

Habakkuk (4)

—H. L. Rossier

Habakkuk's Prayer — Chapter 3
God Heard"A Prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth"¹ (v. 1).

The prophet summarized the conclusion of all that he had heard from the mouth of the Lord in *a prayer* that was simultaneously a plea, a thanksgiving, and a psalm of praise. It proceeded from a faith that was fully assured that the Lord would be faithful to His promises. This prayer consists of four parts.

The first part is contained in the second verse.

"Jehovah, I heard the report of Thee, *and* I feared. Jehovah, revive Thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make *it* known: In wrath remember mercy!"

In chapter 1:2 the prophet had said: "Jehovah, how long shall I cry and *Thou wilt not hear?* I cry out unto Thee..." How could he ever have expressed such words: "Thou wilt not hear"? In all the instructions the Lord gave him afterwards, He showed him that He had heard and always hears. With near fatherly feelings He made it clear to him that the judgments which He had to allow over *His people* and over *the enemies of His people* were righteous judgments. However, God also showed him that *the righteous* is not without help while going through the judgments, for he shall live by his faith. Finally God declared to him that in a future day He will be glorified and personally highly praised, and the whole earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord's glory.

Therefore the prophet could say: "I heard"; not: "Thou hast heard," for his question had resulted from his weak faith. Now, however, he had knowledge of God's thoughts. The Lord had given this to him, and he did not have to wait for His governmental ways before he could understand them. Through faith he had come to know them already.

Yet, at the announcements of these judgments he said, "And I feared." Indeed, God's judgments are terrible, they must fill the heart with a wholesome fear! Still one thing he wanted to ask: Revive Thy work of grace toward Thy people! "In the midst of the years," before the end time of which Thou didst speak. Act in mercy toward us!

The deliverance out of Egypt constituted "the beginning of years," in which the Lord had shown His work of grace on behalf of His people. The prophet desired that God would take it up again before He would give deliverance *at the end of years* which would introduce the Millennium. He knew that he lived in the time of wrath.

This was all the more a reason to call upon God's mercy, for just when He pours out His judgments over the world we ought to trust His grace, today as much as in the past. The prophetic prayer of Habakkuk will be answered at the revival of Israel, more particularly toward the faithful remnant of which the prophet was a type.

The Salvation of the Lord

The *second part* is contained in the verses 3 to 15. It describes the deliverances of the Lord in the past and His intervention in favour of His people in the last days.

The *first section of the second part* is covered in verses 3-6. "God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covereth the heavens, and the earth is full of His praise. And *His* brightness was as the light; rays *came forth* from His hand; and there was the hiding of His power. Before Him went the pestilence, and a burning flame went forth at His feet" (vv. 3-5). Here the Exodus from Egypt is described. These verses show us the Lord coming from the east,

¹ The word "shigionoth", the plural of "shiggaion", seems, according to a competent researcher, to refer to a series of cries and lofty songs of praise which together form what is here called a "prayer." This explanation seems quite plausible to us, seeing the natural division that we find in the prayer of Habakkuk.

from Teman and the mountains of Paran which dominate the wilderness known by that name, in short, from Edom's territory. He comes to the aid of His people, to deliver it out of the bondage of Egypt by the destruction of the nations who oppressed it and resisted Israel.

Deuteronomy 33:2 says that the Lord came from Sinai, out of Seir and from Paran to deliver His people and to give them the law. According to Judges 5:4 Deborah sang about the Lord's intervention, coming from Seir, to destroy the enemies of His people. We find the same in Psalm 18:8-20, but there it concerns more particularly the enemies of the last days. Psalm 68 identifies the deliverance out of Egypt with that of the people in the last days. Psalm 77 draws out of the deliverance from Egypt the confidence that the Lord will deliver His people in the time of the Great Tribulation. And so, all these portions, just as Habakkuk's prayer, sing of God's past intervention to save His people as an earnest of the deliverance in the last days.

"He stood, and measured the earth; He beheld, and discomfited the nations; and the eternal mountains were scattered, the everlasting hills gave way: His ways are everlasting" (v. 6). The nations who sought to resist Israel were scattered, the power of ancient Egypt broken. The eternal hills — picturing the authorities established by God Himself, whose rule should therefore have been of unlimited duration — gave way before Him who came from His holy mountain to deliver His people. The prophet adds: "His ways are everlasting."

What assurance gives this thought to faith! What God has done in the past, He will also do in the future; with Him "is no variation nor shadow of turning" (Jam. 1:17).

Whether it is a question of judgment or of deliverance, God's ways of righteousness and of life are ever the same, reaching "unto the bounds of the everlasting hills" (Gen. 49:26).

Comparing Past and Future Deliverance

The *second section of the second part* is covered in verses 7-15. In these verses we find a comparison between the future deliverance and that out of Egypt, which was only a weak picture of the former.

"I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction; the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble" (v. 7). With awe the prophet thought of the events that still had to take place, but which he in *his vision* saw as already having taken place. The territories of Cush to the West and to the North, Arabia to the East and the South, will tremble before the Lord. The past deliverance when Israel went out of Egypt did not by any means stretch as far as the here-described future deliverance.

"Was Jehovah wrathful with the rivers? Was Thine anger against the rivers? Was Thy rage against the sea, That Thou didst ride upon Thy horses, Thy chariots of salvation?" (v. 8). God will do away with the boundaries of the nations, He Himself will slay them in their confusion. But when He will act in this manner, His purpose is not just judgment, for His chariots are "chariots of salvation." Certainly, the judgments will have to run their course until the end, the stripes foretold by God's Word come down upon the nations and their boundaries are obliterated (v. 9). The governmental authorities will be terrified, the whole world will utter cries of fear, while the people will in vain lift up their hands in the midst of the flood of judgments that will be poured out over them (v. 10). Nothing will be able to stay the Lord's battle against the godless until they are completely consumed. It will be as it was in the days of Joshua: "And the sun stood still, and the moon remained where it was, until the nation had avenged themselves upon their enemies" (v. 11; Josh. 10:13).

Moreover, God's wrath will not spare *the land*, Israel's territory. The unbelieving and apostate part of the people will, like the nations, receive the stripes of the Lord's indignation (v. 12).

Salvation, deliverance for Israel, will be the result of this tremendous flood of disasters: "Thou wentest forth for the salvation of Thy people, for the salvation of thine anointed; Thou didst smite off the head from the house of the wicked, laying bare the foundation even to the neck" (v. 13). Isn't this a wonderful thing? To such degree will that small nation — and even *then* only represented by a small, insignificant remnant — be the object of the loving care of the almighty God, that He will bring the whole world in turmoil to save that nation. It is, because Israel is *His anointed*: He has put the seal of His Spirit upon it; He wants to have it near Him as partaker of His glory in the centre of a reign wherein His eternal righteousness will rule. The *true* Israel may be little in the eyes of men; in the day in which He exercises His authority it will be His "precious jewel."

Here we do not speak of the Assembly, the bride of the Lamb, whose blessings exceed those of Israel as far as the heavens are above the earth. The Old Testament never speaks about this bride. Our heart is interested in "the Jewish bride," because Christ, the Lord, her Messiah and King, has such interest in her. With pleasure He looks upon her as His precious

jewel. All His promises made before — which to Him were always without repentance — He will fulfill. No matter how great Israel's unfaithfulness may have been, the heart of the King is not changed toward His people. Though He had to cast her off for a time as an unfaithful wife, He will receive her again after He has purified her in the fire of judgment by the Great Tribulation which caused the heart of the prophet to tremble in anticipation. The thought expressed in verse 13 we find back in that beautiful portion of Isaiah where we see the Lord coming out of Edom, from Bozrah, with His great power. He has trodden the winepress alone, treading the nations in His fury; and then He says: "For the day of vengeance was in My heart, and the year of My redeemed had come" (Isa. 63:1-6).

Then will "the head from the house of the wicked" be smitten, and "the foundation even to the neck [the last stone]" be laid bare (v. 13). These words refer doubtless to the Chaldean who had founded his house on unrighteousness. They carry our thoughts, however, to the "godless one" of the last days whose house will also be destroyed from the roof top to the foundation.

And so it is with verse 14 in which the last conflict is described. All nations will rush in to scatter this poor, tested, powerless remnant and to devour it in a secret place. In our expositions of the prophets we have more than once brought it to the reader's attention that the nations of the last days will not publicize their plans. In secret they will decide to snatch their prey from their allies of one day. But when Christ appears, it will be sufficient that the horses of this mighty Warrior show themselves to break through and destroy the tremendous might stirred up by Satan against Him and His people. Revelation 19:11-16 gives more details of this battle scene. There we see it from its heavenly perspective, something the Old Testament never does.

Rest Today and in the Future

The *third part* is contained in verse 16.

"I heard, and my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in my place, that I might rest in the day of distress, when their invader shall come up against the people."

This verse is the conclusion and summary of what has been said in the previous verses. In verse 2 we read what the prophet had heard and how it had caused him to be frightened when he thought of the Divine wrath. Then he had interceded for the people to remind the Lord of His mercies. The entire scene of the last days had then passed before his eyes. He had been reminded of the judgments that once had been executed over Egypt and over all Israel's enemies when God wanted to deliver His people. Next his prophetic vision had dwelled on the judgments of the last days, and he had understood that these had only *the salvation* of the God's people in view, just as in earlier days. This all he had seen and accepted as reality. Yet, that did not stop him from trembling to his bones, even more than he had done at the beginning of his song. It was with him as it had been with Daniel who said, when he saw "the great vision," "And my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength" (Dan. 10:8). This is a necessary preparation for receiving prophetic information in order to enter into the thoughts of God. Therefore the angel had comforted Daniel: "Fear not, man greatly beloved; peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong" (Dan. 10:19).

And so it is in this concisely presented scene. Habakkuk trembled; it was as if the entire judgment was poured out over himself, yet he was at rest while awaiting the day of distress. A similar work of the conscience, this feeling of total incapability and this conviction that our nature is corrupt, are unavoidable if we are to find rest, whether it concerns the history of men in the past, the present, or the future. Here it is a question of rest in the future. The prophet wished it to Israel in *the day of distress, the day of the Great Tribulation*, in which the enemy would come up against the people.

From numerous places in the prophets we know who that enemy will be, which armies will come up against Jerusalem. The prophet was sure of the eventual deliverance and the lasting rest. However, the Word presents here a rest that can be enjoyed *ahead of time*. It is the rest of soul even in the midst of the most sorrowful tribulations. That is a peace that can only be obtained once one has learned to judge oneself totally and after one has come to know God's love and mercy.

Full Fellowship with the Lord

The *fourth part* is contained in verses 17-19.

"For though the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall *fruit* be in the vines; the labour of the olive-tree shall fail, and the fields shall yield no food; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will joy in the God of my salvation. Jehovah, the Lord, is my strength, and He maketh my feet like hinds' *feet*,

and He will make me to walk upon my high places."

In this fourth part of the song we find *the faith* of the prophet beautifully put into words. Since the beginning of his conversations with the Lord his faith had steadily increased. He expected a future deliverance (see v. 16).

But he also knew that this deliverance could still tarry. His faith answered therefore to the word: "Though it tarry, wait for it" (2:3). He therefore waited for it in the assurance that the deliverance would be *preceded by distress*.

For him, however, there would be in the midst of this breaking loose of the storm, a safe secure hiding place, a little sanctuary, where he could find the rest of the presence of the Lord. That hope sufficed him. He knew that the rest would come as soon as the distress was passed. But what was he to do at present? It was a time a great scarcity that mirrored the spiritual condition of the Jewish people in our days. The fig-tree, the vine, and the olive-tree are without fruit — all symbols of that nation. Nothing is produced for God. Wheat, sheep, cattle, everything is lacking; there is even no longer a sacrifice to establish communion between Israel and God.

In Christendom it is not any better. Everywhere there is scarcity and hunger on the Christian terrain; great weakness of the Christian testimony; a confession without life and without communion with God.

"Yet..." adds the prophet. He lived by his faith and had accepted the promised deliverance as if it was already his. He did, however, not rejoice in the rest that he had not yet reached, not even in *the salvation*. He had a much higher joy: he possessed the Lord Himself, the God of his salvation. Him in whom he rejoiced and would always rejoice was the God who did not hide anything from him, who acted toward him as a friend, who made his most secret thoughts known to him. He could count on His mercy, even when all would fail, because He is the God whose blessings endure forever. "We will be glad and rejoice in Thee," said the Shulamite bride, "We will remember Thy love more than wine" (Song 1:4). Thus God gives songs in the night (Job 35:10). These experiences gave the *prophet full fellowship* with the Lord. At first he had understood that "the Lord, His God and holy One," is *light* and that He is "of purer eyes than to behold evil" (1:12-13). Now he rejoiced himself *in Him*, he enjoyed all the perfection of His person, and understood the *love* of "the God of my salvation."

But the Lord was not only his *joy*, He was also the prophet's *strength* (v. 19) when he was powerless. "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee" (Ps. 84:5). Thanks to Him our feet are made as hind's feet during a time of utmost weakness, when as yet not a single promise for the future has been fulfilled. We may rise up to our high places and walk through them with light, joyful, quick, and free steps. The heavenlies are for us, believers of today, the terrain where we find ourselves in Christ. What does scarcity mean to those who enjoy all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies?

Worship

"To the Chief Musician. On my stringed instruments" (19).

How could we then wonder about it that during those disastrous times Habakkuk rediscovered worship as in the days of David and Solomon. He handed his song over to the Chief Musician to sing it accompanied with harp and lyre. Here he realized even beforehand the song of praise that Israel will sing in a future day in His restored temple. And don't we have the same privilege? The certain knowledge that the things of earth are nothing drives us to the Lord, and when we then rejoice in the boundless, unfathomable riches, only one thought overpowers our whole being: to cast ourselves at His feet and to worship Him! The worship of God's children may be found anew in the midst of the ruin of Christendom.

We want to close this exposition with the words of another who said about the prophecy of Habakkuk:

"There is nothing finer than this development of the thoughts of the Spirit of God, the sorrows and anxieties produced by Him, the answer of God to give understanding and strengthen faith, in order that the heart may be in full communion with Himself" (Habakkuk by JND).

Summary

Habakkuk occupied a very special place among the prophets, although Jeremiah as far as his personal experiences are concerned, resembled him in certain aspects. Yet, Jeremiah's horizon stretched further. Initially, Habakkuk rebelled against the regime of violence among his people; he cried: "How long?" But as soon as the Lord announced the judgment over Israel by the Chaldean the heart of this man was deeply moved for his people. Like Moses he pleaded as mediator

with the Lord for Israel. God answered that He would judge the Gentiles who were the rod in His hand. But Habakkuk learned a personal lesson that is at all times and under all circumstances of great value: "The just shall live by his faith." Faith was the only principle on which he had to lean even in the most evil day. This verse is the kernel, the centre of the entire prophecy. From this moment on, his faith fathomed the "why" of the judgments. He viewed the past deliverances, realizing those of the future, and went through the present tribulations with an unmixed joy that clung to the person of the Redeemer with the power that God Himself was for him, and with the unconstrained, happy joy of the eternal blessings. Enriched with such blessing the man of faith had found entrance to the sanctuary, which he entered to bring worship to God.

The path of faith is most glorious, for it raises us above all hindrances, *even above our personal experiences*, and fixes our eyes on the things that are not seen, "for the things that are seen *are* for a time, but those that are not seen eternal" (2 Cor 4:18).

The End

The Battle of Conquerors (10)

—G. H. Elbers

Chapter 12

"Stand therefore, having girt about your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and shod your feet with the preparation of the glad tidings of peace: besides all these, having taken the shield of faith with which ye will be able to quench all the inflamed darts of the wicked one. Have also the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's Word; praying at all seasons, with all prayer and supplication..." (Eph. 6:14-18).

"...above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked..." (Eph. 6:16 KJV).

"...in addition to all this, take up the shield of faith..." (NIV).

"...in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith..." (NASB).

Well, there you stand as a believer! Blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, the loins girt about, having on the breastplate, firm on your well-shod feet. That is irritating and insulting to the enemy! Just like Goliath in his day was deeply irritated by the self-confident and very evident attitude of David (1 Sam. 17:42-44). So, the giant wasted no time before attacking; he thought to knock David down a few notches.

Shield

We may well compare David's faith, firm as a rock as it was, to that part of the spiritual armour which we will now discuss: the shield of faith. David showed his shield by declaring that he came "in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel." It was recognizable through his faith, he radiated it, and it made him, as it were, invulnerable. This young man knew God as a shield to all who would trust for shelter in Him (Ps. 18:31). Unafraid, he hid behind that shield!

In Ephesians 6:16 we find immediately an important point regarding that shield of faith: we must take hold of it — pick it up. In this connection we must realize two things: first, we must believe that it really is a shield. Why else would we use it? Secondly, it is a matter of faith. We must realize that faith truly is of great value in the battle we have to fight. I trust that if we glance back to the preceding studies, we will agree with this.

What Does that Shield Do?

Ephesians 6:16 states clearly that the shield of faith quenches all the fiery darts of the wicked. Thus... although we are girt, clothed, and shod (6:13-15), *still the enemy will not leave us at rest*. He begins to change his tune. And now we must for a moment recall the image of a soldier in Paul's days. They often fought man to man with swords and clubs. But they also used another tactic: At unexpected moments they would shoot darts from unexpected quarters in order to surprise and eliminate the enemy. Just as man has always been quite adept at dreaming up new, deadly methods of attack ('swift their feet to shed blood' it says in Rom. 3:15), they had an even more dangerous method: shooting fiery, burning darts. If the dart didn't lead to an immediate death, then the burning tip ensured a blazing, all-consuming fire.

We see that the shield had a double function. First of all, the darts would glance off, but the shield of faith would also extinguish the fire. Our shield stops the destructive intentions of our enemy in good time. It is an extremely important part of the armour. Better said: *faith is of utmost importance in the spiritual battle!*

Prepared, Having at Hand

The soldier in Paul's days may have been very proud of his beautiful shield. He could, for example, hang it on the wall and talk a lot about it. He could put it in the corner of the living room and polish it a little every day. Yes, the enemy would enjoy that! For as long as the soldier didn't actually wield the shield, it had no value at all! Do you understand what I mean? We can talk about faith. We can make all kinds of studies of it and cherish it. But what it really comes down to is this: what is the practical value of our faith when an enemy's dart is fired at us? Do we practice what we know? Do we experience what we confess? Or is faith just something theoretical? Paul writes that we have to take up the shield of faith, take hold of it. Not for a festive parade, but for the battle. This we must do *above all*: not last of all.

Fiery Darts

We would do well to investigate what fiery darts really are, because we read they are fired at us as believers. Satan would love to eliminate us by wounding us in such a way that we can no longer cope with the affairs of life. Of course, a direct hit would be enough to eliminate us. However, such ideas as murdering our neighbour or robbing a bank we would immediately put aside. Satan cannot make such direct hits against God's children. But... he has other darts, the type that can cause little, sneaky fires, smouldering little fires which can flare into inextinguishable infernos.

Consider the dart that Satan fired at Eve. The spark of *doubt* caught fire and she took the forbidden fruit and ate it in a blazing fire of pride and disobedience (Gen. 3:6, cf. Rom. 5:12). Think about Achan, the man who was hit by a fiery dart of *greed* (Josh. 7:20); of David in whom the fire of *lust* flared up (2 Sam. 11:2). We read of these men (and of Eve) that they saw (the fiery dart) and they thought about it (smouldering) and they gave in (the flaming fire) to something which they previously certainly hadn't wanted to do. This also happened with Judas, to Ananias and Sapphira, and... to you and me?

Let's not think that we won't be a target of the enemy! No, he will certainly try to fire the darts of pride, greed, lust, doubt, and anger at our lives. And what is our 'antidote'? How can we defend ourselves? By going to assembly meetings? By studying the Bible a lot? By associating with Christian friends? These are important matters in the lives of believers which they must not ignore. But... in the armour God gave us a shield, the shield of faith. If we would know all there is to know about God, if we would have memorized the whole Bible and could pray nicer than anybody else, *without having faith and practicing it*, then every shot of the enemy would hit the mark.

Practical Applications

I remember that once, during a meeting, there was a lot of noise in the street directly in front of the building. A few young people seemed to enjoy disturbing the meeting. At a certain moment a brother stood up and suggested we should pray together that the Lord would give silence. And that's what happened. Even during the prayer it became quiet and the young people disappeared, they went to another street. That's how promptly the prayer was answered!

After the meeting a brother came to me and said, "That was a lucky coincident! Right when we were praying an ice-cream wagon came by. That's what made those kids run away..." A coincident? No, brother! That was an answer to prayer! And if you don't believe that, well... what exactly *do* you believe?

But, let's talk about ourselves now! Didn't we often pray that the Lord would give a solution for certain problems, for sickness or need? What was our reaction when the Lord answered? "What a lucky coincident"? When the Lord once came to his disciples when they were in great distress, they did not call: "Hurray, there comes the Lord!" No, they screamed in fear: "It's a ghost!" (Mark 6:49). Where was their faith? We need faith not just when there are problems. We need it just as much when Satan comes with temptations and doubts. Let us then think of the weapon that God Himself gave: the shield of faith. If we hold onto God's promises and to His Word, the darts of the wicked one will harmlessly bounce off and... be quenched!

"Stand therefore, having girt about your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and shod your feet with the preparation of the glad tidings of peace: besides all these, having taken the shield of faith with which ye will be able to quench all the inflamed darts of the wicked one. Have also the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's word; praying at all seasons, with all prayer and supplication..." (Eph. 6:14-18).

"...above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked..." (Eph. 6:16 KJV).

"...in addition to all this, take up the shield of faith..." (NIV).

"...in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith..." (NASB).

We shall once again stop at 'the shield of faith.' In the previous chapter we saw how important this faith really is, but it would be good to pay some extra attention to the *practicing* of faith. To know something is nice is not enough. In our daily lives, we must practice what we know so as to be able to fend off the attacks of the evil one.

What exactly is Faith?

The first answer we will find in Hebrews 11:1, where we read: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Faith is then not something in the sense of: "I believe that it will rain tomorrow." By that we mean that it may or may not happen, we just have to wait and see.

The Christian faith is a *certainty*. Indeed, a certainty of things hoped for, which one doesn't see (as yet). Not in that same sense as 'it may or may not happen,' but 'it will happen, that's for sure!' As believers we presume that God will do what He has said. In that same Hebrews 11 several names are mentioned of people who, without fail, held on to the promises of God *because He had promised it*. That was enough for them. That kept them going, no matter how difficult life was. That may be an encouragement to us to believe like they.

Gods Show-window

God wants to bring several people and situations to our attention who can inspire us to believe, to teach us what faith really is. Let us read a few of these passages:

To believe is: trusting in God, that He, who is the Creator of all things, does know what we have need of and won't give us stones for bread (Mt. 6:32; 7:9).

To believe is: trusting in the words of God, who has said that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (Jn. 3:16).

To believe is: trusting in the promises which we find in His Word concerning the future of the believers (1 Cor. 15:51-57; 1 Th. 4:13-18).

To believe is: trusting that God really will forgive our sins if we confess them, because the blood of the Lord Jesus cleanses us from all sin (1 Jn. 1:7-9).

To believe is: accepting that God can do more than we can we ask or think (Eph. 3:20).

To believe is... and so we could go on and on! The most wonderful things can be accepted by faith, simply because God has said so! We may in fact use those promises and certainties as a shield when Satan tries to undermine our relationship with God, especially when doubt is sown in our hearts.

Once again, when we know these things, but look at them with only our understanding, they have hardly any value. We must look at them with our heart and contemplate them in our heart. Then we will not only enjoy them, but also be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked with them.

Practicing

Now I still want to point out a very important aspect about the function of an armour. The point is: our becoming skilled

with it, our practicing the use of it. Let us once more draw upon the comparison with the soldier's life! Trained soldiers are the best soldiers. During the Second World War when 'fresh troops' were sent to the front, the local commanders weren't very happy. Those young soldiers sometimes made mistakes, getting others in danger, *mistakes due to lack of experience*. If, however, they had been well-trained, they could have adjusted quickly to the local situation. But if untrained soldiers were sent, it was better if they were sent back, for their own safety as well as that of others!

When the Lord wants to put a shield in our hands, then we will have to practice using it. A shield is an adaptable component of the armour. It makes no sense to put it always on the left side — maybe the attack will come from the right. We must learn to know the tactics of our enemy so that we can react properly.

In 1 Corinthians 10:6 and 11 we find a serious warning! The believers had to take due notice of what had happened to God's people Israel. They would do well to find out how that old nation had fallen into sin, how they had come to sin. From it they would begin to recognize Satan's tactics.

Of course this also applies to us! If we research in the Bible what sins are and who Satan is, we can arm ourselves and say: "We are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11). And... one who knows this also knows how, and where, to hold his shield.

The Importance and Effect of Faith

Faith also requires exercise. Sometimes the LORD wants to see what is really living in our hearts, as was the case with Abraham. The LORD asked Abraham to offer his son (Gen. 22). That was a very strange request! First of all, it was strange because it was totally against God's ideas that a man should be slaughtered and burned. Abraham didn't know this yet, but it was also strange that *he* now had to sacrifice his son who was the subject of a promise! Isaac was to be the ancestor of a whole nation. But in Hebrews 11:17-19 we find Abraham's thoughts recorded. *He believed and trusted that the LORD was able to raise up his son even from the dead!* God also did show this to be true, and what a spiritual power has resulted from this exercise!

The Effect of Faith

We read a few more examples of what has been effected by faith, what results it can have:

By faith the walls of Jericho fell (Heb. 11:30)

By faith David could defeat Goliath (1 Sam. 17)

By faith Ezra could travel safely (Ezra 8:22,31)

By faith there is no condemnation, but eternal life (in. 3:16)

By faith we are justified (Rom. 5:1).

And John writes in 1 John 5:4-5 (KJV) "...and this is the victory that overcometh the world: even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

Maybe after all this you say: "Yes, that may be so, and it is written, but I still find it hard to believe. I wished I could produce so much faith at critical moments."

This happened once when the Lord said to a desperate father: "All things are possible to him that believes." It concerned a situation where faith was called for (Mk. 9:21-24). Then the father answered so movingly simple: "I believe, help Thou mine unbelief."

In this way, faith is a shield against all the fiery darts of the evil one, whatever he may set before our mind, whatever anger and doubt he may sow. We may as *a decisive response* wield the shield of faith. It is not our great faith in God, but our faith in a great God which has the last word!

To be cont'd

THE PRAYER OF JABEZ — 1 Chronicles 4:9-10 (NKJV)

—Hugo Bouter

Is Jabez merely an insignificant, unknown person mentioned only in the records of the Chronicles? It would be wrong to think so, for the Spirit of God devotes two important verses to this man, verses which have not lost their value and which make the list of names that we find here interesting reading material indeed. Who, then, was this Jabez? He was probably a descendant of the Kenites who were later incorporated into the tribe of Judah (see Judg. 1:16, 4:11; 1 Sam. 15:6; 1 Chron. 2:55). Initially, he did not belong to the nation of God. To use Paul's words in Ephesians 2:12, Jabez was an alien from the commonwealth of Israel and a stranger from the covenants of promise. Yet, through God's goodness, he received a place within that nation, namely within the tribe of Judah, which means 'Praise.'

In these verses in 1 Chronicles 4 we find Jabez's prayer in which he praised his newfound God. He called on the God of Israel, it says here. This confirms the thought that as a stranger he had joined the nation of God and taken refuge with the God of Israel — just as Rachab and Ruth had done earlier. He realized that he would be safe under the protection of this God, the living and true God, and he committed himself fully to Him. His prayer testifies to his very great faith.

The story of Jabez begins with pain and sorrow. The word 'pain' is used twice here. His mother had given him the name Jabez (= causing pain), because she had given birth to him in pain (v. 9). Jabez prayed that no harm or evil might pain him (v. 10). Although a son born in pain, he was prominent among his brothers. He was more honourable than his brothers (v. 9). Therefore, Jabez reminds us of Benjamin who was called "Son of My Sorrow" by Rachel, but was called by Jacob the "Son of the Right Hand" (Gen. 35:18). Suffering and sorrow are the consequences of man's sin ("in pain you shall bring forth children," Gen. 3:16). But they are followed by glory, the glory of God to be revealed in all the earth, the glory at God's right hand which is now real to faith. This held true for Benjamin, for Jabez, but most of all for our Lord Jesus Christ; but it holds true for us as well. The sufferings of the cross were followed by Christ's exaltation to God's right hand in heaven. And so we can also partake of Christ's sufferings, since the Spirit of glory rests upon us and we know that we will be glorified with Christ (1 Pet. 4:13-14).

Jabez's prayer consists of five parts. The first part is: "Oh, that You would bless me indeed." Jabez recognized that the God of Israel, upon whom he called, was the source of all blessing. Just as James tells us, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights" (Jam. 1:17). Jabez, conscious of this, had great faith. And so he prayed for abundant blessing. No doubt, his faith was not confounded. The same applies to us. Our Lord, in His grace, grants us life and He grants it more abundantly (Jn. 10:10). As Christians we know that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3).

This brings us to the second part. Jabez prayed also for enlargement of his territory. Christ became poor, that we might become rich. In Him, the Man at God's right hand, we have a heavenly inheritance. We possess a rich domain of spiritual and eternal blessings, a territory in a heavenly home, better than the land of Canaan. In that sense, all believers are 'landowners' who may hope for enlargement of their territory. A beautiful Old Testament example of this is Joshua, who received the promise: "Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon, I have given you" (Josh. 1:3). Step by step we may enter the promised land and claim the inheritance that has been given to us in Christ. When He gives us the victory we can say with Isaac, "Now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land" (Gen. 26:22).

So Jabez desired to enlarge his territory in the land of Canaan. A similar desire was found in Achsah, Caleb's daughter. She asked for a field and for springs of water (Josh. 15:18-19; Judg. 1:14-15). And she was given what she had asked for. The same is recorded here of Jabez: "So God granted him what he requested." God is willing to bless us; that is His desire because, in Christ, He can look upon us with favour.

In the third place, Jabez prayed that God's hand would be with him. He did not lean on his own strength and understanding, but relied on God's help and guidance. He wanted to be led by *God's* hand, since he had put, so to speak, his own hand into God's hand. He was aware of the miracles of that mighty hand. With "a high hand," Israel had been delivered out of Egypt and brought into the land of Canaan (Ex. 6:1; 14:8 KJV). Could the arm of the Lord ever be shortened? (Num. 11:23). "The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him" (Ezra 8:22). Have we put our hand in God's hand? Do we realize that He is for us and that therefore all hostile powers must retreat? (Rom. 8:31).

"And that You would keep me from evil," is the fourth part of Jabez's prayer. This can be understood in two ways: evil in the sense of sin, or something that is harmful to us, e.g., a disaster. We will not always be kept from harm. To the Israelites, however, earthly prosperity was clear evidence of God's favour. When an Israelite was kept from harm, it was a sign that God's hand was with him. For us, Christians, things are different because our blessings are on another level; they have a specific spiritual and heavenly character. However, as disciples of the Lord we may also pray this prayer and ask to be kept from evil, and to be delivered from the evil one (cf. Mt. 6:13). If it concerns evil in the sense of sin, we have also our own responsibility to flee from evil (cf. Job 1:1).

These remarks can also be applied to the fifth part of the prayer "That it may not pain me" (NASB). It is sad when people yield to evil and thus pierce themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim. 6:10). The Lord wants to protect us from this when we walk with Him. However we do live in a creation that is subjected to vanity, a valley of tears and sorrows, so that, sooner or later, suffering and sorrow will come our way. But when we commit ourselves to Him, the harm will not 'pain' us anymore. Jabez's prayer that still has so much to say to us has been answered. Verse 10 concludes, "So God granted him what he requested." God hears our prayers — let us be convinced of that! This is the happy message that resounds in these final words and encourages us to follow Jabez's example!

Wisdom From Above

—A. E. Bouter

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show out of a good conversation [walk] his works in meekness of wisdom... But the wisdom from above first is pure then peaceful, gentle, yielding, full of mercy and good fruits, unquestioning, unfeigned" (Jas. 3:13,17)

James teaches us about two entirely different worlds, the one from above and the other from beneath, placed opposite each other. He who is the Father of Lights (Jas. 1:17) and the Lord of glory (Jas. 2:1) is Author and Centre of the first, the one from above; whereas Satan, the father of lies and the murderer from the beginning, is the originator of the second, the one from beneath. The challenge for believers is: Who is the source of our wisdom? Which world do we promote in our daily lives?

Christ Reproduced in His Own

God's objective is that Christ, the Wisdom from above, may be displayed in each Christian; this only is true spiritual growth. In James 3:17 we read: "The wisdom from above is pure, peaceful, gentle"; this is Christ Himself — true, but reproduced in the believer. Although "heaven is my home," as we sometimes sing, heaven is also right here, seen in you and me — though in a limited way — in the measure in which Christ is displayed in us.

The Lord Jesus is rejected in this world, but God wants to display Him in the Christians in the very scene of Christ's rejection. We are to be His witnesses, His disciples, showing forth this heavenly wisdom in its seven beautiful features. These seven features of heavenly wisdom are contrasted with the features of devilish wisdom! Comparing them, you can see the two different *origins*, the two different *methods*, and the two different *results*.

Thus, when Christ's character is reproduced in us, a transformation will surely take place. That is what God, the Father of lights, wants to obtain. You call yourself a Christian? Then God says: I want to see Christ in you, and nothing else. And so, according to God's plan, the Holy Spirit produces His nine-fold fruit in us (Gal 5:22-23, Phil. 4:8), conforming us more and more to our Lord Jesus, who is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). As these wonderful features are reproduced, there will be results towards God, results towards men and also results towards ourselves.

"Who is Wise?"

This matter is intimately linked with James's question, "Who is wise?" At the very end of our dispensation, God is looking for wise men. Is there anyone who is wise? No doubt it is the one who uses God's resources while living in a world that has rejected God. Let us learn from Daniel and his friends, who were living in days of great transition and trials, and who were marked by wisdom. Today it is up to *us* to learn wisdom at the Lord's feet. In connection with James's question I have listed four characteristics of wisdom.

1. Wisdom is found in *redemption*. If we are not redeemed by the blood of Christ, we cannot be wise in God's eyes. Christ has bought us with a price, however we only learn wisdom if we submit to God's claims (see Ps. 107:43 and context).
2. Wisdom understands God's dealings with His people in judgment — judgment begins with the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17). The prophet Jeremiah was taught by God and could declare God's ways in discipline (Jer. 9:12).
3. Wisdom understands God's dealings with His people in grace. The prophet Hosea summarizes God's gracious reception of repenting Ephraim, and then asks the same question: "Who is wise?" In other words: Who understands that God is

faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins? (1 Jn. 1:9).

4. Wisdom expresses itself *in a meek and godly walk*, in the ability to act for God in the midst of controversy.

At the end of the old Jewish age, just before the destruction of the temple, James asked: "Who is wise?" Does this not illustrate the last days of our present dispensation? Then, God gave a time of transition from the Jewish "system" to the Christian dispensation. Today, we live shortly before the introduction of God's millennial kingdom in which the restored nation of Israel will once more play a key role. In such times of imminent change we require much wisdom to know God's ways and to walk in His paths! Yes, God is looking for wise men today!

Shining Lights and Wisdom from Above

In James 1 we read about the Father of lights from whom all light and blessing flows. In accord with this, the Lord instructed His disciples, "Be ye therefore perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5:48). He wants all Christians to be shining lights. Therefore, it is so important to focus on the Lord of glory, who is the Sun of Righteousness; and we, Christians, are like planets orbiting around Him. Our Lord Jesus, the Son of God, is the very centre; He is the Sun and we are attracted by His glory, so that we can reflect His light in various ways in the dark night in which we live. Let's study and cultivate the sevenfold fruit of the heavenly wisdom, till the Lord comes!

God's Wisdom

Its *origin* is from above.

Its *methods* and features bear the character of the fruit of righteousness sown in peace — of meekness.

Its *fruit* is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), bringing transformation:

1. pure
2. peaceable
3. gentle, forbearing
4. reasonable, compliant
5. full of mercy and good fruits
6. without partiality, unwavering
7. without hypocrisy

"If any one thinks himself to be wise among you in this world, let him become foolish, that he may be wise" (1 Cor 3:18).