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A BROKEN VOW – A FULFILLED PENALTY.

– 2 CHRONICLES 36:11-21. – SEPT. 3. –

Golden Text: – "Be sure your sin will find you out." – Numbers 32:23.

ZEDEKIAH, the last king on the throne of David, was exalted to his position by Nebuchadnezzar and reigned eleven years, until the overthrow of the dynasty. He was given the throne upon his taking a solemn oath of faithfulness as a vassal to the king of Babylon. The taking of that oath was the immediate cause of his downfall. The matter is so stated in Ezekiel's prophecy. – Ezek. 17:11-21.

The folly of the king's course in this matter is but an illustration of the general folly of all who reject the Lord as their counsellor. Our lesson relates how the Lord through Jeremiah his prophet had warned the king respecting reformation and the keeping of his oath and the certainty that the king of Babylon would vanquish him. Self-willed and unbelieving and careless of his oath, the king, abetted by the princes and his counsellors, took the course which proved to be the way of folly and which led to the utter overthrow of the nation.

This reminds us of our text for the year, "The wisdom that cometh from above is first pure, then peaceable, easy of entreatment, and full of mercy and good fruits." It was, of course, not the privilege of Zedekiah or others living at that time to have the guidance of the holy Spirit in the sense that spiritual Israel may enjoy it now. Nevertheless they had what to them was a very fair substitute, all things considered, namely, God's direct revelations through his prophets. But now as then an evil heart of unbelief is inclined to lean to its own understanding, its own wisdom – earthly wisdom, which often, as the Apostle declares, is sensual and devilish. This is the meaning of much of the war and commotion which we see about us in the world, especially amongst so-called "Christian nations." Nor

should we too severely censure the world for not acting along the lines of faith and trust in the Lord when we remember that they know him not and see him not as do his spirit-begotten children – "Blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear." For those who do see and do hear and do know the Master's will to proceed along worldly lines would certainly be much more reprehensible than for the natural man to take the same course. The Lord looketh upon the heart, and where the privileges are small the requirements will be correspondingly lenient; where the privileges are [R3623 : page 267] great, as with us, we can only reasonably expect stricter requirements at the Lord's hands.

"THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE"

In Zedekiah's case the Lord allowed the natural consequences of his wrong course to follow, and they were severe indeed. His sons were slain before his eyes, then he was blinded and carried to Babylon, where he was a prisoner until his death. We infer from this that he never came to a properly repentant attitude of heart before the Lord. On the contrary his father, the previous king, Jehoiachim, who was taken a prisoner to Babylon eleven years before, was subsequently released from prison and granted many favors at the hands of the king of Babylon.

These high ones in nominal Israel may properly enough represent the more highly favored ones of the Lord's people in spiritual Israel, and we may draw the lesson that the unfaithful, like Jehoiachim, might be chastened and afterwards treated with leniency; but that those who violate the oath of their covenant, their vow to the Lord, breaking that vow, will suffer loss in every sense of the word – they shall thenceforth be blinded by the Adversary to the blessings they had once enjoyed and they will subsequently die the Second Death. Everywhere the Scriptures uphold the thought that a vow, a solemn compact with the Lord, is a most binding obligation. It is under such an obligation that all the members of the New

Creation have been granted the first fruits of the spirit. Disloyalty or renouncement of this vow to us could therefore mean nothing short of the Second Death.

CALAMITY AND RUIN

The calamity and ruin which came upon Jerusalem and Judea, at the time described in our lesson, doubtless seemed to many to indicate God's lack of power, his lack of ability to protect the nation which he had specially planted. Not so. The Scriptures assure us that God foresaw the calamities which then came upon his chosen people; he foretold them through the prophet and he permitted them to come upon the nation. The lessons he had sent them in the nature of milder chastisements had availed little. The example he had shown of scattering the ten tribes on account of their idolatry had not properly been taken to heart by the two tribes with whom his favor still remained. Now he would scatter them all and leave the land desolate for a period of seventy years – a period long enough to allow nearly all of them to die in exile, a period in which those who loved idolatry might go their way, as it is written, "Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone." It was a period, too, in which those who still revered the Lord – as for instance Daniel, and others mentioned – would in a foreign land look back longingly to the land of promise, read more attentively than ever the records of the Lord's dealings with their nation, and see how he had predicted this very trouble which they now were experiencing, and lead them thereby to a better condition of heart and to the instruction of their children in the right ways of the Lord.

As a matter of fact this was the result. At the close of the seventy years' desolation of the land the Lord raised up Cyrus, the King of Media and Persia, who, having conquered the Babylonians, offered liberty to all of the Jews who desired to return to their own land. That proclamation would have little influence upon the vast majority of the Israelites who had gone into captivity. Those idolatrously

inclined had undoubtedly forgotten all about Jehovah and the covenant made with their fathers, and were fully amalgamated with the heathen by intermarriage, etc. The indifferent Israelites settled in the foreign land realized that it would be to their disadvantage in temporal matters to leave their Babylonian homes to go back to Palestine, there to begin life afresh and to battle with the inconveniences, the wilderness condition, of their once fertile land. Consequently of all the hosts of the twelve tribes that went down to Babylon in various captivities only about 50,000 accepted the offer of Cyrus to return. Only a very few of these had ever seen Palestine; they had merely heard of it through their parents and the few aged ones of their number. These, however, had learned well the lesson which their fathers refused to learn. From the day of the return from the Babylonian captivity, we have not a record of further idolatry in Jerusalem and Judea.

DESOLATED SEVENTY YEARS

The last verse of our lesson tells us how the land lay desolate three score and ten years to fulfil her Sabbaths, as the Lord had foretold by the mouth of [R3624 : page 267] his prophet Jeremiah. Here we see clearly marked the time when the seventy years began, that it was at the time of the carrying away of Zedekiah and not at the time of his father's captivity, eleven years previously. We see distinctly that it was not seventy years' captivity but seventy years' desolation of the land, and apparently the land was not desolate during the eleven years of the reign of Zedekiah. This is an important point in history, and one which has misled many in their chronological reckonings. It is an important point in the reckoning of the Jubilees, but for a fuller statement of this matter we refer the reader to MILLENNIAL DAWN, Volume II., Chapter VI.

The Lord had appointed a jubilee arrangement by which every seventh year would be a Sabbath year of rest to the soil, and every fiftieth year a Jubilee of restitution for all the people, to all the

inhabitants throughout Israel. It would appear that this divine arrangement fell into neglect or was only partially observed for a time. Doubtless the princes and nobles and wealthy thought they saw an error in the divine program and that they could improve upon God's arrangement. At all events there is no record of the keeping of the Jubilees, and the Lord here declares that they were neglected – either they were not kept at all or they were observed in so perfunctory a manner as to constitute neglect from the divine standpoint. Nevertheless we have no record [R3624 : page 268] of the Lord having chided the people on this score. A lesson for us would be that every feature of the divine law is of importance, that every regulation should be observed, that there is a blessing in the arrangement whether it so appears to human judgment or not, and that the Lord will require an account from us eventually respecting our knowledge and obedience.

Turning to Leviticus 26:33-35, we find that the Lord through Moses had foretold this very failure to observe the year Sabbaths and Jubilees, and that it was on this account that the whole nation was cast out of the land of promise so that it received in the seventy years of its desolation the full number of Jubilee years – "For as long as it lay desolate it kept Sabbath to fulfil three score and ten years."

This thought, that each of those years that the land was desolated represented a Jubilee year which had not been properly observed by Israel, furnishes one of the keys by which we may estimate the whole number of Jubilees from the entrance of the children of Israel into the land of Palestine down to the grand consummation when the Kingdom of Messiah will be established and the actual Jubilee, the antitypical Jubilee, will begin. These calculations carried out show that we are already living in the great antitypical Jubilee, which will last for a thousand years. As the priests were to blow the silver trumpets in the beginning of the typical Jubilee year announcing its beginning, so now all who are of the Royal Priesthood are commissioned by the Lord to blow upon the silver trumpets of truth,

and to make known to all who have a hearing ear in spiritual Israel our present times and seasons, and that the great Jubilee, the times of restitution of all things, has begun. This implies, as we have already shown, that the great King is now taking unto himself his great power, and that his reign over the nations will soon begin, precipitating the time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation, the result of which will be the overthrow of all human institutions and the opening of the way to the establishment of the Kingdom for which we pray, "Thy Kingdom come," under whose ministrations all the families of the earth will be blessed, and every evil institution and thing suppressed, and every good and true matter brought forward to the light, established.

Thank God for the great blessing and privilege of living in our day under these favorable conditions. Let us be faithful to our vow and for the present be submissive to the powers that be, waiting for the Lord in his own time and way to establish his Kingdom and to fulfil all the gracious promises of his Word. Let us who realize that we are now in the antitypical Jubilee be faithful to the blowing on the trumpets.

"Blow ye the trumpet, blow
The gladly solemn sound;
Let all the nations know,
To earth's remotest bound,
The year of jubilee is come,
Returning ransomed sinners home."

