

"PRIDE GOETH BEFORE DESTRUCTION"

– *DECEMBER 5. – 2 CHRONICLES 26:8-21. –*

ISRAEL A TYPICAL KINGDOM – MESSIAH TO ESTABLISH THE ANTITYPE – UZZIAH'S POLITICAL AND MILITARY SUCCESS PROVES A SNARE TO HIM – HIS SIN OF PRESUMPTION – ITS PUNISHMENT – A LESSON TO BOTH THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD – IGNORANCE OF GOD'S LAW NOT AN ACCEPTABLE EXCUSE.

"A man's pride bringeth him low; but he that is of a lowly spirit shall obtain honor." – Proverbs 29:23. R.V.

UZZIAH was a great and prosperous king in Jerusalem. He made a good beginning, was reverential toward God, and put his capital and the remainder of his kingdom into good condition for defense against enemies. When thinking of the wars of Israel, we are to remember that for a time this nation represented God's rule in the earth in a sense that no other nation ever did, either before or after them.

The kings of Israel were anointed by Divine commission and authority, as were no other kings; and they were said to "sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord," as no other kings before or since have held dominion. Theirs was not, however, the Kingdom of God for which we pray, "Thy Kingdom come," but merely a preparatory arrangement with the typical Israelites.

God's Kingdom will really come to earth after Messiah shall establish it. For a thousand years He shall reign, to uplift the humble, to bless all who seek righteousness, to punish and correct all others, and finally to destroy the incorrigible in the Second Death. It was, therefore, quite in line with the arrangements of the time that the kings of Israel and of Judah should fortify and

strengthen themselves and defend the land which the Almighty had especially given to their nation.

THE KING'S PRESUMPTION

The truthfulness of the Scripture, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall," was illustrated in King Uzziah. When his fame had spread abroad [R5804 : page 350] and he began to feel his greatness, pride came in. He forgot that he was merely the Lord's representative in the kingdom, and that his first duty as a loyal subject of God was to hearken and to obey the Divine commands.

Having accomplished great things from a political and military standpoint, King Uzziah essayed to a religious distinction. Evidently he felt that God was proud of him and of his success, and would be very well pleased to have him enter the Temple after the manner of the priests and offer incense at the Golden Altar. He knew of the rules and regulations governing the Temple and its service, but considered himself above them. He would go directly to God, and not recognize the priest.

Many successful people fall into the same error of supposing that their success in business or in politics, their brilliancy of mind or their polish of education is the only requisite in the sight of Jehovah God. They feel that if they should go to church and acknowledge God, He should be very proud to have them and, of course, should give them the first place in everything. This is a mistake. The great King Eternal, "the Lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity" (Isaiah 57:15), has rules and regulations governing all attempts to approach Him. There is just the One Way of approach, and no other. – John 14:6.

THE MELCHISEDEC PRIEST

"Oh!" says one, "I see. You wish us to understand that the laity have no access to God; that they must come through the clergy, even as King Uzziah should have approached God through Israel's high priest. But I deny that the clergy are any more than other mortals. I claim that many of them are less brilliant of mind than myself; that many of them are less educated, and others totally devoid of business sense. I admit that it may be well enough for the common people to approach God through the clergy; but whenever I approach, I do so on the strength of my own personal intelligence and with the realization that the Almighty is glad to have me come. Often I pray, 'O Lord, I thank Thee that I am not as other men, nor even as this publican.'" – Luke 18:11.

No, friend; this is not our thought – not the Bible thought, not the lesson which we should draw from the Scriptures under consideration. We must admit that there is no Scriptural authority for a clerical class in the Church of Christ – unless it be the Twelve Apostles, St. Paul taking the place of Judas. Scripturally those Twelve rank as a hierarchy – the special mouthpiece of Jesus.

We are not intimating that the soul desirous of approaching God must come through the clergy of any denomination. We do emphasize, nevertheless, the fact that there is but the One Way of approaching God, and that is by and through the Great Advocate whom He hath appointed for us – "Jesus Christ the Righteous" – "a Priest for the Age after the Order of Melchisedec." (1 John 2:1; Hebrews 5:6.) "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me," was His Message. "There is none other name given under Heaven or amongst men whereby we must be saved," is the Apostle's Message. – Acts 4:12.

INCENSE AT THE GOLDEN ALTAR

Those whose eyes of understanding have never been opened to a realization that Jesus is the Divine Appointee for the reconciliation of the world to God may be excused if they approach God in prayer aside from Him. Their prayers may be answered to a limited extent, if offered in sincerity, from the heart, and because, as St. Paul intimates, "God winked at" their ignorance of His arrangements. – Acts 17:30.

But as King Uzziah knew of the Divine arrangement that only the priest could offer to the Almighty incense on the Golden Altar, so those who have come to a realization of the fact that Jesus is the great antitypical Priest, through whom communication with the Father has been opened up, would come under condemnation should they intrude into the Divine Presence in prayer otherwise than as provided in God's arrangement, even as King Uzziah was smitten with leprosy for his presumption and pride.

Leprosy, Scripturally considered, is a type of sin. King Uzziah's experiences, therefore, signify typically that whoever would approach God aside from His ordained Priest, having a knowledge of the impropriety, would come under Divine sentence as a wilful sinner. The penalty would be in proportion to the degree of enlightenment previously enjoyed.

FOURSCORE VALIANT PRIESTS

When the king entered the Holy of the Temple to offer incense at the Golden Altar, the high priest and eighty of the under priests followed him, protesting against his sacrilege. Although this was only their duty, nevertheless it marked them as valiant, courageous men; for in ancient times a king had great power. King Uzziah was feeling his own greatness and was proud of it; therefore he was likely to resent any interference with his kingly prerogatives.

Their words of protest voiced what the king already knew respecting the restrictions attaching to the services of the Temple. But they added, "Go out, for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honor from Jehovah God." True honor, true blessing, true prosperity, cannot be found in opposition to the Divine arrangements. The king's course, therefore, must bring him dishonor. Had he hastened to glorify God, he would have received a blessing, no doubt. But instead, violation of the Divine Law brought him the curse.

The lesson is a plain one, exemplified by our text and by our Lord's words, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted; he that exalteth himself shall be abased." (Luke 14:11.) It was not enough, even if the king had good intentions, instead of pride, backing him up. Good intentions should have guided him to a study of the Divine arrangements and promises. Ignorance of the Law is not an excuse. Hence the Apostle's exhortation, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth." – 2 Timothy 2:15.

The lesson seems to be one of humility, both for the Church and for the world. Some are born humble-minded, and others are born self-conceited. The latter, therefore, are handicapped as respects this grace, though Scripturally advantaged in respect to courage to battle against present adversities. On the whole, our handicaps through imperfections of the flesh are not so unequal as to make it easier for one than for another to enter into the Kingdom under the call of this Gospel Age. For where much is given, much is required; and the judgment of the Lord will be according to the heart, the will, the intention, the endeavor, and not according to the flesh, its weaknesses and its failures.

Humility is important, not only on its own account, but also because the other graces of the Holy Spirit cannot be cultivated without it. At the head of the list of these spiritual graces is

meekness. How could one be gentle or make good progress in the cultivation of these graces if he were not meek? How could one be patient and submissive in the trials and difficulties of life if not meek? How could one be kind toward opponents and kind in all things if he were not meek? How could one be patient **[R5804 : page 351]** toward all if he were not meek? How could one have brotherly kindness except through meekness? How could one be Godlike except he possessed meekness? How could one be loving in the Scriptural sense without meekness? Along these lines all who will be of the Church will be tested. And meekness and humility must be cultivated and must abound in the heart, in order to enable the cultivation of the other fruits of the Holy Spirit.

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