

Thoughts From the Inner Room

—K. Beekhuizen

Introduction

Today I would like to take you to two secret spots in the Scriptures where rather intimate conversations take place between God, as Bridegroom, and His bride. They deal with the "inner room" of our heart, our deepest inner being, that is often forbidden ground for others. It is the place where God reveals His love and life, where new birth has taken place and where we, Christians, beloved children of God, enjoy the love of our Bridegroom. He, our Beloved who has promised to come soon to get us for the marriage, admonishes us to be especially watchful in our inner room, and not to fall asleep, so that we must be chastised (Song 5:2,7).

I want to keep it simple and only make comments about various verses here and there.

Song of Songs 3:1

In the night we become quiet, reviewing the day and our relationship to our beloved Lord Jesus, our Bridegroom. That relationship is not always what it ought to be or could be, however. Often we are unfaithful. Our "first love" no longer functions as in the beginning when we went after Him "in the wilderness, in a land not sown" (Jer. 2:2). Although we know that we are "holiness unto the Lord" (v. 3), the Lord's "first fruit" over which He watches, we realize very much that our response to His love, faithfulness and patience is meager at its best. We see even greater evidence of His faithfulness at these times (Jn. 13:1-5). Our conscience tells us that we must return to "our first works" (Rev. 2:5). It is as if the Lord says: "I know very well that you cannot return to your first love by yourself, but at least do the first works that went with your first love."

We realize we need repentance; we need to return to the Source of light, love, and life! We are in need of a renewed "circumcision" of our hearts, removal of the selfish things that threaten to choke the seed of God's Word (Jer. 4:1,4). Too often we stray away from the Lord rather than seek Him in our "inner room" (Mt. 6:6; Song 3:4). Too often we bring the seed of God's Word to the wrong places and take too little account of "justice and righteousness" (Jer. 4:2-3; Mt. 6:5-6). Therefore we, at times, experience the same thing as the bride: "But I found Him not..."

Song of Songs 3:2

To still our sense of emptiness, we seek to lose ourselves in busy activities, meetings, revivals, and such. We realize that the Lord Jesus "loves our soul," as the bride expresses it, and we are therefore convinced of our eternal salvation because of His love and faithfulness. He died for sinners, people who are "black" but who are nevertheless also "comely" in His eyes (Song 1:5-6; Eph. 2:4-5). Despite the incomprehensible nature of this (agape) love of God, to which we can only respond with (phileo) love, we do not always experience the joy of this love. When we realize that our first love is languishing, we often arise and seek comfort in the wrong places, in the "camp," with the people in the street, in our neighbourhood, or Christian fellowship, with friends and relatives, or wherever! In general we don't find Him there!

At the outset of our life as a Christian, soon after our conversion, when the Lord in His grace gave us "guardians and caretakers," we found Him quickly at the places where the shepherds of the flock dwell, places where others had gone before us (Song 1:7-9; Gal. 4:1-2). But there comes a time when we seem to lose this type of caretakers and are directed to our own relationship with the Lord Jesus and responsibility as "heirs" (Lk. 14:25-33; Mk. 10:28). We long to go back to those moments of intimacy when He answered our prayers speedily, giving us what we thought we needed; but now we "no longer find Him so quickly" (Song 3:2).

Song of Songs 3:3

During our search, we meet the "watchmen" of "God's house" — not always a pleasant encounter! (Song 5:7). These are often "men of renown," as Moses called them (Num. 16:2), men who have a say among the children of God. Often,

however, they don't know how to guide us back to our first love. These shepherds watch over our souls, but are not always "wise" — they sometimes avoid or deny difficulties! (Isa. 62:6; Acts 20:28-29; Isa. 56:10-11). When the Object of our love has withdrawn Himself from our sight (of faith), we feel simultaneously empty, sinful, and sad, and experience a deep longing. We seek help from the "watchmen," but we don't find in them what our heart needs — understanding, warmth, consolation. The result is the sharp coolness of the night, darkness over our souls (Isa. 50:10). Sometimes we try to light strange fire, thinking that we have rekindled that feeling, but in the end we are again left to ourselves (v. 11). While this spiritual condition lasts, the "watchmen" will not only fail to point the way, but may even hurt us, so that the people to whom we turn for help discover our "nakedness" (Song 5:7; Ezek. 16:37; Jer. 37:11-15).

And yet, even this kind of trial can bring blessing! It causes us to seek the "inner room," in the stillness after the storm and the thunder, and it purifies our life of faith so that we see "no man save Jesus only." Afterward, we have to acknowledge that it was the hand of the Lord that guided us through this searching, directing the circumstances (Jer. 15:15-21; Ps. 119:67,71,75,79; 107:4-16).

Song of Songs 3:4

Again we long for a renewed encounter with our Bridegroom. Often we fail to realize that bearing our own cross works for good in this respect. Faith, especially young faith, needs testing and purifying, otherwise it will not become 24 karat gold but a gold or silver alloy that needs assaying and purifying in the "furnace of affliction" (Isa. 48:10). Jeremiah's feelings through this kind of experience resulted in his writing Lamentations (Lam. 3:21-33). Our faith, feelings, and thinking are often a mixture of "two kinds of material" — a mixture that God does not appreciate.

Often our "first love" looks more like "we have fallen in love with love"; a kind of love that resembles a raging mountain stream carrying a lot of "old garbage" along so that no life can be conceived in it. Then, having come into a more quiet, broader bed, here and there possibly a little "channeled," the dirt begins to sink to the bottom of our existence until some unfriendly person stirs it up. Meanwhile, there is some life in that life-giving water that streams from within us! That is what produces fruit for God, fruit early ripened! Meanwhile the "bathwater of God's Word" washes and cleanses the sometimes defiled soul's life, so that the moment of the marriage seem to come near (Eph. 4:14-32; 5:26; Ezek. 16:8-14). After all, God seeks our first love... or was it "our first works"? Works of love and faith belong to deeds of obedience and understanding of what God desires from us. Our first love is often occupied with that which we believe our Beloved will appreciate, but... it is often directed to our own I, despite the fact that its goal is the Bridegroom, who first loved when we were still sinners, and even enemies! (Rom. 5:8).

Therefore we must distance ourselves from the watchmen around us. Sometimes they are simply — often unintentionally — in the way, between our Bridegroom and ourselves! No, we don't avoid them entirely, but we seek a place where we can again see only the Lord Jesus and at His feet hear the delivering word that we are cleansed from our sins, so that the wounds of our souls can be healed. When we speak with the watchmen, we quickly feel hurt, damaged. But at the feet of Jesus, where we were "abandoned" by good friends, is a safe place for our soul. He finds our soul by far too precious to allow it to be lost! (Lk. 5:18-19; Jn. 10:28).

When finally — through all trials — we are again drawn close to Him, we don't want to let go of Him (Mt. 28:9). We then have a message for others, a message of love, which also contains a warning and call to careful activity (Song 3:5; Mt. 28:10).

From now on we firmly hold on to His promises and stay near Him, waiting for His voice which often leads us to quietness, reflection, and introspection before it urges us to action (Lk. 14:31; Acts 1:4).

Then, when we, in the inner room where our new birth has taken place, listen to the true, Eternal Life, we will have a fresh, new experience. You could call it a second conversion (cf. Lk. 22:32 KJV). There, brought into renewed communion with our loving Lord Jesus, we learn what it is to receive forgiveness and to give forgiveness (Mt. 5:23-25; 6:14-15; Mk. 11:25-26; Col. 3:12-15). There, in that inner room, drawn close to the heart of the Lord Jesus, we learn what it means to be set free from nasty feelings and bitterness, feelings we had drowned in that wildly streaming, uncontrolled current of our first love, but which His comforting and rest-giving nearness now laid bare in all their uncleanness (Zech. 3:3; Jn. 13:6-10). When we don't permit ourselves to be cleansed, but rather continue to walk around with bitter feelings, thereby "defiling many," it becomes alarmingly dark in and around us and our eye will be evil (Mt. 6:23,25; Heb. 12:11-15).

Only when we allow ourselves to be, comforted, and restored will our discernment, our first works and our consecration to Christ return again, more stable than ever! Then we see merely motes in the eye of others, but a beam in our own eye and will become very careful not to "point the finger" at the fault(s) of others (Mt. 7:2-6).

Song of Songs 3:5

When we have been strengthened in our inner room, we have sufficient energy to witness to others of our beloved Saviour. We have a message of salvation, forgiveness, and healing for the soul and sometimes for the body also. But we must handle God's love carefully. It is quickly saddened, and at times it seems as if it — insofar as our feelings are concerned — can be extinguished. Happily, that can never be! (Song 8:7).

Let us not talk about our experiences with Christ, but about His character. Often our "testimonies" are rather emotional. That is normally the case with a first love, as we have seen. But such testimonies do not go very deep. They are very superficial, depending on our feelings rather than on God's gracious, tender touch. When God's agape love fills us, we begin to testify of the Person of whom God's Word says: "It is the King in His beauty," a King who desires to dwell in a "broken and humble spirit"! (Isa. 33:17; 57:15). Then we no longer speak about the old life, less about our "experiences of faith," but more about "Him whom my soul loves," who He is, from head to feet (Song 5:9-16).

Song of Songs 5:8-16

Only when we are so filled with His love can the world observe that we have been changed by Him from quick-tempered, stubborn, proud "Peters," into people who can acknowledge guilt, who consider others to be higher than themselves (2 Pet. 3:13-15; 1 Pet. 5:5-6).

Then we will become aware of "the little foxes that spoil the vineyard" (Song 2:15). It is often those small irritations which the Lord calls "the world of offences," that mar our peace and bring us into the darkness of the night! (Mt. 18:7). But when, in answer to the prayer of the shepherds, the Lord Jesus can fill our inner room with Himself, His Spirit will bring rest to our spirit. Joy and peace take the place of restless searching for love and attention. When men prove to be "poor comforters," when friends leave you, deny you, or even betray you, God's love remains strong. Jesus desires to dwell as Lord in our inner room with His Word. From there, then, come the good works (Col. 3:12-17; Eph. 3:17; Phil. 2:13). Then His good works become automatically visible, of which not we ourselves but others will testify. (Eph. 2:10; 1 Tim. 5:25; 2 Cor. 10:18; 1 Th. 1:2-10).

May the Lord Jesus find us sorrowing, and repenting about the imperfections of our first works. If so, the candlestick of our local fellowship in which God has placed us will remain and our prayers will be answered (Rev. 2:5).

The Church

—A. Eysink

May I share a few thoughts with you relating to the Church (the Assembly) which have become precious to my own heart? As a boy, I learned several of these thoughts; then, as a young man, I had to repeat the lessons I was taught earlier. Sure, I knew all these things with my intellect, but they weren't precious to my heart. It was at a time of testing that the question came to me: If the Assembly is so precious to God's heart, how precious is the Assembly to mine? To begin, let us read two expressions: "The Assembly of God, which He has purchased with the blood of His Own" (Acts 20:28); and: "Christ also loved the Assembly, and has delivered Himself up for it" (Eph. 5:25).

The Word calls the Assembly "the Assembly of God." This shows us that the Assembly belongs neither to me nor to you. We each are a part of it, as members of that one body, according to 1 Corinthians 12:12. But once again, the Assembly does not belong to us. The words: "The Assembly... which He has purchased with the blood of His Own" shows us the price. How precious must the Assembly be to God's heart! How great must the Lord's love for the Assembly be that He gave Himself for it! If we see in the Scriptures how God appreciates the Assembly and how the Lord loved and still loves the Assembly, the question arises, How do I appreciate the Assembly, what is its worth for my heart?

Is it not true that here on earth we can never fathom the depth of God's appreciation for His Assembly nor the depth of Christ's love for the Assembly? But there is more. We are responsible for "the Assembly or the Church of God," because He gave us the truth of "His Assembly" and we are responsible to maintain the Assembly as God meant it to be, as shown us in His precious Word.

In the Scriptures we have several pictures of the Assembly:

1. "[God] has put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Assembly, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23).
2. "Ye are... built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the corner-stone" (Eph. 2:19-20).
3. "Let us rejoice and exult, and give Him glory; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and pure; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints. And he says to me, Write, Blessed are they who are called to the supper of the marriage of the Lamb. And he says to me, These are the true words of God" (Rev.19:7-9).
4. "And I have other sheep which are not of this fold: those also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one flock, one Shepherd" (Jn. 10:16).
5. "The kingdom of the heavens is like a treasure hid in the field, which a man having found has hid, and for the joy of it goes and sells all whatever he has, and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls; and having found one pearl of great value, he went and sold all whatever he had and bought it" (Mt. 13:44-46).

Below is a key phrase for each picture:

Christ the Head: Inseparable unity.

The foundation of the apostles: Building the house of God.

The Lamb's wife: Submission.

One fold, one Shepherd: Following

The treasure hidden in a field: Preciousness

One pearl of great value: Beauty.

1. Christ the Head: Inseparable unity

One could wonder: Is it possible for the body to act by itself? I have frequently asked this question, and people have answered: No... impossible! But let's consider Colossians 2:18-19: "Let no one fraudulently deprive you of your prize, doing his own will in humility and worship of angels, entering into things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by the mind of his flesh, and not holding fast the Head."

Let us ponder these last words for a moment: "Not holding fast the Head." Now, what answer should we give to that question: Is it possible for the body to act by itself? Yes it is possible! Many beloved children of God are in a clerical system, not holding the Head, and going so far as to replace the Lord Jesus as Head of the Assembly. For example: the Queen of England is also the head of the Church of England; the Pope is the head of the Church of Rome. But these things should not allow us to forget about ourselves! We sometimes give such an important position to one or more brothers that we obey their word, forgetting to check if it really comes from the Lord Jesus.

The body depends on the Head. In other words, the Assembly depends on the Lord Jesus. How is this practically realized in life of the local assembly? Is it not through dependent prayer and reading and obeying the Scriptures?

Allow me to give as example the very first believers. I am well aware that the Assembly was not yet formed then, but the characteristics of these believers continue to be seen in the later chapters of Acts. In Acts 1 we read that Judas had to be replaced. How did these believers know that? Was it by saying to each other, "We have been twelve disciples and the number eleven is such a strange number, we better change that"? No, way! These brethren based their action upon the Scriptures. We read in Acts 1:20: "For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his homestead become desolate, and let there be no dweller in it; and, Let another take his overseership" (Ps. 109:8). Then we find that they choose two persons: "And they appointed two, Joseph, who was called Barsabas, who had been surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou Lord, knower of the hearts of all, shew which one of these two Thou hast chosen" (vv. 23-24). Again I would like to emphasize two aspects:

1. The early believers based their actions on the Word of God and
2. they acknowledged the Lord as the One who knows the hearts.

This leads us to three questions:

Do we base our thinking on the Word?

Do we acknowledge the Lord as the One who knows the hearts?

Do we leave the final decision to Him?

2. *The Foundation: Building the House of God*

The apostle uses the picture of a house to tell us another truth. We read in 1 Timothy 3:15: "But if I delay, in order that thou mayest know how one ought to conduct oneself in God's house, which is the Assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth." By means of this expression "God's house" he tells us how to behave ourselves in the house of God. Again a simple example. In my house my rules are valid — no other man's rules, but my rules. In God's house — and the local assembly is supposed to be an expression of God's house — God's rules are valid and we should behave according to these rules. Psalm 93:5 says: "Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh Thy house, O Jehovah, for ever." Holiness has two sides: The first side is that I fellowship with the Lord. The second side is that I separate from evil, the things of this world.

What we read about the first believers in Antioch (Acts 11:26) is impressive: When Barnabas had found Saul, "he brought him to Antioch. And so it was with them that for a whole year they were gathered together in the assembly and taught a large crowd: and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." "The disciples were... called Christians." Note, these people were called "Christians" by others. They did not say, as many do today: "I am a Christian." You and I better show it instead of saying it. Others labeled the disciples "Christians." They were named after Christ, their Lord and Saviour. Christ, the Holy One! When the people of Antioch looked at these believers, they could see *Christ*. The Christians themselves showed to others what the Lord said in John 17:16: "They are not of the world, as I am not of the world."

This raises another set of questions:

Do I fellowship with the Lord every day?

Can others see Christ in *me*?

How is *my* way of thinking?

3. *The Lamb's Wife: Submission*

This refers to the relation between husband and wife. First we read in 1 Corinthians 11:3: "I wish you to know that the Christ is the head of every man, but woman's head is the man, and the Christ's head God." Notice this order in God's creation as it is presented in the Scriptures. In spite of today's emancipation, this order should be accepted and maintained! Secondly, we read in Ephesians 5:22: "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord." And in the third place, we read in 1 Corinthians 7:34: "But she that has married cares... how she shall please her husband."

The local assembly should express the characteristics of "the Lamb's wife." She should recognize His authority, she should be submitted to the Lord. Let me simply apply 1 Corinthians 7 as follows: the local assembly should care how she may please the Lord, who is here called "the Lamb."

One may say, "Authority, submission, and pleasing another" are no longer valid ideas in our days. Even amongst ourselves worldly ideas like: "I will decide that for myself!" and: "I believe my ideas are best; I feel just fine with them, thank you!" have been adopted. But beware! The Assembly is "the Lamb's wife." Let us take another look and see who He is.

Isaiah 53:7 says: "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter." He willingly went there. He acknowledged the authority of the Father. In John 8:29 He says: "I do always the things that are pleasing to Him." Do these words from the Scriptures not show that the Lord acknowledged the authority of the Father, His submission to Him, and His desire to please Him alone? Should it not impress us that the Lord Jesus went willingly to the cross, that in obedience He did all things to please the Father, and that He did all these things for us because He loved us so much? Would we, as a local assembly that wants to be an expression of the Lamb's wife, not be willing to recognize His authority, to submit ourselves to the One who loved and loves us so dearly? Are we not willing to please Him? Does He not deserve that?

Another thought arises. What is actually the condition of our hearts? Are they beating solely for the Lord Jesus, or do we have divided hearts? I think of the bride in the Song of Songs 5:2: "I slept, but my heart was awake. The voice of my

beloved!" Is this not a strange attitude for a bride? She should not have slept. She was not entirely devoted to Him. How sad! Let us look at another example in Genesis 24:65: "She had said to the servant, Who is the man that is walking in the fields to meet us? And the servant said, That is my master! Then she took the veil, and covered herself." What does this veil mean? By her act she was saying, I am here only for you, my husband, not for others!"

4. One Fold, one Shepherd: Following

John 10:27 says: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." That is the character of the sheep: They listen to the Good Shepherd. They hear Him, and there is a response to what He says! When we meet as the expression of the Assembly, how do we hear? Luke 8:18 says: "Take heed therefore how ye hear." This warning is also for us. How do we hear? Is there a response? How often have we been together as an assembly and we only heard a brother preaching? We didn't hear the Lord? There is a French hymn that says: "It's the voice of a Friend." Look who the Shepherd is! No one can take better care of us than He. No one can be compared to Him. When we look at who He is, should it be difficult to follow Him? David knew the LORD as his Shepherd, and he surrendered himself to Him in order to be led by Him. As a result we have this Psalm of David.

1 Jehovah is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou hast anointed my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6 Surely, goodness and loving-kindness shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of Jehovah for the length of the days (Ps. 23).

May I ask another set of questions?

Do I, do *we*, hear His voice?

Do I, do *we*, follow the Lord?

Do I, do *we*, surrender completely to Him?

5. Treasure Hidden in the Field: Preciousness

Let us read Matthew 13:44 again. "The kingdom of the heavens is like a treasure hid in the field, which a man having found has hid, and for the joy of it goes and sells all whatever he has, and buys that field." Isn't the Assembly seen here as a treasure? At the time the Lord spoke these words, the Assembly did not yet exist. It was hidden in the field. In Acts 2 we find the beginning of the Assembly. Between Matthew 13 and Acts 2 the Lord Jesus "goes and sells all He has." We see Him also "buying" the field in order to possess the treasure: the Assembly. He sold all He had. He gave His life, His blood, His all! (I see, dear readers, my vocabulary is not sufficient to write down what is in my heart. Perhaps those whose mother tongue is English are a bit more capable to do so. But no one among us will be able to express fully the Assembly's value to the Lord's heart.)

The joy of knowing about that hidden treasure caused Him to come down to earth as a little baby.

The joy of knowing about that treasure caused Him to endure 33 years here on earth.

The joy of knowing about that hidden treasure caused Him to willingly suffer on the cross.

The joy of knowing about that treasure caused Him to accept bearing of our sins in His own body on the tree (1 Pet. 2:24).

The joy of knowing about that treasure caused Him to allow Himself to be made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21).

The joy of knowing about that hidden treasure caused Him to accept being made a curse for us: for it is written, "Cursed is every one hanged upon a tree" (Gal. 3:13).

The joy of knowing about that hidden treasure caused Him to endure to be forsaken by a Holy God (Mk. 15:34).

The joy of knowing about that hidden treasure caused Him to willingly die for it (Jn. 19:30,33).

Hebrews 12:2 says: "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."

That leads to further questions:

How precious is the Lord Jesus to *my* heart, is He *my* All?

What appreciation do *I* have for the Assembly, knowing that the Lord gave His life for it?

6. *One Pearl of Great Value: Beauty.*

"Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls; and having found one pearl of great value, he went and sold all whatever he had and bought it" (Mt. 13:45-46). So is the Lord Jesus. He invested His energy in seeking. And He found one pearl, a pearl of great value! It's a beauty in His eyes. One pearl: the Assembly, formed by all born-again believers: a unity! The Assembly is, like a pearl, the wonderful result of suffering.

In conclusion: When the Lord Jesus considers the Assembly to be His Beauty, how do we from our side consider the Lord? Do we say, as the bride in the Song of Songs: "He is altogether lovely"!??

The Prophecy of Haggai

—H.L. Rosier

Introduction

Past History

The circumstances giving rise to the prophecy of Haggai lead us back to the last events recorded in the Old Testament. When Israel's decline had reached its lowest point, God had declared this people to be "Lo-Ammi" ("Not My People"). This had already been announced by Hosea, who prophesied in the days of Uzziah and Hezekiah (Hos. 1:9). Long afterward the ten tribes were taken into captivity, and years later also Judah and Benjamin. The enemy laid Jerusalem in ruins and destroyed the temple. From that moment on, there no longer existed *in the eyes of men* a house of the Lord on earth.

At the end of the seventy-year captivity announced by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 25:11-12; Dan. 9:2), the Lord raised up Cyrus to allow the people to return to Jerusalem. As a result of the king's call, a remnant of Judah and Benjamin under the direction of Zerubbabel and Joshua departed for Jerusalem in 536 BC to "*build the house of the Lord*" (Ezra 1:2-3).

In the seventh month, this remnant again set up the altar on its base and offered burnt offerings on it, thereby restoring publicly the great *testimony of their relationship with God* (Ezra 3:2-3).

In the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem they laid the foundation of the temple while displaying joy, yet mixed with weeping. The enemies of Judah offered to help with the work. The leaders, however, refused to work together with them, but the rest of the people were afraid and left off building. This disruption lasted sixteen years, six years of which were solely for fear of the opposition. The ten remaining years the work rested because Ahasuerus had commanded that they could no longer work on the rebuilding. This prohibition must be seen as a chastening of God over the remnant due to their lack of faith.

In the second year of the reign of Darius, the king of Persia, the Lord raised up the prophets Haggai and Zachariah. Their admonitions and encouragements had a beneficial effect. Then all changed: the people no longer allowed themselves to be disturbed by the governors and officers, or by their opposition. They resumed the work, and after four years the large building was completed.

During that time the work prospered, not as result of the command of Darius, but "through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zachariah... They built and completed it according to the commandment of the God of Israel," (Ezra 6:14) from whom the decisions of the authorities who ruled over them emanated.

When in 515 BC the house was finished, the people celebrated the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread with joy (Ezra 6:19-22).

With this, the first part of the Book of Ezra, which relates to the prophecy of Haggai, ends. It contains therefore three important facts:

First, the building of the altar;

Second, the laying of the foundation of the temple, and
Third, the rebuilding and completion of the house of the Lord.

Application for Our Time

This episode from Israel's history has great significance for us as well. "All these things happened to them as types, and have been written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (1 Cor. 10:11). The circumstances of the earthly people (Israel) can be compared with those of the heavenly people (the Assembly). There is, however, this distinction: the actual events in Israel's history contain a spiritual lesson for us, Christians.

Israel's history has a great similarity to that of the Assembly. As Israel, so has the Assembly been formed by God on the basis of responsibility. But as greatly as Israel, the Assembly has fallen into complete ruin, because man has introduced wrong and corruptive principles. Where do we find Israel today? Where is the Assembly of God? True, *in God's eyes* it continues to exist in its unity, and so it is for the eye of faith. Just as certain will He, who is her Architect and Bridegroom, one day present her to Himself glorious. But left to her own responsibility she is in the eyes of men just a poor ruinous heap.¹

Now that the ruin of the Assembly has become so great, God calls in our days, just as in those of Ezra, a weak remnant to rebuild His house. For a Jew, the house of God was the temple in which He was pleased to cause His name to dwell. For the Christian, the Assembly is a spiritual temple built with living stones and meant to be a "habitation of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22).

We need to understand well that it was not the purpose of the Jewish remnant to build a *second* house. Neither is it the calling or charge of the Christian remnant to establish a *new* assembly. On this point many have erred. Through ignorance of God's thoughts and by satisfying the longings of the flesh, they have sought to build a new house. Their work only adds another ruin to those already set up. The Holy Spirit wishes us to be on our guard against such foolishness. In the eyes of God, the Assembly is and remains one, just as there was for Him only one temple in Israel. There will never be a second one. Regarding the temple we find therefore expressions such as they "*began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem*" (Ezra 5:2). Although destroyed, God still saw it as His house. We "*build the house that was built these many years ago*" (Ezra 5:11). The new house was the same as the old one. The "king of Babylon . . . *destroyed this house . . . king Cyrus gave orders to build this house of God*" (Ezra 5:12-13). The rebuilt house was the same as the destroyed one. And when Haggai spoke about the future, he said as the mouthpiece of the Lord, "I will fill *this house* with glory," and: "*The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former*" (Hag. 2:7,9). The prophet did not say, "The glory of this latter house."² For though the glory is different, it remains always the same house in God's eyes and the eyes of faith. Indeed there were in days past several temples: the temple of Solomon, that of Zerubbabel, and that of Herod.

In the future there will be a temple in which the antichrist will dominate and, finally, the temple which will be built during the Millennium (according to Ezekiel). God, however, does not count five temples but only one.

The building of God's house for us, therefore, is not the establishing a new building, but bringing again to light in days of decline the house of God the way *He* established it. As in the past, so today it is the task of all who, taught by the Holy Spirit, are encouraged to restore the truth of the Assembly in the midst of today's declension. They must show a practical testimony of what the Assembly ought to be. Such a restoration is not possible without feelings of deep sadness and humility. The joy of those few from Israel who saw the foundation of the house that was to be rebuilt was mingled with bitter tears when they saw the poor result of that work compared to the richness and perfection of the first edifice (Ezra 3:11-13).

The Altar and the Lord's Table

Those who do not know what the Assembly really is believe that its restoration took place in the Middle Ages, during the Reformation, and that the "protestant church" is the manifestation of it. But this idea is plainly wrong. The characteristic of the Reformation was that through the Word of God the bands were broken wherewith Satan had tried to bind the people. That Word brought the great truths of personal salvation to light once more. For this we must be very thankful.

¹ Here we speak solely of the Assembly as the house of God, of which the building has been entrusted to the responsibility of man. The Word of God sees the Assembly from other viewpoints also, not identified in this article.

² The KJV, NKJV, and the NIV translations all have this sense. The NASB, like the New Translation, has: "The latter glory of this house."

On the other hand, by their forming of many churches the reformers proved that they were unfamiliar with the truths unfolded in God's Word regarding the Assembly. In fact, by their practices they denied what the Assembly is in the eye of God.

The first deed of the remnant of Israel, as we saw already in the book of Ezra, was reestablishing and meeting around the altar. In our day, few of the witnesses God has raised up to "rebuild" His house gather at the Lord's table. This meeting of believers seems to be of little significance to Christendom, but to God it is everything.

At the Lord's table His redeemed ones proclaim that they possess a living relationship with God based on the work of Christ. At this table there is only place for those who through faith in Christ have part in His salvation. Because of this, every unbeliever is firmly refused. There is thereby a separation from the world to bring those who believe together in unity. The Lord's table is the symbol of this unity (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

A feeble remnant of believers announces there the oneness of the body of Christ. Their number is immaterial, for the issue is the rebuilt altar.

There are doubtless many believers who celebrate the Lord's Supper in all sincerity in remembrance of Christ's death. Sadly, they don't know that another characteristic of the Lord's Supper is that it separates the children of God from the world and that it is the visible sign of the oneness of the body of Christ. This truth is accentuated in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22.

Over against the enemy the altar stood as a safe place for the small remnant of the captivity. "They set the altar on its base; for fear was upon them *because* of the people of the countries" (Ezra 3:3).

The gathering of God's children around the visible token of the oneness of the Assembly cannot please Satan. The enemy always seeks (and often all too successfully) to destroy [the expression of] this oneness by scattering the sheep. Nevertheless, he is unable to do anything against them as long as the saints maintain the unity. The blessings connected with the gathering of believers at the Lord's table are inevitably experienced. There, new insight will accompany the obedience to God's Word, when souls return to the apostles' doctrine and to Christ, the only foundation on which [the local expression of] the assembly can be built.

When Christ is acknowledged as the only Center around which we gather, it does not take long for difficulties to present themselves. The proof of this is the experiences of the small remnant of Israel. "We would build with you," said the opponent of Judah and Benjamin. If those two tribes had assented to this, it would have meant the denial of the oneness of God's people, which, through the altar and the foundation of the temple, had been brought to light once more. God did not allow these efforts to succeed. The blessing which the faithful ones had found in their oneness as the people of God caused them to reject with indignation all action in common with the world: "Ye have nothing to do with us to build a house to our God, but *we alone* will build to Jehovah the God of Israel" (Ezra 4:3).

The enemy's ploy had been prevented, but he did not give up. He sought to scare them, arouse opposition, and after that persecute the faithful ones. Through various means, their hands became weak. In the end Israel lost interest in building and left the work. — How much unfaithfulness has presented itself also in our day! — Immediately, Haggai interfered by showing the remnant the causes that, after a firm and joyful start, led to their failure to continue the work that God had entrusted to them. May we find in the prophecy of Haggai the admonition and encouragement that we need so greatly today.

To be cont'd

All Have Turned Away From Me

—J. van Dijk

Introduction

In this treatise we would like to consider Paul's comment to Timothy: "Thou knowest this, that all who are in Asia, of whom is Phygellus [little fugitive] and Hermogenes, have turned away from me" (2 Tim. 1:15). Questions have been raised regarding the significance of these words. What are we to understand by them?

Possible Meanings

We know that Paul was imprisoned in Rome for the second time when he wrote these words. This time, his condition was far more precarious than at first (2 Tim. 1:3,12,16-18). It does not need much imagination to realize that many would have felt rather unsafe to be known as associates of a prisoner for whom very little hope was left of escaping an unjust sentence (2:9-10), let alone of ever getting out of prison (3:12; 4:6).

What would you and I have done under such circumstances? There was little one could do for Paul. To stay around would have involved considerable risk. Home was in far-away Asia Minor. Since nothing could be done anyway, why stay around? (4:16). It is easy for us to say from the comfort of one's home that the brothers should have stayed with Paul out of love and a desire to be of comfort to him. It is doubtful, though, that many of us would have mustered the courage and stamina to do so. And so Paul writes: All who are in Asia... have turned away from me. That is one possible explanation for those words.

Some, however, consider these words to mean that all in Asia had turned their back on Paul's teaching, that the turning away was not so much a personal matter as an essentially abstract one. Perhaps there is reason for this explanation. It needs to be noted that Paul did not say: "All those *from* Asia have turned away from me." That would have inferred that the persons he spoke about were from Asia, but were not necessarily in Asia at the time of Paul's writing. He said, however, "All those *in* Asia." This gives the impression that the persons he referred to were in Asia at the time of Paul's writing. That would therefore preclude a literal, physical abandoning of him such as we have considered in the first explanation. Moreover, the New Translation reads: "Have turned away from me." This phrase, too, seems to have a significance greater than a physical abandoning of the imprisoned apostle, as also the context appears to infer (vv. 12-14).

An Open Division?

All in all, there is much to be said for the explanation that these words involved not merely a physical abandoning of the apostle, but indeed also a turning away from the things he had taught, especially on the subject of the Assembly and its functioning. Some who adhere to this thought go on to teach that from that time onward there was open division in the Church. According to them, one faction, presumably largely outside of Asia Minor, was going on with Paul, the other in Asia Minor had separated themselves and was no longer walking with their brethren. Let us consider whether such a conclusion is scripturally tenable.

As soon as we are faced with a division among God's people, we should make sure that we ourselves are walking with those who are continuing on with the Lord, i.e., where the Lord can continue to give the confidence that He is in the midst according to His word in Matthew 18:20. So it would be in this supposed division. We must ask ourselves: Which of these two factions would have had the Lord's approval?

A Scriptural Test

To find an answer to this question, let us look at chapters 2 and 3 of the Revelation, written by the divine inspiration by John, the last surviving apostle, some thirty years later. There we read about the Lord walking in the midst of the seven candlesticks, by definition, the assemblies in Asia Minor. To our surprise, there He is present among the very assemblies that supposedly had initiated open division between themselves and those believers walking with Paul. We observe that God's Word speaks of **the seven churches which are in Asia** (vv. 4, 11). This assures us that the letters were not just meant for a select group of churches in Asia that somehow were not covered by Paul's "*all in Asia*," for then the article *the* would have been omitted. No, the text gives us every reason to believe that the letters were to be sent to all seven churches in Asia. To be sure, in the letters that the Lord addresses to them, He has to point out many things of which He cannot approve. Yet, there is also much that he commends. What is most amazing that these letters, written long after Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, do not contain any mention of the division which some insist had taken place. Even more amazingly, the Lord finds two assemblies in Asia whom He has not to reprimand in any way. Yet, they too belong to the "all in Asia."

Having made the above observations, we must face some serious questions. Do Paul's words in 2 Timothy really convey the idea of an actual open division? If the answer is "Yes", we are bound to conclude that the Lord in Revelation by addressing them is showing His general approval of the assemblies in Asia rather than of those assemblies with whom they were no longer walking. The logical result thus would be that the Lord would be approving the move away from Paul. So, if the answer to our question is "Yes", we do not see how anyone could in any reasonable way come to any other conclusion.

No Open Division!

In view of the above observations, it should not surprise anyone that our answer to the question "Does 2 Timothy indicate an open division?" is a very definite "No". The idea that Paul's words signify an open division within the Church of those days is entirely untenable. Nowhere in God's Word nor in Church history is there any evidence that such a division occurred at that time. We therefore conclude that, although there was evidently a great degree of worldliness present in Paul's days, as is evident from his comment in Philippians 3:18 and the Lord's admonitions in the letters in Revelation 2 and 3, things had not come to the point of open division. Paul's remark that "all had turned away from him" may very well mean more than a mere physical abandonment, but it definitely does not refer to the onset of open division.

Consequences

These considerations are important for the correct understanding of the remainder of 2 Timothy. In expounding 2 Timothy 2 it makes a great difference if one begins reading that chapter with the unfounded assumption that an open division had taken place at that time. We felt compelled to look into this, since the idea propounded by some of an open division in 2 Timothy 2 has led to some other wrong conclusions also. Later we may well look into further ramifications of this idea.

May the Lord help us to rightly divide the Word of Truth.