and blood, with people, while the Assembly has to deal with a spiritual opponent as described in Ephesians 6:12. Let us never get this mixed up!

Why do I reemphasize this difference? Because some preachers contend that conversion automatically leads to health and a profitable life here on earth. They tell poor and sick people that they must be converted in order to get ahead materially. And then they refer to the blessings that God gave to Israel. In this way they mix the earthly blessings with the heavenly and therefore they do not understand that there is a difference both in the type of battle and in the battle-tactics.

Such a gospel-message is not Biblical. Of course God's children are allowed to enjoy whatever material blessings there may be. But these are not the result of the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross. Reverently speaking: Was the Lord really made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21) to give us a nice big house and to guarantee us a Cadillac? Did He bear our sins in His own body on the tree (1 Pet 2:24) to give us a prosperous life here on earth? No, the reasons are mentioned in the same verses. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself... that we might become God's righteousness in Him." And that "we may live to righteousness." It was therefore for spiritual reasons. This righteousness is only possible if our sins are gone, if the sin-problem is resolved. This is the reason our Lord died on the cross, and not to resolve an appendicitis, unemployment, or a marriage-problem. He definitely can resolve such problems, and many have experienced this! God is so good, but that was not the reason why He sent His Son to the earth, or why the Lord Jesus delivered Himself into death. It was to purify a people unto Himself, to build a spiritual house (Tit. 2:14, 1 Pet 2:5).

For-Profit Conversions Are Only Temporary!

Don't let anyone ever say (like a Pastor once said): "Look at me, I live in a big house, drive an expensive car and have a good marriage. That's because I'm converted, because I follow Jesus." Such a belief is a profit-belief. In that case you believe because you can get ahead materially and have earthly advantages.

To tell you the truth, I know people who live totally idolatrous lives and worship real idols. Yet they live in an even bigger house than the TV pastor, they own a bigger car and also have a good marriage. They run a flourishing business and it sometimes even looks like they are not the least troubled by the economic problems. Yet, their 'happiness' will only last an earthly lifetime at the most, and after this comes the judgment. Then these people will stand before God empty-handed.

On the other hand, I do know fine Christians who nevertheless lead a difficult life full of suffering. They are however able to bear up under problems of living quarters, health, and even of a life in a wheelchair. Cheerfully they hold onto Romans 8:18: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us." They look past the mountains of today at the green pastures and still waters of tomorrow. And they put into practice that which Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:6 to scattered sojourners: "Ye exult, [in the heavenly portion which awaits you, though you may be] for a little while at present, if needed, put to grief by various trials". Peter encouraged the believers, "who are kept by the power of God" (v. 5), to gaze upon the eternal things, which are firm and sure.

Once more, the blessings that the Lord has prepared for the Assembly are in the first place spiritual blessings! And that's the point on which the enemy wants to attack us. That's why we speak of a spiritual battle. Let's not confuse our position as Christians with that of Israel, for that would cause us to use the wrong weapons, and that would be disastrous!

Suitable Weapons

During the Second World War a desert war was fought in North Africa. The Allies fought against the Germans with specially equipped tanks. When the Allies gained the victory, the army command visited the battlefield. What did they find there? Submarines and mine sweepers? Of course not! Such material would have no value in a desert war. They found vehicles and weapons (and remains) of a type suited for the desert. Aren't airplanes used for air raids and ships for sea battles?

A child knows they are. Therefore it is understandable that a spiritual struggle requires spiritual weapons. As Christians we don't have to deal with the Amorites, the Philistines, the Hivites, and the Canaanites (Joshua), but with principalities, with authorities, with the universal lords of this darkness, with spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies (Eph. 6:12). Those are enemies which are much more dangerous than those with which Israel had to cope.

God has given us a wonderful position, in which we must stand fast (Eph. 1:20 and 2:6). Read that last part over again. It doesn't say that we have to exert ourselves to gain the victory; we are already conquerors in and through the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:37). Now we must withstand, stay fast, and not give up any of the blessings that Christ's victory has brought us.

Where Should We Stand Fast?

When the Israelites took possession of the Promised Land, the promise that God gave to Abraham was fulfilled. That land would be "for an everlasting possession" (Gen. 17:8). Now they had to stand fast in that "land of promise." The Lord had not only promised, but also given. They could rejoice and delight in that they had such a wonderful God, who gave this splendid land as an inheritance. He had done all that was needed. What more could they desire? Indeed the Lord had given them every place where the soles of their foot had trodden (Dt. 11:24; Josh. 1:3; 23:5,14). They had no reason to doubt; they had come to know God as the Trustworthy One!

We also come across "standing fast" in Ephesians 6:11 and 13. There the believers are called individually as well as collectively as assembly to stand fast. Just like God first brought His people Israel into the proper place, so He did also with the believers of today. They are raised up together with Christ and placed with Him in heavenly places (Eph. 1:20; 2:6). Christians have received the same position as their Lord! If the Bible didn't say it, you wouldn't believe it! But... it truly is written. We do have a wonderful position "in Christ." We didn't earn it; we received it. And that's where we have to stand fast. Through God's power of course!

To be cont'd

Samson as Type of Christ (1)

—H. Bouter, Jr.

A Nazarite of God

"For lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son, and no razor shall come on his head; for the boy shall be a Nazarite of God from the womb; and he shall begin to save Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (Judg. 13:5).

Although Samson failed seriously in his personal life, thereby reflecting the low moral condition of God's people in these days, still he is in some aspects a clear image of the Messiah. The Epistle to the Hebrews ranks him therefore among the heroes of faith (Heb. 11:32-33). In these articles we want to present some points that confirm this parallel with our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Deliverer of His people.

The fact that Samson was called as judge to begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines is a first indication of this. The heroes who delivered Israel again and again from the oppression of their enemies, were forerunners of the coming king, who would deliver his people for good from their enemies (think of king David). In those days there was not yet a king in Israel (Judg. 21:25). The Israelites had to be satisfied with the rule and judgment of the judges.

Samson judged Israel for twenty years, and he did this all alone. No one helped him; his compatriots were even against him. (Judg. 15:11). This is in great contrast to the beginning of the time of the judges, when the judges were often army commanders who allowed the people to share in the victory (Judg. 7:2). This means that the strength to deliver Israel was actually concentrated in one person (this is very clearly seen in Samson). This too makes Samson, the twelfth and last judge described in this Book, an image of Christ, for he was rejected by His own and brought about the deliverance of His people all by Himself.

Samson came out of the tribe of Dan; and the name Dan *means judge*. The last words of Jacob to his fifth son allude to this: "Dan will judge his people, as another of the tribes of Israel" (Gen. 49:16, cf. 30:6). The manner in which Dan took care of his own rights was at times most questionable (see Judg. 18). This we will leave for what it is. The office of judge itself was good and pointed ultimately to the rule of Him, who by the prophet Micah is called "the Judge of Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from the days of eternity" (Mic. 5:1-2).

Samson's name also points in this direction. His name means "as the sun," or "man of the sun." In this respect he is a type of Christ as the Sun of Righteousness (Mal. 4:2). When He appears, a cloudless morning dawns for Israel and for the world (2 Sam. 23:3-4). Christ is the great Light that rules the day. His government brings pure blessing to all who fear Him. And His own share also in His royal government over the earth. For all who love Him are as the rising of the sun in its might (Judg. 5:31). It is as the Lord Himself said to His disciples: "Then the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Mt. 13:43).

Returning now to Judges 13, we see a few more points of agreement between the deliverer Samson and Christ Himself as the Saviour of His people. First there was the remarkable birth of the deliverer. The wife of Manoah was barren, but the Angel of the Lord brought her the glad tidings that she would conceive and bear a son. Samson's birth was therefore the result of a special intervention from God's side, just as it was for that matter in the case of Samuel's birth (the last judge, the forerunner of king David) and that of John the Baptist (the forerunner of Christ Himself).

The birth of the Lord Jesus from the virgin Mary was of course entirely unique. After all, no other human deliverer can be compared with Christ Himself. Yet, we may perhaps carefully draw a few parallels. Just as that "Holy Thing" that was born of Mary (Lk. 1:35) was the true Nazarite whose entire life was consecrated to God, so also was Samson, from his mother's womb until the day of his death, "a Nazarite of God". A *Nazarite* was a "consecrated person," someone who was entirely separated for the service of God. The remarkable thing with Samson was that his was a question of a *permanent* Nazariteship, whereas the Nazarite vow of Numbers 6 had a *temporary* character. Here God claimed, therefore, the entire life of His servant.

It is certainly no coincidence that we find the same permanent Nazariteship with Samuel and John the Baptist. The deeply-grieved Hannah vowed that she would give her son to the Lord for his whole life and that no razor would come upon his head (1 Sam. 1:11). And at the announcement of John the Baptist's birth we read that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb and that he would drink neither wine nor strong drink (Lk. 1:15).

With this, two specific characteristics of Nazariteship have been mentioned: the long hair and the abstinence from wine and strong drink. These characteristics we also find with Samson. Samson's long hair, a token of his total dependence upon God (cf. 1 Cor. 11:15; Rev. 9:8), is naturally known best. His tremendous strength depended on that (Judg. 16:17). But the prohibition of wine or intoxicating drinks is most certainly also mentioned to Manoah and his wife; it was especially stressed as a precept for the Nazarite's mother (Judg. 13:4,7,14).

Next we see how the Angel of the Lord departed from Manoah and his wife: He ascended in the flame that rose from the altar to heaven (Judg. 13:20). God's gracious dealings with His people was always founded on the value of the sacrifice, that was actually already since the fall of man. Once, the true Redeemer would come. He would become Man and give His life as sacrifice on Golgotha's cross, and then, in the strength of His finished work, ascend again to heaven. The wonderful way in which the Angel of the Lord (a reference to Christ before His incarnation) acted was a foretaste of this.

The last verses of Judges 13 announce briefly that Samson was born, that he grew up, and that the Lord blessed him. In similar words Luke speaks about the way in which John the Baptist and Christ Himself grew up (Lk. 1:80; 2:40). The chapter ends with the remark that the Spirit of the Lord in preparation for his work began to move (lit. "to forcefully push") him. This reminds us of it how Jesus, as the true Nazarene, was led by God's Spirit into the wilderness (Lk. 4:1). Happily we find with Him no trace of all the failures that so much characterized Samson's further life.

Samson's Riddle

"They said to him, Propound thy riddle, that we may hear it. And he said to them, Out of the eater came forth food, And out of the strong came forth sweetness" (Judg. 14:13-14).

The history of Samson's marriage and riddle teach us something about the blessed results of Christ's victory over the power of the adversary, who, according to Peter, "walks about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet 5:8). The slain, dead lion is a picture of the devil, who met in Christ his better. The devil is an "eater," constantly in search of prey. He is also the "strong one," who guards his domain, and who can only be conquered by someone who is stronger than he.

These two qualities Samson used in his riddle, speaking of the lion he had killed in the vineyards of Timnathah (a city in Dan at the border of Judah). The spiritual significance of this is clear enough. Christ is the stronger One who did not only bind the strong eater, but also gave him the stab of death (cf. Mt 12:29).

Actually this last expression is not entirely correct. Samson did not at all carry a weapon with which to kill the lion. Bare-handed He gained the victory. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him, enabling him with his own hands to rend the lion that came roaring at him, as one rends a kid of the goats (vv. 5-6). So it is too with the victory that Christ gained over Satan. Christ approached him in the power and worthiness that He personally possessed, without further human means. He fought the fight entirely alone and no man stood at His side. Still He gained (also through the power of God's Spirit) a sudden and definite victory over the wicked one, whose might was now broken forever.

I believe this to be the typological lesson of this portion, and first we need to let this lesson sink in thoroughly. Naturally questions will then arise (for Satan is still the prince of this world, and still walks about as a roaring lion), but these are of secondary importance. We must first be impressed of the tremendous and definite victory that Christ gained over His adversary. It seems that Scripture wants to teach us here what is:

1. the essence of the conflict,
2. the definite end of it, and what have become
3. the blessed results of Christ's victory for His own.

1. Christ was the Judge and Redeemer of His people, the Nazarene who was entirely consecrated to God from His mother's womb. He came to stand face to face with the violent adversary who sought His life. This began as early as at the temptation in the wilderness, when the devil tried to tempt Him, but had eventually to depart from Him. Christ gained the victory entirely alone, because He fought in the strength of God. He did not possess any human weapons. His only weapon was the "sword" of God's Word.

2. Then followed the years of the Lord's servile work in which He again and again bound the "strong one" (i.e., Satan) and ravaged his house. This aspect is not at all considered here in the history of Samson. Here we find, as mentioned, only the definite end result of the confrontation between the Lord and the enemy of souls. On the cross of Golgotha, Christ gained the total victory over His adversary. As the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it so strikingly: Christ became Man, taking part of blood and flesh so that "through death He might annul him who has the might of death, that is, the devil; and might set free all those who through fear of death through the whole of their life were subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:14-15).

Here, too, He did not use a human weapon. He conquered His adversary "through death" namely by penetrating into the last bulwark of the enemy and so to rob him of his power — just as David once killed Goliath with his own sword. This victory is definite and absolute, as so many places in the New Testament assure us (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Col. 2:14-15).

3. Now, however, this victory has blessed results *only for those who believe*. This means that there is a great amount of tension; for, though on the one hand Satan is a conquered enemy, on the other hand he is still walking about, seeking whom he might devour. His defeat is a settled fact, but the execution of the judgment awaits the beginning of the

Millennium. At the beginning of it, he will be bound and cast into the abyss, and at the end of the thousand years he will be cast into the lake of fire and sulphur (Rev. 20:2,10).

Therefore, the food coming forth out of the eater and the sweetness coming forth out of the strong one is not yet available to everyone. The whole creation does not yet share in the glorious results of the triumph Christ gained at Golgotha; that will only take place at His return. Yet, meanwhile, they who are united to Him do indeed share the sweet and blessed results of His work. They taste, so to say, of the "honey" that comes forth from the strong one — just as Samson himself ate while going on and as his father and mother tasted of what he shared with them of the honey out of the dead lion's carcass (v. 9). At this time, only the family of the Conqueror shares in the victory.

This remains for the time being a great secret, as we clearly see in this history. Even Samson's parents, his next of kin, did not know what was the origin of the honey their son gave them to eat. So also does the gospel remain a mystery for the Jewish nation at this time because there lies a veil over their hearts (Rom. 11:8; 2 Cor. 3:15).

For the "Philistines," those who are professors in name only, the worldly people, it is a complete mystery. The word of the cross is even "foolishness" to those who will be lost (1 Cor. 1:18). They don't understand anything at all of the fact that salvation is only to be found in Christ, the crucified One; that He through His suffering and death and His glorious resurrection from among the dead has annihilated all enemy powers for good; that His own people share in the sweet fruits of His work. That is a matter of faith: faith in God's Word, in the finished work of Christ, in God who raised Him from among the dead. Without faith, it remains a mystery, a secret, a riddle that no one can solve, not in three days, nor even in seven days (vv. 14-15).

Here the Philistines, the enemies of God's people, obtained the solution to the riddle only via a detour. They pressed Samson's wife to tell them, but this meant also the end of the feast. It heralded their own demise. With us who believe it is entirely different. God's secrets do not remain a mystery for us. The Holy One Himself, indwelling us, declares them to us, initiating us into the mysteries of God's wisdom (1 Cor. 2:6ff).

Because of this we can repeat what the Conqueror says: "What is sweeter than honey, what is stronger than a lion?" In other words: nothing is to be compared with the glorious results of the work of Christ who slew the strong enemy. He has annulled him who had the power over death. Now we are redeemed and delivered. We enjoy the food, peace, liberty, eternal life. The "honey" lights up our eyes, our heart, our understanding (cf. 1 Sam. 14:27), until we will be revealed with the Conqueror in glory, and the secret of His victory be unveiled before the eyes of all!

To be cont'd

Fighting the Good Fight

—J. van Dijk

Those who have open ears and eyes realize that throughout Christendom times of tumult are experienced. Where many can look back to times of peaceful fellowship, yes even restorations of past rifts, today it seems that such times are behind us. We are troubled! We knew that to be a Christian meant to have tribulations, but who expected these to come from within? We fully expected attacks and troubles from without; but from within? Surely, that would not be! Let us see what God's Word tells us about this (Mk. 4:17; Jn. 16:33; Rom. 5:3).

We know that we are living in the last days. We have read what Paul said about the things to be expected then (2 Tim. 3:1), and we understand that the history of the Church will end with Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22). We realize what Jude and John said about the development within the Church (Jude :4,8; 1 Jn. 2:18-19). And Paul, in his second Epistle to the Thessalonians, warns them not to be troubled in spirit. Did they not all expect that these things would take place "within"? And do these things not grow in such a way that Jude has to say that some got in *unnoticed*. It is therefore to be expected that such things are found in the very midst of the Lord's people. Yet, in amazement Christians turn to each other saying: "Why do we find this among those who want to please the Lord?"

All who walk with the Lord will know the answer to this question: It is through our own lack of staying really close to the Word of God, and through our own lack of watchfulness. Had we been closer to Him, He would not have to chastise us, and we would have discerned much sooner what was coming. We also would have had the strength to deal with things when they were still in the bud. But we thought it sufficient to love the Lord, and that we did not need to be too concerned about such questions as: What manner of behaviour gives proper testimony to who Christ is and our relationship to Him? As long as we had reasonable morals, and avoided gross errors in doctrine we were satisfied and at

ease. But was the Lord pleased with what we allowed in our personal and collective behaviour? I venture to say, If the Lord had been satisfied He would have spared us today's sad experiences. The very fact that we experience today's difficulties is evidence that we have done what was good in our own eyes. First, this needs to be confessed.

What further? Shall we, ignoring the disturbing difficulties, keep ourselves occupied with the more profitable proclaiming of the gospel and visiting the sick? By all means we should not refrain from these things; but is it not the time to also search out what among the various teachings that claim to be from God is really from Him? A thorough searching of God's Word is needed to see which of the various voices is truly of God. Though this involves an occupation with unpleasant matters (after all it will include having to declare the teachings of some we love to be unscriptural), it is, nevertheless, most essential if our confession is not to be one of mere generalities, lacking in specifics. Without such searchings of Scriptures and hearts, we could never take the vital step of ordering things according to God's instructions.

Any suggestion that occupation with unpleasant things may be called for meets with the protest: "Think of our young ones! To be occupied with these things tires them and causes them to give up and stray!" (Mt. 13:24). Yes, we should think of them, but shouldn't we have been concerned about them when we lightly introduced (for their sake?) things we were not instructed to do by God's Word? When Nadab and Abihu brought strange fire on the altar of incense, they did not do something God had prohibited; they did what God had not commanded! It must have seemed immaterial or even more appropriate to them to bring their own fire. After all, this way they did not, unworthy as they were, have to approach to the altar of burnt offering to take fire from there. This is a most crucial lesson for all, who no longer, as their forefathers, ask *only* after what God has said, but *also* permit themselves to do what God has not told them to do. When we introduced things which God had not told us to do, *then* was the time to think of our young ones, for what we experience today, and what troubles our youth, is but the outflow of *our* carnal walk. Although this is the day of grace, God has not changed. Today He (thankfully) does not respond by immediate death, but He does respond by causing us to taste the end result of our introducing things that seemed good in our eyes. For it is the things we allow ourselves to do apart from the guidance of God's Word that bring discontent and strife among men and displeasure from God. Because God has taken note of all this, He also has allowed teachers to creep in who teach things that scatter instead of gather. Of these things we need first to speak with each other, then to own them in confession before the Lord, and finally to take care that they are left behind.

Then there is another point worth considering regarding our young ones. Paul, writing to young Timothy, did not occupy him with pleasant matters, he spent a good deal of his Epistles telling Timothy how to deal with the many difficulties that were to be expected and in part were already present. He trained him by not sparing him. Paul used the very difficulties he foresaw as training material for Timothy. Of the 196 verses he wrote, 69 deal with present or potential problems. It is no wonder that he also had to write encouraging words to him, being mindful of his tears. Indeed the difficulties Timothy had to face came for the greater part from within; they caused him to cry. Yet, Paul did not apologize for burdening him, young as he was, with these problems, but as a father admonished him not to give up, to know the doctrine of God, and to endure as a good soldier.

Those who are older, have a real task towards their younger brethren. That task, which begins by confessing to them our own failure, is not to shield them from the difficulties, but to use the very difficulties to train them so that they may develop a spirit of power, love, and wise discretion (2 Tim. 1:7). Cowards run, men of God stand in battle! May we, in a spirit of humility, train our young ones like Paul did Timothy, and so equip them to fight the good fight.

Cowards run.

Men of God stand in battle!

And you?