

## TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY

1 Chron. 5:18-26

Intro: A book like 1 Chronicles is not an easy book to read, and sometimes it is read very carelessly.

However, like other parts of the Word that are similar in character, choice truths and great lessons are tucked away in all of the seemingly pointless detail that will reward the reader who is careful not to skip over anything.

Such is the case with the passage at the end of 1 Chron. 5.

It even has to do with the two and one-half tribes which stayed on the east side of the Jordan -- the tribes we would be inclined to consider the least important of all. In fact, chapter 5 begins by telling us why Reuben, the head of one of these tribes and the firstborn of Israel, did not get the birthright.

The story is twofold:

- 1) It begins with a great victory. Outnumbered by these descendants of Ishmael, the two and a half tribes were, nevertheless, victorious.
- 2) It ends with defeat -- which led ultimately to captivity by the Assyrians -- a humiliating defeat which never should have taken place.

The account is evidently a summary, showing what happened over many years of time.

Two striking contrasts are to be seen in these two stories:

- 1) In the first one, the trouble was from the outside.
- 2) In the second one, the trouble was from within.

The two sections are vv. 18-24 and 25-26.

As to the nature of the two conflicts (because the second one ended in conflict, too):

- 1) The first was an offensive warfare. This led to victory under the blessing of God.
- 2) The second was defensive, and ended in defeat under the judgment of God.

Some very important lessons are here. Need we be reminded that we, too, are engaged in a conflict -- a conflict with the forces of Satan. The outstanding features here are full of helpful teaching to keep us from the same fate which came to the 2½ tribes across the Jordan.

I. THE FACTORS WHICH LED THE PEOPLE TO VICTORY (1 Chron. 5:18-24, esp. vv. 18-22).

A. They were valiant men (v. 18).

This is a word for both physical and moral strength. They displayed good qualities such as integrity and virtue. They were strong, capable, qualified.

However you may look at this word, it draws attention to what the men were in themselves.

B. They were trained men -- trained for war (v. 18).

Who can fail to see a connection between Eph. 6 and the references here to the shield and the sword and the bow.

Obviously they could not wait until they got into battle before they trained with these weapons.

How is our faith being strengthened now, and what do we know about using "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God"? Cf. Eph. 6:16, 17.

C. They were strong in numbers (v. 18).

The children of Israel were to seek full enlistment. They were not satisfied with just a few. Paul had this idea about his own ministry as we see in Col. 1:28, " . . . warning every man . . . ," etc.

D. They carried the battle to the enemy (v. 19).

These Ishmaelites evidently were a constant threat to the Israelites and would carry out raids against them, and so the Israelites went to war.

Note the very instructive statement in v. 22: "For there fell down many slain, because the war was of God."

E. Two things characterized these men:

1. They prayed, even "in the battle." Cf. v. 20.
2. They were trusting God to give them the victory. (See also v. 20.)

And this led to those very encouraging statements in v. 20:

- 1) "And they were helped."
- 2) "And He was entreated by them" -- meaning that He answered their prayers.

It is always encouraging to hear about those who have been helped by God in a time of need. That is the rea-

son we love to read the Psalms. Think of Psalms 34 and 46.

God never changes, and neither does His Word. If we meet the conditions for the battle that are laid out here, we, too, can expect His blessing. WHAT OTHER REASON WOULD THERE BE FOR PUTTING IT IN THE WORD?

Read what the Lord told Moses, and what He commanded Moses to tell the people -- that they would never be defeated IF they were always careful to obey His Word and to do His will!

It would be wonderful if we could say that the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh were always like they are seen in vv. 18-22, BUT UNFORTUNATELY THEY WERE NOT!

Note vv. 25, 26.

## II. THE ONE FACTOR WHICH BROUGHT ON CAPTIVITY (1 Chron. 5: 25, 26).

Note three things:

A. They had not learned a thing from history (v. 25b).

Note how it is stated: They "played the harlot with the gods of the people of the land, whom God had destroyed before them."

Read the life of Abraham and you will see that the children of Israel knew that God was going to judge the Canaanites 400 years before it eventually came!

And then they turned around and did the same thing!

This is really a picture of the human heart -- of Israel's heart -- your heart and mine!

And so what?

B. They became idolaters (v. 25a).

"And they transgressed against the God of their fathers, and played the harlot with the gods of the people of the land."

Now you can see why God wanted them destroyed.

THE IMPORTANT THING TO NOTE, HOWEVER, IS THAT THIS

TROUBLE AROSE FROM WITHIN -- WITHIN THEIR LAND AND  
WITHIN THEIR OWN HEARTS.

And this is what led to their downfall!

Consequently . . .

C. They were carried away into captivity by kings who  
were not even thinking about them (v. 26).

Concl: No one can say what all of the factors were that  
entered into the lives of the Israelites to change  
their circumstances from victory to defeat,  
from glory to humiliation.

BUT ONE THING IS SURE: SOMETHING HAPPENED IN THEIR RELA-  
TIONSHIP WITH GOD.

Have you been reading Ephesians -- really reading it?

Have you noticed Eph. 5:3 and then 5:5?

I have never really seen a good study on idolatry, but this  
passage evidently indicates that there is a connection, a  
strong connection between IDOLATRY and THE DESIRE TO HAVE  
THINGS.

Perhaps it is nothing more than the desire to have the  
approval of people. And soon this desire overcomes the  
desire to have God's approval.

Is this not what James had in mind when he used those strong  
words in Jas. 4:4?

"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the  
friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever,  
therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of  
God."

WHAT IS THERE IN YOUR LIFE THAT COULD LEAD YOU TO SHAME AND  
DEFEAT? WHAT IS KEEPING YOU FROM THE WORD AND FROM PRAYER?  
WHAT IS KEEPING YOU FROM OBEYING THE LORD IN THOSE THINGS  
WHICH YOU KNOW ARE WRONG IN YOUR LIFE?

Idolatry (worshipping something else, or someone else, more  
than I do the Lord) is spiritual adultery. It never starts  
all at once -- but by little things which are not judged.  
May the Lord show us that, if we as individuals and as a  
Church are defeated, it will most likely be from within  
first -- and then from without. Only as we continue to  
place Him first, will we continue to enjoy His blessing.