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BOASTERS DEFEATED, PRAYERS HELPED.

– 2 CHRON. 32:9-23. – JULY 2. –

Golden Text: – "With us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles." – 2 Chron. 32:8.

THE International Sunday School course of Bible studies now changes from the New Testament to the Old. The present lesson relates to one of the severe experiences that came upon the people of Judah under the reign of good King Hezekiah. Hezekiah's father, the notoriously wicked king of Judah, lacking faith in the true God, had introduced the idolatries of Moloch, had closed the Temple against divine worship, and in every way endeavored to lead the minds of the people into the idolatrous ways of the surrounding nations. Doubtless he reasoned that, as Israel was once a mighty nation yet had latterly made much less progress than the nations round about that were idolatrous, this should be understood to mean that idolatrous nations would prosper the more. He did not see what we see in this matter, namely, that God was not dealing with the surrounding nations, the heathen nations, but allowing them to take practically their own course, interfering with the same only as it impinged upon the features of his plan and upon the Jews, his peculiarly favored people. He did not realize that the covenant entered into between Israel and God meant great blessings for them if faithful, and implied corresponding tribulations if they were unfaithful, and that their measure of unfaithfulness had been the cause of their lack of prosperity.

SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS FOR SPIRITUAL ISRAEL.

While recognizing this truth respecting natural Israel, we should guard our minds against expecting temporal blessings as a reward now in respect to Spiritual Israel. God's promises to natural Israel were the temporal blessings on condition of their hearty obedience

to his requirements. But the blessings he promises to Spiritual Israel are the spiritual kind – not temporalities. Hence, when we find that while seeking to serve the Lord faithfully we are not prospered in temporal matters, we should understand that in some way which the Lord sees he is overruling our temporal adversities for our profit in spiritual things as his Spiritual Israel, his New Creation. The failure to see the differences between the promise of earthly blessings, physical health, etc., made to natural Israel, and the blessings of spiritual favors, spiritual health, made to Spiritual Israel, has been the occasion of much confusion and stumbling to some of the Lord's people. Let us not so stumble.

Hezekiah, at the death of his father Ahaz, attained dominion over a nation already considerably impoverished; because Ahaz, failing to have the Lord for his counsellor, after making various blunders endeavored to enter into a compact with the surrounding nations. Toward the north were the Philistines, who had triumphed over him on several occasions, taking possession of much of his territory. He also feared the Egyptians, and for his protection he made an alliance with the king of Assyria, becoming a vassal king, paying tribute annually to the king of Assyria to protect him from his closer neighbors, his enemies. Thus the kingdom not only lost much of its independence, but much of its wealth and considerable of its territory; and instead of the Moloch worship advancing the national interest, as had been hoped for, the Lord, true to his covenant, had allowed troubles to greatly increase against his covenant people. We thus see that Hezekiah and the whole nation were greatly handicapped by the idolatrous course of Ahaz.

Shortly after Hezekiah took the reins of government and instituted the true worship of God at the Temple, abolishing the idolatrous worship of Moloch, etc., blessings began to flow upon him and upon the nation according to the same divine covenant. He longed to rid himself of the exactions of the Assyrian compact, and the favorable opportunity seemed to arise when Assyria was at war

with Babylonia. He neglected and refused to send the annual tribute, in this going contrary to the counsel of Isaiah the prophet, and showing that although loyal to the Lord he was not without self-will. No doubt the trouble which speedily followed chastened the king and prevented his becoming more self-willed, more arrogant, less to the Lord's pleasement.

The Assyrian king, vanquishing the army of Babylonia, turned to punish the people of Judah and other surrounding nations which had withheld the tribute. The march of Sennacherib's army meant destruction and captivity to many small cities and towns on his route toward Jerusalem. Sennacherib's own account of this invasion was written upon what is commonly known as the Taylor cylinder, now in the British Museum. After an account of his triumphs over Syria, Egypt and Philistia,

SENNACHERIB GIVES THIS ACCOUNT.

"And Hezekiah, the Judaite who had not submitted to my yoke – forty-six of his fenced cities and fortresses and small towns in their vicinity without number...I besieged and took, 200,150 persons, **[R3582 : page 189]** small and great, male and female, horses and mules, asses, camels, large cattle, small cattle, without number, I brought forth from the midst of them, and allotted as spoil. As for himself, like a caged bird in Jerusalem his capital city, I shut him up. Forts against him I constructed, and any who would go out the city gate I caused to turn back....Fear of the luster of my sovereignty overwhelmed him...Thirty talents of gold and eight hundred talents of silver,...great stores of lapis lazuli, couches of ivory,...an immense treasure,...to Nineveh my capital I made him bring; and for the rendering of tribute and making homage, he sent his ambassador."

This was the condition of affairs at the juncture represented in our lesson. Sennacherib's army had **[R3582 : page 190]** prospered greatly, and Hezekiah at Jerusalem realized himself powerless to

oppose such an army. The inhabitants awaited in dread the storming of the capital city, with prospects of a siege, famine, etc., for Jerusalem, being hilly and fortified, was prepared to stand a siege for some little time. In great haste King Hezekiah made up a large sum of money, estimated at about \$600,000, or, in proportion to the purchasing value of the present day, the equivalent of about 6,000,000 dollars in gold and in silver. This was sent to Sennacherib at Lachish as tribute money, hoping thereby to turn aside the king's wrath and to restore the conditions of peace, and to at least save the capital and the remainder of the nation. Sennacherib took the money, but slacked not to make preparation for the utter destruction of the whole country, purposing, we are informed, the carrying away captive of all the people. The coming of the Jewish representatives with this treasure money to Assyria was represented in bas-relief on the walls of his palace at Nineveh, and this portion was cut out and transferred to and is on exhibition at the British Museum. It is interesting to note the complete harmony between these records and those of the Scriptures. The Bible, we hold, is the reliable history of the world, preserved to us by divine power; but it is pleasant to have such corroboration from other sources.

Although the present was sent to Sennacherib at Lachish, that city stood a siege, and Sennacherib himself remained with the army besieging it while he sent three of his chief generals and some of his principal warriors and paraphernalia to Jerusalem to accomplish its captivity. Realizing that the city could stand a considerable siege, and desiring to hasten matters, especially as there were rumors of an Egyptian army coming against Assyria, these generals attempted by intimidation, boasts, etc., to terrorize the people of Jerusalem, so that a sedition would be formed within the walls and overcome the king and his faithful and open the gates to the invaders, hoping thereby to be spared from the terrors of a siege, and from perhaps severer treatment at the hands of the captors if the city required to be taken by force of arms.

They did not in those days have rifles or cannon, but came to close quarters using arrows, spears, etc. Many of the people of Israel gathered upon the wall, some of them no doubt soldiers armed with bows and arrows, spears, etc., to defend the walls, but in the presence of so mighty an army there was evidently a fear to attempt to arouse its ire. The generals of Sennacherib took advantage of the situation, and sought to impress upon the soldiers and others within their hearing the uselessness of such destruction of life as would be involved in a siege, and assured them that other nations round about had succumbed, and that it would be foolish to think that they could withstand so mighty an army, so great a general. They pointed out the fact that other nations had gods in whom they trusted also, but that none of these were able to deliver them, and that the people of Judah should not be deceived and be persuaded by Hezekiah that they had the slightest hope of deliverance, nor should they believe that their God could accomplish more for them than the gods of other nations mightier than they. The Hebrew language was used, in order that the people might understand the proposition, and undoubtedly a great influence was effected; yet the people remained calm and obedient to their king, to whom Sennacherib's representative sent a letter expressing the same sentiments – their hope that he was a man of sense and reason, who would not jeopardize the kingdom and his own life also by trusting in foolish hopes, railing also at Jehovah the God of Israel as being no mightier, but less mighty, than the gods of the greater nations already conquered.

OPPOSITION AWAKENS FAITH

Hezekiah had undoubtedly come to deprecate his course in ignoring the advice of Isaiah in respect to the tribute. He was thoroughly humbled now, and the more he heard of the opposition of his enemies to the Lord the more sure he seems to have felt that God would take vengeance upon those who thus railed at him, and so we read, "And for this cause Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah cried to

heaven." Their faith grew stronger the more the false gods were brought into contrast with the true.

And is not this true with all of the Lord's people today? While we are in very different circumstances every way as members of the Royal Priesthood, Spiritual Israel, nevertheless it is true that our faith is sometimes helped to shine the more brightly when it is brought into sharp contrast with the errors and falsities around us. This is the right effect of love and faith toward God, which cast out fear and enable us the more earnestly to lay hold upon the exceeding great and precious promises of the Lord. The extremity of Hezekiah and his people became God's opportunity. The blasphemy against God and the comparing him with the gods of the nations became the opportunity for the Lord to show to the contrary, to avenge his own, to deliver his people. In answer to that faith and prayer, yet in full accord with his own foreknown plans, the Lord sent his angel and cut off in death the mighty ones of the **[R3582 : page 191]** army of Assyria, so that he returned to his own land with shame. We are not told in what manner this was accomplished – here is one of the peculiarities of some parts of the divine Word, so much is told in so few words. We do not need to think that an angel of the Lord went about through the camp of the Assyrians and smote all the chief men of the army and demoralized it. We may on the contrary very properly remember that the Lord could use as his angel or messenger a flame of fire, a stroke of lightning or a breath of pestilence. The important thing is to recognize that the Lord did it and that it was in answer to prayer. This account of Sennacherib's terrible defeat is not confined merely to the Bible account, which says (2 Kings 19:35) that of officers and the bravest of the troops 185,000 perished, the remnant fleeing in wild disorder. Geikie remarks that the hills over which the Assyrians fled received the name of the "mountains of prey," so great was the disaster and so great the spoil left in the hands of the Jews. The poet Byron has given a vivid picture of this Assyrian defeat, from which we cull the following:

"The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold.

* * *

Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green
That host with their banners at sunset were seen.
Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.
For the angel of death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed.
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances uplifted, the trumpets unblown,
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Has melted like snow in the glance of the Lord."

Sennacherib later on was slain in the house of his god by two of his sons, as is recorded in a veiled form in this lesson. Thus did the Lord bring eventually a blessing to Hezekiah and the Jewish nation because of their faithfulness to him, at the same time permitting a chastisement because of temporary neglect of his commands. The Lord's victory doubtless became known as that of Hezekiah, and as a consequence he was honored in the sight of all the nations henceforth.

What a lesson is here for all of the Lord's people of Spiritual Israel to-day! When our proudest, strongest foes seem triumphing over us the most, when they are loudest in their denunciations of the Lord and his promises, is the very time when we should lay hold on the Lord's promises with the greatest confidence. Indeed we give it as our experience that those who are most thoroughly rooted and grounded, whose hopes are most surely anchored within the veil, are those who have been attested through very trying experiences, and have had occasion to call mightily upon the Lord for help, when there was no earthly arm to lean upon. How many have found that the breaking of earthly ties has meant the strengthening of the heavenly ones, that the opposition of the world and the Adversary has meant

increase of spiritual favor, because, "Greater is he that is for us than all they that be against us."

