

2 Chronicles - Commentaries by W. Noel Tomkins

Bible Treasury: Volume N8, Suddenly (29:36)

The grace of God bestowed upon king Hezekiah was very great. He succeeded king Ahaz who had gathered together the vessels of the house of God, cut them in pieces, and shut up the doors of Jehovah's house; also in addition to making him altars in every corner of Jerusalem, and in every several city of Judah high places to burn incense unto other gods, he had removed the brazen altar, and substituted for it one made after the pattern of an altar he had seen at Damascus, on which he elected to offer his offerings. Hezekiah, however, on his accession, changed all this, opening the doors of the house of the Lord and sanctifying it in eight days, so that in sixteen days they had made an end; and we read, "Moreover all the vessels which king Ahaz in his reign did cast away in his transgression, have we [said those entrusted with the duty] prepared and sanctified, and, behold, they are before the altar of Jehovah" (2 Chron. 29:19). This altar, "the altar," is alluded to seven times in the same chapter, as we have the blood, sprinkled upon the same, four times—of the seven bullocks, the seven rams, the seven lambs, and of the seven he goats, for a sin offering for the kingdom and for the sanctuary. The prevalence of the perfect number (seven) is striking, as also that the atonement was "for all Israel," for so had the king commanded the burnt offering and the sin offering. What a moment it was when, the burnt offering having begun, "the song of Jehovah began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David king of Israel. And all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; all until the burnt offering was finished" (vers. 27, 28)! Space forbids to dwell upon the delightful scene, so, with the Holy Spirit's comment, we say, "And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people; for the thing was done suddenly" (ver. 36).

There is a day coming when, as the prophet Malachi tells us, "the offering of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasant unto Jehovah, as in the days of old, and as in former years" (3:4); and this will be consequent upon another sudden event, even that described in ver. 1 of the same chapter, viz., "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith Jehovah of hosts."

There is, however, what comes home to us in a nearer way perhaps—the birth of the holy Babe —(whom it was Simeon's joy to confess as "Thy salvation," for that Babe was Emmanuel, God with us!) In lowly guise and garb was He to be a sign to Bethlehem's shepherds, even the One concerning whom the angel of the Lord spake to them these wonderful words, "Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior which is Christ the Lord." Further, "Ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger"! What depths of lowliness and heights of majesty do these words unfold! Do we wonder that "Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good pleasure in men" (Luke 2). "And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him." "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." "He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him." Of all that Jesus did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, were the apostles witnesses. Coming to His own [possessions] His own [people] received Him not, but slew Him and hanged Him on a tree. Nevertheless, God raised Him up the third day and showed Him openly, before He was received up into heaven. Moreover, when He had by Himself purged our sins, He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

To Him now ascended are believers united. And of this the relentless persecutor of those who called upon that name is to be the witness. Saul, armed with letters to his co-religionists, went to Damascus to bring the saints, whether men or women, bound unto Jerusalem to be punished and put to death. Paul's own testimony in Jerusalem, on the stairs of the castle, is—"As I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" and, to his question, the answer from heaven is, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest." Thus was the present glory of the Lord Jesus, and for our sakes His having become poor, made known to the chief of sinners, for in that Name is salvation, the forgiveness of sins, as the angel said to Joseph, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." We forbear on the present occasion to dwell on how in it all is to be discerned the revelation of the mystery—the very words indicating that the poor persecuted ones were His, in an especial way, "for we are members of his body" (Eph. 5:30).

Acts 2:2, 3, gives us, we may reverently say, the joy of the Holy Ghost in taking up His habitation in that which the precious blood of Christ had fitted to be His dwelling-place. "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting." "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."

When Paul and Silas, after considerable trials in their pathway of service, arrive at Philippi (where only women, but no "man of Macedonia" is apparent), and where, consequent on rebuking a young woman with a spirit of divination and commanding the spirit to come out of her, these servants of the Lord find themselves in a dungeon, with backs sore, and feet made fast in the stocks, they made it the occasion, not of murmuring—but of praise—"they prayed and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them"; can we wonder that "suddenly" there was a great earthquake, and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bands were loosed, or that the Lord of all gave to His servants not only a man of Macedonia, but all his, for "he believed in God with all his house" (Acts 16:32)?

Is it not striking when on the holy mount, Peter, in mistaken zeal, asked for what would have put his Master on a level with Moses and Elias, and was rebuked by the "voice that came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son, hear ye him" (Mark 9:7), that we should read, "And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves," as if the lawgiver and the prophet had made haste to depart at such a belittling of their adorable Lord! We need to be much on our guard, as saith the Master Himself, "Watch ye therefore, for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch" (Mark 13:35-37).

There is, however, that blessed hope which puts every "suddenly" into the shade, for "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump... the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed." May we therefore have grace to be so waiting for Him as to open to Him immediately when He comes. W. N. T.

Bible Treasury: Volume N12, Asa and Jehoshaphat (16:1-10)

2 Chronicles 16:1-10; 20:1-30

One hardly knows anything more sad than this account of Asa. No doubt he was the Lord's, but he was out of communion, and relied on his own resources. And he begins by robbing God. Then he asked a worldly man to do a distinctly dishonorable thing: "Then Asa brought out silver and gold out of the treasures of the house of Jehovah and of the king's house, and sent to Ben-hadad, king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus, saying, There is a league between me and thee, as there was between my father and thy father: behold, I have sent thee silver and gold; go, break thy league with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me" (vers. 2, 3). If we get out of communion there is no saying what we may do. It is sad to think that the flesh has more scope in a believer than in the unconverted.

Asa gets his way with Ben-hadad, but Jehovah sends a messenger who tells him he is only a sufferer by getting his own way. Then he adds: "For the eyes of Jehovah run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show himself strong in the behalf of those whose heart is perfect towards him" (ver. 9). Those whose hearts are perfect are not those perfect in flesh, but those who know there is nothing good in them. "Cease ye from man," and begin with yourself.

We need mercy, we need wisdom. Let us ask of God, Who giveth liberally and upbraideth not. We have had here a word of warning, Now let us turn to chap. 20:1-3.

Oh, how blessed! There is nothing finer than this. David, and rightly, "inquired of Jehovah," but Jehoshaphat "set himself to seek Jehovah," and then proclaimed a fast-setting aside the flesh. Oh, how delightful to see the people of God realizing their weakness, and gathering together to seek the Lord as in ver. 5! Mark Jehoshaphat's reasoning: he makes it a question of God, to Whom all power belongs. Clearing the ground altogether, he makes it a question of God, and God's ability.

What a delicious verse is ver. 6! But he is taking the very highest ground in ver. 7. "Abraham, thy friend"! Twice do we get the father of the faithful spoken of as the "Friend" of God! Here for the first time, then in Isaiah (41.), and lastly in James (2.). Doubtless, the people had behaved very badly, and Jehoshaphat is ready to own it; but if grace gives us high ground it is the merest pride to reject it. Some think it wrong to know the forgiveness of sins; but no, God says it, and the believer ought to occupy the high ground His grace gives.

Mark how he piles it up in vers. 8, 9. It is very beautiful. There is no boasting, but telling God how they have rested in Him, and now they are doing exactly what God would have them do, answering to Solomon's prayer, and relying on His promise, and He cannot deny Himself.

"And now, behold, the children of Ammon and Moab and mount Sier, whom thou wouldest not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them, and destroyed them not; Behold, I say, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit, O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee." How blessed! He pleads with God all that His grace has given, and asks if God is going to allow the enemy to triumph. He would have us trust in all He has given us. But he makes no preparation—no war loan—no fresh taxes! No; "our eyes are upon Thee."

Then "All Judah stood before Jehovah," and the little ones are given first. You know what parade is. Here the little ones come first. The Lord Jesus was much displeased with those who would keep the little ones from Him. Here the little ones stand first before Jehovah, then the wives—not the warriors.

The sons of Asaph were singers, and of them, says ver. 15: "Hearken ye, all Judah and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith Jehovah unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God's," etc. And God owns to it. They had owned God, and He answers to it. God knew exactly the place where the enemy was; they might go to their beds, for He that keepeth Israel was watching over them, and "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still and see the salvation of the Lord with you" —a remarkable expression. Not salvation for you as at the Red Sea, but with you—with the little ones, the wives and the children. "Go out... for Jehovah is with you."

Ver. 18: What a lovely scene! Here are these people, with the foe to be dealt with to-morrow, worshipping the LORD. There was no nonsense about it (ver. 19). Why should they not stand up to praise the LORD with a loud voice on high?

"So shall ye be established" (ver. 20) —that was the point. "I commend you to God," said the apostle. "We want implicit trust in our God and Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ." "Believe His prophets" —yes, always the word of God for all. Our sorrows arise because we have acted without the sanction of the word.

Ver. 21 "Beauty of holiness," rather "In holy splendor." They were not going to do it in tinpot style but "in holy splendor." They were rather previous, but they were all right. It is a very good receipt to praise beforehand! If God has promised, may we not give thanks? They began the song of triumph, and Jehovah set ambushments.

"And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten." How lovely! Israel never shot an arrow; this war never cost them a farthing; no one got a scratch. God said He would fight for them and this is how He did it. To me, this is most delightful. The enemies all slay one another. Judah had said, "Our eyes are upon Thee," now they get another sight—all dead bodies.

"They were three days gathering the spoil" (vers. 25). Can we think of these three days without thinking of that Blessed One Who won the victory for us? And on the fourth day they blessed the LORD (ver. 26). On their side it was a perfectly bloodless battle! not one soldier missing!

I am looking at it in a practical way for ourselves, but when He comes as the rightful Conqueror, we shall come with Him. They started from the house of Jehovah, and they returned there (ver. 28).

It is a true thing to look to Him. In the early days of our short little history they had not much trouble with those who wanted to come into communion—the fear of the Lord was over them. If we fail, always at once confess it; keep short accounts, and rely on Him, and be obedient to the word of His grace.

W. N. T.

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