

THE FIVE KINGS ... who were in a hole
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(JOSHUA 10: 16)

They were very foolish, for in time of danger they walked into a cave, and a cave can be a dead end! Yet their stupidity had been apparent for days ; they seemed to have developed a habit of getting into a hole! One would have thought that five kings would have had more sense. They did not consider that it was much easier to get into a hole than to get out of one. They had illustrious names. Adonizedec, king of Jerusalem . Hoham, king of Hebron; Piram, king of Jarmuth; Japhia, king of Lachish, and Debir, king of Egion. Far be it from us to criticize the descriptions of these ancient monarchs, but history suggests that their titles were inadequate. At the risk of inviting criticism, let us attend a posthumous christening service!

The King of Unrighteousness

Every Canaanite knew that the children of Israel were on the march. Their intrepid leader, Joshua, was filled with the wisdom of God, and already his exploits had terrorized the border cities of the land. Jericho and Ai had fallen, and it was only a matter of time before the invaders would advance toward other centers. It was also stated that the God of these strange people loved righteousness and hated iniquity. This was a holy war against the abominations of the Canaanite cities. One royal outpost had capitulated, and by means of trickery had made peace with the invaders. The king of Jerusalem heard the news, and scowled. He had no thought for his iniquitous systems ; he shed no tears for his sins. He thought only of resistance ; and, summoning four other monarchs, he prepared to go forth in defence of his kingdom. Had he honestly abandoned his sin, he might have avoided getting into a hole!

The King of Unreasonableness

" Come up unto me," he said, " and help me, that we may smite Gibeon ; for it hath made peace with Joshua, and with the children of Israel " (v. 4). This was poor military strategy ; the real danger lay in the camp of Israel, and not in the surrendered city of Canaan. It was suicidal to sacrifice valiant fighting men on the altar of personal feuds. It was not necessary to warn other wavering cities, for these were joining in the battle of vengeance. This stupidity demonstrated that the Canaanite heart-disease had spread upwards! They were not only evil ; they were prepared to defend their wickedness. Obviously they were heading for a hole!

The King of Unrepentance

" And the Lord discomfited them before Israel . . . and chased them . . . And it came to pass . . . that the Lord cast down great stones from heaven upon them ... they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword" (vv. 10, I 1). And still there appeared no sign of repentance. The Gibeonites had made mention of the God of Israel, and even though fear had played a major part in their deliberations, at least some measure of faith had been produced. These five kings relied upon their self-sufficiency. It is not for us to decide whether or not their repentance would have obtained pardon-the fact remains that they preferred to get into a hole than to kneel to pray.

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The King of Unpleasantness

Everything had gone wrong. Their armies had been defeated on the field of battle ; their cause had perished, and their future was fraught with great peril. Realizing their need of a refuge, the five kings ran toward the hills. Possibly one of them knew the location of a cave, and thought it would offer a respite. He led the way, and thus it has been written, "But these five kings fled, and hid themselves in a cave at Makkedah." Amid the gloom of that cavern it would have been impossible to identify this fourth king, for by some optical phenomenon all five faces seemed alike. They were all in a hole! They had made shipwreck of life, and were now clutching at straws!

The King of Uselessness

They cowered in the far end of their cavern ; they heard the huge stones being rolled into position at the mouth of the cave (vv. 17, 18). Then, as silence reigned in the prison, one man crept forward to reconnoitre the position. The entrance had been blocked. Too late, the stricken men discovered there was no other exit; they were caught like rats in a trap. And during all the years that followed, the pile of stones reminded travellers of the cave which had become a grave. Five foolish men had slipped into a hole, and had failed to climb out. Poor fellows-the hole was as deep as eternity. Joshua should have placed an inscription on the tomb. " Keep on God's highway, and avoid cul-de-sacs."

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