

Christ's Glories as Judge (1)**Revelation 1**

—A. E. Bouter

"I John, your brother and fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and patience, in Jesus, was in the island called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus. I became in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet, saying, What thou seest write in a book, and send to the seven assemblies: to Ephesus, and to Smyrna, and to Pergamos, and to Thyatira, and to Sardis, and to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea" (Rev. 1:9-11).

Introduction

In writing the Revelation, John calls himself a bondman. He addresses his fellow-Christians who are devoted to serve the Lord as fellow-bondmen. Why? Because the attitude and commitment of a bondman are needed to understand this last Book of the Bible. John sees himself also as a disciple in the kingdom of God, and as a brother linked with all the believers world-wide. Like John, these believers belong to the same kingdom, and though they are now rejected in this present evil age, they soon will be manifested in glory, together with their Lord and Master. During their time of rejection, they will experience afflictions and, therefore, have need for endurance, or patient perseverance. John links these qualities with our Lord Jesus — "in Jesus" — as the One who has been the perfect Model of these features while on earth. Now He is in heaven, crowned with glory and honour, the Finisher of our faith. "Looking steadfastly on Jesus the leader and completer of faith: who, in view of the joy lying before Him, endured the cross, having despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

Despite the hardships of his exile on Patmos, John is found in the right spiritual condition — "in the Spirit" — in tune with, and under the control of the Holy Spirit. Although Satan abused him during his exile, John was also in God's school. What a lesson for the believer today; no matter how great the enemy's efforts to attack or seduce, God is in control, and He makes all things work together for the good of His children (Rom. 8:28). Furthermore, these circumstances were used by God to give John a special revelation, not only to be shared with the Christians among whom he had been working — the seven assemblies — but also for our encouragement today.

A Special Day, a Special Revelation

"A great voice as of a trumpet" sets the stage for this revelation. This occurred on the Lord's day (Rev. 1:10). The text uses an adjective form of the noun Lord, so that we could translate it 'pertaining or belonging to the Lord.' Its only other New Testament reference (1 Cor. 11:20), taken in context, helps us to understand that this must have been the first day of the week, the day of Christ's resurrection. Many look at this expression as though it has the same meaning as "the day of the Lord" used by many prophets in the Old Testament. These prophecies, however, are linked to the later chapters of Revelation. This can be seen in the general framework for this book, given in chapter 1:19, which puts the "day of the Lord" after chapter 4:1, when the believers will have been taken into heaven (1 Thes. 4:16-18).

"And I turned back to see the voice which spoke with me; and having turned, I saw seven golden lamps, and in the midst of the seven lamps one like the Son of man, clothed with a garment reaching to the feet, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle" (Rev. 1:12-13).

Compare this with Daniel 7:13-14: "I saw in the night visions, and behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like a son of man, and he came up even to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

Wonderful vision, solemn, impressive! The Lord Jesus as the Son of man appearing before the Ancient of Days, is also the Ancient of days Himself (Dan. 7:22). This is a mystery. Although veiled in the Old Testament, the realities of the Trinity and of the greatness of Christ's Person were clearly there, before they were revealed in the New Testament when the Word became flesh (Jn. 1:14; 1 Tim. 3:16). Yes, the Son of man is the same as the Ancient of days! That is why in Revelation 1:14 His head and hair are described as white wool and snow, just like the Ancient of days in Daniel 7:9. The Son of man is God

Himself, eternal, all-wise. The first time in Scripture we read about the Son of man is in Psalm 8:4, speaking about His universal reign of blessing. Then in Psalm 80:17 "Let Thy hand be upon the man of Thy right hand, upon the Son of man whom Thou hast made strong for Thyself."

The Son of Man and Our Responsibility

Let's see how Scripture links these Old Testament portions with the New Testament. We read in John 1 that the Lord Himself spoke about the glory of the Son of man as being higher than His glory as the King of Israel (Jn. 1:49-51). In John 5:27, a discourse in which the Lord shows His co-equality with God the Father, He says that the Father has given Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of man. This is confirmed in Paul's address on Mars' Hill: "because He has set a day in which He is going to judge the habitable earth in righteousness by the Man whom He hath appointed; giving the proof of it to all in having raised Him from among the dead" (Acts 17:31).

This Son of man has been crowned with glory and honour in heaven (Heb. 2:5-9) where He has seated Himself at God's right hand (Heb. 1:3). But in the passage that is now before us (Rev. 1-3), He appears to John on earth, and John sees Him in the midst of seven lampstands, with supreme authority, speaking with "a great voice as of a trumpet." These lampstands represent the seven assemblies to which John had to write (Rev. 1:19f). These assemblies are now God's present testimony on earth — "the things which are" — representing Him here in the scene of His rejection while the faithful and true Witness — who once walked down here — is now in heaven. John sees the Lord Jesus, the Son of man, as the Judge, who examines, discerns, and searches all. This is in line with Peter's words that judgment must begin from the house of God, seen as entrusted to man's responsibility (1 Pet. 4:17), a concept Paul often explains (e.g. in 1 Cor. 3:10-17). We need to distinguish our responsibility from our position in Christ, which, according to God's counsel, is not subject to failure or judgment.

A Few More Glories of Christ in Revelation

In the Revelation after the introduction (1:1-8), Christ is first seen as the Judge pronouncing the verdict. After that He is presented as the One who executes this judgment. Besides these functions, we find the Lord Jesus referred to by many different names and having various capacities. John loves to present Him in His unique greatness, in His attractiveness, and in His many marvellous qualities. A few of those are:

- Jesus (1:1,9), the humble Man of Nazareth;
- Christ (1:1), God's anointed Man;
- the faithful Witness, the Firstborn from the dead, the Ruler over the kings of the earth (1:5); these names express Christ's perfections with regard to past, present and future;
- the Alpha and Omega¹ (1:8; 21:6; 22:13), or the Beginning and the End (21:6; 22:13), the First and the Last (1:17; 2:8; 22:13);
- the Lord God (1:8); He is Jahweh Elohim, as we know Him from the Old Testament;
- He who is, and who was, and is to come (1:8), above and outside of time and space, yet revealed in time and space;
- the Almighty² (1:8), who will fulfill His plans and promises no matter what happens (cf. Gen. 17);
- He who lives (1:18); see John 1:4; 5:21, 24; 20:31; 1 John 5:20; (cf. "the Son of the living God," Mt. 16:16);
- the Holy and the True (3:7; 6:10);
- the Faithful and True (3:14; 19:11);
- the Amen, the true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God (3:14);
- the Lion of the tribe of Judah (5:5);
- the Root of David (5:5); the Root and Offspring of David (22:16);
- the Lamb (5:6) — used 28 times in Revelation in a diminutive form, meaning 'little lamb' yet powerful enough to overcome the powers of the dragon and all hostile forces;
- the King of kings and Lord of lords (19:16);
- the Word of God (19:13);
- the Bright and Morning Star (22:16);
- the Lord Jesus Christ (22:21).

¹ As this name represents the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, it implies that He encompasses everything that can be expressed of God.

² "The all-powerful One." This name of God is used 10 times in the New Testament, 9 of them in Revelation (2 Cor. 6:18; Rev. 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22).

During the present period of grace He is honoured as Lord and obeyed by those who believe before the whole universe is brought at His feet (Phil. 2:5-11).

To be cont'd

Separation: Not Fusion

—C. H. Mackintosh

"Therefore, thus saith the Lord, If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before Me; and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as My mouth: let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them" (Jer. 15: 19 KJV).

The principle laid down in the foregoing passage is of the deepest possible importance to all who desire to walk with God. It is by no means a popular principle; very far from it. But this does not detract from its value in the judgment of those who are taught of God. In an evil world the popular thing is almost sure to be the wrong thing, and whatever has the most of God, the most of Christ, the most of pure truth, is sure to be most unpopular. This is an axiom in the judgment of faith inasmuch as Christ and the world are at opposite points of the moral compass.

Now, one of the most popular ideas of the day is fusion or amalgamation, and all who desire to be accounted men of broad sympathies and liberal sentiments go in for this grand object. But we do not hesitate to clearly state that nothing can be more opposed to the revealed mind of God. We make this statement in the full consciousness of its opposition to the universal judgment of Christendom. For this we are quite prepared. Not that we court opposition, but we have long since learned to distrust the judgment of what is called the religious world, because we have so constantly found its judgment to be diametrically opposed to the plainest teaching of Holy Scripture. It is our deep and earnest desire to stand with the Word of God against everything and everyone, for we are well assured that nothing can abide forever except that which is based upon the imperishable foundation of Holy Scripture.

What then does Scripture teach on the subject of this paper? Is it separation or fusion? What was the instruction to Jeremiah in the passage quoted above? Was he told to try and amalgamate with those around him? Was he to seek to mingle the precious with the vile? The very reverse! Jeremiah was taught of God first of all to return himself, to stand apart even from those who were the professed people of God, but whose ways were contrary to His mind. And what then? "I will bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before Me."

Here we have Jeremiah's personal path and position most clearly laid down. He was to return and take his stand with God in thorough separation from evil. This was his required duty, regardless of the thoughts of men or of his brethren. They might deem and pronounce him narrow, bigoted, exclusive, intolerant, and the like, but with that he had nothing whatever to do. His one grand business was to obey. Separation from evil was the divine rule, not amalgamation with it. The latter might seem to offer a wider field of usefulness, but mere usefulness is not the object of a true servant of Christ: it is simply obedience. The business of a servant is to do what he is told, not what he considers right or good. If this were better understood, it would simplify matters amazingly. If God calls us to separation from evil, but we imagine we can do more good by amalgamation with it, how shall we stand before Him? How shall we meet Him? Will He call that "good" which resulted from positive disobedience to His Word? Is it not plain that our first, our last, our only duty is to obey? Assuredly! This is the foundation; yes, it is the sum and substance of all that can really be called good.

But was there not something for Jeremiah to do in his narrow path and circumscribed position? There was. His practice was defined with all possible clearness. What was it? "If thou separate the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as My mouth." He was not only to stand and walk in separation himself, but he was to try to separate others also. This might give him the appearance of a proselytizer or of one whose object was to draw people over to his way of thinking. But here again he had to rise above all the thoughts of men. It was far better, far higher, far more blessed for Jeremiah to be as God's mouth than to stand well with his fellows. What are man's thoughts worth? Just nothing. When his breath goes out of him, in that very hour his thoughts perish. But God's thoughts shall endure forever. If Jeremiah had set about mingling the precious with the vile, he would not have been as God's mouth; he would have been as the devil's mouth. Separation is God's principle; fusion is Satan's.

It is counted liberal, large-hearted and charitable to be ready to associate with all sorts of people. Confederacy, association, limited liabilities, are the order of the day. The Christian must stand apart from all such things, not because he is better than other people, but because God says, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." It was not because Jeremiah was better than his brethren that he had to separate himself, but simply because he was commanded

to do so by Him whose Word must ever define the course, govern the conduct and form the character of His people. Further, we may rest assured, it was not in sourness of temper or severity of spirit, but in profound sorrow of heart and humility of mind that Jeremiah separated himself from those around him. He could weep day and night over the condition of his people, but the necessity of separation was as plain as the Word of God could make it. He might tread the path of separation with broken heart and weeping eyes, but tread it he must if he would be as God's mouth. Had he refused to tread it, he would have been making himself to be wiser than God. Though those around him, his brethren and friends, might not be able to understand or appreciate his conduct, with this he had nothing whatever to do. He might refer them to Jehovah for an explanation, but his business was to obey, not to explain or apologize.

Thus it is always. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God and they shall be My people. Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor 6: 14-18 KJV).

It may seem very plausible and very popular to say, "We ought not to judge other people. How can we tell whether people are believers or not? It is not for us to set ourselves up as holier than others. It is charitable to hope the best. If people are sincere, what difference does it make as to creeds? Each one is entitled to hold his own opinions. It is only a matter of views after all."

To all this we reply, God's Word commands Christians to judge, to discern, to discriminate, to come out, to be separate. This being so, all the plausible arguments and reasonings that can possibly be presented are, in the judgment of a true-hearted, single-eyed servant of Christ, lighter by far than dust.

Hearken to the following weighty words from the blessed apostle Paul to his son Timothy, words bearing down with unmistakable clearness upon all the Lord's people at this very moment. "Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His. And let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these [the dishonorable vessels], he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (2 Tim. 2: 19-21).

Here we see that if any man desires to be a sanctified vessel, fit for the Master's use and prepared unto every good work, he must separate himself from the iniquity and the dishonorable vessels around him. There is no getting over this without flinging God's Word overboard; and surely to reject God's Word is to reject Himself. His Word commands me to purge myself, to depart from iniquity, to turn away from those who have a form of godliness, but deny its power.

Simplicity That Is in Christ (1)

—*Hervé Theret*

If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light (Mt. 6:22 KJV)

Simplicity is in Christ. It is in the message of grace. Christ is the way God shows His grace, love, justice, holiness, perfection and glory. Nothing outside of Christ is suitable for honouring God. Refreshing simplicity and evident righteousness are found in Christ as we follow Him through the pages of the Holy Scriptures. The one perfect Man, the Son of God, shows integrity in all He is, in all He does, in all He says. There is a unique consecration in His birth, His life on earth, His death, His resurrection and His exaltation on high; in His teaching, availability, caring, obedience, trust in God, in His mind, prayers, pardon, promises and answers, too.

It is blessed to gaze upon such a perfect Being. There is strength in His integrity. It gives rest to the heart. And it gives a calm, deep joy to think that He wants us to be with Him and to share divine, sweet communion forever to the glory of God the Father and the Son.

A Baby Lying in a Manger

The Lord Jesus is born apart from others because there is no place in the hearts of men to welcome Him. He enters the

world in complete humility. He doesn't come into the world as a great king who would conquer a land with the appearance of power and might. No, He does nothing that could lead us to step forward in the flesh to accept and serve Him.

He enters this world from the inside to meet the deep need inside the heart of men. God among men, wonderful name of Immanuel! How amazing and beautiful is the mystery of His coming! He comes down here to be open to everyone and to offer grace freely to anyone who will believe. His purpose is to bring to God the sincere heart that will accept His salvation and authority by simple faith.

The Saviour of the world is laid in a manger. God reveals His boundless grace in absolute perfection and humility in this holy little Being to be His delight among men.

Man has broken his relationship with God. In His divine way of doing things, God sends His Son and thus comes into this world to reconcile man to Himself. And so too, from a practical point of view, in a situation of conflict we are urged by God's Word to go first and meet with our brother or sister to make peace (Mt. 18:15).

Respect

From His youth on, Jesus is respectful and obedient to His parents. We see Him at the age of twelve at Jerusalem sitting in the temple among the teachers. Everyone hearing Him is amazed at His understanding. But we see in Him no boasting or self-importance. He asks questions and gives answers. He is about His Father's business. And to His mother's anxiety after three days of searching, He answers in a calm and divine way before following His parents in full obedience, just naturally. We hear from Him no complaint at any time about anything, though as the Son of God, He is over all things.

Throughout His pilgrimage He does not lack respect for anything or anyone. His conscience is at peace. He doesn't criticize the authorities or despise the Pharisees. And if sometimes He has to loudly and clearly denounce the hypocrisy in men's hearts, He targets the conscience because *open rebuke is better than hidden love* (Prov. 27: 5). His love could not possibly turn into hatred or irritation. The motivation of all that He does is love, the same love that made Him leave the glory of heaven to serve and suffer and die on the cross. No one is excluded from that eternal love. Not even you or I.

Our Lord shows respect to the authorities. *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God* (Rom. 13: 1 KJV). He is the owner of the earth and all that is in it, and yet we see Him humbly sending Peter to find a coin in the mouth of a fish so as not to offend the tribute collector in Capernaum. Splendid detail in the life of our Lord showing us His perfect respect and humility!

And still He will eventually be treated like an outlaw and put to death. But again He won't demand justice when falsely accused in court. He knows why He has come and will not be diverted from His grand work. He will never step back on His perfect path.

Obedience

His purpose is not to prove who He is, but to fulfill the task the Father has given Him. And this is His delight. He would not defend Himself and hastily overlook the Word when challenged by the devil in the wilderness. We see Him steady and sober under the shower of temptation because His expectation is in the Word of God.

He *is* the Word made flesh. Though tempted as a man, He nevertheless remains the Holy One of the Lord, and as such, He doesn't stray from His path, and never will. All that the devil offers him here is God's, but this is not yet the time appointed by divine wisdom for His exaltation to take place. The glory of our Lord will eventually shine in everything, *He hath made everything beautiful in its time* (Eccl. 3: 11).

We also shouldn't answer back in an unconsidered way when put to the test by spiteful defiance but should stay quiet and confident in the help of the Lord. *Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass* (Ps. 37:5 KW).

Prayer

The Son was in the Father's bosom from everlasting. And when on earth, as the perfect Man in His walk, He cultivates the

sweet relation of prayer with His God in a way depicted beautifully and respectfully.

He starts a day very early going off to a desert place to pray (Mk. 1: 35). This is prayer showing dependence upon God before activity. In another place, we see Him going to a mountainside alone to pray as evening draws near after feeding 5,000 people. He didn't forget to pray after activity either.

Let's notice in this same situation that looking up to heaven He prays and gives thanks before breaking the loaves. It is right to express thankfulness to God for what we might take for granted in everyday life, should it be small or big in our eyes.

His intercession is rich, accurate and pertinent. Let's take only the example of John 17 when it comes to intercession. What a power in this quiet and confident prayer! He is there praying for those He has been given by the Father, His disciples. He asks for their protection by the power of His name during the time He'll be away. He asks that they may taste the full measure of His own joy. He asks for their sanctification by the Word of God. He asks that the believers may be one in the Son and the Father and that they may bear witness of the truth and love from above to the world. And He wants those He has been given to be with Him where He is. This is His heart's wish. Everything He asks for Himself is closely linked to His person, for there is nothing apart from Him given for everlasting blessing. Starting now, may we take hold of what is truly life. *He* is the way, the truth, and the life (Jn. 14:6).

These are fundamental requests of the Lord for His disciples. They are grand, and they let us know about our Lord's desire relative to our communion with Him. This is a day by day matter. And as we go on our way here below, we know we now have a great High Priest who has gone into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, and that He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because He was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet He was without sin (Heb. 4:14). He cares about everything that could touch us, whether it be small or large. He knows everything we need and He is constantly before His Father as Intercessor and Advocate.

The Father's Glory

The Lord never performed any miracle or spoke words just for show. Every one of His acts, every one of His words was meant to reveal the One who sent Him.

Let's take the example of the raising of Lazarus from the dead in John 11. It seems the Lord isn't in a hurry to come to Bethany when He is told that Lazarus is sick. But at the time appointed by divine wisdom, and not according to human reasoning, He stands there before the grave where Lazarus lies. Jesus says to Martha, *Didn't I say to you that if you believe, you should see the glory of God?*

Then Jesus lifts up his eyes and thanks the Father for being heard by Him. He knows that the Father always hears Him, but He says it that the people standing by Him should understand and believe that *the Father* has sent Him. He has always been serving the Father, and He lets it be known. After the Lord cries with a loud voice, Lazarus who was dead comes forth. The power of resurrection is used for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

If the Son is glorified, it is to the glory of the Father, since He is in the Father and the Father in Him, and anyone who has seen Him has seen the Father. There is a complete reciprocity between the Son and the Father.

Oh, the mind which is in Christ Jesus! Unlike Adam, being God in nature, He does not think it robbery to be equal with God but *humbles Himself* and obeys unto the death of the cross. That is why God has highly exalted Him, that every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, *to the glory of God the Father*. See Philippians 2: 5-11 (KJV).

Meeting Each One

The Lord is more than approachable — He comes into the world to meet people. He is there for everybody, without showing partiality. This loving Man spends much time and energy going and meeting all kinds of people. No matter what their reputation or their past, no matter what the weather, distance, fatigue, thirst or hunger, His way and mind are straight. He does all things without hesitation, in absolute wisdom unfolding divine grace in the eyes of men.

He is there for older people as well as for children. He is there in the form of a little child to meet the hope of an old man, Simeon, a just man waiting to see the Lord's Christ before dying (Lk. 2:26), and later, during His ministry, He is there to let the little children come to Him (Mk. 10:14).

He is there for the rich as well as for the poor. He walks to meet Zacchaeus, a rich chief tax collector (Lk. 19:5), as well as Bartimaeus, the blind man begging by the roadside (Mk. 10:46).

He is there for the highly educated as well as for uneducated people. He is there at night to answer the questions of Nicodemus, a teacher (Jn. 3), as well as to choose such disciples as Peter and John who were unschooled and ordinary men (Acts 4:13).

He is there for lonely people as well as for the crowds. He is there to give back a dead, only son to his widowed mother in Nain (Lk. 7:11) as well as to teach the crowds on a mountainside (Mt. 5-7).

He is there for the sick as well as for the healthy and wealthy. He is there in Simon's home for Simon's mother-in-law suffering from a fever (Lk. 4:38) as well as at a banquet at Levi's house with tax collectors and others (Lk. 5:29).

He is there for the people of Israel as well as for the Gentiles. He is there for the lost sheep of Israel (Mt. 15:24) as well as for a Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar (Jn. 4).

Outward Appearance

The Lord doesn't look on the outward appearance, but on the heart. He doesn't fail to see a certain poor widow casting her little bit of money into the temple treasury, and He values it as a great offering to God because it was all she had (Lk. 21:2-4).

He also values the impulse of a heart attached to Him, even if sometimes we have to learn to count on Him instead of on our own strength to do what He wants us to do. As the Lord prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail, so the Lord prays today for us, for He is now our great High Priest in heaven who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

It is comforting to us to see how the Lord in His grace restores Peter and assigns him that beautiful, merciful service of feeding the lambs and the sheep of the Lord. He entrusts the care of His flock to Peter and says, *Follow Me*. Restoration is full and effective.

Good for Evil

The Lord gives back good for evil. He turns everything to God's highest glory. He says we must love our neighbour and even our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. These aren't empty words from our Lord's lips. We see Him carrying out all this in practice. He is indeed the Good Samaritan who shows in His compassion and concern a love in deed and in truth.

After a life full of mercy, He is put to death and is the object of outrageous hatred on the part of men who smite Him, spit on Him, crown Him heavily with a crown of thorns, flog Him and make mockery of Him. He is the Just One among the unjust. No one could find anything amiss in Him. No fault is found in Him. Not even false witnesses can demonstrate Him to be guilty of anything. None of their machinations can stand firm against the Truth. They don't stand before Him because no act, no word, no behaviour could be condemned in Him. He is pure.

He is so pure that when He is nailed to the tree, placed in a most humiliating and painful position, and derided, He is there, hanging, with hands wide open and pierced like His heart, and He prays for his accusers. *Father, forgive them; for they don't know what they do* (Lk. 23:34).

He gives His life willingly to offer grace and salvation to the same people who are crying out, *Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!* and to every sinner. O supreme and eternal love of God, you shine through Christ on the cross!

Perfect Balance

The Lord finds His delight in just weights (Prov. 11: 1). He is the Word made flesh, full of grace and truth. He is love; He is light. He is light; He is love. He comes bringing the good news that every sinner might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Grace is now given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. *Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound* (Rom. 5:20). God's assessment is supreme.

He doesn't publicly condemn a sinner dragged before Him by her accusers without reminding them that they are sinners too. He judges the thoughts of the heart and nothing is hidden from His sight. *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God* (Rom. 3:23). Everybody needs grace, no matter how honourable they may be before men.

When the Lord is craftily asked by the chief priests and scribes whether they should pay tax to Caesar or not, let's hear how He answers rightly and uprightly. *Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's* (Lk. 20:25). In Him there is perfect balance and understanding of what is owed to the world and what to God. And that makes His walk straight, constant, and steady. He walks in the way of righteousness and His judgment is just because He doesn't seek His own will.

To be cont'd

*Oh what a Saviour is Jesus my Lord,
Well may His name by His saints be adored!
He has redeemed them from hell by His blood,
Saved them for ever, and brought them to God.*

The Prophecy of Zephaniah (4)

—H. L. Rossier

Chapter 2 — Judgment over Apostate Israel and the Nations

A Faithful Remnant Is Preserved

"Collect yourselves and gather together, O nation without shame, before the decree bring forth, before the day pass away as chaff, before the fierce anger of Jehovah come upon you, before the day of Jehovah's anger come upon you. Seek Jehovah, all ye meek of the land, who have performed His ordinance; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of Jehovah's anger" (Zeph. 2:1-3).

This is a general appeal to the unbelieving, shameless nation when the day of the Lord is about to begin and threatening thunderclouds pack together at the heavens. God wants to give them one last chance to repent and find shelter. How great is God's long-suffering! How clearly do we see that He does not want to judge, but desires to show mercy.

It is, in fact, the same call as in Joel 2:16: "Gather the people." There it is directed to those who believe, whereas He finds only rebellious ones in Zephaniah. The shameless people gather together in order to resist the "overflowing scourge" in the day of wrath, thinking that it cannot reach them (Isa. 28:15).

They will gather themselves to be judged, just as God will assemble the nations for the same purpose (Zeph. 3:8). Make haste, says the Lord, before these things overtake you. If you wait until tomorrow, it will be too late, then the day will have passed.

"Seek Jehovah..." (2:3). Here, for the first time, we find reference made of the remnant. In the midst of the shameless nation a group of meek ones will be formed, a family of children of the kingdom of which the Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Mt. 5:5). They will walk in the footsteps of their Master, who could say: "I am meek and lowly of heart." God's thoughts are occupied with these few, these poor, despised, and persecuted little ones (Zech. 13:7). We encounter them everywhere, in the Psalms, in the Prophets, even in the Gospels, before the Assembly has been formed through the death and resurrection of Christ. One can again follow their history from the moment on that God, after the rapture of the Assembly, renews His relationship with the old nation Israel.

The time will come when He will lead them, as His own people whom He has received again, into the glory of their earthly inheritance. They are the "wise ones" in Daniel, who will "turn the many to righteousness," and who, after they have been persecuted, martyred, chased, and hated by all, will "shine as the brightness of the expanse... as the stars, for ever and ever" (Dan. 12: 3). They belong to those whom God will gather (Joel 2:16) and who will weep between the porch and the altar at the moment the day of the Lord arrives. They will direct their eyes to Him whom they have pierced (Zech. 12:10). These few occupy an important place; again and again we find them as witnesses in the midst of the unfaithful nation. The Lord will remember them and consider them to be His possession (Mal. 3:17); His eye will be upon them.

Trusting During the Day of the Lord

Yet, they too will go through the day of the Lord, for they will have to bear the consequences of God's wrath because they belong to the people who have rejected and crucified their Messiah. But whereas the unbelieving part of the nation will not be ashamed about this wicked deed, the faithful ones will call upon God with crying. They will understand why they have been rejected. "Save us from blood guiltiness!" they will call. They will consider the judgment that fell upon them to be righteous, and will be able to bear it through faith, as we see in Habakkuk. Yet, they will cry out, "How long?" while realizing that God will not forget to set the hour of their deliverance. They will build on His mercy as their only recourse. They will understand that they "may be...hid in the day of Jehovah's anger" (v. 3). This "may be" will be changed into certainty at the hour of deliverance. In anticipation of it they will seek "righteousness and meekness." Their only concern during those disastrous times will be: not to lose sight of the Messiah, to whom they belong and to whom they bore such a great guilt, to display the mind that was in Him, and to watch most carefully against sinning. During this time of tribulation they will experience what it means to be sheltered, as once Israel was in that fateful night when the angel of death went through the land of Egypt. They will listen to the call: "Come, My people, enter into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee, *hide thyself just for a little moment, until the indignation be past*" (Isa. 26:20).

During the Great Tribulation they will find shelter in the wilderness of the nations. A part of them will, however, remain in Jerusalem to preach the gospel of the kingdom there. They will fall as martyrs as a result under the hand of their opponents. But they who have fled will be sheltered among the nations who will cover them with their protective government (Rev. 12:14).

What a source of trust for their faith is this "may be," that the Lord spoke to them. During the course of this exposition we will follow this faithful remnant step by step, until the day of victory, the day of joy and rest, that will dawn during the last days under the Messiah's scepter.

The Judgment over the Philistines

"For Gazah shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon shall be a desolation; they shall drive out Ashdod at noonday, and Ekron shall be rooted up. Woe unto the inhabitants of the seacoast, the nation of the Cherethites! The word of Jehovah is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines: I will destroy thee, that there shall be no inhabitant" (vv. 4-5).

The most prominent cities of the Philistine's league, except for Gath which had been regained by Uzziah (2 Chr. 26:6), are mentioned here with a play of words on their names, somewhat similar to that in Micah 1:10-16. The Philistine people are referred to as "inhabitants of the seacoast, the nation of the Cherethites." In Ezekiel 25:16 they are referred to in the same way. The Philistines were originally immigrants from the Isle of Crete. Elsewhere it is mentioned that they came from Caphtor (Amos 9:7; Jer 47:4). In Canaan they had settled along the coast of the Mediterranean. All prophecies of their destruction infer their defeat by Pharaoh of Egypt (Jer. 47:1), by Nebuchadnezzar (Zeph. 2), or Alexander the Great (Zech. 9:5-8).

These historical events, however, were only the precursors of the final destruction in future days, for "no prophecy of Scripture is of its own interpretation" (2 Pet. 1:20).

As so many other nations, the Philistines will also reappear before the great drama of the day of the Lord. Through the demise of the "inhabitants of the seacoast" it will become possible to shelter the remnant of Judah during the days of the Great Tribulation. Never in history has such a thing occurred. In this portion Zephaniah tells us emphatically: "The seacoast shall be cave-dwellings for shepherds, and folds for flocks. And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereon: in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening: for Jehovah their God shall visit them, and turn again their captivity" (vv. 6-7). A portion of the remnant will find a refuge for its flocks and safe rest in the destroyed cities of the Philistea. The characteristic words: "Jehovah shall... turn again their captivity" always refer to the end times. It is a clause that is often found; it is a special manner of speech. It indicates the return of all captives and is therefore used with a view to their definite restoration. Since the dispersion of the Jewish nation, no such thing has ever taken place.

The return of Judah to its land in the days of Cyrus didn't concern the entire nation, but just a part of it. It did not end the captivity, not even for those who returned, for when it was back in its own land, it remained in servitude to the nations. Even in our day Jerusalem is trodden down of the nations (Compare Neh. 9:36-37; Ps. 126:1 with verse 4). The partial return was commanded by God so that a small part of the nation could receive the Messiah in Judah. If they had received

Him, their "captivity would have turned" and the kingdom of Israel would have been restored. The iniquity of the nation, in that it crucified the Lord Jesus, has made the restoration thus far impossible. Only in the prophetic times their "captivity will be turned." This expression points therefore to an event that lies entirely in the future. It is most important to observe this, since Israel's history and the glorious reign of the Messiah are inseparably linked together. Not just Israel will be restored, but also Moab, Ammon, and other nations. The restoration, however, has particular reference to God's people, the true remnant.

Moab, the Children of Ammon, the Ethiopians

What primarily characterized Moab and the children of Ammon were the indignities and insults with which they had mocked the people of God. Thereby they had fought against God Himself without taking into account the extent of their cruel hatred against Israel. Secondly, pride had driven them to attack the borders of the inheritance of the people. The recompense on the day of the Lord will therefore be executed over them by the remnant: "the remnant of My people shall spoil them, and the residue of My nation shall possess them" (v. 9). This fact has also never taken place in history. The final revenge still awaits these two nations. Even the future Assyrian will not bring them into subjection at his invasion of Palestine (Dan. 11:41), for another fate is to be their lot. Edom will endure the same judgment (see Obadiah), but even more terrible, for he will be entirely destroyed, "Jehovah will be terrible unto them (Moab and Ammon)" (v. 11).

Indeed this overthrow will be terrible; their idols, Chemosh and Milcom, about whose protection they often prided themselves, will be destroyed. Neither Chemosh, nor Milcom will be able to prevent the destruction. But the curse over these guilty people is not the last word of the Lord over them. They will be forced to acknowledge the superior authority of Christ and to bow their knee before Him. What a grace that this is so and that God does not end with judging His enemies! True, we read in Scripture that this subjection will not be voluntary by all. Many out of the nations, from among the foreigners, will only feign subjection to Him, only feign to honour Him (Ps. 18:45; 66:3). But many others, who through the gospel of the kingdom have come to repentance, will acknowledge Christ's authority. Thereby out of most nations a remnant will be formed that will share in the general restoration. The "isles of the nations," the regions most remote from the city of the great King, "shall worship Him, everyone from his place" (v. 11). That certainly does not preclude that from year to year these remnants will travel to Jerusalem "to worship the King, Jehovah of hosts, and to celebrate the feast of tabernacles" (Zech. 14:16).

The sword of the Lord will also fall directly on the Ethiopians (v. 12). In earlier days the Israelites had trusted in them, had taken refuge by them to obtain help against the Assyrian (Isa. 20:5-6).

Nineveh

After the judgments announced in the previous verses, this chapter mentions in conclusion the end of Assyria and Nineveh (vv. 13-15). At the time of Zephaniah's prophecy, Nineveh had not yet been destroyed. He, therefore, announced the fall of Nineveh, which was the special subject of Nahum's prophecy, as a future event in the times of the end. In Nahum we see the announcement of the destruction of Nineveh, and with her of the Assyrian, which was to be executed by "His heroes," the Chaldeans (Nah. 2:3), the instruments of His choice. In Zephaniah it is said that the judgment will be executed by the Lord Himself: He will stretch out His hand against the North, He will lay bare the cedar work. Nineveh, just as little as Babel, will not arise from her ashes in the last days. Her destruction is definite. The Assyrian empire, which was destroyed at the invasion of its capital, will arise again. The Word of God, however, announced already beforehand the direct destruction of this restored power by the hand of the Lord in the last days. Nineveh was "the rejoicing city that dwelt in security, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none else beside me"! Her trust in her own power, her egoistic pride that only took its own interests into account, her serving the "I," which did not permit others the least right of competition, was the cause of an all-consuming judgment. In our days the same principles are loudly proclaimed by certain nations and they will issue in the same disasters.

To be cont'd

Jeremiah The Weeping Prophet

What fitted Jeremiah for his God-given charge:
"If thou take forth the precious from the vile,
thou shalt be as My mouth"?

Was it not his heart's condition that made him
known to us as:

The Weeping Prophet?