

The King's Highway

An Advocate of Scriptural Holiness

VOL. XXXVIII.

MONCTON, N. B., JANUARY 15TH, 1943

No. 83

GETTING OUT OF DIVINE ORDER

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"In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths." Prov. 3:6.

It is a wonderful thing to feel that one is in divine order and being clearly led in every detail of life. Perhaps we are safe in saying that at least half of the people of the world are out of divine order more or less—either behind or ahead of God's clear leadings. For instance, years ago they attended the wrong school; they joined the wrong church; they went into business with the wrong party; they moved to the wrong city; or in other ways they marred God's original plan for them. True, some of them repented, and this gave God a chance to rule and overrule in a measure, but nevertheless they are not at their best for God and souls.

Well, what can be done about it? Go into despair and give up? No! let the result be more humility, more compassion toward others, more wisdom in warning others, and in various ways turn the misfortune into a blessing.

Let us now study a few Bible characters and gather lessons for our profit.

Abraham. God told him that in his old age he would have a son, but after hoping for years he and Sarah took things in their own hands and Hagar, their slave, brought forth Ishmael. The result was the earth was cursed with a false religion and today we have over two hundred million cruel, superstitious Mohammedans, all because one good man got out of divine order just once. Gentle reader, remember, a hurry spirit is from beneath. "He that believeth shall not make haste."

Jacob is another case. He and his mother felt that he was to be leader over his twin brother Esau. In fact God had said so. But instead of trusting Him to bring it to pass they took things in their own hands, and made it difficult for God to overrule their deceitful work. Friend, you never need to "pull wires" and resort to sly methods in order to come to the top and succeed. "Honesty is the best policy."

King Josiah was another sad case who marred the divine plan. He was a good king, above the average, but died too soon because he got out of place and meddled. "Forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that He destroy thee not." II. Chron. 35:21. These are the words of a heathen king, Necho of Egypt, to Josiah, king of Judah. It seems that Necho was about to continue the Egyptian conquests in Asia. In so doing, his nearest route was along the seacoast of Palestine to a point about fifty miles north of Jerusalem, where his army disembarked and started to march across the country via the plain of Esdraelon. King Josiah objected to this, though Necho was ready to pay for the privilege of taking the land route, which was nearer. But Josiah stoutly refused and went out to intercept him and there lost his life. Yes, "He that passeth by, and meddleth

with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears"—he is likely to be bitten.

Josiah was a remarkable king—few like him today. At the age of eight he began to reign and at sixteen made a covenant, put down all idolatry and revived the true worship of Jehovah. At the age of eighteen he kept the passover of which it is said, "There was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet." Josiah himself gave "thirty thousand lambs and kids, and three thousand bullocks." In this he surpassed all other kings. But was it not sad that after all the good he did he should suddenly come to an untimely end, while in the prime of life, simply because he stepped aside and meddled? As long as he was kept busy cleaning up around home, he had no time to meddle with the quarrels of other kings. Had he remained at home and been content to enjoy the smile of his God and his own people, he would have lived to a good old age and died in peace. But his curiosity was aroused when he found that Necho was making haste to forestall his Babylonian rival. This curiosity drew Josiah away from his place of security and he was slain.

I may be preaching now to someone who, back yonder, brought upon himself suffering and sorrow because he was curious and did not remain at home. Jacob and his household were disgraced and an awful slaughter followed because his daughter Dinah "went out to see the daughters of the land." She was not the only child to bring upon herself and her people ignominy as a result of going to parties and pleasure resorts.

No one has time or disposition to meddle with others until he first becomes unduly elated over his own real or fancied success. Amaziah, King of Judah, sent a challenge to Jehoash, King of Israel, saying: "Come, let us look one another in the face." But Jehoash replied: "Thou hast indeed smitten Edom, and thine heart hath lifted thee up: glory of this, and tarry at home: for why shouldest thou meddle to thy hurt?" But Amaziah would not hear. Therefore Jehoash went up. And Judah was put to the worse and "fled every man to their tents."

It was after Josiah had put down all idolatry in his kingdom, re-captured and rebuilt the waste cities, and had rest on every side, that he vainly overestimated his ability to go against perhaps the most powerful kingdom in the world. The heathen king tried to dissuade him saying, "What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? I come not against thee this day, but against the house where-with I have war . . . Forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that He destroy thee not." I gather from this incident that the sin of meddling is so great, so inexcusable, in the sight of God that He will permit, yea, assist a wicked nation to afflict and punish a more righteous nation, if she meddles. How terrible then, yea, how unpardonable, must be a spirit of self-sufficiency!

Many a man, who had been led out poor and unnoticed. But by his piety and frugality he became influential. How sad then to see him become over-elated and fling to the winds those qualities which had built him up! Many an illiterate but born preacher or leader began his career in a very humble way. But through meekness, prayer and fasting, coupled with hard study he came to the front and was accorded a place with the mighty ones. How sad then if he becomes independent and self-important! Josiah's sad and beclouded end should teach all of us the danger of disregarding reproof, though it come from a heathen.

David, a glorious exception! Yes, we ought to have at least one character who refused to take things in his own hands. David was not always emplatry, but in his attitude toward Saul, his unrelenting enemy, he stands next to Jesus Christ. On two occasions God stepped aside and gave Saul over into the hand of David. Some of his valiant men urged him to slay his sleeping enemy, but he restrained them and said, "Mine hand shall not be upon him." The laws of war would have justified David in slaying the rival who was seeking his life, but he was willing to wait God's time to ascend to the throne. (See I. Sam. 24 and 26).

God grant that we, too, may be too magnanimous to fight our own battles, but patiently bear all that a merciful God may permit, or wicked men or devils may inflict!

"A QUEST FOR SOULS"

Jesus preached His chiefest sermon on the new birth to just one man.

And when Jesus came to preach His sermon on eternal life, He preached it yonder to a woman at the well of Samaria—a poor drab of a woman, about whose character the less said the better, and yet she had a soul that was to live forever, and when she came to that well to draw water therefrom, Jesus had His opportunity, and with words tactful and honest and faithful, He found His way to that woman's conscience, and at the right time revealed Himself the forgiving Saviour to her. Jesus gave His best service for one soul. Listen to Him yonder as He tells the story of the shepherd leaving his ninety and nine sheep safely housed in the sheepcote. Ninety and nine of them were safe, but one was missing, and he left the ninety and nine safely housed in the sheepcote, and went out after that missing sheep, over the hill and mountains, with his feet pierced by stones and thorns, searching, looking for that one missing sheep. Nor did he give up his quest until that sheep was found, and the shepherd brought it back and put it in the sheepcote with the others. What is Jesus saying in this pungent parable? "Oh, my church," the compassionate Saviour says, "go out and seek earnestly until that lost soul is found!" He is saying just that. —George W. Truett.