

[R3616 : page 252]

PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE.

– JEREMIAH 38:1-13. – AUGUST 27. –

Golden Text: – "Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

– Matt. 5:10.

INCIDENTS of our last lesson – the writing of his prophecy, etc. – brought the Prophet Jeremiah into special prominence. Our present lesson finds him in the reign of Zedekiah, the last king of the house of David to sit upon the throne: the one of whom it is written, "O thou profane and wicked prince of Israel, whose time is come, when iniquity shall have an end. Thus said the Lord God: Remove the diadem, and take off the crown....I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it unto him." – Ezek. 21:25,26.

How accurately this prophecy has been fulfilled! With the captivity of Zedekiah the Kingdom of David was overturned but not destroyed. To all human appearances it has been destroyed, for no heir of his has occupied the throne of Israel from Zedekiah's day to the present time – over twenty-five hundred years. If Israel were today exalted to place and power in the world, and desired to re-establish the kingdom of David, no Jew could prove his title to the throne as being of the lineage of David. All such records have long been lost. There is just one who could claim title to that throne, namely, he who was the man Christ Jesus. Born of Mary, he was of the seed of David, and adopted by Joseph who was of the same stock. Although he surrendered his life as a ransom for sinners, he was and still is heir of all the promises made to Abraham and to David, and soon, according to the Scriptures, will take to himself his power and great glory and reign as the antitypical David upon the throne of the Kingdom of the Lord, to bless Israel and every nation, people and tongue. [R3616 : page 253]

The long interregnum of 2520 years, the "seven times" of Israel's disfavor and of Gentile rule, will soon be complete and usher in the glories of the Kingdom of God. The overturning of the diadem was not to be perpetual, but "until he come whose right it is." This was not completely fulfilled in our Lord Jesus at his first advent. True, he came to be a King, but the great Prophet, Priest and King of the divine plan was not the man Christ Jesus, but the glorified Christ – Jesus the Head, and the Church, the members of his body. He whose right it is by divine sanction is selecting from amongst his brethren a little flock to be his associates, and this Gospel age is the period of their testing and development.

THE REMOVAL OF THE DIADEM.

The captivity of Judah was in two sections: the first included Daniel and others with the King Jehoiakim. The king of Babylon left Zedekiah in control as his vassal under tribute, but on account of the latter's treachery and league with Egypt, the Babylonian army came again against Jerusalem and besieged it. Famine and pestilence resulted, and ultimately the city of Jerusalem was captured and utterly destroyed, and King Zedekiah, with his eyes put out, was taken a prisoner to Babylon, with all the people except a few of the very poorest and least competent. Jeremiah, given his liberty, chose to remain with the poor of the land who subsequently went down into Egypt, so that Jerusalem and the country round about lay desolate without inhabitant for seventy years, according to the word of the Lord at the mouth of Jeremiah. – 2 Chron. 36:21.

OBEYING GOD, OPPOSED BY MAN.

Our lesson particularly relates to the period at the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar's army. Jeremiah had prophesied the success of the enemy and recommended the Israelites to surrender speedily and save themselves from the great trouble, famine, etc., which otherwise would surely come upon them. He pointed out that their troubles were the result of disobedience to God,

and that the proper course now was to repent and accept the situation and learn the lesson and profit thereby.

Certain princes of the kingdom soon learned of the prophesying and appealed to the king that it must be stopped, as it had a demoralizing effect upon the defenders in proportion as the prophecy was believed. They requested the death of Jeremiah, and the king responded that the matter should be in their hands. But perhaps fearful of the consequences of the act, or perhaps deterred by the Lord's providence, instead of putting Jeremiah to death they put him into a dungeon, which was probably a water cistern. Its bottom was foul with accumulated mud, and the prophet sank into this and would soon have perished of hunger had it not been for the interposition of a colored man, an Ethiopian eunuch, one of the king's servants, who appealed to the king against the injustice and was commissioned to take Jeremiah out from the dungeon or cistern by means of cords, his tender heartedness and care for the prophet being indicated also by his supplying cast-off rags to keep the ropes from cutting the prophet's body.

Surely we may conclude that this Ethiopian of kindly heart was used of the Lord in this emergency; that whilst the Lord could have delivered his prophet with equal facility in some other manner, he was pleased to use a person of kindly heart who was at hand. And yet we have people of sufficient intelligence to write books who claim that the "Negro is a Beast," and that he is everywhere condemned in the Scriptures. This Ethiopian evidently had a cleaner heart than the majority of the chief men in Israel – a heart much nearer to the divine likeness than theirs. Similarly, an Ethiopian eunuch, a Jewish proselyte, was amongst the first to be established and blessed with the Gospel, under the special providence of God, through the ministries of Philip. – Acts 8:27-38.

Jeremiah's experiences illustrated a general principle, namely, that where the will of God and the plans of man conflict, those who

are faithful to God are likely to be in the minority and to be considered public enemies, because out of accord with those who are out of harmony with the Lord and his plan. It was this that brought upon Jeremiah his imprisonment, as it has brought upon the Lord's people of every age the frowns and opposition and persecution of those who are not the Lord's faithful people, of those who are not guided by the divine counsel, but are walking in their own ways under the leadership of the prince of this world.

"IN IGNORANCE YE DID IT."

Since Satan is still the prince of this world it is reasonable to suppose that those who are in accord with him to-day will be found similarly opposed to God, opposed to all who are loyal to the teachings of his Word. It is for this reason that the Scriptures assure us that we must expect to suffer now, to be misunderstood, misrepresented – "Marvel not if the world hate you; ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world the world would love its own, but ye are not of the world, for I have chosen you out of the world."

Looking back all through the Gospel age, from the days of Jesus until now, we find that those who have been loyal and faithful to him in every time have been called upon to prove, to witness, to testify to their faithfulness to the Lord by the trials and difficulties which they would endure for his sake. And this expression, "for his sake," means much the same to-day as it did in the day of Jeremiah, namely, for the sake of the Word of the Lord. It was because Jeremiah was faithful to the Lord's message and the others unfaithful to it that they persecuted him. And this is still the case: the Word of the Lord is his representative in the world still. Our Lord places himself and his Word side by side when he said, "He who is ashamed of me and my Word, of him will I also be ashamed."

The test is upon us to-day as it has been upon the **[R3616 : page 254]** Lord's people in the past. Are we ashamed of him, of his

message? All who are of the overcoming class, all who will constitute the "very elect," the "Kings and Priests unto God," all who will be associated with Jesus as overcomers of the world and his joint-heirs in the Kingdom will have these characteristics. They will be loyal to the message, not ashamed of it. The words of the Apostle well voice their sentiments, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ."

Not being ashamed of the Lord and his message implies that they will be faithful in the presentation of the same when convenient to themselves or when inconvenient. To the best of their knowledge and ability they will speak forth the words of truth and soberness – as wisely as possible, as inoffensively as possible, but they must speak. As the Apostle said, when forbidden to declare the good tidings, "We cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard." – Acts 4:20. But it is only those who have heard something and seen something who have any testimony to give; those who know nothing may as well keep quiet. Until by the Lord's grace the eyes of our understanding are opened, until we shall have seen something of his grace exhibited in his divine plan, we are not prepared, not qualified to tell others. We must first receive the living Bread before we can dispense it; we must first know the truth and be set free by it before we can become its bond servants, before it could be true of us as it was of the Apostle "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel of Christ." That is to say, he would be unhappy if not permitted to tell the glorious message of God's redeeming love and mercy exhibited in his divine plan.

"GOD KINDLY VAILS OUR EYES."

As the poet has declared, "We know not what awaits us." That is, we know not with distinctness what to expect. In a general way we are informed by the Lord's Word that a great time of trouble is impending. It is not our duty to make this our central theme. Rather the good tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people, secured

through the precious blood of Christ, [R3617 : page 254] is our central theme; and in connection with this is the proclamation of the terms and conditions upon which we hope to be accepted of the Father as joint-heirs with Christ – members of his body. Occasionally, and only occasionally, need we enter upon the role of Jeremiah to be announcers of the evil conditions coming upon the world. Perhaps as we get down in the stream of time, nearer to the actual trouble, we may see it to be our duty to call attention to it more particularly, and to urge the people to take the course which would save them from the severity of that trouble – the course of harmony and accord with the Lord. When that time shall come such advice will doubtless run counter to the wishes and ambitions of some who will then be in power, and it may be that we shall be imprisoned or otherwise maltreated, after the example of Jeremiah. The Lord knoweth what is necessary for us to know. It is sufficient that we have the gracious promise that all things shall work together for good to those who love him, and that we should be able to trust him, come what may.

Our Golden Text is especially appropriate and should always be remembered, not only in severe persecutions but also in the lesser ones, when our names are cast out as evil, "when men shall separate you from their company," when they make all kinds of misrepresentations against you falsely because of your faithfulness to the Lord and to his Word and to the principles of righteousness. Then remember this Golden Text, and assure your heart in harmony with it and with other statements of the Lord's Word, that all these experiences of opposition the Lord is willing to overrule for your highest welfare, causing them to work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. All who will be of the Kingdom of heaven class must pass through some such experiences for the development and testing of their characters.

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