

SYMPHONIES IN THE STORMS

SYMPHONIES IN THE STORMS

"Nevertheless afterward" (Heb. 12. 11).

Mrs. Charles Cowman, in her inspiring book *Streams in the Desert*, draws attention to a text in the epistle to the Hebrews and tells an interesting story about a man who owned a castle on the banks of the Rhine River in Germany. The innovative gentleman stretched wires between the towers of his elegant home, hoping the winds would play upon them and produce the music of an Aeolian harp. He waited for the breezes to blow but unfortunately was rewarded only by silence. Some time later a great storm devastated the area, and gale force winds blew upon the castle. When the gentleman stood at a window to survey the countryside, he heard the most entrancing sounds, for the hurricane was playing upon his wires, and the music could be heard even above the noise of the storm. Mrs. Cowman quoted a delightful poem:

Rain, rain,
Beating against the pane:
How endlessly it pours
Out of doors,
From the blackened sky;
Wonder why?

flowers, flowers,
Upspringing after showers,
Blossoming fresh and fair,
Everywhere!
Ah, God has explained
Why it rained.

There is nothing more entrancing than a bright spring morning which follows a tempestuous night. The Bible supplies thrilling examples of this fact.

Job... The Glowing Heart (Job 23:10)

The story of the sufferings of Job presents difficulties. To say the least, it seemed unfair that a righteous man should be compelled to suffer. The Bible explains how the event was permitted by Jehovah, but the fact remains that for the harassed farmer, it was hard to understand why God allowed such devastating experiences to over-

170

whelm a good man. If Job ever asked, "Why has this happened to me?" he expressed the thoughts of innumerable people. The compensation given later by the Almighty was too late to ease the pain caused by the initial tragedies.

"Nevertheless afterward" when the patriarch reminisced, he discovered his gains exceeded his losses. It is believed Job was one of the earliest humans, and the book which bears his name was the first volume known to mankind. His limitless patience set an example for all descendants to follow, but among the somber colors and designs of his tragic experience was a golden thread which made everything worthwhile. The troubled man learned his greatest lesson during the stormiest period of his life.

There came a time when Job envied people who had died. As he looked through tear-filled eyes, it appeared as if deceased neighbors were extremely fortunate. Their sorrows had been buried; their sufferings ceased when death terminated pain. They had been released from discomfort and anguish, and although the people were dead, never again would they encounter the problems which had beset them during their lifetime. Desperately, Job said, "Why

SYMPHONIES IN THE STORMS

died I not from the womb? . . . for now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept; then had I been at rest. . . . There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest" (Job 3:11-17). I am reminded of a lady who said, "I am dying and have no hope for the future. I believe death terminates everything. I have made my last will and testament and arranged that my body be cremated and its ashes scattered over the sea." That despondent woman believed she was about to enter into an unconsciousness from which she would never emerge. Job could have sympathized with her.

It is not known how he graduated from his fatalism. Somewhere amid the depressing events of his life, a new idea began to change his outlook, and he was no longer convinced death was the end of existence. Perhaps it seemed incongruous that God should have nothing better to offer than eternal oblivion. Whether or not he shared his ideas with friends has not been revealed, but there came a day when the patriarch said, "If a man die, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14). That statement represented a small light in the blackness which had surrounded his soul. He was no longer sure his earlier belief was valid. Could it be possible that beyond time's horizon lay another world—a place of immortality? Probably Job remained un-

171
aware that God was beginning to reward his loyalty. His God was the Jehovah of the present; but could He also be the Lord of the future? Perhaps, after all, there was hope of eternal life!

When he advanced along his path of discovery, things happened quickly, and finally, doubts were overcome and questions answered. Exultantly he exclaimed, "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God; Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another" (Job 19:25-27). That thrilling revelation completely changed Job's outlook. He could have said with Paul, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

As the clouds parted and the sun began to shine upon the patriarch, his blessings were unprecedented. He remembered the dark valley through which he had traveled, but of greater importance was the new understanding gained in transit. The grave, which only offered oblivion, had become an entrance into everlasting bliss. His Redeemer intended to descend to earth, and Job would meet Him face to face! He smiled. His ordeal was over. He had discovered something in his valley of darkness that might have remained unknown had his prosperity been uninterrupted.

The Hebrew Young Men... The Gracious Helper (Daniel 3:25)

Their outlook was bleak. It was difficult not to be frightened. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, was exceedingly angry. His ego had been offended, and he was determined the arrogant Hebrews would pay for their indiscretions. Had the monarch been less opinionated, he would have recognized the animosity of his counselors. They detested Daniel who had been elevated to a position of importance within the kingdom, and consequently, they also despised his friends. Three young men had been made rulers within the province of Babylon, and the noblemen were envious. "Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews They spake and said to the king. There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego" (Dan. 3:8-13).

172

When the Hebrews reiterated their refusal to bow before an image, the monarch was incensed and "commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace" (Dan. 3:20). Those moments were terrifying, but the prisoners believed it was better to die honorably than to live in shame.

To a degree their spiritual development resembled that of Job. At first they knew little if anything of spiritual realities. They had been born in captivity, and any knowledge of God had been gleaned from the teaching of the elders. The fathers of the nation were determined to preserve their faith, and alongside the rivers of Babylon they instructed the children. There the boys learned about Jehovah and His chosen people. It became evident that their lessons made an impact upon the scholars, for when they were commanded to eat prohibited food, their refusal made the prince of the eunuchs say, "I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat, and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? Then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king" (Dan. 1:10). There is no evidence that Daniel's companions had any personal relationship with Jehovah. They believed what they had been taught and refused to violate the commandments of their fathers' God.

At a later date their faith led to a tremendous experience. The irritable monarch could not remember a dream that had disturbed his slumber. When he sought aid from his astrologers and wise men, they were unable to satisfy his demands, and in his rage Nebuchadnezzar threatened to slay them. Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions: That they should desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret, that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon" (Dan. 2:17-18). Apparently this was the first time these young men were asked to pray. They believed in the God who had helped Israel in past years, but now they were to discover Jehovah could repeat His earlier actions. Their spiritual education was not yet complete. When they were about to be cast into the furnace, they needed a Savior who could deliver them from imminent peril. Could there be such a God? They were resolute in their decision. If He could help them they would love Him forever; but if not, they would still obey His commands.

173

Their ordeal was over—was it? They were dropping into the flames. There was no turning back. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counselors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God" (Dan. 3:24-25). That story explains how God became a reality to people who trusted Him.

"Nevertheless afterward" there were moments when they relived their experience and were elated as they remembered their spiritual growth. The God of the past was also the Lord of the present. Jehovah, who resided in heaven, could also come to earth to be with His servants. Evidently He could have prevented their being thrown into the flames, but that would have been a mistake. The devouring fire was a school-house in which life's important lessons were taught. The ordeal not only destroyed their bonds, it opened their eyes to recognize the sovereignty of God. Those

SYMPHONIES IN THE STORMS

Hebrews had contemplated the future and wondered; they remembered the past and worshiped.

Paul... . The Guiding Hand (Acts 27:23-24)

The waves were devastating, the storm unrelenting. Even the captain of the ship had lost hope of surviving the onslaught of the sea His ship was being driven to destruction. Years later, when Luke wrote his memoirs of that terrible occasion, he said, "There arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive. And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat. . . . And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away" (Acts 27:14-20).

To be adrift in such a vast expanse of raging waters was an experience never to be forgotten. Only one man on that foundering vessel knew God continued to control the elements. "The Mediterranean Sea is the largest enclosed sea in the world, and is connected with the open sea only by the narrow strait of Gibraltar. Its area is

174

estimated at 965,000 square miles. The island of Malta, the largest of the islands, covers an area of only 95 square miles" (quoted from Funk and Wagnalls Encyclopedia, vol. 16, pp. 5790, 5948). No person aboard that ship knew the location of the vessel, and since it was completely out of control, the crew and passengers could only hope and pray for a miracle.

It is now recognized that throughout the duration of that voyage, God controlled the weather. He did not need stars nor navigational instruments; sails and tillers were not required. The currents in the ocean took the ship unerringly to the place where Paul was needed. The vessel could not sink until God permitted it so to do. Even the gale was subject to the divine will. The people who lived on the island of Malta needed to hear the Gospel, and the father of the governor was seriously ill. If the storm had not driven Paul's ship, the preacher would have arrived too late to save that man's life. Unerringly, through days and nights of unprecedented anguish, God piloted the vessel, and when the episode ended, Paul and his companions were able to reminisce and know that the Lord had ordained every detail of their harrowing experience. Once again the words, "Nevertheless afterward" became attractive! It has often been claimed that hindsight is better than foresight, but the accuracy of the statement may be challenged. Looking back at threatening storms cannot supply the strength needed to endure. Retrospect can only promote understanding. Paul with unerring foresight saw what God intended to do and was able to say, "For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me" (Acts 27:23-25).

`Tis far far better to let Him choose
The way that we should take:
If only we leave our lives to Him,
He will guide without mistake.
We in our blindness would never choose
A pathway dark and rough:
And so we should ever find in Him

SYMPHONIES IN THE STORMS

The God Who is enough!
Author Unknown

175□

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.daneprairie.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.