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BURNING THE WORD OF GOD.

– JEREMIAH 36:21-32. – AUGUST 20. –

Golden Text: – "Amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God." – Jer. 26:13.

KING JOSIAH, of our last lesson, dying in battle, made no arrangement respecting his successor on the throne, and the elders of the people chose his youngest son to be the king of Judah. The king of Egypt, on his victorious return from war with Assyria, exercised a suzerainty over the kingdom of Judah, and took the king a prisoner to Egypt, and exalted to the throne his eldest brother, Jehoiakim, who proved to be a thoroughly bold and bad man. Under his guidance of the kingdom evil of every kind seemed to prosper, and the good reforms instituted by his father gave way to fresh idolatry.

This was at the time when Jeremiah was one of the principal prophets in the land, who had been hindered for some time from prophesying publicly, but under the Lord's guidance he wrote out his prophecy respecting the coming judgments and chastisements upon the people of Judea, his scribe being Baruch. When it was finished it was read before certain prominent people of Jerusalem, and so deeply impressed them that they desired that the [R3614 : page 250] matter should be brought to the king's attention. Apparently they were friendly to the prophet and the scribe, and suggested the necessity for their concealment, lest the king should be angry with the prophecy and should seek to do them injury. King Jehoiakim, not satisfied with the general report given him respecting Jeremiah's prophecy, demanded to see the document itself, and had his own scribe read it before him. The king was unmoved by the message, and after hearing the contents of three of the columns of the manuscript he took his scribe's penknife and cut them off and cast them into the fire before him, and so he continued to do with the remainder until the entire manuscript was read and destroyed. Thus he emphasized his

determination to take no counsel from the Lord, or we might say that he evidenced his lack of faith in the Lord and his disregard for his Word.

THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH.

The king ordered the arrest of Jeremiah and his scribe, but, in harmony with the Lord's providences, they had already secreted themselves and were not found. In their seclusion they learned of the destruction of the manuscript, and prepared another statement of the prophecy, which we are informed had certain further additions, and this constitutes the book of Jeremiah as found in our Bibles. This gives us a little view of the manner in which the Bible came into existence piece by piece under the Lord's supervision. Doubtless the first manuscript delivered to the king was more particularly in respect to his own time and affairs. This served its purpose, and then the larger and fuller book of Jeremiah's prophecy, as we now have it, was prepared – not especially for the people of that time, but, as the Apostle Peter points out, it was designed for the instruction and edification of the Gospel Church. (Rom. 15:4; 1 Pet. 1:12.) Even those things which were applicable in some measure to Jeremiah's day and to Jehoiakim and to the king of Babylon were, as we have seen, of two-fold significance – applying not only to the literal Babylon of that time but also to the mystic Babylon of this Gospel age.

The Lord declares, "My Word that goeth forth out of my mouth shall not return unto me void, but shall accomplish that which I please, and shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it." (Isa. 55:11.) We see this not only in the narrative foregoing – that the Lord's plans were not frustrated by the king – but we see it also in all the various steps of the Lord's providences in connection with the giving to us of his Word. Much of that Word for centuries has seemed dark and meaningless to the Lord's people, but in the light of the Millennial dawn it is becoming luminous. Not that we should

consider that every little item and detail of the prophecies of old would contain great value and great instruction, for this we do not find. Our understanding is that the pearls of truth are scattered throughout the Word, here a little and there a little, and that in this manner our Lord has hidden the beauties of his plan from the casual reader, while his Spirit draws the attention of the New Creation to these pearls of thought so valuable to us in our spiritual upbuilding, in giving us knowledge of the divine plan. It is with this as with everything in nature: diamonds are not found in a heap together, but scattered here and there in the peculiar soil in which they are secreted. Gold is not found in large blocks, but usually in very minute grains intermingled with tons of sand and dirt and rocks. In the wheat field there is a much larger bulk of straw and of chaff than of clean grain.

We have doubtless all noticed this in the quotations made in the New Testament from the prophecies of the Old Testament, that only a fragment here and there is quoted and applied. We have all doubtless noted also that frequently the context seems very irrelevant, without connection with the part quoted. In other words, the Lord and the apostles selected for our nourishment the grains of wheat without specially referring to the chaff and straw of the connections. And so at the present time, as the Spirit of the Lord opens the Old Testament before his people more and more, and we see in it wonderful things, we need not expect to find every item and every verse of every chapter full of meaning and spiritual nourishment. We must expect that a considerable portion of it will be like the straw and the chaff, not suited to our spiritual nourishment though necessary to the presentation of the meat in due season – necessary and proper in connection with the giving of the same, while at the same time hiding it from the world in general, especially until the due time. Thus the chaff hides the grain.

Our figure is still more complete when we remember that even if we have found the grain it needs a certain preparation of grinding

or bruising, etc., before it is ready for our nourishment. So even after we have separated wheat from chaff, spiritual things pertaining to our time from other features pertaining to the time in which the Scriptures were written, we still require the assistances of the holy Spirit and agencies used of the Lord for the grinding and preparation of the meat in due season. By whatever means it is provided it is necessarily of the Lord's provision, and to him we render the thanks and praises and appreciation for all that has been done under the various instrumentalities of the Lord, the apostles and others.

FIGHTING AGAINST GOD.

As Jehoiakim found it in the end vain to fight against God, and that burning the words of Jeremiah did not destroy nor render null and void his prophecy, so others are finding the matter to this day. Roman Catholics have apparently long been opponents of the Word of God, the Bible, and under their direction considerable Bible burning has been done. History tells us that the first edition of Tyndale's translation of the New Testament was bought up in the book-stores of London, etc., and burned. Indeed in very recent years we have heard of similar proceedings in Spain and less than three years ago in Brazil. The Bible may be set down as the strongest foe of ignorance, superstition and **[R3615 : page 251]** every wrong doing: it is no wonder, therefore, that many hate the book.

It would not do for Roman Catholics to ignore the Bible altogether, since in considerable measure their religious system is based upon its teachings; hence they have from time to time issued various editions of the Bible, various translations, though none of these were ever issued by the authority of the Roman Catholic Church as a whole, but merely by local Bishops. It would not be claimed by any that there is a wide discrepancy between the teachings of the popular Douay edition of the Bible used by Roman Catholics and the common English version of the same books. The Catholic version is supplied with elaborate notes on the Scriptures,

supposed to safeguard the latter from heresies, while the Protestant version is usually published without note or comment except the marginal readings respecting the translation.

In our day a peculiar anomaly is presented: the Roman Catholic Church, which through her popes has denounced Bible Societies as being of the devil, has within the last few years through its councils at Baltimore, and also more recently through the pope's encyclical letter to the bishops of America, advocated the reading of the Scriptures by its people, and urged that the priesthood shall encourage this reading. Probably this is merely for effect, merely to counteract the past tendencies of the Church, and to seem to imply that papacy is loyal to the Scriptures. As a matter of fact Roman Catholics tell us that the priests do not urge the reading of the Scriptures, but when inquired of on the subject treat the matter lightly and rather discourage it. Of course only a Douay version is permitted at all, and it only to the educated, whom it would be unwise to refuse. Furthermore, the price of the Catholic edition is rather prohibitive so far as the poor are concerned.

THE BIBLE-BURNING SPIRIT.

Those whose eyes of understanding are open have doubtless noticed a peculiar change of sentiment amongst Protestants respecting the Bible. The division is into three main classes: one repudiates the Bible except as a work of literature. These are known as higher critics, who consider their own judgments respecting all Biblical matters to be far superior to the opinions and testimonies of the Lord, the apostles and the prophecies. Egotistical and self-confident, they assume to be much wiser than is written, yet hold that it is not well to break entirely with the Bible because it still has a considerable hold upon many good people, and by rejecting it in toto they would not only lose the respect of these good people but also lose their support. The second class still holds to the Bible as a fetich, a charm, a book of good luck, which they like to have upon their

parlor tables and without which in the house they would not feel entirely safe; they regard it as the Word of God, but do not understand it themselves nor do they believe that others understand it. They have a special interest in and regard for Churchianity, especially for the branch of it to which they have given adherence, and they somehow realize that an investigation of the Bible might undermine the influence of Churchianity and make its students independent of those systems of man which have grown so grandly influential in social and financial circles. These would not burn the Bible itself, but would be in full sympathy with the burning of MILLENNIAL DAWN or any other book which would remove the dust and smoke of superstition from the Word of God and let its true light and beauty shine forth. They would not hesitate to burn these, because they feel instinctively that such a shining forth of the Word of God means a proportionate decline in the luster of their earthly systems of Churchianity.

Thus do we account for the burning of the WATCH TOWER publications. In one or two cases the burning was done in public; in many instances, on the advice of this class of people, timid ones of the Lord's sheep have burned their books privately. One sister who attended a Canadian Convention not long since, as she shook hands with the Editor remarked: "Brother Russell, the Lord in his providence sent me MILLENNIAL DAWN several years ago, but I hearkened to the voice of those whom I supposed to be my religious superiors and proper Christian guides and I burned the book. Still gracious to me, the Lord sent me another copy: again I listened to the voices of darkness and burned the book. The Lord in great mercy sent me a third copy, and this time I was ready for it – it burned me; it has set me free, and I am here to-day rejoicing in the favor of God and in the light upon his Word." Her husband at her side spoke up, saying, "Yes, and it has burned me, too," – burned the old self-will and sectarianism and opposition to the Way, the Truth and the Life, which God has revealed to us through his Word, to which Jesus and his redemptive work are the key.

Let us, dear friends, realize more and more that we cannot turn aside the divine plan by our puny oppositions if we were so disposed, and let us get into such heart harmony with the Lord, let us exercise such faith toward him, that nothing will be farther from our thoughts than to substitute a plan of our own for his, or in any wise to alter, change, or amend the gracious plan which, rightly seen, includes all the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of love and wisdom divine. Let us not fight against God, and be overwhelmed and suffer loss of position if not loss of life eternal. Let us on the contrary receive the great blessing which comes to all those who are children of the light, who receive it into good and honest hearts, and who rejoice in it.

THE GREATEST OF BOOKS.

Many of the world's best and noblest characters have acknowledged the grandeur of God's Book, even those who, like Presidents Lincoln and Grant, were not themselves professedly consecrated Christians. We are all familiar with General Grant's declaration that he esteemed the Bible to be the corner-stone of the liberties enjoyed in the United States. President Lincoln said, **[R3615 : page 252]** "Take all of this book upon reason that you can, and the balance on faith, and you will live and die a better man." Coleridge said, "The words of the Bible find me at greater depths of my being than all other books put together." John Ruskin said, "Whatever I have done in my life has simply been due to the fact that when I was a child my mother daily read with me a part of the Bible, and daily made me learn a part of it by heart." Huxley, the agnostic scientist, declared, "The Bible has been the Magna Charta of the poor and the distressed." Gladstone declared, "What crisis, what trouble, what perplexity of life has failed or can fail to draw from this inexhaustible treasure-house its proper supply?" President Roosevelt said, recently, "If we read the Bible right, we read a book which teaches us to try to make things better in this world."

These testimonies come to us from the outside rather than from the inside – mainly from those who understood very little of the true Divine Plan of the Ages. How much deeper and more meaningful is the testimony of our hearts to the value of this book as we come, step by step, to a proper appreciation of the glorious and wonderful words of life which it contains and the true meaning of its exceeding great and precious promises, by which in the Lord's plan it is designed that a little flock may become partakers of the divine nature and be prepared to be the Lord's instruments for the blessing eventually of all the families of the earth.

THE BIBLE INDESTRUCTIBLE.

In an early edition of Wyclif's Bible there was a frontispiece representing a fire of true Christianity against which its enemies, Satan, the pope, and infidelity, were blowing with all their might, trying to put it out; but the more they put themselves out of breath the more brightly did the fire burn. This is still true. The enemies of the Lord's Word, whether great or small, those who are doing their utmost against the spread of the Truth and to oppose the Helps for Bible Study which the Lord is now sending forth, are really in some respects at least spreading the flame of the Truth. We may be sure that eventually the object, the purpose, of the divine Word will be accomplished – the elect Church will be called, schooled, prepared for the Kingdom and gathered into it to do the work promised, the blessing of all the families of the earth.

As illustrating that the Bible has stood the test of time where other books have failed, we note the fact that while other books have no particular opposition, no attempts having been made to destroy them, nevertheless they sink out of sight – while the Bible, with all the opposition which has been brought against it for centuries, is more widely circulated to-day than ever. It is estimated that "there are more than a million volumes in the imperial library at Paris gathered in since the fourteenth century; yet of this immense

catalogue, 700,000 are out of print....Mere fragments of all the literary wealth of Greece and Rome have made their way down the centuries, while the riches of Solomon and David and Moses, prophets, scribes, have held their steady place." "Not a manuscript of the classics is a thousand years old, but at least fifty manuscripts of the Greek New Testament are more than one thousand years old."

Our experiences in the study of the Word in this harvest time, the new beauties and rich depths of the divine wisdom, love and power which our wondering hearts behold, are illustrated well by the experiences of the French electrician, Ampere. He was shortsighted without being aware of it. When he became conscious of his defect of vision, through the casual use of a friend's eye-glasses, he burst into tears as he realized how much he had missed throughout his life of the wonderful beauty of the world around him.

