

Remember Jesus Christ Raised From Among The Dead (6) (Some thoughts on 2 Timothy 2)

—A. E. Bouter

Thus far we saw the personal character of Paul's epistles to Timothy. They present the responsibility of a faithful Christian in a day of ruin, particularly at the end of the present dispensation of grace. Ephesians and other passages speak of our collective responsibility to put God's thoughts about the Church of the living God into practice, and to maintain the truth in love. But what should the righteous do in days when the majority of professing Christians refuses to act according to divine principles? In early days there was spiritual energy to deal with evil and "the wicked person" (1 Cor. 5:13). But what should be done when the majority accepts evil, or at least tolerates it in certain persons?

Paul, Timothy's father in the faith, had already told him how to maintain a faithful testimony for his rejected Lord. In his cold Roman prison, he had identified himself completely with his Lord. We reviewed the different illustrations Paul used to encourage his child and fellow-worker in such a "discouraging" situation. Yet, Paul, not discouraged, wrote with tremendous power, lifting Timothy, and us, above the circumstances by introducing all the resources of a faithful, unchanging, loving God.

A Vessel

Truth amid progressing evil

To Timothy, faced with progressing evil (2:14; 16-18), the question of how to act became more and more urgent. Therefore, Paul mentions specifically those "who as to the truth have gone astray, saying that the resurrection has taken place already; and overthrow the faith of some" (2:18). One of the basics of the Christian faith had come under attack. We cannot be sure if we should read *resurrection* with or without *the*. If we should read it without *the* it could be understood as *a* resurrection. In the latter case, these false teachers belonged to the gnostic school of those days. Perhaps Paul refers to them also in 1 Timothy 6:20f. At any rate, these teachers, under the influence of pagan philosophies, despised the value of the human body. On the one hand they were characterised by strong ascetic rules (1 Tim. 4:3), on the other by immorality, because they claimed that the human body was like a prison for the soul and did not really count. Soul and spirit, according to their teaching, were more important and in need of deliverance from the influence of earthly and material things. Therefore, these gnostic teachers did not believe in a bodily resurrection. They "spiritualised" it by saying something like this: "The resurrection is the rising of the soul from the death of ignorance to the light of knowledge." They might even have tried to justify their thoughts with Paul's doctrine of resurrection in and with Christ (Eph. 2; Col. 2)!

When we looked at 2 Timothy 2:15, we saw what the right attitude towards the Word of truth should be. Paul placed the Person of our Lord Jesus in the very centre (2:8) and related the various aspects of the truth to Him. Doing this works as a preservative of the truth. A test and remedy when any question regarding the truth arises is to ask: How does it affect my Lord? He is the truth and when it comes to the truth of resurrection, He is also "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul shows that a denial of physical resurrection in general implies a denial of the physical resurrection of Christ. These are no unimportant matters (2:16-18), but basic issues with fundamental consequences for our practical, daily life. Examples of evil doctrine in our days would be: liberal theology, Bible criticism, extreme forms of mysticism, theistic evolution, and the so-called New Age Movement with its emphasis on (super-) spiritualism. People turn away from the truth and, claiming to demythologise the Bible, give themselves over to all kinds of fables (2 Tim. 4:3f literally speaks of "myths") or superstitions.

The truth as expressed in Jesus

When the Lord says that He is the Truth (Jn. 14:6), we understand that in Him the full truth regarding God, man, the Assembly (Church), eschatology, etc., has been revealed. Whatever subject we take, the truth regarding all things is to be found in Him (cf. Jn. 1:5,9). Therefore, every deviation affects the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. We should always question how a deviating doctrine affects the honour and glory of Christ. Each doctrine should also be examined as to its basics, its attitude towards the authority and integrity of the Scriptures (cf. Jn. 17:17). This we saw before. In the Scriptures we find the objective measure of the truth. In the Lord Himself the truth is brought out in His blessed Person. The full revelation of the truth is also the test for every deviation (Heb. 4:12f).

The firm foundation of God

The armour of God has been given as an effective means of defence of the truth against the attacks of the enemy. Here Paul assures us that the whole truth of God is based on God's own firm foundation, and we know that He Himself can never be shaken (cf. Ps. 11:3f). Amidst the progress of evil, amidst the attacks of the enemy who even tries to subvert the foundation of the truth, our eyes are directed to God Himself in whom is firmness and stability. "[The] Lord knows those that are His" (2:19), even when we can no longer determine this. Notice here, however, that Paul links this aspect immediately with our personal responsibility: "Let every one who names the name of [the] Lord withdraw from iniquity."¹ This is the first part of the answer to the question what Timothy and the faithful Christian of today should do in the face of progressing evil in its various forms.

A vessel to honour

Again Paul uses figurative language to explain the situation to Timothy. In 2:20 the apostle compares the entire Christian profession with "a great house." It is the outcome of man's efforts in what God had given at the Church's beginning (1 Cor. 3; cf. Mk. 4:30-32). Thus Paul continues to compare it to the owner of a house who knows its contents. God not only knows the golden and silver vessels, but also the wooden and earthen. In 1 Corinthians 3:12 a similar distinction of materials is mentioned. Gold and silver speak of God's glory and of redemption. Wood and earth suggest things introduced by man, things which are shown to perish when subjected to fire or other forms of testing. Verse 18 speaks of nominal Christians and verse 19a of true believers, as the Lord knows them. This distinction parallels the difference in substance, gold versus wood.

Verse 19b emphasizes the responsibility of those who name the name of the Lord to withdraw from iniquity. In doing so it introduces a second principle, relating to the use of the different vessels: vessels to honour and to dishonour. It is once more a question of man's responsibility. How can a vessel (a metaphor for a believer) in the "great house" function to the honour of the Lord? The answer is: by separation from evil and consecration to the Lord. Even a "golden vessel," a true believer, is not necessarily a vessel to honour. Why not? Because a golden vessel may be defiled and become unsuitable for use to the honour of the Lord. We will address this principle of separation from evil and withdrawal from iniquity, which includes doctrinal and moral evil later. First we will answer the question, What exactly is meant by "to honour or to dishonour?"

To honour or to dishonour

Some suggest that the question of honour or dishonour refers to the vessel itself. Romans 9:21 seems to confirm this thought. There it is a question of the (ultimate) destination of the vessel. However, in the context of 2 Timothy we understand that the condition of the vessel (even a golden or silver one) determines whether or not the vessel is to the honour or dishonour of the Master. Verse 21 decides the matter: "If therefore one shall have purified himself from these, [in separating himself from them], he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work." A vessel (a servant) in the great house of the Christian profession, by obeying and separating itself, makes itself available for a task to the honour of its Lord. If we think of false teachers, as mentioned in 2:16-18, it is not too much to suggest that these are vessels to dishonour: their doctrine and works, even their presence in the great house in such a condition, not only dishonours themselves but especially their Master.

The need for separation

The situation in "the great house" has become so confused, that we might wish that the Lord would act as He did when He purified the temple. However, the time has not yet come for such public intervention, although we should realise that, despite all appearances, our Lord remains in full control.² From our side, however, purification through separation from

¹ 1. Compare the two sides of the seal with Numbers 16: 5, 26 as quoted from the Septuagint. In the rebellion against Moses and Aaron there were also these two sides. God's side, who knows who are His; and man's side, who is responsible to withdraw from iniquity (rebellion).

² This is the mystery of God (Rev. 10:7; 11:15-18), who is in full control, (Mk. 4:26-41); while the mystery of iniquity (2 Th. 2:7) is working in the sphere of the profession.

evil is the means whereby the individual Christian can maintain the rights of his Lord. This will remain our personal responsibility, till the Lord Himself comes to cleanse His house from all iniquity.

This matter of purification and separation is presented in 2 Tim. 2:19-22 as a process in which we may distinguish several phases.

1. Our first personal responsibility is to withdraw from iniquity (2:19). Even naming the name of [the] Lord obliges us to keep false doctrine from our hearts and lives, and not to give in to moral evil in any form whatsoever.

2. We also must separate ourselves and stay apart not just from the evil itself, as mentioned in point 1, but also from all persons who are under the influence of evil and therefore affected by it. We are to do this, not because we are any better than our fellow-believers, but because of the penetrating power and defiling effects of evil. "Do ye not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" (1 Cor. 5:6); compare also Num. 19:14-22; Hag. 2:11-20. These things are essential if we want to be a vessel to the honour of the Master, accepting His absolute claim upon us, wishing to be available for Him for every good work (2:21),

3. A further important step is noticed in 2:22, "But youthful lusts flee." Besides the outward purification suggested in steps 1 and 2, an inward process of sanctification is essential. Would "youthful lusts" not refer to the danger of pride (1 Jn. 2:16), which is a trap especially for those who are young in the faith (see 1 Tim. 3:6)? Timothy, as a relatively young Christian, in the presence of many older brethren, who were indeed failing, might have thought, "I'm going to do a better job than they did," therefore he had to be aware of this pitfall. He would be kept from it by continuous self-judgment, by fleeing from such an influence (cf. 1 Cor. 6:18; 10:14; 1 Tim. 6:11). What he must condemn in others, he had first to condemn in himself.

4. Besides these "negative" steps, made in obedience to the Lord and His Word, Paul confronts Timothy, and us, with some "positive" challenges. "Pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart." Here we see that it is not just a matter of naming the Lord's name, of confession and profession. A purified vessel, an instrument ready for service, one submitted to His absolute authority (which is practically rejected in the great house) must realise its utter dependence,³ and be a worshipper *together with others*. We are never supposed to be the only one who worships (Jn. 4:23f; Phil. 3:3). Yet, the Lord does not demand that we first try to find *all* who call upon His name out of a pure heart, before we begin to worship. Thus our individual desire to maintain the Lord's rights will always lead us to walk with others in the light of God's unchanging truth, and in response to Him. Is it not beautiful to see how God provides for Himself a priestly company of worshippers, even in a day of ruin and failure?

Additional notes.

The vessel.

Though the word *vessel* refers to any kind of object (Mk. 11:16), it more specifically speaks of objects with capacity to contain something (Jer. 18:1-11). It is also used symbolically to indicate someone (Acts 9:15) in the service of God (Heb. 9:21). The Scriptures see believers as vessels filled with the Lord's glory (2 Cor. 3f; 4:7), and the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5), formed for the glory of God, for His service, to worship Him. My impression is that many of these thoughts are contained in the word vessel in 2 Timothy 2. I suggest that the apostle has two main functions of the vessels in view: Levitical service and priestly service.

In connection with separation from evil, there are some other aspects besides right material and right use to be considered. Some are added in 2:21.

- "Sanctified," or set aside for a special purpose. Of this we have an example in the Lord (Jn. 10:36; 17:19).
- "Serviceable," or useful for service (4:11) and for the Master (2:21), who has all rights over the vessel, which has been formed, purchased, redeemed, and freed from captivity by Him (see the type in Ezra 1).
- "Prepared," which implies a work of the Holy Spirit, through the ministry of His servants (cc. Lk. 1:17).
- "For every good work," where the emphasis is on *every*, for even defiled vessels may do a good work by the sovereign grace of God.

It is the responsibility of the vessel to follow the instructions given in 2 Timothy 2:19-22 and only then, under the eye of the Master, and under His entire control, would the vessel be totally ready for service, entirely pleasing to Him (3:17).

³ *In the midst of evil, we find confidence in God (Gen. 4:26) and access to Him (Gen. 12:8).*

God's path in a day of decline

Some additional points in 2:22, are worth mentioning:

- *Pursue* suggests active, spiritual energy (Phil. 3:14) and continuous exercise.
- *Righteousness* is needed to walk the path of the Lord aright (cf. the Lord's example in Ps. 45:3f), and to be practically in harmony with God (cf. the breastplate of righteousness in Eph. 6:14). It includes having right motives, not holding prejudices against fellow-Christians.
- Then it is also a matter of the practical exercise of one's personal *faith*, not merely confessing the doctrines of the faith, but, in a dark age, realising God's thoughts. We see this in Paul (3:10), and in the example of Abraham (Isa. 51:1-6).
- The source of all this is found in divine *love*, which has been shed abroad in our hearts (Rom. 5:5). Love begets love. This is the way to survive in a world full of hatred and cold profession.
- The outcome will be *peace*, which is characteristic for the kingdom of God (Mt. 5:9; Rom. 14:19) as well as for the Assembly of God (Eph. 4:3).

A pure heart

Besides the divine source, agape-love, there is the question of the condition of our own "source": our heart, from which are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). It is the very centre of the human being. A pure heart suggests inward purity, sincerity (Mt. 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:22). We might think that this is an impossible instruction, for God alone knows the hearts. True, but this chapter gives us some tests with the help of which we are able to discern whether or not a professing Christian walks in a path that can only be walked, under the obedience to His holy claims, when self has been given up, and the heart is filled with Christ. May the Lord help us!

Naming the name of the Lord and Calling upon the Lord

In a day of ruin, these expressions have some qualifications attached to them. Separation presupposes close communion with God and great love for God's people. We should never forget this! If we do, we will fall into formalism, isolationism, and similar evils. These qualifications are also prerequisites for acting for the glory of God and withdrawing from iniquity. In the early days of the Church, the mere naming of the Lord's name would be sufficient for God and for man, as we find in 1 Corinthians 1:2. But in a day of ruin the test of withdrawing from iniquity is added, in order to check the validity of the confession. The second step of separation, purification from persons associated with evil, has also a qualification. For those who are purified outwardly it is not enough to call upon the Lord, but the test is, whether it is "out of a pure heart." Compare this with Malachi 2 and 3, especially 3:16.

Some Notes on Leaven and Evil

Leaven

Leaven spoils dough, and speaks of progressing defilement. Its power can only be stopped through baking, by the application of fire, which speaks of judgment. In Leviticus 23:17, the people is presented to God under the form of two wave-loaves baked with leaven; the working of the leaven (evil) has been stopped. For instance, in Corinth the working of evil (leaven) is stopped in the local assembly (1 Cor. 5 & 11). It was stopped, not just by removal of the wicked person (who was later restored — 2 Cor. 2 & 7), but also by their self-judgment. When, discipline is no longer practised collectively (as in 2 Tim. 2), it remains our personal duty to exercise self-judgment. This is essential if we are to remain in harmony with the Lord and useful to the Master.

Other Old-Testament illustrations of evil's defiling power.

- *Leprosy*, which speaks of extreme self-will (Lev. 13-14)
- *Issue* or *flux* speaks of lack of self-control (Lev. 15)
- Contact with *death*, which speaks fellowship with formal religion, in which is no life (Num. 19:11-16).

The people of God were not to have contact with these things (Num. 5:1-4). Evil first affects individuals through whom, if they are not removed, the whole camp will be defiled. This principle is applied in 1 Corinthians. But leprosy may also affect a house in the land (Lev. 14), which is a type of the evil considered in 2 Timothy 2.

Seven forms of New-Testament leaven

- *Idolatry*, which appeals to the affections (Mt. 13:33; cf. 1 Jn 5:21; Rev. 2:4).
- *Hypocrisy*, or "religious" leaven, Pharisaism (Mt. 16; Lk. 12:1).
- *Rationalism* is "scientific" leaven, Sadduceeism (Mt. 16:6).
- *Herodianism* speaks of worldliness, "political" leaven (Mk. 8:15).
- *Immorality in all its forms*, not just fornication (1 Cor. 5:11)
- *False doctrine* (Gal. 5)
- *The flesh*, which is referred to as "old leaven" (1 Cor. 5:7). It speaks of evil belonging to the "old man," that creeps in again because of a lack of self-judgment.

In 1 Corinthians 5:7, Paul, in speaking about the need for purging or purification, uses the same Greek word as in 2 Timothy 2:21, although he adds there the preposition *from* (which is paraphrased⁴ in the New Translation by JND by the words between brackets). Contact with, and influence from false teachers, or fellowship with groups that tolerate such influences, will have its negative impact. (See for example Jer. 15:16-21; and compare Abraham in Gen. 18:16-33 with Lot).

To be cont'd

Comfort (3)

—J. van Dijk

We have seen how Paul and Job have been comforted by the Lord in the midst of their trials. Now let us look at the three friends of Daniel in Daniel 3.

Three friends in an oven

After Nebuchadnezzar had threatened to put the three friends of Daniel into the fiery oven, they answered, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer thee in this matter. If it be [so], our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver [us] out of thy hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image that thou hast set up." And so they were thrown into the fire (Dan. 3:16-18).

There are situations in tribulations and difficulties that we have no hand in. Job's calamity came upon him, and Job had to make no decisions, the calamity simply came. Job's situation was something that Job could do very little about. For these three men, it was different. The three friends could have said, "The king is very determined, we have no way out. God knows that we don't do this from the heart, but we better kneel down. God knows that our hearts do not kneel down for this idol, we do it just for the sake of appearance. What else can we do?"

They did not talk like that at all. They took a firm decision, and said, "We don't need to talk about that O king; we will not bow before your god, that is all there is to it. Our God is able to save us out of the fire, and if He doesn't... well, we will not bow the knee for your god."

That took courage. It took a very big decision, a definite decision. But that brought tribulation. That is why we look at this as well, because some of the situations we are in, we could perhaps have escaped by not being genuine before our God. This should not be, for then we will miss something, something really great.

We know how things went. They said our God is able to keep us out of the fire, but God didn't do that. God let them go! "Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste; he spoke and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said to the king, True, O king. He answered and said,

⁴ Some have objected against the bracketed clause in the New Translation, supposing that JND laid his own interpretation into Scripture. However, *purge* means: "To purify by separating" (Webster). Therefore the KJV means: "If a man...purifies himself by separating from these." This is the rendering of the New Translation.

Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of God" (Dan. 3:24-25).

Then the men were brought out, and spoke to the king. Their faithfulness had a tremendous effect. Nebuchadnezzar honoured God, and it seems that Nebuchadnezzar at the end of his life became one who belonged to God. This was partly owing to the faithfulness of these three men. Unreasonable faithfulness, if one looks as man looks; but very reasonable faithfulness if one really looks from God's side.

Now let's imagine a conversation with these three men. "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the three of you, I like to ask a question. Now that you have come through this experience, what would you have liked better: that God would have prevented Nebuchadnezzar from throwing you into the fire, or that you had to experience the way God was with you in the midst of this ordeal?"

What do you think these three men would have answered? Do you think they would have had a long debate among themselves. I am sure they would have said, "We are so glad that our God chose that way, that He let us go into the fire. You know something, we never experienced a thing like this! Our God was with us, He walked with us. What a nearness of heart, what a companionship! What an experience with God."

But one can only have such an experience in the fire. I am sure the verdict of these three would have been unanimous; they must have been thankful for what God had done. They didn't know that half an hour earlier, but their hearts were prepared, they knew God could do it, but didn't know God would do it, and they were ready to be burned for His name!

Is that not a lesson for ourselves? There are situations in which we have to make a decision that determines how our path goes. If we choose the right way we will have the tremendous experience that the God of all encouragement, the God who knows how to show sympathy, is with us and walks with us. That is an experience, I am sure, of which no one who has experienced it would say, I wish it had been different.

How about you?

So there have been many people in this world who have suffered. Paul, Job, and the three friends of Daniel. When we look at them we are encouraged. Their tribulation was for our encouragement. How much have they been encouraged. Job who received back double of all that he had. He had again ten children. No, he had twenty! He had ten with the Lord, already promoted, and ten with him for his enjoyment. God gave him double in every way. But that was not the greatest thing. He could say, "Now mine eye seeth Thee." And that was the greatest thing of all.

This will be the experience of each one who is encouraged by God. He will receive a double portion; he will have seen God and have realized who he himself was. What an experience it is to learn who God is, in spite of what we ourselves are! The greatness of God stood before Job. The three men in the oven have seen God with them. Don't you long for an experience like that? Well, you cannot have it without suffering, without trial! But God will encourage you. I trust that if you are suffering today that you will experience something of what these people experienced. That you will see the greatness of your God, the God of all encouragement. Your God! The God of comfort who is with you!

The End

The Prophecy of Joel (4)

—R. Been Sr.

In the preceding issues we have noticed that Joel's prophecy concerns the day of the Lord, first in the typical character of the Locust plague, then in the judgment over the Assyrian that the Lord Himself will execute at His coming. We will now see how the Lord does not deal with Assyria alone, but with all the nations surrounding Israel in the last days.

Chapter 3

Judgment over the nations

The events mentioned in the second and third chapter of Joel's prophecy are *concurrent*. The prophet separates them in two chapters to enable him to pay special attention to the invasion and destruction of the Assyrian, Israel's most

important enemy. Yet, the fate of the Assyrian is also included in the judgment over the nations that is described in chapter three. He is not mentioned separately there, since he is already covered in detail in chapter two. From Daniel and Revelation it is apparent that the judgment over the Assyrian will *follow* the judgment over the antichrist and the nations of the Roman empire, the "beast." Chronologically chapter two should, therefore, have followed chapter three.⁵

It is Joel's purpose to portray the events connected with the day of the Lord. Separately, he mentions the destruction of the most important enemy, and then he speaks about the fate of the other nations in chapter three. The blessings of the Millennium are mentioned twice, first after the judgment over the Assyrian, and again after that of the nations. This proves that chapter three speaks of the same time and the same events as chapter two — the day of the Lord.

Verses 1-2

In those days there will be a turning point in the fortunes (NASB and NIV rendering, the KJV and JND both have captivity) of Judah and Jerusalem. By this is meant a turnaround in the conditions of the believing, converted remnant from the two tribes, over whom the Spirit of God has already been poured out. For this remnant (called, the elect) there will be an escape, a salvation on mount Zion at Jerusalem (2:32), for the Son of man will execute judgment over the powers of the nations. Joel's prophecy speaks only of the remnant of the two tribes, not over that of the ten tribes. This latter remnant is not yet in Palestine at the time of the Lord's appearing.

In the day of the Lord, all the nations (*goim*) who have trodden down Judah and Jerusalem will fall under the same judgment as the Assyrian. Thereby a complete salvation of the remnant out of the two tribes becomes possible. "I will also gather all the nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat."

The Valley of Jehoshaphat.

A lot has been said and written about this valley. A tradition void of scriptural basis assumes this valley to be that of the Kidron which separates Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. This tradition dates back to the first centuries of our calendar, and both Jews and Muslims still hold it today. They consider the valley of Jehoshaphat as the place of *the last judgment, the judgment of the dead*. This is because they know nothing of *the judgment of the living* (Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:5), the living nations. This fable likely arose from the fact that Jerusalem will be involved in this judgment (3:16; Zech. 14:4), which they believe to be the last. But the judgment of the living nations cannot be assigned to a particular place. Besides, the Hebrew word *emeg*, used here for *valley*, never refers to such a narrow valley as that of the Kidron.

There is a close relationship between the word *Jehoshaphat* and the contents of Joel 3. The name Jehoshaphat means: "the judgment of the Lord." And the place of the judgment is the "valley of judgment" or better: "the valley of decision." The name "Jehoshaphat" has therefore a symbolic meaning. The prophet alludes to Jehoshaphat's history as recorded in 2 Chronicles 20. We must remember that in Joel 3, the subject is the judgment of the nations, *with as purpose*: the deliverance of the remnant of the two tribes. Well, we see the same in the history of Jehoshaphat. The deliverance that God gave then is a picture of the deliverance of the future remnant through God's judgment over their enemies.

At the slope of Ziz (the ascent of Ziz) at the end of the valley of the brook, before the desert of Jeruel and toward that of Tekoa, Jehoshaphat had a great victory over the many nations that had come with a great army against Jerusalem (2 Chr. 20:1-30). Jehoshaphat had been unfaithful to the Lord in his alliance with Ahab, the godless king of Israel (2 Chr. 18:1-3). Then the enemy had mistaken him for the king of Israel, and cornered him, but he had called to the Lord for deliverance, and God had turned his enemies from him (2 Chr. 18:31). Later, Jehoshaphat became again unfaithful when he allied himself with Jehoram, Ahab's son, to go together with the king of Edom against Moab. That alliance had also been a shame to Jehoshaphat (2 Ki. 3). The defeat of Moab had instilled a deep-seated hatred in this proud nation against Judah. Later it joined with the Ammonites and the Meunites of Seir (Edom) in an incursion into Judah's territory by making a flanking move around the Dead Sea and setting up camp in Engedi.

All of this resulted from Jehoshaphat's unfaithfulness, which was a part of the unfaithfulness of Judah. However, Jehoshaphat acknowledged his guilt. Before he set out to meet the enemy, he called for a fast and gathered all Judah, even the children, their wives, and sons, before the face of the Lord. This time of fasting causes us to think of that called for by Joel (2 Chr. 20:3,13; 2:15). Afterwards Jehoshaphat, in utter despair, called upon the Lord for deliverance from the

⁵ *The order in God's Word is often moral rather than chronological. — The Editor*

united armies, that great company (2 Chr. 20:6-12; 2:17). A similar plea from repentful and humbled hearts we find in Joel's prophecy.

Then the Lord declared that this battle was neither Judah's nor Jehoshaphat's, but the Lord's (2 Chr. 20:15). The Spirit of the Lord came in their midst upon the prophet Jahaziel, just as the Spirit will come upon the future remnant of the two tribes (2 Chr. 20:14; Joel 2:28). Afterward the army of Jehoshaphat went to meet the enemies toward the wilderness of Tekoa. However, *not to fight, but to see the salvation of the Lord* who was with them (2 Chr. 20:17,21; Joel 3:2,12,14). They found the enemies in the valley (*emeg* in Hebrew, the same word used by Joel). Jehoshaphat and his people called this valley of decision the valley of Berachah, the valley of praise (2 Chr. 20:26). There they sang the praises that they had raised in faith even before the victory was won: Give thanks to Jehovah; for His loving-kindness endureth for ever! (2 Chr. 20:21). This song could be called the Song of the Millennium.

Verse 2

The historical events point remarkably to that which was said by Joel. Verse 12 says that *the nations will come up* to the valley of Jehoshaphat, but that the Lord will sit there to judge these nations. Verse 2 gives us the other side. The Lord leads all these nations to the slaughter because of their anger against His people. Initially the remnant of the two tribes will also be unfaithful, but through the Great Tribulation it will be sanctified, and come to repentance and conversion. God will give them His Spirit. Though the remnant will get into dire straits, it will not have to fight, even if it would be able to do so; they will see the Lord's victory. For the remnant too, the valley of judgment, of decision, will become the valley of Berachah, the valley of praise, just as it did in the days of Jehoshaphat.

Although the prophet alludes here indeed to the historical event in the "valley of Jehoshaphat," this does not mean that *the future event will take place at the same site* as the historical one. The allusion to the valley of Jehoshaphat has reference to the *name*, which means, "the Lord judges," rather than to the place. Here it is not in question whether or not the place in the prophecy of Joel and in 2 Chronicles 20 is the same. That could perhaps be so, but it often proves dangerous to determine the place where prophetic events will take place. One can safely say, however, that the valley of Jehoshaphat is the valley where the judgment of Jehovah will fall upon the enemies.

This judgment in the valley of Jehoshaphat belongs to the events of "the great and terrible day of the Lord." Its main event will be the appearing of the Son of man. This judgment actually concludes one phase of that day, for after it Christ's kingdom will be established as part of the of events the day of the Lord.

Comparing Old- and New-Testament Prophecies

The coming of the Lord Jesus to take the believers of the Assembly (the Church) into heaven is never the subject of Old-Testament prophecy. This mystery was only revealed by Paul in his Epistles. It will only be seen by the world through its consequences. But when the Son of man comes for judgment, accompanied by His heavenly saints, He will be seen by all, for it is written: "Behold, He comes with the clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they which have pierced Him" (Rev. 1:7).

The New Testament also speaks of the appearing of the Lord. It says that the Lord will come from heaven with the angels of His power and with all His saints (2 Th. 1:7; 1 Th. 3:13; Rev. 19:14). It gives as purpose of the appearance, the execution of judgment over the nations of the restored Roman empire, the antichrist, and Satan. In it we don't read anything about the judgment over the Assyrian, Israel's chief enemy.

The Old Testament prophets show another purpose of the Lord's appearing. They say that, when He will be revealed on earth, His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives. He comes to establish His kingdom on the earth, as the anointed King of Israel. There is, therefore, a definite distinction between the views of the Old and New Testament. Although these views do not conflict, they should not be mistaken for one another. This should be kept in mind when studying prophecy.

Verses 3-8

The Lord will gather all nations in the valley of Jehoshaphat to judge them there. The test will be how they have dealt with Israel. Some of these nations will be charged with having scattered the Israelites and having divided Palestine. They did cast the lot over God's people (Haman cast the lot to determine the best day to eradicate all Jews in the Persian empire). Israeli boys were given in exchange for prostitutes, girls for wine, so that the traders could drink. Tyrus, Sidon, and

Philistea, and later also Egypt and Edom, are mentioned separately (v. 19). These nations had plundered the Lord's inheritance, they had robbed, sold the children of Judah to the Greeks, and taken possession of the land. In turn Judah would sell these nations.

Verses 9-18

The judgment at the Lord's appearing will have a warlike character. Then all power of the nations will be destroyed. The nations will think to accomplish their purposes; little do they know that they are speeding to their destruction (v. 9).

All efforts for peace will be abandoned, they rather put in an extreme effort preparing themselves for war. Agricultural implements are converted into weapons, there is a world-wide mobilization, even the weak ones are encouraged to act as heroes. Whatever may prompt the various nations, all will seek to take possession of Jerusalem and Palestine in an effort to obtain the world-hegemony. For the last time, the Oriental question will be the cause for their tremendous exertion. But the Lord will use this whole display of strength to gather the nations in Palestine, their entire military force. At His appearance this force will be destroyed. For the powers of the enemy and the apostate Jews, the appearing of the Lord will only mean destruction, but for the remnant of the two tribes it will mean redemption.

Then the Lord will be the shelter and strength of the renewed Israel. He will dwell on Mount Zion, His holy mountain. Jerusalem will truly be a holy city, purified from all defilement, and consecrated to the Lord. The nations will no longer pass through it. A stream of earthly blessings will be the portion of Israel.

Verse 18-21

Once the reign of Christ has been established, there will be an initial meting out of various judgments over the nations bordering on Israel, such as Edom, Egypt, Moab, Ammon, Tyrus, and Sidon. Joel refers to these judgments; we will pass them without further comment.

The innocent blood of the Holy and Righteous One, once shed by Judah and Jerusalem, will then have become the blood of atonement whereby Judah and Jerusalem, the remnant, is reconciled to God. On the basis of this blood, this atonement, the Lord will be able to dwell in Zion.

Some think that verse 21 speaks of the blood that the enemies of Judah have innocently shed. They believe that this verse declares that it will not be left without revenge. This thought rests on a different translation [which is given by the NASB, "And I will avenge their blood which I have not avenged."]. This rendering is perhaps more in line with this chapter of Joel's prophecy, since it speaks of retribution (cf. v. 19).

The End

Outline for Bible Study (54)

109. The Preaching Of John. Jesus Baptized. — Luke 3:1-22; Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:1-11; John 1:6-34.

Outline

1. John called for repentance Lk. 3:1-6
2. John reproved the unbelievers Lk. 3:7-14
3. John's witness for Christ Lk. 3:15-18
4. The baptism of Jesus Mt. 3:13-17

Explanation

1. John the Baptist preached the baptism of repentance (conversion; cf. Acts 3:19) in the wilderness. The date refers to Gentile kings, for the Jews were under foreign rule. Though Annas was not high priest, he had great influence as head of the Sanhedrin. Despite the unfaithfulness of God's people, God's grace desired to save them and deliver them. He fulfilled His promise through Isaiah (40:3). Salvation to the nations would come out of Israel (Lk. 3:4-6).

2. John spoke most severely against hypocrisy. God would judge His people unless they repented and showed this in baptism. What was needed was simple honesty and compassion for one's neighbour, and denouncing of greed.

3. John pointed away from himself to One greater than himself. Christ would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (fire speaks of God's power that consumes evil, Heb. 12:29). The Holy Spirit gives life and fellowship with God. In grace, the Lord Jesus identified Himself with the humble, believing remnant that accepted the testimony of John (Ps. 16:2-3). Not sin, but the desire to fulfil all righteousness, and grace toward the remnant led the Lord to be baptized in the Jordan. ("For thus it cometh us..." Mt. 3:15). The heavens were opened and God gave testimony concerning Him.

Lesson

Luke 3:5 refers to the human heart. When a king came to a city, road conditions were improved. At the coming of the true King, the hearts need straightening and opening up.

John remained separate and in fellowship with God. This gives power for testimony. Humbleness of heart showed in his dress and food.

The Spirit of God descending upon the Lord as a dove, testifies of His purity, humbleness, and meekness.

At the Jordan, the first revelation of the Trinity of God was given: the Father spoke from heaven, the Holy Spirit descended from heaven upon the Son on earth (cf. 2 Cor. 13:14).

110. The Temptation in the Wilderness. The first Disciples. — Matthew 4:1-11; 9:9-13; Mark 1:12-13,16-20; 2:13-17; Luke 4:1-14; 5:27-32; John 1:29-51.

Outline

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| 1. The temptation in the wilderness | Mt. 4:1-11 |
| 2. John, Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathanael | Jn. 1:35-51 |
| 3. The call of Matthew (Levi) | Mt. 9:9-13; Lk. 5:27-32 |
| 4. Peter, Andrew, James, and John called | Mk. 1:16-20 |

Explanation

1. The Lord Jesus was tested as one tests pure gold to prove its purity. The first attack used the lust of the flesh, the Lord's hunger. The Lord withstood Satan with the Word of God (Eph. 6:16-17) and His obedience. The second temptation used the pride of life, the honour men would give when He fell without harm from the pinnacle of the temple. Satan misquoted God's Word. God had promised to keep "in all thy ways"; Satan omitted these words (cf. Ps. 91:11 with Lk. 4:10). The last temptation addressed the lust of the eyes. Satan promised the kingdoms of the world without the cross or death. The Lord wanted to receive all things only from the hand of God, His Father, on the ground of His obedience, even at the cost of death on the cross (Phil. 2:7-11; Dan. 7:13-14). After the temptation, He "returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee" (Lk. 4:14).

2. John the Baptist spoke of the Lord as the Lamb (not just the Messiah), "that takes away the sin (not here 'the sins') of the world." He will remove the curse from the world so that God can dwell with men (Rev. 20:6; 21:1-3). John's repeated testimony prompted John and Andrew to follow Jesus. Andrew who seems less significant in his service than Peter, brought Peter to the Lord. The name Peter, "Cephas" points to his later confession (Mt. 16:16). The Lord Himself called Philip. With a grateful heart, Philip called Nathanael from under a fig tree (a symbol of Israel). Nathanael's uprightness overcame his prejudice against Nazareth. He came and saw. Nathanael calls the Lord Rabbi, Son of God, King of Israel. So also shall the remnant of Israel (of which Nathanael is a type) know the Lord as God's Son and King (Ps. 2:6-7). The name "Son of man" points to Christ's humiliation on earth, where He was the object of the angels' ministry. It also speaks of His present glory in heaven, as the Lord of Creations (cf. Ps. 8; Jn. 5:27; 12:23-24; 13:31-32).

3. The Lord called Matthew (who is also called Levi) away from his job as tax collector. Matthew first left all (which speaks of his heart), then he rose up and followed the Lord (Lk. 5:28). Matthew's response gave opportunity to show grace to many of Matthew's colleagues.

4. After Peter, Andrew, and John had met the Lord (Jn. 1) they returned home and fished. Later the Lord called them to be with Him (Mt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-20; Lk. 5:10). Later again He appointed them to their apostolic office (Mk. 3:13; Lk. 6:12-16), after which they were sent out (Mt. 10:1-15; Mk. 6:7-11; Lk. 9:1-5).

Lesson

The number 40 appears often in connection with the testing of men. The Lord was forty days without food, Moses was forty years in the wilderness before he led Israel through the wilderness journey, which again took 40 years.

As the Lord overcame the temptation by meeting the enemy's attacks with the Word of God, so should we. Beware! The enemy will try to *use* it too, but will misquote it. How important it is to put on the complete armour of God, be steadfast in prayer and reading the Word of God (1 Pet. 5:8; Ps. 119:11, 110).

Because Jesus was tempted, He can help when His own are tempted. He is a merciful, faithful, and helping High Priest to them (Heb. 2:17-18).

In Andrew we see how the Lord often uses seemingly less significant tools to bring the "more important" ones to Him (cf. Barnabas and Paul in Jerusalem Acts 9:27).

To be cont'd

God's Choice and My Circumstances

*God chooses my circumstances, my sicknesses,
my sorrows, in view of what He is accomplishing.*

*"We do know that all things work together for
good to those who love God....Because whom
He has foreknown, He has also predestinated
to be conformed to the image of His Son"
(Rom. 8:28-29).*

*He thus chooses the circumstances for us that
will best accomplish His purpose of conforming
us to the image of His Son. The consequence
is that, if in the line of His purpose, I will never
seek to change my circumstances. In fellowship
with the heart of God I will gratefully leave that
to Him.*

E. D.