

THOSE PESKY HORNETS

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Long ago, one of Job's friends said, "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea" (Job 11:7-9). The ancient philosopher's conception of Jehovah suggested that Job could never clearly understand the God he professed to serve. Many people would disagree with that opinion, for they have learned to see God in a flower, hear His music in the songs of the birds, recognize His artistry in sunrises and sunsets, and feel the warmth of His love in the Person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jehovah is no longer an inscrutable Deity existing and reigning in distant heavens; He is close to all who call upon Him. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe He is best seen in little things in the circumstances by which people are surrounded daily.

A Revelation of Divine Tenderness

"And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee" (Ex. 23:28). The children of Israel were on their way to Canaan. The bondage endured in Egypt had become an unpleasant memory. The future seemed to be bright with prospect and hope, yet the undisciplined Hebrews had no experience in warfare, and their enemies were likely to benefit from that fact. Moses had been specially trained, but unfortunately he could not do everything. The Lord was aware of this, but He had many assistants. The wilderness was the home of myriads of winged nuisances, and even they responded to the suggestions of the Almighty. The children of Israel should have understood that fact, for they had seen how the plagues of frogs and lice paralyzed the Egyptians. If swarms of hornets went ahead of the advancing Hebrews, their rapier-like stings could easily strike terror into the hearts of all they attacked. There is no conclusive evidence that the "hornets" were insects. The absence of references in the historical books of the Old Testament lends credence to the interpretation that they were kings at war among themselves, that God overruled in the affairs of men to protect His beloved people. It is interesting to note that God speaking through Joshua said to His people, "And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out

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from before you, even the two kings of the Amorites; but not with thy sword, nor with thy bow" (Josh. 24:12). Most theologians believe the hornets could have been difficulties of many kinds, that adverse circumstances terrified the enemies, and thus the safety of Israel was assured.

It is wise to remember that God's care for His people is unending. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him" (Ps. 103:13). The fact that Jehovah commanded His people to advance even when the sea blocked their pathway to freedom was evidence that He would divide the sea and make obedience to His command possible (see Ex. 14:15). When Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden of Eden, God went with them. When Israel left Egypt, they did not go alone. The Almighty accompanied them, and although the people disappointed Him, He never abandoned them. As they journeyed through the wilderness, Jehovah knew they were incapable of overcoming their enemies, so special "hornets" became their advance guards. It was written, "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Ps. 103:17). God never changes, and it is stimulating to remember that

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the text includes all generations. Men are never expected to do anything alone, for even in the most critical emergencies the Lord abides with His people. "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut. 33:27).

A Revelation of God's Thoughtfulness

..... I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee" (Ex. 23:29). Had Jehovah so desired, He could have instantly exterminated all the enemies, but sometimes delayed blessings are the greatest of all benedictions. If children were not placed upon their feet, they would never learn to walk. The conquest of Canaan would not be easy, but to cultivate the land, keep at bay the wild animals, and at the same time to survive in strange surroundings would require endless fortitude and patience. Men do not mature overnight. Every enemy stronghold was surrounded by fertile land, the product of unceasing labor. If the Canaanites had been annihilated, the land would have become a wilderness before the Hebrews could possess it. Many years were to pass before God's people would occupy their inheritance, and until that day arrived, the local

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inhabitants would act as caretakers. Lions and other dangerous beasts would be controlled, and in an indirect way the future of the nation would be assured. Evidently, God foresaw every need of His people and with continuing wisdom planned their protection. God is wiser than people; humans think only of the moment. The Lord Who sees the end from the beginning knows how to plan for the future and is never surprised. Judas thought only of the transient and lost his soul; Annanias and Sapphira thought only of wealth and never lived to spend their money. Yet, "Moses, when he was come to years refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" (Heb. 11:24-26).

Sometimes it is difficult to understand the delays of the Lord, and many people would like Him to act more quickly. Nevertheless, God knows what He is doing and is extremely capable of handling the affairs of all who trust Him.

A Revelation of God's Thoroughness

"By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and will inherit the land" (Ex. 23:30). Sometimes the outflow of divine energy is regulated by the appreciation of the people to whom it is sent. Need begets prayer; affluence and excessive success beget independence and forgetfulness. The Lord disciplines His children even as human fathers do their offspring. Some people are better Christians in trouble than when their circumstances are serene and pleasing. The disciples of Jesus learned more in the storm-tossed boat than they would have on the shore. Children never become adults overnight, and students do not graduate after one lesson! "Little by little" seems to be God's way of delivering, helping, and controlling His people. The poet was inspired when he wrote, "O God our help in ages past; Our hope for years to come." Another writer said, "I need Thee every hour, most gracious Lord." But the man closest to reality said, "Moment by moment, I've light from above." To walk with the Lord is better than to visit Him at some unique festival. The refiner gives special attention to his work when dross is being removed from the molten metal. When the gold reflects his image, he knows his task has been completed. God is very thorough! Blessed are the people who never complain!

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A Revelation of God's Truthfulness

Many years had passed since the original promises were made to God's people. Unfortunately, disobedience and lack of faith had prevented Israel from occupying the land, and the tribes had wandered from place to place in the wilderness. Someone said, "It took one night to get Israel out of Egypt, but forty years to get Egypt out of Israel." Yet finally, Joshua led a new generation into the Promised Land. When he reminisced, God said to him, "And ye went over Jordan and came unto Jericho, and the men of Jericho fought against you, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I delivered them into your hand. And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out from before you, even the two kings of the Amorites, but not with thy sword or with thy bow. And I have given you a land for which ye did not labor, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat. Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth" (Josh. 24:11-14). What God had promised decades earlier He faithfully fulfilled. The hornets—what-ever they were—had completed their mission and the Promised Land had been possessed. That wonderful fact begat responsibility, and therefore, Joshua urged his followers to abandon their idols. Jehovah, who had accomplished so much on their behalf, deserved to be honored. He had not failed; neither should they.

Christians should look back with gratitude, up with praise, and onward with courage. The children of Israel could never repay the debt of love they owed, and neither can we. There is always cause to return thanks.

O Thou whose bounty fills my cup,
With every blessing meet!
I give Thee thanks for every drop—
The bitter and the sweet.
I praise Thee for the desert road,
And for the river side,
For all, Thy goodness hath bestowed,
And all, Thy grace denied.
I thank Thee for both smile and frown,
And for the gain and loss:
I praise Thee for the future crown,

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And for the present cross.
I thank Thee for both wings of love
Which stirred my worldly nest
And for the stormy clouds which drove
Me trembling to Thy breast.
I bless Thee for the glad increase,
And for the waning joy:
And for this strange, this settled peace
Which nothing can destroy.
Author Unknown

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