

ADONI-BEZEK . . . the toe and thumb specialist
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{Judges I : 5-7}

He was a foul unmitigated scoundrel, a blot on the society of his day, and a shameful law unto himself. His weird eccentricities were widely known, and probably many people said he was mentally unbalanced. Yet his evil deeds continued unchecked, and his name became increasingly infamous throughout the land. He loved to dethrone and mutilate kings. Then with grim delight he watched and laughed as his unfortunate captives "gleaned" at his table.

A Royal Collection

To all but a semi-maniac, the sights in the palace dining room would have been nauseating. Seventy kings crouched against the walls hopefully watching a gluttonous monarch. The presence of the guards was a guarantee against insurrection, for their long whips were ready to administer instant punishment to any man who felt disposed to rebel against his treatment. Hungry eyes furtively watched the table, and as the detestable king threw pieces of food to the floor, the starving men fought like jackals for the portions, and all the while the mocking laughter of the watching scoundrel echoed through the room. Even the guards enjoyed the fun as the desperate men rolled over each other in the mad scramble for food. Adoni-bezek, the Canaanite king, was able to say, "Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gleaned their meat under my table." Without thumbs, their hands had become claws; and without their big toes, their sense of balance had been impaired. To watch these starving men desperately struggling for survival was highly amusing, and the chief among the sordid onlookers was Adoni-bezek himself.

A Rebuking Conscience

It was almost inconceivable that he should ever feel concerned about the shamefulness of his conduct. His behaviour suggested that he had never heard of God, and yet this was not so. Archaeological discoveries have proved that the Canaanites spoke a language similar to that in use among the Hebrews, and it is therefore most likely that the people of the land were acquainted with the earliest forms of religion. We do not know the degree of Adoni-bezek's knowledge, but it is truly significant that from his own lips came the confession that God had watched the revolting displays in the palace. Such a revelation could hardly have taken place in a moment. The fires of conscience had not been completely extinguished; they had slowly but unmistakably smouldered in his mind. Yet during all the years of savage enjoyment, this arrogant man had rudely thrust aside any attempt of God's Spirit to lead him into nobler avenues of life and service. He was fascinated by his cruel hobby; he revelled in the sense of his own indisputable superiority, and neither religion nor ethics should rob him of this source of pleasure. Nevertheless the pin-pricks of conscience made themselves felt, and when grim retribution eventually overtook the guilty man, his first words spoke of God.

A Remarkable Confession

"And Judah went up; and the Lord delivered the

ADONI-BEZEK . . . the toe and thumb specialist Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men. And they found Adoni-bezek in Bezek, and they fought against him . . . But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes. And Adoni-bezek said, Threescore and ten kings having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gleaned their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me." Then he discovered that the opportunity to repent had vanished. He had lived either in ignorance or open indifference of one of the greatest principles of life and law. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption: but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting " (Gal. 6 : 7-8). And it would seem that in this important matter, Adoni-bezek was not alone. "And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died." Before the throne of God he would be without excuse; a poor, destitute, bankrupt soul, with no friend-no hope-no Saviour. He had deliberately closed his eyes to the requirements of moral and spiritual law, and his ultimate fate should be a warning to us all.

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