

Remember Jesus Christ Raised From Among The Dead (5) **(Some thoughts on 2 Timothy 2)**

—A. E. Bouter

In days of decline and departure from the truth, when the Church has failed to live up to its testimony and to meet its responsibilities, there remain divine resources available for the faithful. God takes care to maintain His testimony. This is suggested in the seven different aspects of "the man of God" in 2 Timothy 2. These seven aspects give, as it were, a moral succession seen only in the Christian who maintains a living link with his Lord (2:8), the perfect Model. After admonishing Timothy to be a faithful child, a good soldier, an obedient athlete, and a patiently labouring farmer, Paul now instructs him — and in him the faithful today — to be a diligent workman (2:15).

A Workman

Before addressing him as a workman, however, Paul tells Timothy to listen carefully (2:7) and to absorb the truth God had given through the apostles (1 John 4:6). Although Paul stresses Christ's Lordship in this epistle, he presents the greatness of His Person in chapter 2:8. I think this verse is a key for the understanding of 2 Timothy. Paul exhorts Timothy and us to remember Christ, to keep Him constantly before our eyes (cf. Eph. 1:18). This is the means by which the truth is to find a living expression in those who enjoy a relationship of life and immortality with the Living One in the glory. The basis of this relationship is Christ's death and resurrection (1:10; 2:8), according to God's promise of eternal life (1:1). Thanks, praise, and worship be to God!

The path to follow

Amidst developing evil (2:16f), which Paul through the Spirit of God had foreseen (Acts 20; cf. Mt. 13; 1 Tim. 4; 2 Pet. 2; Jude; 1 Jn. 2:18-27; Rev. 2-3), the apostle delineates a path of separation from evil for Timothy to follow:

1. Do not have disputes of words¹ (2:14);
2. Shun profane, vain babblings (2:16);
3. Withdraw from iniquity (2:19);
4. Purify yourself from defiled vessels in the great house (2:21);
5. Flee youthful lusts (2:22);
6. Avoid foolish and senseless questionings (2:23);
7. Turn away from lovers of self, who have a form of piety but deny its power (3:5).

Paul balances these negative points with the positive instructions for the workman (2:15), the vessel fit for the Master's use (2:21f) and the bondman of the Lord (2:24-26), which form an important part of our further studies.

Strive diligently

Now let us take a closer look at the points concerning the workman. As a workman Timothy had to be diligent to present himself approved to God. In 4:9 and 21 the same Greek word is translated by *use diligence*, suggesting eagerness, earnest zeal on the part of Timothy. The same verb is used in:

"Remember the poor, which same thing also I was diligent to do" (Gal. 2:10);

"Using diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3);

¹ Actually Timothy had to warn others who were guilty of these things: probably the Judaizing teachers (1 Tim. 1:3f; 4:7). However, later Timothy himself is instructed not to contend (2:24).

"We have used more abundant diligence to see your face" (1 Th. 2:17);

"Use diligence to come to me" (Ti. 3:12);

"Using all diligence" (2 Pet. 1:10 also :15; 3:14).²

These verses show the need for spiritual zeal. They also presuppose right motives for service and thus give us a good understanding of Paul's intent when he said "strive diligently."

To present thyself to God

The Greek verb *to present* is used in 4:17, "But the Lord *stood with* me"; and in Acts 27:23, "For an *angel... stood by* me." In 2 Timothy 2:15 it is the other way around. Because of his rightful dealings with the Word of Truth, Timothy could present himself approved to God, placing himself in God's presence, at His side. The aim of Paul's ministry is to present redeemed ones before God, either in heaven or on earth, having His approval as a seal upon them. He admonishes us, "Present your bodies" (Rom. 12:1) and, "Yield (present) yourselves to God" (Rom. 6:13,19); he wants to "present [you] a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2) and "present every man perfect in Christ" (Col. 1:28). He also tells us that Christ will "present you holy and unblameable and irreproachable before [God]" (Col. 1:22), and "present the assembly to Himself glorious" (Eph. 5:27). Finally, there is a precious jewel in Luke 2:22, where Joseph and Mary took our Lord Jesus as a little Baby "to present [Him] to the Lord." Luke, who describes the Lord Jesus as our perfect Model, gives here an illustration of what God has in mind for the believer. God wants to present him to Himself, for His delight! In 2 Timothy 2:15 the emphasis is on the individual responsibility "present thyself," whereas other passages show how God works to present the believers, individually and collectively, to Himself.

Approved (to God)

The Greek word for *approved*, which is translated in different ways, introduces the idea of testing for a special task. As a result of the test or trial, the material or person is approved by the one who tested. Again the apostle Paul is our example (1 Cor. 4:1-4; 1 Th. 2:4). Here too, other passages in their context help us to grasp God's thoughts which the Holy Spirit would like to convey to us through this word. As a verb we find the word *approve* in: "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them" (Lk. 14:19); "The fire shall try the work of each what it is" (1 Cor. 3:13); "Let a man prove himself, and thus eat... and drink" (1 Cor. 11:28); "Whomsoever ye shall approve, these I will send" (1 Cor. 16:3); "Proving the genuineness of your love" (2 Cor. 8:8); "We have sent with them the brother whom we have often proved to be of diligent zeal in many things" (2 Cor. 8:22); "Prove your own selves" (2 Cor. 13:5); "That ye may prove what [is] the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2); "Proving what is agreeable to the Lord" (Eph. 5:10); "Let each prove his own work" (Gal. 6:4); "That ye may... approve the things that are more excellent" (Phil. 1:10). First Thessalonians 2:4 is specially important. "Even as we have been approved of God to have the glad tidings entrusted to us, so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, who proves our hearts." That whole passage gives many tests for a faithful "workman" of God. Another principle closely related to these instructions is given in 1 Timothy 3:10. "Let these be first proved, then let them minister, being without charge [against them]." Finally, we read in 1 Peter 1:7, "That the proving of your faith, much more precious than of gold which perishes, though it be proved by fire, be found to praise and glory and honour in [the] revelation of Jesus Christ." The result of the test will be seen in the day of the revelation (appearing) of the Lord Jesus.

In view of that day, Paul desired that which David expressed in Psalm 139:23-24. He knew he was not able to probe his own motives entirely (1 Cor. 4:1-4), but his desire was to be in agreement with God's thoughts. He sought to evaluate every thought, action, and movement in his service for the Master by the light of the judgment seat of Christ. This high standard, he applies in 2:15 to Timothy, to you and to me. Approved before God, as one "whose praise [is] not of men, but of God" (Rom. 2:29), he would, at least ultimately, also be approved before man. Although this was not apparent, because of the condition in "the great house," his responsibility remained the same. Compare Samuel's example in 1 Samuel 2:26; 3:19-21; 12:23-25.

Approved (dokimos) — a sevenfold testimony

This word occurs seven times in the Greek New Testament as adjective or noun:

² As a noun we find it e.g., in 2 Pet. 1:5; Jude:3; 2 Cor. 8:7; Rom. 12:8 and 11.

1. Concerning the kingdom of God: "For he that in this serves the Christ [is] acceptable to God and approved of men" (Rom. 14:18).
2. In the list of recommendations and greetings: "Salute Apelles, approved in Christ" (Rom. 16:10).
3. Concerning faithfulness within the local assembly, "For there must also be sects ("schools") among you, that the approved may become manifest among you" (1 Cor. 11:19).
4. Regarding service: "For not he that commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends" (2 Cor. 10:18).
5. Paul didn't admonish others for the sake of competition: "Not that we may appear approved, but that ye may do what is right" (2 Cor. 13:7).
6. James teaches: "Blessed [is the] man who endures temptation; for, having been proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which He has promised to them that love Him" (Jas. 1:12).
7. These six verses surround the verse about the approved workman in 2 Timothy 2:15.

Some more details

The process of testing is described in James 1:3 and 1 Peter 1:7. These verses relate to Old Testament passages that give many details (Mal. 3:1-3; Zech. 13:8f; Dan. 11:35). We are at God's school, in His workshop. He desires to produce refined gold and silver answering to His own character, His nature, and being! Although the world around us is under Satan's leadership, God has found it well to leave us here for His own glory. What a triumph for Him when something of Himself is reproduced in us as a testimony in this world where He is rejected! Basically, in God's dealings with His own, He is testing them for His own honour and glory. Satan, of course, would use adverse circumstances to make us fall, or at least complain. God, however, uses them to further His work in us, to have results in us now (Jas. 1) and ultimately in the revelation of Jesus Christ. Then, "the proving of your faith, much more precious than of gold which perishes, though it be proved by fire, [will] be found to praise and glory and honour" (1 Pet. 1:7).

A workman

This word may be applied to any kind of labourer, and so may the principles flowing from it. Applied to Timothy, I suggest that the word *workman* relates to his handling of the Word of God. The second part of 2:15 confirms this. We have already seen that Timothy's gift and task was teaching and pastoral ministry, yet Paul encourages him to do the work of an evangelist as well (4:5). Nor was his work limited to this. He had to be "prepared for every good work," and "fully fitted to every good work" (2:21; 3:17). Similarly, we read about elders "labouring in word and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17). There the apostle links the diligent workman's way of using the Word of Truth with the toils of the husbandman.

Interestingly, many passages speak of God or the Lord Jesus as a soldier (Isa. 59:17), a husbandman³ (Isa. 28:23-29; Zech. 13:5; Jas. 5:7; Jn. 15:1), or a workman (Jn. 5:17). God likes to see His own features reproduced in those who represent Him in this world. "My Father worketh hitherto and I work" (Jn. 5:17), and "I work a work in your days" (Acts 13:41) show that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are involved in this divine workmanship, past, present, and future. They work now in us and with us (Eph. 2:10; 4:12; Phil. 1:6,22; 2:30; Col. 1:10; 1 Th. 1:3). What a privilege and challenge for Timothy and for faithful believers today to be involved in God's work (1 Cor 3:9, by way of application) and working together for the kingdom of God (Rom. 16:21; Col. 4:11).

In contrast to workmen who are approved to God, there are "workers of iniquity" in the "Christian" profession (Lk. 13:27), "deceitful workers" (2 Cor. 11:13), and "evil workmen" (Phil. 3:2). Each represents a different method of the enemy's opposition.

The workman might ask himself what purpose his labours serve anyway. What comfort then, but also how sobering, to hear the Lord's voice in Revelation 2 and 3, saying seven times, "I know thy works." May they be for His glory!

A workman that has not to be ashamed

³ In the Greek there is a clear link between the words translated by husbandman, workman, and fellow-worker.

Disobedience brings shame; lack of respect and submission make one ashamed before God and man (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:6; 14:35). 2 Timothy 2:15 shows that the way in which we handle the Word of God is the ultimate test. The qualifications and motives⁴ are important, but simple obedience and submission to God's Word become the real test. This is specially so in days full of the contentions and vain babblings of false teachers (2:14, 16-18), and in places where the form of piety is kept by those who deny its power (3:5). In our time we see opposition to the truth through imitation (3:8). Sound teaching is forsaken by those in the great house who, after turning their ear away from the truth, turn aside to fables (4:3f).

Today suffering is not the result of failure or disobedience (2 Tim. 3:12), as it would be under God's direct government in the Millennium. On the contrary, if one suffers "as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but glorify God in this name" (1 Pet. 4:16). Paul was not ashamed: "For which cause also I suffer these things; but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed" (1:12; and 2 Cor. 10:8; Phil. 1:20); Timothy was not: "Be not therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner" (1:8); nor was Onesiphorus: who "has not been ashamed of my chain" (1:16); and neither were John's children: "And now, children, abide in Him, that if He be manifested we may have boldness, and not be put to shame from before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28).

We can summarize the lesson in these verses as follows: when we identify ourselves with the Lord and His interests here on earth, with His people who suffer because of their faithfulness, the Lord will identify Himself with us. That He does so is brought out in Mark 8:38, Hebrews 2:11, and 11:16. Wonderful truth!

Cutting in a straight line the Word of Truth

Timothy 2:15 is the only verse in the New Testament where we find this verb. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) it is used in Proverbs 3:6 and 11:5. Timothy was to make straight paths through the Word of Truth, directed by the Spirit of God. Words closely related to the one in our verse, are found in Galatians 2:14, Acts 14:10 and Hebrews 12:13. Uprightness with God of a faithful child is of the utmost importance in dealing with His Word, the Word of Truth, or the Word of the Truth (2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 1:13; Jas. 1:18), the sum of the divinely-given revelation (3:16). The Word of God is truth (Jn. 17:17), as perfectly expressed in our blessed Lord, who could say, "I am the truth" (Jn. 14:6). This Word is now made effective by the Spirit of Truth (Jn. 14:16; 15:26; 16:13) in us. The word *straight* is linked with agriculture in the husbandman (2:6) who makes straight furrows, with architecture where each part of the building has its correct place, in the right relationship with all the other parts. Thus, "cutting in a straight line" means giving to each part its rightful place when using the Word of God. Hymenaeus and Philetus (2:16-18), against whom Paul had to warn Timothy, had neglected to use the truth in its unity and harmony (e.g., 2 Pet. 1:20).

The need for balance

Paul himself had given a well-balanced ministry: Repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). He had presented the glad tidings of the grace of God, the real, full gospel of God. He had preached the Kingdom of God, the counsel of God, and the truth of the Assembly of God. He had brought out objective truth, but had also stressed the need for practical results in the lives of the disciples (subjective truth). In other words: he had presented the position of the believer, without forgetting its practical impact, their condition. Cutting straight the Word of Truth implies also maintaining the difference between the nations, Israel, and the Church (1 Cor. 10:32); understanding the different dispensations, without becoming artificial or fanatic. It also requires discerning the different aspects of the truth, without specializing in or over-emphasizing one particular aspect. Over-emphasizing is characteristic for those who bring erroneous doctrines. While they give the impression that the truth is being maintained (and some are very particular about this), they fail to realise or do not want to realise that they bring only part of the truth and thus their system or dogma becomes a distortion of the truth. Just imagine someone who builds a house and fails to lay a proper foundation, or to finish it with a roof. Thus the right proportions of the Word have to be understood and respected in its unity, harmony, and balance.

Some areas to be kept in balance are: faith and works; law and grace; worship and service; the rapture and the appearing of Christ; man's responsibility and God's sovereignty; the autonomy of the local assembly and the unity of the body of Christ. We

⁴ Besides what we have discussed see e.g., 1 Th. 1:5; 2:1-14; 2 Cor. 2:17; 3:5; 4:2; 5:11; 6:4-10 and many other passages in 2 Corinthians.

should realise that the truth is so great that we, little creatures, cannot grasp it; nevertheless the God of Truth has entrusted this precious treasure to us. How it behooves us then to have the right attitude towards the Word of Truth!

To be cont'd

Joel (3)

—R. Been Sr.

Chapter 2 (Continued)

Verses 20-21

These verses announce the fate of the prophetic Assyrian, whom God will use as a chastening rod for the unbelieving and apostate Jews. He will conquer the land of Palestine and the city of Jerusalem. God will drive him into a land barren and desolate, the vanguard to the Eastern Sea (the Dead Sea), and his rear guard to the western sea (the Mediterranean). The stench of all his slain will fill the air. Joel alludes here to the heir of locusts which, after it had been destroyed, also filled the air with stench. The judgment over the Assyrian force in the days of Hezekiah was only a weak example of the final judgment over this great enemy of Israel (2 Ki. 19:35; 2 Chr. 32:21).

Many prophets speak about the definite end of the prophetic Assyrian, the king of the North. Isaiah says that the people who live at Zion will not have to be afraid of Asshur when he comes to oppress them, for after a little while the Lord will pour out His wrath over the Assyrian. Then the Lord of hosts will stir up a scourge against him, just as the Midianitish king had been slain at the rock Oreb in days past (Jud. 7:25). God will lift up His rod, His power, over the Assyrian just as He had done earlier in Egypt over the sea. Then his yoke will slide off the shoulders of Israel (Isa. 10:24-27; 14:24-25).

Daniel speaks in detail about the end of the Assyrian and his campaign, first against Palestine and afterward against Egypt. When he hears rumours, he returns to Palestine to find his end at the mountain of Jehovah. The appearance of the Lord in judgment causes him and his power to fall, and no one will help him (Dan. 11:40-45). A sudden and terrible destruction will come over this great enemy of Israel, *because he has exalted himself to do great things*. Only Jehovah, however, does great things. Palestine is encouraged not to fear but to rejoice. When the Lord rises up to judge, the pride of the Assyrian is destroyed. His hatred against God and God's earthly people, his attacks, looting, destruction, all his evil deeds, all will be done away, for the Lord does great things and His day is great and terrible.

The Assyrian had been the Lord's chastening rod over the unbelieving and apostate Jews, but it was also "God's great army" (v. 25), just as the locusts had been in days past. But the mercy of the Lord, His free grace, and His salvation toward the remnant will be even greater. *From Him come both judgment and blessing*. He knows how to cause His love, redemption, and grace to agree with His holiness, righteousness, and judgment. He will do great things for Israel's sake at the introduction of the Messiah's reign. For the believer in Christ *the great things have already been accomplished, and they know them*. They don't first have to go through the days of the Great Tribulation as the remnant of the two tribes. They know that on Golgotha God's mercy and truth have met each other; there righteousness and peace have kissed each other (Ps. 85:10).

Verses 22-27

Verses 22-27 deal mostly with the blessing of the *land* that will then have been freed from all kinds of catastrophes. *Yet, the whole creation will share in Israel's glorious restoration*. The Lord will judge the Assyrian, the military and political power of the restored Roman empire (the beast), the antichrist with the great number of apostatized Jews, yes, every opposing power. Daniel and Revelation speak much about these judgments but Joel speaks only about the judgment over the prophetic Assyrian. After these judgments all plagues that have come over the earth will have ended for ever. The condition of the entire creation will then be glorious.

Yet, Joel restricts himself to Palestine. Green will sprout forth everywhere, the harvest will ripen in the fields, vine and fig tree, the characteristic types of Israel, will bear fruit in abundance. Ezekiel speaks in a similar way. The day of the Lord will call the

corn and multiply it. There will be no more famine; the nations will no longer speak abusively about famine in the Land of the Lord (Ezek. 36:29-30).

In verse 23 the prophet encourages the children of Zion to *rejoice in Jehovah*: "For He gives you the Teacher of righteousness," who will instruct Israel in practical righteousness. Before, righteousness had been the *prerequisite* for obtaining the earthly blessings. Then, Israel didn't care for righteousness and, therefore, they had not received the earthly blessings. One day, under Christ's peaceful reign, all will be different. Then every Israelite will know the Lord, and will have new life from God. It will be a need of their hearts to live in practical righteousness. Then the threshing floors will be full of corn, the presses will overflow with wine and oil. Thus the Lord will make up to Israel the lost years when locusts and other vermin devoured everything. These locusts were then the great army of the Lord, that He had sent to Israel because of their sin, just as Joel described it in the first chapter of his prophecy.

It is remarkable that the obtaining of earthly blessings is here linked to the presence of the Teacher in the midst of Israel. He is Jehovah, their King. Through Him, Israel has *obtained* this glorious position, and it will also *retain* it through Him. Hosea says that Jehovah will come to Israel as the rain, the latter rain that will water the land (Hos. 6:3); all depends upon Him. The poet of Proverbs speaks in the same way (Prov. 16:15). Israel will enjoy all the earthly blessings and praise the name of Jehovah, who has dealt wondrously with them. Never again will the people be put to shame, because — and this Israel must well understand — Jehovah, their God, their King, will be in their midst. The relationship of God to the people will be completely restored. The Lord of glory will dwell in the midst of the nation; an abundant blessing will, therefore, be theirs. The creation will be set free of the bondage of corruption.

Verses 28-32

These five verses open such a new subject that the Hebrew Bible begins the third chapter with these verses. The prophet's view changes from the *earthly* blessings promised to Israel to the *spiritual blessings*. During His reign on David's throne, Christ, the King, will bestow these upon Israel and those other nations that have come through the judgments.

"Afterwards... I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh" (the NIV gives: "on all people"). After the Lord has completed His judgments over the power of the enemies at His appearing, the kingdom of the Lord will be established and the remnants of the two and ten tribes, the nucleus of the new Israel, will be showered with *earthly* blessings.

Joel doesn't say *when* God will pour out His blessing over all flesh, he merely says "afterwards." When Peter quotes nearly all of these verses in his speech to the Jews at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, he introduces a few changes. He says, "And it shall be *in the last days*, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh." The change from *"afterwards"* to *"in the last days"* is very remarkable because it does not follow the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament generally quoted in the New.

The term "in the last days" is generally used for the short period immediately preceding the appearance of the Lord Jesus for judgment. Before His appearance, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the remnant of the two tribes will take place. Signs and wonders of judgment, which are mentioned by Joel, precede the appearance of the Lord, and only then the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. This is the sequence of events in Joel, and in Zechariah. God will pour out a Spirit of grace and prayer over the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the remnant of the two tribes (Zech. 12:10). This remnant is already converted, but they still have to learn an important thing. By seeing Him whom they, their people, have pierced, they will learn that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth and the Son of man appearing in glory, power, and might are one and the same Person, Jehovah Himself. The prophecies about this future event concerning the two tribes point to an outpouring of the Spirit *in the last days* as well.

In Joel's prophecy and in the quote by Peter on Pentecost the pouring of the Spirit is announced *upon all flesh*. This means: also, though not necessarily simultaneously, on the elect from the ten tribes and over the remnants of the many nations who will have accepted the gospel of the kingdom. The first will be gathered to Palestine immediately after Christ establishes His kingdom (Mt. 24:31). Yet, *"all flesh"* does not mean *all people who live then*. The Holy Spirit will certainly not be poured out over those who only feign subjection to Christ.

Then Israel, formed out of the remnants of the two and the ten tribes, will not only be showered with earthly blessings, but they will also have part in the spiritual blessings of the new covenant. They will receive a new heart, a new life from God and

be able to know the Lord, their God, who will no longer remember their sins and iniquities. Thus far there are only few believers in Israel, then all in Israel will know God. God will no more hide His face from this new Israel once He has poured His Spirit upon them (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:24-27; 39:29).

It is very important to understand Peter's quote of Joel well. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit *then* was not *the* fulfilment of Joel's prophecy, but only an initial and partial one. Peter declares that what is seen there — God-fearing men speaking about the great works of God in foreign languages they had not learned — "is that which was spoken through the prophet Joel." This means: *In principle you see here what Joel spoke about*, rather than This fulfils what Joel has spoken. Words like the latter are used in other places about other prophecies, where they signify true fulfilment (Mt. 1:22; 2:15,17,23).

On the cross of Christ, God's judgment over sinful man has been meted out, but there the Lord Jesus also gained the *victory*. After this victory, after His resurrection, He set Himself at the right hand of God, and only then could the Holy Spirit be poured out (Jn. 7:39). This great event took place at Pentecost. All Jews who then believed in Christ received the Holy Spirit, and through the Spirit they were baptized into one body. Peter preached "Repent, and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Thus *a first remnant* out of the two tribes was saved and added to the Church, the Assembly, which was something entirely new then.

If the entire nation had repented then, they all would have received the Holy Spirit, and the terrible judgments over the Jewish people would not have come. Unfortunately, the nation did not only reject the Messiah, the Son of God, but also the Holy Spirit. It stoned Stephen who, as all could see, was full of the Holy Spirit. Then God acted like the king in the parable. The king became angry, sent his army, slew the murderers, and burned their city (Mt. 22:7). This happened in the year 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. The Jews, in so far as they were not killed or sold into slavery, were scattered over the whole earth.

Not only the Jewish remnant that believed in Christ received the Holy Spirit. The door was also opened to the nations, and everyone who called upon the name of the Lord was saved. Jews and Gentiles were added to the one body, the Assembly. Both, reconciled to God in one body, received by one Spirit access to the Father (Eph. 2:16,18).

After His rejection by the Jews, the Lord prepared Himself a bride, the Assembly, the pearl of great price, of much greater glory than the Israelitish bride. One day she will be with Him in heavenly glory. Now she has to display her heavenly calling on earth, for she is blessed with all heavenly blessings. The Holy Spirit, who came to earth, dwells in the Assembly and in each believer. When the Assembly is taken up at the coming of her Bridegroom, the Holy Spirit will leave this earth as well.

After that, God will again take up the thread of His earthly people that He had put aside temporarily. Of this all prophets speak. During twenty centuries the Jews have persisted in their unbelief. They have rejected their King, and as judgment for this, they will come under the yoke of the antichrist. Jerusalem will be a cup of bewilderment to all the nations. While the Assembly will be in heavenly glory, the earthly Jerusalem will again undergo the terrors of judgment, especially from the hand of the Assyrian, the king of the North, because of the apostasy of the greater number of Jews.

During the days of this Great Tribulation, a remnant from the two tribes will be formed. It will be purified through the many sufferings, and turn to Jehovah with humble repentance about the condition of the nation. Over this remnant God will pour out His Spirit. Later He will do this too over the remnant of the ten tribes and the remnants from the nations.

This will completely fulfil Joel's prophecy, the initial, partial fulfilment having taken place at Pentecost. Those who believe in Christ today have the first-fruits of the Spirit (Rom. 8:23); but the full harvest did not come at Pentecost. Yet, just as sure as the first fruits of the Spirit came, so also will the full harvest, the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh. The outpouring at Pentecost was "the early rain," that in the last days the "latter rain." Peter mentions twice that God will pour out *of* His Spirit, Joel says simply: *My Spirit*.

The outpouring of God's Spirit over the future remnants from the two and the ten tribes will not make these remnants into a heavenly people with heavenly blessings. Israel is, and will always remain an earthly people. Even less will the remnants from the nations become heavenly people. Jerusalem will then be the centre of the entire earth. No longer will it be a bewilderment, but a blessing. It will be the city of the great King.

Peter characterizes the relationship between God and the believers of the Assembly and of the remnant of Israel as follows: "Even upon *My* bondmen and upon *My* bondwomen in those days will I pour out of *My* Spirit." This means: upon those who

belong to *Him*. Joel on the other hand says, "Even upon *the* bondmen and upon *the* handmaids," referring to those who belong to *Israel*.

The expression: "Upon all flesh," does not include those who are added to the Assembly today, but it does include the future remnants from the nations. They, as the great crowd that no one can number (Rev. 7:9), will enter into Christ's kingdom.

Verses 30-31 are an interjection in which the prophet speaks of signs and wonders, which, by way of judgment, will occur before He appears in judgment. The invasion of the Assyrian is certainly one of these signs. Though Joel does not mention it, the concentration of power in the Roman empire, will be another one.

Immediately after the tribulation of those days, directly preceding the appearing of the Lord, "the sun shall be darkened, and the moon not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven" (Mt. 24:29-30). *The sign*, the appearance of the Son of man, is therefore preceded by other signs. That is the way Joel speaks about it too (2:31; 3:15-16).

It is evident that there will be complete chaos during the days immediately before the appearing of the Son of man. The things said of the sun, moon, and stars are symbolic. They signify the fall or degeneration of all higher and lower forms of earthly government. Every nation is at war. People have no longer anything to hold on to. On top of that, great natural disasters will occur.

Then the sign of the Son of man will appear in heaven. There is no need to think here of a particular sign. *The sign* will be the appearing of the Son of man Himself. The antichrist, the false prophet did many signs on the *earth*, and then the true Messiah appears as a sign in *heaven*. The expression: "the sign of the Son of man" occurs only in Matthew's Gospel. Didn't the disciples ask: "What is the sign of Thy coming?" The Lord responds as it were, "That sign will be My own personal and sudden appearance." As a bolt of lightning, as an eagle on its prey, so the Lord will appear there where the subject of His judgment is, in Judah and at Jerusalem.

Then verse 32 adds that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord, everyone who will give ear to the gospel of the kingdom that will be preached in those days, will be saved. This means that they will share in the glory of Christ's kingdom. On mount Zion and at Jerusalem there will be the escape from death, and the Lord will call all who escape. Salvation will spread beyond the boundaries of Palestine, and be available to everyone calling upon the name of the Lord.

The same message is contained in the gospel of grace preached today. "Whosoever believes on Him may not perish" (Jn. 3:16). On the basis of Christ's work on the cross "there is no difference of Jew and Greek; for the same Lord of all is rich towards all that call upon Him" (Rom. 10:12-13).

In the future of which Joel speaks, mount Zion and Jerusalem will be the objects of an earthly salvation. All who escape by calling on the name of the Lord will receive part in the glorious kingdom of Christ on earth, not just Israel, but also the remnants of the nations (Rev. 7:9-17).

To be cont'd

The God of all encouragement (2)

—J. van Dijk

The second time God addresses Satan about Job, Satan is not about to admit defeat. Brazen-faced he says that Job remained faithful because God didn't touch his life. If God had permitted another discussion about Job, Satan would no doubt have had another reason, but God stopped these conversations. God knew that this was enough for Him to reach His end with Job: "the end of the Lord." God had a purpose with Job's calamity. He could use it for the blessing of Job.

A blessing for Job? See him sitting there, covered with wounds, unfit to be in the house. He can't be with others because they might get infected. He sits on the ash heap and scratches himself, because he itches. There is no cure, no help. The future looks bleak, so how can it ever turn to blessing? Humanly speaking, the end of Job has been written. And what an end? An end of torture! It was too much for his wife, she says, "Curse God and die." Well, that was all that Job needed. After all that, his

wife comes around and says, "You know what, just give up on God." I trust that we are more of a help for our spouses. Only if we know the Lord, can we be different. We should lift one another up, and encourage one another.

Look at this Job, he had a relationship with God, and he knew it. He knew that God was a righteous God. God would not do things unreasonable. Though he didn't understand God at all, he answers his wife, "Look when you talk like that, there is just no distinction between you and a foolish woman. Don't talk like that!" Nothing comes over his lips that God has to judge. But then, in chapter 3:1, he curses the day that he was born. It was too much for him. This is a clear indication of how deeply effected Job was by what came over him, and how his soul was in turmoil.

After all that has transpired, his friends started to speak and Job had his answers, for he was an intelligent and careful man. He had been praying and sacrificing for his children so that God might be gracious to them. Obviously Job was a thoughtful man, not one that just went through life enjoying it and ignoring the end and his responsibility before God. Consequently, he had many thoughts that came out in his answers. And though we could learn much from the conversations between Job and his friends, we will pass these over. What we see is that, though it was really too much for Job, he continued to trust his God. This is what we may do too in the midst of difficulties. God has allowed Job's calamity so that you and I may be encouraged. We will have, in various degrees, our own troubles, but who can say that he has, or will have troubles like Job's? Ours may be great, they may be hard, but who among our readers lost ten children, all possessions, health, and wife? And if any of us did, we still have the comfort of knowing that the God who sustained Job, will also sustain us.

Let's now consider the end of Job, because there we can see "the end of the Lord." In chapter 42, God has been speaking directly to Job, and Job answers Jehovah (v. 2-3), "I know that Thou canst do everything, and that Thou canst be hindered in no thought of Thine. Who is he that obscureth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered what I did not understand; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not." You see, Job finally realizes that his talking has been without any true knowledge of God. In God's presence he should have listened to God, rather than spoken about Him. He realized that he himself had been the one who had obscured counsel without knowledge. He had been uttering things too wonderful for him, which he knew not (v. 4). But now he asks God, "Hear, I beseech Thee, and I will speak: I will demand of Thee, and inform me." Now he stands before God and says, "God show Thyself to me." And he explains (v. 5) "I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear."

That is what happens to us when we first come to know the Lord Jesus, with our ear we hear of Him. We have heard Him speak about our sinfulness, and His sacrifice for our sins. That is good, but Job goes on. He says (v. 4) "Now my eye seeth Thee." Through all that has transpired, he has come to understand who God is. That is very, very important. We don't come to this very easily and God knows that. Job was a man that God could highly recommend. With confidence He could speak to Satan about Job. He could say, "Look at him." He could allow Satan to do things to Job. We could say that God had a lot of confidence in Job, because God knew that Job indeed relied upon his God. Yet, God also knew that, since Job hadn't fully understood who God was, he had not seen himself for what he was in God's sight either.

Only after a soul has come to see who God is, and has seen itself in God's light, then only can an intimate fellowship between that soul and God begin to blossom. God knew this, and that is why He caused Job to suffer. That is why Job had to go through this. The Lord's end with Job is so precious. A nearness between him and his God had developed. As a result Job became, like the Lord Jesus, a mediator between his friends and God; he could pray for them. He could have said, "You misrepresented my God entirely, and added to my misery." He could have said, "You are my friends? You were my friends; at least I thought you were my friends." He didn't do so, he prayed for them because he knew that they had a great need too, and he was the one who was allowed to pray for them. Did these friends pray for him when he was in trouble? They talked to him, but we don't read about their praying for him. But now Job prays for them. That is what God did. In the sufferings, God said as it were to Job, "Come here, come close to Me, so that you really see Me, afterward I can use you for the good of others." I am sure that Job, besides praying for his friends must have been a real help to the friends as well. Job's story shows us how God encourages through suffering by showing His own compassion.

To be cont'd

Outline for Bible Study (53)

107. Simeon and Anna. The Wise Men. — Luke 2:21-38; Matthew 2:1-12

Outline

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|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| 1. The circumcision | Lk. 2:21 |
| 2. The presentation in the Temple | Lk. 2:22-35 |
| 3. Simeon and Anna | Lk. 2:36-39 |
| 4. The wise men in Jerusalem | Mt. 2:1-8 |
| 5. The wise men in Bethlehem | Mt. 2:9-12 |

Explanation

1. Since the Lord was born under the law (Gal. 4:4), He had to be circumcised.
2. Since He was a firstborn child, His parents had to bring a special sacrifice. They could only bring the sacrifice of the poor (Lev. 12:8).
3. Simeon and Anna (a remnant, only a small believing part of Israel) recognized the child as their Redeemer (grace). In faith, Simeon could prophesy about Him as a light to the Gentiles (Isa. 49:6) and the glory of Israel. Simeon then blessed the parents, speaking also of the Lord's suffering. Anna also praised the Lord and spread the news among those who waited for the Redeemer.
4. The wise men (magi) concluded from the star that the great King of the Jews had been born in Jerusalem (Num. 24:17). But there they found only unbelief, indifference, and fear, instead of joy.
5. Although they found the King in a simple house in Bethlehem, they did not doubt, but presented their gifts — gold, speaking of royalty; frankincense, speaking of worship; myrrh, speaking of suffering — and worshipped Him. Israel's leaders were not interested in the Lord; Herod the Great, the king, tried to kill Him. God watched over Him and told the magi in a dream to go home some other way (Ps. 121:4).

Lesson

God rewarded the trust in His Word of Simeon and Anna.

Notice how the believers of the remnant knew each other (Lk. 2:38; Mal. 3:16). Also today true children of God know each other and speak together about the Lord, so building each other up (Jude :20-21).

Like the chief priests, some know where to find the right answers but have no desire for the Lord Himself.

The magi are an example of the nations in the Millennium: Mt. 8:11; Ps. 86:9; Isa. 60:3.

108. The Flight To Egypt. Herod Slays Bethlehem's infants. The Return From Egypt. In The Temple. — Matthew 2:13-23; Luke 2:40-52

Outline

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| 1. The flight to Egypt | Mt. 2:13-15 |
| 2. Herod slays the infants | Mt. 2:16-18 |
| 3. The return from Egypt | Mt. 2:19-23 |
| 4. Jesus stays behind in the Temple | Lk. 2:40-45 |
| 5. Jesus found in the Temple | Lk. 2:46-50 |

Explanation

1. For the journey to Egypt, which takes five to six days, God had provided through the gifts of the magi.
2. Fear for his throne caused Herod to kill the infants at Bethlehem in the hope that the King of the Jews would be killed too. God thwarted his plan, and punished him through a horrible death.
3. Though Nazareth was a despised village, the Lord chose to live there (deep humiliation). The word "Nazarene" probably refers to *Netzer*, meaning "branch" or "rod" (Isa. 11:1).
4. The veil covering the Lord's childhood is lifted only once. Every male Israelite had to visit Jerusalem three times a year (Dt. 16:16). On his twelfth birthday every young man became a "Son of the Law." It then was his duty and privilege to take part in the feast of the passover.
5. With His questions and answers, the Lord Jesus taught the teachers (Isa. 11:2). He was not preaching, but all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and answers. Here, He announced for the first time the relationship between Himself and the Father. Yet He followed His parents home.
6. In Nazareth He, who was God in the flesh, was subject to His parents.

Lesson

The young Boy, Jesus, was more interested in "the House of the Father" and "His Word" (Ps. 26:8; 84:1-2; 119:97-99,111) than in the palaces and gardens of Jerusalem. What are our priorities?

The beautiful example, both to children and adults, of His obedience to His parents (Col. 3:20) teaches us that to be subject to others is not at all the same as to be inferior to them.

To be cont'd

My walk in the World

My business is to walk as a Christian, and show the character of Christ, not to set the world right. If I am to set the world right, I must join with the world, and cannot have any principles but theirs. Then I must give up Christianity. The Christian is to let his light shine; if he joins with an infidel he owns infidelity can set the world right.

J. N. Darby