

**Simplicity That Is in Christ (2)**

—Hervé Theret

*The Teaching of Our Lord*

Our Lord's teaching is full of imagery. He reveals precious truths from God in a beautiful way, using simple, proper, accurate words and parables. He begins with concepts, well-known by the people He is speaking to, and gives them a supplementary dimension.

See how beautifully He takes into account our weakness and passes over it to reveal divine thought! Take the example of Luke 7:36-50. After reading the thoughts of Simon the Pharisee, Jesus tactfully questions him. On basis of a parable, Simon is able to give a right, common sense judgment. But a further step is needed for man to grasp what the Lord really means — heart involvement. This is exactly what the woman here has done.

Teachers of God's Word should always be careful to make any message from the Lord plain to their audience. They shouldn't use any code, whatever it may be, that excludes some people and flatters others. We should all beware of intellectual or spiritual pride to the detriment of others and to God's disgrace. Instead, let everything be done for peace and spiritual growth. And as hearers of the Word, we should always seek what God is telling us now, no matter who may be the brother speaking.

*The Promises of Our Lord*

The promises of our Lord are crystal clear. He put exceeding great and precious promises into simple words so that even a child can make them a reality. And when we think that by these we can be partakers of the divine nature, we can only bow in humility and hear the voice of our Lord saying, *I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight* (Lk. 10:21).

There is no way to misunderstand the meaning of His words when He says,

*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them* (Mt. 18:20).

*I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen* (Mt. 28:2).

*But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things* (Jn. 14:26).

*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also* (Jn. 14:3).

*Surely I come quickly. Amen* (Rev. 22:20).

Let's remind ourselves of such promises again and again, for this is spiritually sound. They produce hope as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast because it is impossible for God to lie. *All the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us* (2 Cor. 1:20).

*Do This in Remembrance of Me*

There is also a poignant simplicity in the holy supper. See the Lord during the last night before He was nailed to the cross. In the intimacy of the upper room He pleads with the hearts of His disciples, and ours as well, by giving a sign in memory of Himself.

*He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is My body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament [covenant] in My blood, which is shed for you* (Lk. 22:19-20).

Is this out of our reach? No, and it is as deep as it is simple. It is a boundless privilege to be invited by the great Saviour to meet the wish of His heart. *With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer* (Lk. 22:15). Let's remember Him for the sake of what He has done and who He is.

Notice, the Lord wants to occupy our hearts and our thoughts before anything else. Not just one morning a week, of course. The more often we think of Him, the more naturally we will discover His beauty and express it through our behaviour and words. This can and should be a daily practice and bring external fruit when we meet for worship.

### *Dark Prospect*

In Gethsemane Jesus withdraws about a stone's cast and kneels down and prays. There is something happening here we cannot enter into. He speaks to His Father and asks that the cup might be removed from Him if He is willing. *Nevertheless not My will, but Thine be done*, He says.

His sweat is running down as drops of blood and falling to the ground. He knows perfectly the wrath of God against sin, being Himself God and holy. He knows it is terrible. Everything the Lord had done He did full well knowing its consequences.

He knows He will atone for every sin and endure the terrible but just judgment of the God who can't see sin without punishing it. He knows He will be made sin for us and bear our sins in His own body on the tree. He knows what it means. He knows He will suffer, suffer, suffer, and pass through the furnace of affliction in the place of sinners.

He knows He will be abandoned by God during the time of atonement. The sky will be like brass to Him. What a thought for the eternal Son who had always reclined on the Father's bosom in the glory above, sharing His love, His light, His communion in perfect reciprocity. God's excellent plans of grace in relation to men find their substance in that blessed sphere of divine intimacy, and the Son of God came into the world to carry them out to the glory of God.

The Lord Jesus must suffer all these things and enter the glory He had before the world was made, and have the glory of a perfect Man now in the highest place at God's right hand.

So, He walks as far as Gethsemane, where He meets anguish as a Man at the thought of the absence of communion with God during the three dark hours on the cross. Then, when He arises, He goes on to the end of what is planned by divine love. He is the Man of God's counsel. What a wonderful and powerful determination we witness in the singleness of the Saviour's heart! He loves the Father and does exactly what His Father has commanded Him. He loves sinners and wants them to be saved.

### *The Holy Victim*

The Lord gives Himself and is nailed between two malefactors, His hands still wide open to receive whoever might accept Him as his or her Saviour. And one of the two malefactors does this. This very day, he'll be in the presence of the Lord forever.

At the end of the three dark hours in the middle of the day, it is finished. The work the Father gave Him to do is completed. Fully completed. Wonderfully completed! There is nothing to be added to glorify God. The Victim is beautiful and has been found perfect. God's justice is satisfied. His grace can now flow out freely and abundantly through Christ.

The sacrifice for purification of sins will never have to take place again. The believer is sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. The cost for eternal redemption is the precious blood of the spotless Lamb that is shed on the cross.

The wrath of a holy God will never burn against a sinner covered by Christ's blood, for God is just and would never demand judgment a second time for a sin Christ has paid once for all on the cross. The value of Christ's blood is established and declared by God Himself.

Jesus Christ enters death by committing His spirit into the hands of the Father. He cannot lose His life. It cannot be taken from Him. He gives it willingly. He lays down His life for His sheep. And with a loud cry of triumph, He enters death. He will rise again.

The death of the perfect Man, as well as His life, has been a delicate and sweet savour, a pure offering, pleasant to God. He has done everything well.

### *Resurrection*

On the third day, early in the morning, Jesus rises again. He is raised up by the glory of the Father on the first day of the week. He is the Firstborn from among the dead. The light shines out of darkness.

Though He is victorious, the time has not yet come when every knee shall bow before the Lord. Now is the time for grace, not judgment. The risen Man, unknown to men through their wisdom, walks on earth to meet and reveal Himself to his disciples.

This profusion of spiritual richness bestowed on His disciples causes them to understand at a higher dimension, infinitely deeper than anything they could have thought of before. The great purpose of His appearing to all His people is to open their understanding to what He is saying, that they might know Him in reality as it relates to their hearts' welfare.

He appears first to Mary and lets her recognize Him by the way He pronounces her name, *Mary*. What a wonderful face-to-face encounter, where this woman's heart is brought into tune with and responds to her Master's voice, *Rabboni*. She realizes who He is! Then in this short, simple, intense dialogue, the Lord gives her an outflowing revelation to be published abroad: *His Father has become our Father*.

The Lord joins two of his disciples on their way to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-35). Their hearts are burning within them on the way as He opens the Scriptures to them concerning Himself. He eventually opens their eyes to recognize Him when He breaks the bread after they strongly urge Him to stay with them overnight. They return at once to Jerusalem to find the other disciples.

As the Lord stands among His disciples, He says, "Peace be to you." He shows them His hands and His feet to help them believe that it is He Himself, the risen Man Jesus Christ. And He eats some fish and honey. Then He opens their minds so they can understand the Scripture in relation to Him. After this, the disciples go and find a disciple who was missing from the meeting to tell him they have seen the Lord. And one week later, the Lord comes back to take care of the unbelieving disciple and invites him to put his hand into His side. His confession comes forth at once, *My Lord and my God!* (Jn. 20:28).

Some disciples, perhaps discouraged now, go back to their former occupation, fishing. But that night they catch nothing. The Lord stands on the shore in the morning, *Children, have you anything to eat? Nothing. Throw your net on the right side of the boat*. By doing so, they catch a large number of fish. So the disciple who is particularly sensitive to his Master's love says, *It is the Lord*. And after they have joined Him, He restores them around a fire He has prepared for them (Jn. 21:1-14).

Before leaving them, the Lord asks His disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they receive the Holy Spirit, who is the Comforter the Father has promised to send as a divine person to live with and in His children forever. We are not left as orphans. The Holy Spirit is to be sent in the Lord's name to help our infirmity.

The Lord is going away and coming back. It is for our good that He is going away because otherwise the Comforter cannot come to us to teach us all things and remind us of the Lord. The Spirit of Truth speaks that which He hears in heavenly realms and brings glory to the Lord by making this known to us — delightful dialogue of love between the Father and the Son in the glory above. Without the Spirit from above we could not bear such revelation. But in Him we are given the earnest of our inheritance, discovering and making progress in the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. This is not philosophy. This is divine communication that leads every heart to praise the great Architect of supreme plans of grace in abundance of glory. Our inheritance is God all in all.

The Lord is leaving. He is taken up from the Mount of Olives before the eye of His disciples and hidden from their sight by a cloud. The Lord returns into the glory He had in the presence of God before the world began, but this time as Man. Yes, there is a Man in the glory, sitting at the right hand of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, His Son.

This same Jesus who has been taken into heaven will come back in the same way to catch up His Assembly and meet her in the clouds, and then we will be with Him forever.

### **Christ's Glories as Judge (2)**

## Revelation 1

—A. E. Bouter

### *Ten Features of Christ*

The glories of Christ as Judge are summarised in ten features, described by John as he saw His magnificent appearance (Rev. 1:13-16). Since the number ten in Scripture represents the measure of responsibility, we understand that our Lord Jesus Christ fully met and meets God's holy standards.

1. "Clothed with a garment reaching to the feet." This special garment expresses Christ's magnificence, judicial majesty, and supremacy.<sup>1</sup> The Lord Jesus is seen here as King and Priest, and as such is the true Judge. Christ has been on earth as the true Prophet who came to reveal God's thoughts. Having accomplished His work, including His great sacrifice, He is now forever God's King and Priest. His glories as the Priest-King, the great Melchisedec, will be displayed in a future day before a startled universe, but we already know Him this way, being closely linked with Him who has all authority, because He is our Beloved.

The long garment reaching to the feet (suggesting perhaps that this glorious apparel is linked with the Lord's walk on earth) is the royal garment which a king would wear during a session of his tribunal. However, the verb,<sup>2</sup> translated here by "clothed with," is also found in the Greek text of the Old Testament in connection with the long priestly robe which the high priests used to wear according to Exodus 28. Thus the Lord Jesus is portrayed as the true King and Priest, and as such He is introduced as Judge, to establish and maintain God's rights. God's present chief interest is the Assembly, the Church of the Living God (1 Tim. 3:15), and Christ is seen here in its very centre.

Are we not impressed by His majesty? If we are struck by the greatness of the Lord Jesus, we will not fail to be overcomers. John is the prototype of an overcomer. Moved by the preeminence of the Lord Jesus, he had been kept from backsliding, despite the sad developments described in Revelation 2 and 3. The description of verses 13 to 16 is referred to again in the seven messages which the Lord dictates to John. If the saints would have been really affected by the features of Christ in Rev. 1:13-16, they would not have fallen into backsliding and sin, as in fact has happened because of their forsaking their first love. For us today it is, therefore, essential to know and appreciate the Lord Jesus in these attributes as the true King-Priest-Judge. When we see His greatness and fall down before Him, as John responded, we will be kept from many evils.

2. "Girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle" (Rev. 1:13). The second feature is His girdle. The golden girdle shows that He is here for God's glory and for maintaining God's righteousness. Instead of being girt like a bond-servant (Lk. 17:8) to serve His disciples as He did in John 13, the Lord is now girt about the breast with the golden girdle of judicial majesty. That He was girt about the breast indicates that His affections are restrained. This majestic appearance of the supreme Judge emphasises that everything in Him is in perfect harmony with God. When He is serving as Judge (the girdle in Scripture speaks of service), it is to maintain God's rights. The girdle is not around His loins as in humble service, but much higher, to demonstrate His dignity. After the judgments of the tribulation, the world to come will see Christ as follows: "And righteousness shall be the girdle of his reins, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins" (Isa. 11:5). This is another proof that Christ's moral perfections as seen in His walk will be displayed by His royal glories. For the believer today the girdle speaks of readiness to serve God in testimony (Lk. 12:35) and spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:14). How touching it is to realize that as we serve Him faithfully now, Christ will serve us in the glory with all the heavenly blessings (Lk. 12:37)!

3. and 4. "His head and hair white like white wool, as snow." These are the third and fourth features we consider. I count the hair separately since it is mentioned separately in Song of Songs 5:10-16, a passage that also enumerates ten features of Christ, there described as the Beloved. In Revelation, John, the beloved disciple, depicts his Beloved, the Lord Jesus, as the supreme Judge. His head was white, like white wool, calling to mind the Ancient of days. The head represents His intelligence, maturity, leadership, and supremacy. In God's Word, respect and wisdom are linked with white hair (Lev. 19:32; Prov. 16:31) and age or longevity (the Ancient of days) with victory (Rev. 6:2; 19:11), and purity (Rev. 7:13f). Lastly,

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<sup>1</sup> *Think of Joseph. As token of his reign as vice-regent over Egypt, Pharaoh gave him a special apparel of byssus. Similarly, our Lord Jesus has received all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18).*

<sup>2</sup> *This verb is used in connection with the Lord's receiving a mock-garment as King of the Jews (Mt. 27:31), with John the Baptist's garment (Mk. 1:6), and with Herod Agrippa's royal apparel (Acts 12:21). In the Septuagint we find it in the description of the Man clothed in linen (Dan. 10:5). For the Christian the importance of this verb is evident from the following references: the best robe (Lk. 15:22), power from on high (Lk. 24:49), the armour of light (Rom. 13:12), the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 13:14), Christ (Gal. 3:27), the new man (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10), the armour of God (Eph. 6:11, 14; 1 Th. 5:8), the features of Christ (Col. 3:12), the public appearance of the Church in glory together with Christ (Rev. 19:14).*

the white wool is compared with snow (cf. Ps. 147:16), a symbol of purity (Ps. 51:7; Isa. 1:18) and of heavenly glory (Mt. 28:3). We may associate all these thoughts with the Lord, who is the Ancient of days, with His wisdom, purity, victory, and His heavenly character.

5. "His eyes as a flame of fire." This fifth feature reminds me of 2 Chronicles 16:9, "For the eyes of Jehovah run to and fro through the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward Him." Before His intelligent discernment, searching and piercing eyes, nothing can be hidden; no one can deceive Him! In the history of the Church many things have been practised to deceive others, or to hide things from others, even from God. We can fool others or ourselves, but we cannot fool God.

Towards the end of Revelation (20:11-15), we meet the same Judge executing judgment. "And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled, and place was not found for them." Just before this event, the Lord is described coming from heaven in judgment, "His eyes are a flame of fire" (19:12). The fire symbolises God's holiness (Ex. 3:2-5; Isa. 6:1-7).

6. "His feet like fine brass, as burning in a furnace." We have seen the golden girdle in connection with God's glory and intrinsic righteousness. Though the brass also speaks of righteousness, it speaks of the way in which one answers to God's rights in actual practice. The Lord in His walk is always in tune with the high standards of God's glory, His holiness and righteousness. "As burning in a furnace" suggests the severity of this kind of testing. It also suggests that, after everything has been tested, nothing has been proven wrong.

The Lord's actions and walk while on earth are in perfect agreement with His knowledge; His walk corresponds with His words and, as in His life on earth, so now in His dealings as Judge (Jn. 8:25, 29). The brass was used for the construction of the altar of the tabernacle on which the sacrifices were exposed to the consuming fire (Ex. 27:1-8; Lev. 6:12). Personally, the Lord has always been in perfect harmony with the high and holy standards of God's righteousness, which He will maintain publicly when He functions as Judge. His "feet" refer to His walk — marked by stability — and to His ways — characterised by inflexible holiness.

What about our walk? With all these qualities of the Lord before us, we might ask ourselves: What about us? What about my practical purity, what about my maintaining God's rights and God's glory in my own life? What about my readiness to serve God? What about my insight, spiritual intelligence, discernment? Can other people easily hide things from me or do I discern this?

7. "His voice as the voice of many waters." No one can withstand this Judge; every mouth is stopped (Rom. 3:19). When He speaks, nobody can talk back; He has the last word, speaking with irresistible, majestic, power, like the rushing waters of a mighty waterfall. In other passages of Scripture we not only read of the voice of the Bridegroom; of the voice of the Shepherd, which the sheep hear and follow, but also of the voice of the Son of God, a voice so powerful that "all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice" (Jn. 5:37). This mighty voice as of a trumpet speaks with tremendous authority and irreversible power. That same voice called us through infinite grace, as did the Lord's voice with Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:4).

8. "And having in His right hand seven stars." This symbolises His power and authority in relation to the present testimony; the stars are the messengers (angels) of the seven assemblies or churches, representing the responsible side of the Church. The seven stars are in His hand, subordinate to His authority. Stars in Scripture speak of delegated power, of light shining for the Lord. They are under His control, in His hand, also sustained by Him. Being part of His testimony here on earth, what could we do without His support?

9. "Out of His mouth a sharp two-edged sword going forth." The Judge communicates in a way that cannot be misunderstood or ridiculed. The sharp two-edged sword stresses that action will be taken in perfect justice (Isa. 11:4; Rev. 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21). The great Judge discerns everything, speaks and nobody can answer back; He is the Lord who executes judgment. The Judge not only pronounces a righteous verdict, but executes the judgment as well. He will not delegate that to anyone else. The sword is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17) and of the Word of God (Heb. 4:12). Everything He says is according to God's revealed Word, spoken in the power of the Holy Spirit.

10. "His countenance as the sun shines in its power." And finally: His countenance. What a wonderful way to sum up His appearance. Did John know Him this way? Think of the transfiguration when — together with Peter and James, he saw this magnificent glory "as the sun shines in its power" (Mt. 17:2; Mk. 9:2; Lk. 9:29; 2 Pet. 1:16f). Here<sup>3</sup> we see the

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<sup>3</sup> Paul saw Christ in heaven (Acts 9:3), which event he described in Acts 26:13, saying that at midday a light surpassing the light of the sun shone around him from heaven. This suggests that the glory of the Lord Jesus in heaven, as it is visible for the believer today (Heb. 2:9), is greater than His glory that will be seen on earth when He will shine as the sun.

incomparable majesty of the Lord, that He is unapproachable, for who could get near to the sun? Yet as the sun He will bring blessing after judgment (Mal. 4:21).

### *The Right Perspective, the Right Response*

This vision John saw of Christ as Judge put everything in the right perspective. When he had seen this vision, "he fell at His feet as dead." Would the Lord not like to see a similar response in us? Daniel fell before Him when he saw the greatness of the Lord (Dan. 8:17; 10:9, 15-17). So did Ezekiel (Ez. 1:28; 3:23; 43:3; 44:4), Isaiah ("undone," Isa. 6:5), and Joshua (Josh. 5:14). The right response will bring much comfort, because the Lord identifies Himself with those who respond this way, putting His right hand upon the one who falls at His feet. What an encouragement this must have been for John. If we follow John's example, we will also be encouraged; the majestic One will make Himself available for us saying, "Fear not."

How does He introduce Himself to John? "I am the First and the Last." He presents Himself in the glory of His Person (God and Man in one Person), "and the living One," implying both His Deity and His humanity, but emphasising He is a Man, risen after He "became dead." It is as if the Lord was saying, "John, you have fallen as dead before My feet, but you don't have to die. I became dead. I took that place." In His death the Lord Jesus took upon Himself, under God's judgment at the cross, everything that He is going to judge publicly, as described in Revelation. Everything which He has to judge in the assemblies He has judicially taken away by His sacrifice and death. He experienced God's judgment and removed everything from before God that could not exist in His holy presence. Thus we see Him here in His greatness as Redeemer.

Then He says, "I am living to the ages of ages." In other words, "I have nothing to do with death anymore." Here we have the power of resurrection. The Lord Jesus, in doing His work of redemption whereby He took away everything that was against God, went as the sin-bearer into the sinner's death; yet He is also the risen One. In the power of resurrection life He can say, "I am living to the ages of ages." Therefore, God has given Him special authority, so He can continue "to have the keys (i.e., authority, Jn. 5:21-27; 1 Cor. 15:54-57; Heb. 2:14; Rev. 20:12-14) of death and of Hades." He confirms to John the glory of His dominion, Master of death and Hades. He went into the realm of death — "I became dead" — but He left it as the great Victor, the true Overcomer. As such He holds those keys with authority, power, dominion, and He has complete control. Because He is the Son of the Living God (Mt. 16:16), He had power to give the keys of the kingdom to Peter (Mt. 16:19). Having contemplated the vision John saw, we understand this even better. Let us fall down before Him and worship Him (Rev. 5:14)!

*The End*

### **The Gospel for Our Time**

#### **Acts 17:16-34**

—*M. Vogelsang*

How can we say that a passage of Scripture which describes incidents in the life of the apostle Paul speaks about the gospel in our time? I hope to show that our passage contains a few different pictures which show us basic aspects of the preaching of the gospel.

At that time, Athens was the seat of wisdom and intelligence; it was also filled with idolatry. These characteristics are easily applied to our western world. Today, an improvement in education and scientific progress is accompanied by an increase in modern idolatry in its various forms.

How did Paul respond to such things? We want to study his conduct in detail because it can serve as an example for us today. In Athens, "while Paul was waiting for them [Silas and Timotheus], his spirit was painfully excited in him seeing the city given up to idolatry."

How do we feel when we see the condition of the people around us? Are we cold and indifferent? What do we feel when we see that men follow their idols and have no time for God and when we realize that individuals are enslaved to these things?

The apostle had a heart full of love; that is, his spirit was stirred because of the idolatry, not because of the idolaters, as is God's. So should it be with the Christian. There should be an abhorrence of sin and at the same time a love for the sinner. "[Paul] reasoned therefore in the synagogue with the Jews, and those who worshipped." Looking for opportunities to talk to the people, to tell them the glad tidings of God, he met with two groups of people. First, he met the Jews and the proselytes in the synagogue — the regular place of meeting.

In this group we see individuals who today have a certain interest in religious questions. They are to be found in meetings held for the preaching of the word, whether in regular assembly meetings or in gospel meetings. Although hearts may be hard nowadays, and only little fruit may be seen, let us not give up our efforts to reach people in this way.

Then he met with those in the market place. The market was the place of business life and of intellectual dispute. Haven't we all experienced the impression, after having met certain individuals, whether at work, school, or university, that the Lord has brought them on our path?

The reactions of Paul's listeners were as varied as they are today. In verses 18 to 21, we can distinguish the following forms of attack:

1. Philosophical Baiting. *"But some also of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers attacked him."* In response to what we suppose was Paul's public testimony of his faith, the philosophers — attackers, adversaries — tried to bait Paul by initiating a controversial discussion. (This is the same in the following passages Mk. 8:11; Acts 6:9; 11:2!). The admonition of 2 Timothy 2:24 should always be heeded *"A bondman of the Lord ought not to contend, but be gentle towards all; apt to teach; forbearing; in meekness setting right those who oppose."* Our task is not useless disputations but a simple testimony to the truth.

2. Mockery. *And some said, What would this chatterer say?"* (v. 18). As we will see later on, this type of reaction will always be found wherever the gospel is preached.

3. A lack of understanding. *"He seems to be an announcer of foreign demons, because he announced the glad tidings of Jesus and the resurrection to them"* (v. 18). They assumed that Paul was an announcer of strange demons, because Paul appeared to be introducing them to two new gods, when he spoke about Jesus and Anastasis (the resurrection). Such a lack of understanding ought to be quickly cleared up.

4. Curiosity (vv. 20-21). *"For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears. We wish therefore to know what these things may mean. Now all the Athenians and the strangers sojourning there spent their time in nothing else than to tell and to hear the news."* Even in our days there is a tendency to be occupied with all kinds of new religious, and even occult, teachings.

In verses 22 to 31 we have the contents of Paul's preaching. We are not going to look into his message in detail, but simply mention that Paul tries to reach his hearers in their situation (v. 23). He calls for repentance (v. 30) and preaches judgment (v. 31). The reactions to Paul's message in the marketplace can be summarized under three headings. Such reactions will always be found when the gospel is preached.

1. Mockery (v. 32). It is clear that by now they had indeed understood that Paul was preaching the resurrection of the dead; therefore they mocked him.

2. Postponement of the decision. *"We will hear thee again also concerning this"* (v. 32). This is one of the most dangerous tactics of the devil. He tempts hearers to postpone the decision to come to Christ, hoping they will continue to do so until it is too late.

3. Acceptance by a saving faith. *"But some men joining themselves to him believed"* (v. 34). Even on this difficult mission field, Paul saw some fruit of his labours. We don't live in a day of great revival, but even today there are some who believe. How precious are those few souls!

*"Among whom also was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman by name Damaris."* The Saviour gathers His people from all social spheres of life. Let us be untiring in proclaiming the gospel. And if we encounter the same reactions as Paul did, then let us remember that perhaps there is among our listeners or conversational partners a Dionysius or a Damaris whose heart the Lord will open.

*The End*

## **The Prophecy of Zephaniah (5)**

—H. L. Rossier

## Chapter 3

### *The Lord as Judge in the Midst of Jerusalem*

"Woe to her that is rebellious and corrupted, to the oppressing city! She hearkened not to the voice; she received not correction; she confided not in Jehovah; she drew not near her God. Her princes in the midst of her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves, that leave nothing for the morning. Her prophets are vain-glorious, treacherous persons; her priests profane the sanctuary, they do violence to the law. The righteous Jehovah is in the midst of her: He doeth no wrong. Every morning doth He bring his judgment to light; it faileth not: but the unrighteous knoweth no shame. I have cut off nations: their battlements are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by; their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, so that there is no inhabitant. I said, Only fear Me, receive correction; so her dwelling shall not be cut off, howsoever I may punish her. But they rose early, they corrupted all their doings" (vv. 1-7).

Now the prophet turns from Nineveh to Jerusalem, from one capital to the other. Will their lot be the same? Wasn't there a great difference between them? "The Lord is in her midst" could be said of Jerusalem, but He has never been in the midst of Nineveh. Alas, this fact causes the guilt of the city of God to be all the greater! The "woe" was therefore pronounced over Jerusalem. We find it only once in Zephaniah. With the other prophets we have found these words already many times. We just have to recall the "hymn of the curse" in Habakkuk 2:6-20, which was entirely directed to the Chaldeans and their king, while there remained not a single "woe" for the just who lived by his faith. In Zephaniah it falls down as one single, unexpected bolt of lightning on the empty Jewish profession that bears the name of the Lord. The spiritual and moral condition of the inhabitants of the city Jerusalem, elect though it was above all others, was entirely in conflict with this profession. God wants truthfulness, reality. To bear His name and simultaneously to live like the nations calls for a not-to-be-arrested judgment over both Jews and Christians. "Woe to her that is *rebellious* and *corrupted*, to the *oppressing* city!" These are at all times the three characteristics of the people who are separated from God by sin. Everyone is able to observe these. There are, however, also characteristics that only God can recognize. What did Jerusalem — which had a direct relationship with God because of His dwelling in the midst of her — display to the searching eyes of the Lord? (We should remember that in Zephaniah God had not yet left His temple, as He had in Ezekiel. He still dwelled there, but how could He be there in any other capacity than as Judge? "The righteous Jehovah is in the midst of her," v. 5).

Well, He discovered in Jerusalem nothing but negative characteristics.

1. "She hearkened not to the voice," when God spoke to her through His law and prophets. How many times had the Lord spoken to her early or late: Give ear, pay attention! Jerusalem had remained deaf to His word, although it had a very keen ear to hear what the nations were telling her.
2. "She received not correction." How often had she remained indifferent after having been rebuked, admonished, punished, chastised?
3. "She confided not in Jehovah." She trusted men, casting herself into the arms of the Lord's worst enemies and turning her back on Him whom she ought to have considered to be her only Friend. She simply lacked faith, trust in God.
4. "She drew not near her God." Yet He was within her reach, nearby and easy to find. Yet, despite the many advantages afforded her by the Lord's dwelling in the midst of her, Jerusalem preferred to turn to idols, thereby denying her God.

### *A Holy God*

What else did the Lord discover among the leaders of the people? As in chapter 1:8, so also here the person of the king is not in question, for Josiah was acceptable in God's eyes and had received His promises (2 Chr. 34:27-28). But beside Josiah were *the princes*, the responsible governors of the people, who were "roaring lions." They displayed the characteristics of the devil, seeking whom they might devour. This characteristic to which the prophet referred will be seen in a much more pronounced measure in the last days, when the nation will have chosen the Antichrist as king. All *the judges* behaved themselves like evening wolves, who satiate themselves with their prey during the night, leaving no trace of it in the morning (Hab. 1:8).

Among *the prophets*, one found only boasting and faithlessness...

By their presence, *the priests* profaned the temple where God dwelled and did violence to the law by adapting it to their own ideas. In our days unfaithful Christendom adopts more and more this character. The spiritual leaders twist the Word



of God, sow doubt about the existence of God, and contradict the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Their presence and their words profane the house of God, "the Assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15).

All these people cannot, however, escape the fact that "the righteous Jehovah is in the midst of her." He is righteous and cannot permit sin to enter into His presence. Although it pleased Him to set His dwelling among men, yet He can in no way deny Himself. In verse 13 we will see that He will recognize as the fruit of His grace the remnant that He has raised up. But the world must learn that God is a holy God who doesn't do any wrong, and who, to the degree that evil manifests itself, brings judgment to light.

This will always be the case, in every dispensation, whether it concerns Israel or the Assembly. When His government is acknowledged, even if it is so only outwardly without the conscience being affected, this principle is displayed. And when, ultimately, during the Millennium, He takes up the reigns of an openly recognized government, this principle will remain the same: "Every morning will I destroy all the wicked of the land" (Ps. 101:8). In Ezekiel we read that as a result of the unrighteousness of the nation the Lord had to leave the temple. Now it could appear as if He "were sleeping," allowing the evil to take its course without paying any attention to it. But please let us not think so — even His hidden government bears the same characteristics. The prophets have given us sufficient evidence of that, so we will not come back to this.

"Every morning ... it faileth not" (v. 5). In chapter 2:1, Judah had been portrayed as a people without shame. A sinful person will always be ashamed when he appears before God. Adam was ashamed when he had sinned, but he hid himself. Since his conscience had not been touched, he thought he could mislead God. With a truly touched, awakened conscience one abhors himself, just as Job did. Then repentance — sadness for having grieved God — fills the heart, for repentance is the fruit of faith.

Yet, God takes account of every effort to approach, no matter how incomplete, that might bring the sinner to Him.

The unrighteous does not know this initial move which forms the very beginning. Even worse, he counts what ought to be to his shame as an honour (see Phil. 3:19). Do we not see every day how the people pride themselves in their immoral and shameful life, inviting others to follow their example? In chapter 1:16-17 God declared how He intended to deal with Israel in a future day. Now, in verse 6, God reminds them that in the past He had done with the nations exactly as He told them; He had "wasted" them. God used this example to make a last appeal to Jerusalem. "Only fear Me," He said to them, for "the fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 111:10). Was this asking too much? You "received not correction" (v. 2), now "receive correction" (v. 7). God did not desire anything else. "So her dwelling shall not be cut off," as it had been of the other nations. The punishment for the deeds of the other leaders had already been announced (see ch. 1:8-9, 12) and could not be recalled.

If only Jerusalem would take one step toward God, He would not punish her in the same manner as the nations. What has come of these appeals, of these urgent encouragements, which even at the last moment were directed to this rebellious people? The last word of this earnest care of the Lord toward Israel was: "But they rose early, they corrupted all their doings."

### *God's Wrath over the Nations*

*"Therefore wait ye for Me, saith Jehovah, until the day that I rise up to the prey" (v. 8).*

The people of Jerusalem rose early to commit all their evil deeds (v. 7). Therefore God's judgment would come upon these godless ones. Now He turns Himself to the nations. "Wait for Me," He says, "I will rise." How gladly would they have refused this, but willing or unwilling, they must obey this order and meet the Lord face to face. The unbelieving Jews, just as the nations, will also be forced to respond to this call. To them the Lord spoke when He in grace wanted to gather them: "Collect yourselves, and gather together" (ch. 2:1).

Since they were not willing to do this, they will be included in the general judgment that will come over all the habitable world: "*For My determination [or: judgment] is to assemble the nations, that I may gather the kingdoms together, to pour upon them Mine indignation, — all My fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy" (v. 8).*

The day of the Lord, so often mentioned in Zephaniah, will dawn: fury, fiery anger, fire of jealousy will be poured out over all, for God becomes jealous when He sees how the nations despise and dishonour His name (Nah. 1:2).

What will happen afterwards? A wonder of infinite grace and mercy! Out of the tribulation God will bring a remainder out of the nations and a remnant out of Israel to the haven of their desire! (Ps. 107:30).

*"For then will I turn to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of Jehovah, to serve Him with one consent" (v. 9).* The nations will be blessed. They will not from sheer necessity acknowledge the sovereignty of Christ, as it was presented to us in Zephaniah 2:11. No, it will be a submission from the heart. A remnant of the nations, "a great crowd which no one could number" will receive the Lord Jesus as Lord and King (Rev. 7). Then their unclean lips will be changed. That change will come about by the working of the Holy Spirit, as at Pentecost, when tongues of purifying fire descended upon the disciples (Acts 2). The apostle Peter linked this to the word of the prophet Joel (2:8): "And it shall be in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit *upon all flesh.*" In Zephaniah 3:9f we find the future realization of this word as it relates to the nations, whereas in the Acts the promise in Joel is applied to the Assembly. In a coming day, by the Holy Spirit who will cause their hearts to be of one accord, the nations will call upon the name of the Lord and be ready to serve Him with one accord.

### *Return to Palestine in Unbelief*

After the Lord has executed the judgment over the nations and over the Jews, "the shameless nation" that will share the same lot as all other nations, He will turn toward the remnant of this guilty nation. It will not remain in dispersion: *"From beyond the rivers of Cush My suppliants, the daughter of My dispersed, shall bring Mine oblation" (v. 10).*

This verse does not merely refer to the remnant of Judah, but to *the entire remnant of Israel* that will return to the promised land. When God's Spirit will work in the heart of the nations, "the daughter" of the dispersed (not *the dispersed ones*, but that which by faith has been born to them) will come to the Lord as a suppliant, bringing the remnant as an oblation to the city of the great King. They will come "from beyond the rivers of Cush," which probably refer to the Nile and the Euphrates (see also Gen. 10:6-10).

In Isaiah 18:1-2 we read that *before this moment*, the nation, which is here called the "shameless nation" (and not the remnant), will be brought back to its land by a mighty seafaring nation "from beyond the rivers of Cush."

This return to Palestine by the unbelieving Jews, with the help of the nations, will not bear fruit for God. They will not come *pleading* through the working of the Holy Spirit, but thinking that their national claims to the land have again become legitimate, and on this basis they enter the land. The result will be that, after some time, they will choose the Antichrist to be their king. Today's efforts to cause Israel to flourish will only result in this. Therefore the Lord will take His "rest" (Isa. 18:4) during these attempts to rebuild the oneness of the nation *without Him*. Only afterwards will "the present... of a people" (Isa. 18:7) be accepted by the Lord of hosts on mount Zion. When a oneness according to God's thoughts has been established, the spectacle of entering into the land will bear an entirely different character. Those from Israel who have escaped will announce among the nations the appearance of the glory of Christ in Zion. In this connection we read in Isaiah 66:20: "And they shall bring all your brethren out of all the nations as an oblation unto Jehovah, upon horses, and in chariots, and in covered wagons, and upon mules, and upon dromedaries, to My holy mountain, to Jerusalem, saith Jehovah, as the children of Israel bring an oblation in a clean vessel into the house of Jehovah."

### *Three Phases of Restoration*

*"In that day thou shalt not be ashamed for all thy doings wherein thou hast transgressed against Me; for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that exult in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of My holy mountain" (v. 11).*

When the remnant has been brought back to Jerusalem, this city wherein unrighteousness and pride dwelled, where Christ's opponent set up his throne, will no longer be ashamed over all her wicked deeds, for the Lord will remove from her midst the proud ones, and all who were haughty because of His holy mountain.

*"And I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of Jehovah" (v. 12).*

That will be the character of the remnant of Judah in Jerusalem. In verse 10 we find a description of the entire remnant of Israel. But there is a significant distinction between these two. The remnant of Judah, which is guilty of the death of the Messiah, will go through the Great Tribulation. The remnant of Israel will be chastised and purified during its return journey, just as earlier the people who had left Egypt were chastised in the wilderness. It will only return after Christ's appearance in glory. Of the former only a small part will remain in Jerusalem and suffer persecution, even becoming martyrs under the Antichrist. The greater part will flee over the borders of Israel's territory from the unprecedented persecution that is called "Jacob's trouble."

From this exile, during which it will be "hidden," it will return, just like those who earlier escaped from Babel, to receive the Messiah. Then this part of the "remnant of the house of Judah" will find pasture at the coasts of the Philistia and "in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down at night" (ch. 2:7). This will be the first phase of their restoration. The second phase will take place when the nations bring the entire remnant to the Lord as an oblation (ch. 3:10). The third phase — when the ultimate goal is reached forever — will be when the remnant "shall feed and lie down," enjoying undisturbed rest (v. 13).

*To be cont'd*