

GOD'S SEARCH FOR A MAN!

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During the American Civil War, it became urgently necessary to send a message to the general in charge of operations on the firing line. An officer in the Union Army instructed his son to ride into the battle area, and when he returned, the father embraced the messenger and said: "I did not want to see you killed, but I needed someone I could trust."

Ezekiel's statement provided a thought-provoking word picture. Throughout the nation, cities, sheepfolds and vineyards were protected by walls. If these were broken, enemies could attack through the breaches and people lost their possessions. To break down a wall was an inexcusable crime. The prophet used that fact to impress upon his listeners a tremendous truth. The battle against the Babylonians had already been lost; the walls had been broken. Yet, the greatest peril was Israel's sin, and not the heathen invaders. Righteousness was about to pour through the breached walls to slay the guilty nation. God wanted to save His people, and had looked for a man who would prevent the threatened disaster. Unfortunately, such a deliverer could not be found, and the prophet's words became a window through which much could be seen.

The Strange Desire. How Wise

Moses was furious! Even Aaron was frightened when he said: "Let not the anger of my lord wax hot" (Exod. 32:22). The patriarch had been in the mountain with Jehovah, but his prolonged absence had become an excuse for Israel's idolatry. The people had requested the making of a golden calf that they might worship a god whom they could see. Women sacrificed their golden trinkets and necklaces; search was made throughout the camp for every ornament of value, and most of the people forgot their deliverance from Egypt.

When Moses descended from the holy mountain, he found it difficult to believe what he saw and heard. Serenity had been replaced by sinning and inspiration by idolatry. When his amazement subsided, indignation filled the patriarch's soul. "And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, he saw

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the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and break them beneath the mount" (Exod. 32:19). That was one of the most desperate moments in Israel's history. Judgment appeared to be inevitable, but God found a man to stand in the gap (Exod. 32:32)!

The Stumbling Deliverer. . . How Weak!

It was inconceivable that the Israelites had survived twenty years of Philistine domination. Their enemies had been merciless tyrants who destroyed villages, confiscated crops and murdered innocent people. A different kind of Goliath had arisen, and the overwhelming superiority of the heathen had subdued and terrified the Hebrews. But God found a man to stand in the gap!

Samson was unique, challenging and attractive, but arrogant and foolish. Temporarily he ceased being concerned with the plight of his people, and appeared to be mesmerized by a woman. "And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death; That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon my head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any

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other man" (Judges 16:16-17). Samson's phenomenal strength was not primarily in his uncut hair. His vows of consecration had never been broken. Other men might have had long hair and remained ordinary individuals. He was God's man, whose dedicated soul explained his dynamic strength. Alas, he failed, and as he predicted, became like any other man. God had found a man only to lose him to an enchantress.

The Surprising Delay... How Woeful

The disciples were jubilant; their Master's promise had been fulfilled. They had watched His ascent into heaven, and had experienced the thrill of Pentecost. Thousands of listeners had yielded to the claims of the Savior, and the future seemed bright with prospect and hope. The eyes of the preachers shone with happiness; the church had been established, but, unfortu-

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nately, its leaders remained complacent and forgetful. Christ had said: ".... Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature . . ." (Mark 16:15), but apparently the importance of that commission had been ignored.

They were content to remain in Jerusalem as administrators, and after fifteen years of complacency, enjoyed the comparative quietness of their surroundings. Christ won many disciples, but not one was equal to the challenge of world evangelism. It seemed His search for that type of man had been in vain. The Lord could have repeated His statement: "I sought for a man among them, that should . . . stand in the gap before me.. . but I found none." Then God searched again and found Saul of Tarsus.

The Stirred Disciple. . . How Wonderful

The city was in an uproar, a mob of angry people had rushed a young preacher to a place of execution, where Stephen was to die beneath a pile of stones. ". . . and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul" (Acts 7:58). Luke wrote: "And Saul was consenting unto his (Stephen's) death" (Acts 8:1). The memory of that terrible murder would not die, and Saul's life became a nightmare. His misery deepened, and believing something had to be done to quiet his conscience, ". . . Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest" (Acts 9:1). Even Ananias, a devout man in Damascus, fearfully exclaimed, "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem.. (Acts 9:13). But the Lord was pleased Æ He had found a man to stand in the gap!

The new convert did what Christ had commanded the original disciples Æ he went into the known world, and did more for world evangelism than the combined efforts of all other church leaders. The apostle never forgot the moment when he heard the Savior's words: "Depart: for I will send you far hence unto the Gentiles" (Acts 22:21). At first he argued with Christ because he desperately desired to evangelize his own nation. Thereafter he never faltered in his mission and after many years triumphantly wrote to Timothy: "For I am now ready to be

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offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day.. (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

The Sacred Decision. . . How Willing

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How can any person describe the indescribable, or express the inexpressible? There was a moment of stillness when the Divine Family considered their greatest project. Far down the corridor of time, they saw a devastated world in which innumerable people needed a friend. Enormous guilt endangered the souls of men, and the outlook was bleak. Perhaps Isaiah was not the first person to hear the words: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (Isa. 6:8). Then a voice was heard in the eternal stillness: "I will do it—but I will need to become a man."

Paul was aware of that great decision when he wrote: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:5-8). When Mary held her new-born Child, even the angels rejoiced; they knew God had found His Man!

When the Salvation Army was one of the greatest movements on earth, the founder, and First General, was asked to explain his effectiveness as a spiritual leader. General Booth's reply was self-explanatory. He said: "I will tell you the secret. God has had all there was of me. There have been men with greater brains than mine; men with greater opportunities, but from the day I got the poor of London on my heart, and a vision of what Jesus Christ could do for them, I made up my mind that God should have all of William Booth. If anything has been achieved, it is because God had all the adoration of my heart, all the power of my will, and all the influence of my life."

Is God still looking for someone to do a special task? Could He be searching for you, or me?

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