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"THY WORD WAS FOUND, I ATE IT."

—2 CHRONICLES 34:14-28.—AUGUST 13—

Golden Text:—"I will not forget thy Word."—Psa. 119:16.

KING AHAZ, in his wicked rebellion against God's authority, had caused the manuscripts of the Law to be burned—presumably all of them. However, in God's providence, perhaps with the cooperation of some of the faithful priests, one copy of the Law was buried under a pile of stone and rubbish in one of the little rooms surrounding the court of the Temple. There it was found by the priest Hilkiah in the process of the cleaning up and restoring of the Temple services commanded by King Josiah in connection with the reforms he instituted, considered in our last lesson.

Shaphan was the name of the king's scribe, his position corresponding somewhat to secretary of state at the present time. He, as the king's representative, had general charge of the Temple repairs, the collection of moneys donated by the people for the repairs of the Temple, and the re-institution of its services. Not to the king, therefore, but to Shaphan his representative, Hilkiah the high priest delivered the sacred manuscripts, and he in turn reported them to the king. Whether they included all the books of the Law, the five books of Moses and possibly the book of Judges, we cannot surely know, but evidently from the context they included the book of Deuteronomy.

"SANCTIFY THEM THROUGH THY TRUTH."

The Lord predicates two things respecting his Word of truth: First, it is intended only for those of an honest heart and who are seeking the truth; and, secondly, it is intended to still further enlighten and thereby to still further sanctify this class for whom it is intended. It was so with Josiah. Devoted to righteousness and seeking to serve the Lord, the message of the Law tended to deepen his every conviction and stimulate him to still further endeavors in the Lord's service. The reading of the Law alarmed the king greatly, for he was in a condition of heart to believe every word of it. He realized that the nation of Israel had committed the very sins recorded in Deuteronomy, the twenty-eighth chapter (See 2 Kings 22:19), and that, therefore, they were subject to the very penalties therein specified. He rent his clothes—the tearing of the loose outer garment in olden times being a symbol of distress, perplexity or fear.

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At once the king sent commissioners, saying, "Go, inquire of the Lord for me and for them that are left in Israel and Judah concerning the words of the book that is found, for great is the wrath of the Lord poured out upon us because our fathers have not kept the commandment of the Lord to do all that is written in this book." The commissioners inquired of the Prophetess Huldah, and brought to the king the answer that all the evils, "curses," declared in the book as the punishment for such sin would surely come upon the people because they had forsaken the Law. The punishments must be inflicted, but the king, who had shown such a loyalty to the Lord (and presumably others who manifested a similar spirit), would be preserved from the trouble. That is to say, it would not come at such a time and in such a manner as to involve them.

LOYALTY TO GOD, SYMPATHY FOR MAN

The king was doubtless comforted in a measure by the assurance of his own escape from the fiery troubles predicted, but the right condition of his heart was evidenced by the fact that he was not content merely with this, but sought as far as possible to bring the priests, the nobles and all the chief people of Israel, and incidentally, of course, all who were under their influence, back into harmony and fellowship with the Lord. The work of destroying idols throughout the land, which was accomplished in a considerable degree six years before, was renewed and thoroughly accomplished; the Temple services were established also in good form.

In this connection the king ordered the observance of the Passover as directed by the Lord, and the record seems to be that there had never been a more notable one in the history of Israel: the reformation seems not only to have been an outward one but one that reached the heart, and the desire to please and serve the Lord seems to have extended to all classes. Nevertheless we may be sure that then, as at all other times, there were both deep and shallow natures, and that the majority of the Israelites were swayed by the example of the king and nobles, without having any clear moral and religious sentiments of their own on the subject. It is always so in every nation; only the comparatively few seem to really hear and appreciate the Word of God. Thus our Lord said to those whom he addressed, "Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear." The majority neither saw nor heard nor appreciated with their hearts, although the multitudes said, "Never man spake like this man," and great crowds appeared to listen.

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I WILL NOT FORGET THY WORD

The golden Text is the key to all proper living. It was because David did not forget the Word of the Lord that he was the good king, the prototype of the great Messiah. David's prophetic words, however, relate more particularly to the Christ than to himself. Many of his prophecies were

written from this standpoint—as speaking for Messiah. We are reminded of our Redeemer’s sentiments as expressed in another Psalm, “I delight to do thy will, O my God: thy law is written in my heart.” (Psa. 40:8.) The Apostle applies these words directly to our Lord.—Heb. 10:7.

What was true of our Lord, the Head of the Church, must be true of every member of his body. Not a member can be indifferent even to the Word, the testimony, the will of God. And the attitude of each must not merely be a willingness to do the Lord’s will under restraint, but it must be of a willing heart, “I delight to do thy will.” To this end the Word of God must not only be appreciated as so much of literature and history and divine direction, but it must be so thoroughly appreciated as to be received into the heart, or, as the Apostle states it, it must be written in our hearts. This reminds us of the fact that Adam in his perfection was an image of God—that God’s law was written in his heart. Indeed in his nature, being, he was created in harmony with God, in his image, his likeness, as was also our Redeemer by his immaculate birth. The followers of Jesus, however, born in sin and shapen in iniquity, are far from having the divine law written in their hearts—with all of them it has become more or less obliterated through the fall. A part of the Christian’s daily business is to engrave in his character, in his heart, more and more deeply, the laws of the Lord; and the more earnestly he gives attention to this discipline and schooling, necessary to all the disciples of Christ, the more he prepares himself for the Kingdom condition and joint-heirship with the Lord, promised to all those who love and obey and follow him.

“MAKING WISE THE SIMPLE.”

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.” (Psa. 19:7-9.) How true are these prophetic declarations may be comprehended only by those who have learned to appreciate the Word of God. It deters from sin, it encourages toward righteousness, it gives consolation in trouble, it gives strength and courage in a time of general fear and quaking, it gives wisdom in times of perplexity, and the result is that the people of the Lord have much advantage everyway through it as respects the present life, besides the hope, the encouragement and the preparation which it gives for the life which is to come.

The Prophet, representing the Lord’s people of a future day, cries, “Thy words were found and I did eat them,” and this represents a double thought: first it implies that the Word of the Lord would be lost and would need to be searched for; secondly it implies that when found it will avail us nothing unless it be appropriated to our needs, unless its testimony be received into good and honest hearts and be put into practice. The Word of the Lord was lost in a most important sense during the dark ages. Forms and ceremonies and the decrees of councils took the place of the testimony

which the Lord declares to be sure. The result was increasing confusion and deterioration of spiritual vitality amongst those professing the name of Christ. Not only was the Word of the Lord lost in the sense of not being followed,

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but in a very important sense it was also lost by not being studied. The writing of the Scriptures was generally discontinued and the old manuscripts were lost sight of.

The finding of the Word of God seemed to begin afresh with the introduction of the art of printing, at a time when certain of the Lord's people were aroused to inquire more particularly for the "old paths." (Jer. 6:16.) In Luther's day, when printing was considerably advanced, history tells us that although he had been in a religious college for years, and was a professor and teacher, he never saw a copy of the Word of God until he was twenty years of age. Thank God, conditions are so changed now that his Word is found in the sense of being easily accessible to the whole people, and in the sense, too, that, under his providential care, in this time of the end knowledge has been increased so as to be universal in Christian lands. (Dan. 12:4.) Thank God that to-day his Word is abundantly distributed in all civilized lands and is obtainable in all heathen lands and in all languages.

BURIED UNDER TRADITIONS

Nevertheless the Word of the Lord is in one sense still hidden. It is covered with a thick coating of false teaching and human tradition, so that in the homes where the book is to be found there is often so much blindness upon the eyes of the understanding that the truth of God cannot be appreciated. It is still necessary for us to pray with the Apostle, for ourselves and for others, that, the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, we might be able to comprehend with all saints the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of the love of God, which passeth understanding. It is only as our eyes of understanding open that we really see the wonderful things of God's book, and that we really get the wonderful blessings which he intended only for those who seek in truth and in sincerity, only for the saints.

The prophet speaks of a famine in the land, not for bread nor for water, but for the hearing of the Word of the Lord. There was such a famine in the dark ages, and to a large extent the reformation movement was a supply of the heavenly food and drink, spiritual nourishment. But, as we have just seen, there is still a famine though of another kind. Although there are churches in every direction, Bibles in every home, many are beginning to find that they are starving—that with the Word of God in their hands they are famishing, because they have been feeding upon the husks of human traditions, creeds and theories of men, which will not stand the tests of present-day

enlightenment. Some are feeling lank and hungry spiritually. We wish there were more of these, for the Lord to-day, as ever, is as good as his word, assuring us that they that hunger and thirst after righteousness [truth] shall be filled. To all who now come into the right relationship to the Lord and to his Word there is refreshment never before known by his people. His Word, always precious, is a hundred-fold more precious now than ever before; its beauty, its true meaning, its reasonableness are more and more manifest to those who have the hearing ear and the eyes of their understanding opened, to those who are freed from the bondage of human traditions and are seeking the Bread from heaven, the testimony of the Lord that maketh wise the simple, the humble.

Now is the time for those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious and who have found his Word to be meat indeed, who realize that the Lord is present and has girded himself, and is serving the household of faith with meat in due season—now is the time for these to seek for and to assist those who are coming to an appreciation of their lankness and their hunger and thirst. May the Lord more and more give us wisdom and grace in presenting his Truth, that we may testify not only with our lips, but with all the conduct of life, the power and grace of the Word of Life.

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— August 1, 1905 —



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