

PRAYING FOR HELP IN TIME OF WAR.

– 2 CHRONICLES 14:1-12. – JULY 17. –

Golden Text: – "Help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on thee."

OUR lesson relates to the two tribe kingdom of Judah under its good king Asa, the great grandson of Solomon. We have already noticed the tendency to idolatry stimulated by Solomon's marrying heathen women, and then, to please them, introducing their heathen religions. We have seen how only a small portion of the kingdom was left in the hands of Solomon's son Rehoboam, and that true religion for a time was stimulated by the adversities of the government. Nevertheless, idolatry flourished, not only in Israel under Jeroboam, but also in Judah under Rehoboam, and also under the reign of his son Abijah, mentioned in the opening verses of our lesson.

CONFLICT BETWEEN LIGHT AND DARKNESS.

Under all the circumstances one is inclined to wonder whence Asa received his aspirations for righteousness and loyalty to God. We are to remember, however, that the gathering to Judah of many of the religious people of the ten tribes and the Levitical tribe gave true religion a strong foundation in Judah. The heathen religions were fascinating to the people, not only because they were showy, but because they contained a large element of licentiousness, and it is a weakness of the fallen human nature to want to be right and yet to be wrong at the same time – to pretend to be doing good and serving righteousness and exercising the religious elements of human nature, while at the same time gratifying the lower and baser instincts. The entire human family is weak in this direction, as is evident by all the heathen religions of the world. The religion of the Bible is the only one that lifts its standard far above all baseness, and which demands of its followers the highest ideals, as represented in our text for the year, – "Brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are

honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are reputable, if there be any virtue, or any praise, think on these things." – Phil. 4:8.

Our Lord, in telling us to let our light shine before men, informs us that the darkness will hate the light, that there will be continually a conflict between the two, and that this will cause the "children of the light" continually to walk in the narrow and difficult way. Nevertheless the light reproveth the darkness wherever it shines. We may be sure that some such conditions prevailed in the kingdom of Judah when the best people of the whole twelve tribes had gathered in Judah and were letting the light of their faith in God shine before their fellows. The influence of the Truth took hold upon the heart of Asa, and upon his reaching the throne, at the death of his father Abijah, he promptly availed himself of the opportunity to strike a blow at idolatry – to take his stand on the side of the Lord and his Law, which the nation centuries [R3392 : page 203] before had accepted as the basis of their government with God through Moses.

ASA'S COURSE NOT A PATTERN.

The work of reform consisted in the destruction of the altars erected on various hilltops, at which the orgies of heathendom were practised. These altars were surrounded by groves for the worship of Baal and Ashtaroth by those who affected to be in a large sense worshipers of nature, and groves of trees on hilltops were their temples. Asa not only destroyed these unlawful accessories to a false worship, but he caused a proclamation to be made throughout the kingdom calling the attention of the people to the true God Jehovah, the God of their fathers, and to his Law and all the commandments connected therewith.

Such action on the part of Asa has been misunderstood by many well-meaning Christian people to imply that other kings and rulers in other countries should similarly take active measures for the destruction of all false religion and for the establishment of what they

conceive to be the true religion. This has meant religious persecution throughout the past. For instance, in Great Britain, Germany, France, etc., time and again Roman Catholics coming into power have overthrown Protestant worship and persecuted Protestant worshipers, and, reversely, Protestants coming into power have endeavored similarly to persecute Catholics. Sometimes the persecution has been between various sects of Protestants, sometimes between Mohammedans and Christians, etc. Of late years a more tolerant spirit has disposed intelligent people to let each other worship different gods or the same God according to the dictates of the conscience of each. Nevertheless there are many today, who, if they had the power, would feel it to be their duty to emulate the example of Asa, and destroy any and every religion disapproved by their consciences.

Such misapprehensions of proprieties are built upon misunderstanding of the course of Asa and others of his time, who had God's approval in their course of opposing false worships. In order to grasp the situation thoroughly and to see the principles underlying it, we should remember that no nation in the world today occupies the same position toward God that Israel occupied in its day. God chose Israel – the natural descendants of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob – to be his peculiar people, to be his nation. They were thus separated from all other nations of the world, which were accounted heathen. In this his chosen nation God established his Law, and made a covenant with that people by which they were to be obedient to certain directions and to receive from him certain blessings, protection, guidance, etc. It was in harmony with this special arrangement that Asa was properly doing his duty in destroying any and every religious system in his nation contrary to the divine Law and Covenant.

"YE ARE A HOLY NATION."

However, Israel has ceased to be God's people since the time of their rejection of Messiah, and God has not adopted any other nation

of earth to be his nation instead of Israel, and he is no longer in covenant relationship with any other nation. Believers in the Lord Jesus, consecrated followers in his steps, are, from the Lord's standpoint, his "holy nation," his "Royal Priesthood" – spiritual Israel. But these do not constitute a nation from the worldly standpoint. They are the embryo members of the coming nation, the Kingdom of God's dear Son, which will be established in power and great glory at the second coming of the Lord and the establishment of his Kingdom. For this reason it would be entirely improper to any king or governor or president or emperor of earth today to attempt to use any such power as that exercised by Asa with divine approval. During this Gospel age the Lord's plan is that his people shall be as lights in the world in the midst of the darkness of sin and error, and that the light which they let shine shall reprove the world of sin, not nationally but individually, so that those who experience conviction of sin and who go on to repentance may become associated with the light-bearers, the Lord's people, and while still in the world and still of the world, according to the flesh, and still bound to it by certain obligations and laws of men, nevertheless as our Lord expressed it, such, from the time they become members of the Royal Priesthood, the holy nation, are not of the world even as Jesus was not of the world, because he has chosen them out of the world.

King Asa built fortress cities in the highways connecting the land of Judah with the outside world, as a protection against attack from Egypt on the south and west, from Syria on the north and east, and from the ten-tribe kingdom on the immediate north. He organized also a militia army subject to call. These preparations for war had the divine approval, but in no sense of the word indicated that we, the antitypical Israelites, should take a similar course. On the contrary, as the Apostle points out, we are to have on the armor of God, the armor of righteousness; we are to fortify our hearts against the attack of spiritual enemies in every direction; we are to note the quarter from which the enemies are to be expected – the world, the flesh, the Adversary. The battles of typical Israel represented or prefigured and

illustrated the battles in which we spiritual Israelites are to engage and the victories which we are to win on a higher plane, for we contend not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers and wicked spirits in places of influence.

The ten years of quiet mentioned in verses 1,5 and 6, in which Asa instituted reforms amongst the people and equipped them for defence, were evidently all needed for the struggle recorded in verse 9. Zerah, the Ethiopian, with an army of 1,000,000 men, is supposed by some to have been Osorkon II. of Egypt, who was of Ethiopian descent. Others suppose that Zerah was the general of this king. In the days of Rehoboam the king of Egypt [R3393 : page 204] had invaded Judah and conquered it, and had taken away from it an immense treasure in gold accumulated by King Solomon, including the solid gold shields which Solomon had hanging from the pillars of the Temple. It is assumed that Judah became practically a vassal nation to Egypt as a result of this war, and that Asa's organization of the nation on a military basis and the erecting of fortifications meant a declaration of independence and a refusal to pay tribute to Egypt, and that Zerah's army was sent to punish him, to bring away more spoil and to reduce the nation again to the condition of a vassal.

KING ASA'S PRAYER FOR VICTORY.

Asa called into requisition his army, which numbered only about one-half that of the invading foe, but his confidence was in the Lord, and he cried unto him in prayer for help that the war might result favorably to the Lord's people, the Jews. His recorded prayer is beautiful for its simplicity of faith: –

"Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord, there is none beside thee to help between the mighty and him that hath no strength: help us, O Lord our God; for we rely on thee, and in thy name are we come against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee."

The Lord blessed the forces of the Jews. The enemy was discomfited, scattered, routed, and pursued through the land of the Philistines, who evidently were in league with them as enemies of the Jews. This was one of the most remarkable victories ever achieved by the Jews over any foreign nation.

Following the custom of Asa and David and Moses, and others of bygone times in Israel, it is the habit of Christian peoples of our day to offer up prayers for success in war. We recall well the prayers that were offered for the armies during the civil war of this country; we remember the accounts given of the prayers of the British and Boers during the recent British war; we remember in the Spanish war the prayers of the Catholics of Spain and of Italy for the success of the Spanish forces, and how the Pope's blessing was given to the Spanish war vessels. We have heard lately of how the Czar of Russia, on learning of the outbreak of the war, repaired to the Cathedral for prayer to God, and how the leading Russian generals have similarly gone to confession and to prayer and for other public recognitions of the Almighty and appeals to him for success to the Russian arms in the present war with Japan. We have seen pictures in the public press of how the regimental standards, flags, are blessed by the Czar and assisting priests, and the telegraphic reports declare that an image of the Virgin Mary, which was taken with the army in wars of long ago that were successfully waged, is to be taken to the far East as a kind of talisman to give good luck to the Russian side of the warfare. How shall we view these appeals? Shall we view them as others do as being on a parity with the appeal of Asa in our lesson? Shall we consider that they are equally appropriate in God's sight and that they are bringing a blessing and victory? We answer, No. The prayers offered for the success of the Confederate armies did not bring them victory; the prayers and blessings upon the Spanish forces and vessels brought them no victory; the prayers of the Boers brought them no victory; the prayers of the French in their war with Germany brought the former no victory; the prayers of the Russians have in no sense of the word stayed or turned the tide of battle as yet.

GOD'S INTEREST AND CARE AND OURS.

We would not be understood as declaring or even implying that God has no interest in the affairs of the world, and that he does not in any measure take a hand in the results of the wars of our time. Quite the contrary. We believe that the Lord's power, especially in this day, especially in this time of "harvest," is supervising and shaping the affairs of the nations with a view to bringing about the grand consummation of the age so long foretold in the Scriptures, which will result in a great time of trouble through a social, political and financial upheaval which will prepare the way for the Kingdom of God's dear Son in its due time. But we deny the propriety of Christians attempting to pray or otherwise direct the Lord in connection with these matters, and the outworking of the divine program, which we cannot fully and clearly comprehend. No nation in the world today is God's nation in the sense that Israel was his people. With no nation in the world today has God made a covenant such as that which subsisted between himself and Israel for the centuries between the giving of the Law at Sinai and the rejection of the Lord at the time of his crucifixion. No nation or kingdom in the world can claim divine authority or right or backing. The title, "Christian nations," is entirely a misnomer, unauthorized by anything in God's Word. All these nations, from the Scriptural standpoint, are "kingdoms of this world," Gentile kingdoms. The Lord acknowledges none of them, but describes them unitedly as great Babylon, which in due time would fall and give place to the glorious kingdom which the Lord has promised – the antitype of the Jewish kingdom under a still more favorable covenant, under a still better Mediator, under a still more grand and glorious king than David or Solomon or any other.

The proper attitude, therefore, for the Lord's consecrated people to occupy is that of neutrals. "Ye are not of this world, even as I am not of this world; for I have chosen you out of the world, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." The fruit which the Lord's people are to bear is not strife and

enmity and vain glory, but love, joy and peace in the holy Spirit. This does not mean either that we are to quarrel with the world and seek to bring all mankind to the same position that we occupy. On the contrary, we are to realize that the [R3393 : page 205] world is of one nature and the Lord's consecrated and accepted ones are of a new nature; that the Lord has not given to the world the same law that he has given to his consecrated ones, and that he is not expecting of the world the same course of conduct that he is expecting of the house of sons begotten of his Spirit, adopted into his family and guided by his Spirit and his Word.

Let the world fight its fight: the Lord will supervise and the results will be glorious eventually. Let us who belong to the new nation, to the new Kingdom that is not of this world, who use no carnal weapons, but the sword of the Spirit – let us fight the good fight of faith, lay hold upon the glorious things set before us, and not only stand ourselves, but help all those begotten of the same Spirit and members of the same heavenly army corps to stand, complete in him who is the Head of the body, the Captain of our salvation. By and by God's loving care over all his creatures will be manifested in the glorious Kingdom of his dear Son, which shall bless and rule, instruct and uplift mankind in general. "The groaning creation" will then be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God – so many of them as will then accept the blessing. Then all will see that God so loved the world as to give his Son to die for us and to thus open the way for his Kingdom blessings.

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