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## THE STRENGTH OF THE NAME

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Key Text: "The name of Jehovah is a strong tower; The righteous runneth into it, and is safe." (Prov 18:10 ASV)

I would like to assume that all of us, irrespective of our economic or social standing, our academic or professional positions, are conscious of the fact that life today is full of strain and stress.

The illustrative figures of the inspired writings all remind us of this predicament:

Life is described as a race for the running, and it is necessary that we lay aside all weights, forget the things we pass as soon as they are passed, and earnestly fix our eyes upon the goal (Heb 12:1-2).

Life is described as a voyage, and there is need for a mariner who has skill and constant watchfulness that he may escape the perils of rocks and sandbanks and shoals (Jonah).

Life is described as a battle in which the warrior must be fully panoplied and prepared to withstand all attacks in order that, having done all, he may stand successfully (Eph 6:10-18).

Life is described as a great problem, full of perplexities. Every day brings its new amazement and the pilgrim passes from one mystery to another as he passes this way (Eccl 1-2).

All these figures suggest the strain and stress of life.

We are also conscious that sooner or later, our strength is weakened. I tell you that these are stressful days—days in which we find that of ourselves, and in ourselves, we are unequal to navigating the vessel to prosecuting the battle to finality; to discovering the way along which we should walk, and to continuing therein in spite of difficulty. The day when we have to say, "We cannot," is a day of disaster. But it may also be a victory. That depends entirely on whether or not

we believe our text and have entered into the full meaning of its profound and comforting implications: "The name of Jehovah is a strong tower. The righteous runneth into it, and is set on high."

### **The Forces Against Us**

#### **Spiritual Antagonisms**

The forces that have been and still are against us, spiritual antagonisms are mystic, strange, and not perfectly understood. We have been conscious that, in the midst of life, there have come sudden assaults of evil. We do not believe that they come from within. They are not part of us. We deny absolutely that they come from God, but we are quite sure of the assault. Over and over we are made conscious, whatever our philosophy may be, that there are spiritual forces, insidious and subtle, which suggest evil; and we are appalled by the overwhelming strength of these spiritual antagonisms.

A study of the life of Solomon brings a big question to my mind as to how such a gifted man would become a victim of spiritual antagonism. I had a very highly respected professor in our Far East Theological Seminary who also became a victim of this assault and is now on the other side of the fence, assaulting this church.

We are perpetually antagonized by one who has been described as "seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet 5:8), one who finds his way, if Scripture be true, into the immediate presence of God, there to slander us and to ask permission to test us that he may sift us as wheat (Luke 22:31). The revelation of the antagonism of this evil spirit flames into supreme revelation in the book of Job, where we find one remarkable sentence quoting God as inquiring from Satan, "Hast thou considered my servant Job?" (Job 2:3).

The question reveals an enemy who is patiently watching: watching for the weakest link in the chain that there he may attempt to break it; watching for the least guarded door in the citadels of seminaries, of scholars, that there he may force an entrance.

But there are other forces against us. The age in which we live is full of things that hinder us in our attempt to live the godly life.

#### **The Victory of Evil**

There is the fact that there is the problem of the long continued victory of evil in the world, the fact that, time after time, when it seems as though morning were breaking, it suddenly darkens into midnight.

## **Universal Pain**

Then there is the problem of universal pain, the problem that I am always in amazing difficulty as to how to answer. How do we answer a young father whose baby daughter has just died and he asks, "Why?" How do we account for the millions of suffering and starving people? What do we say about wars which disenfranchise and displace millions more? How do we explain the dilemma of the landless poor?

## **The Old Self**

We also have to contend with the persistence of the old self. I often feel that the enemy I dread most is not the devil, nor the problems with which I am surrounded, but myself. The reappearance of the self is perpetual. As soon as one thinks that he or she has gained a victory over it or mastered it, that person discovers that it garbs itself in other vestments and appears anew.

## **Sorrows**

Then there are the sorrows of life, the bereavement that comes to us, the empty chairs and beds in the home, the hope deferred that makes the heart sick, the disappointments that crash the spirit in personal friendships, the hour in which we say: "Yes, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me" (Ps 41:9; cf. John 13:18).

These are some of the forces against us. Individually, they defeat us; united they destroy us. These are among the things that make life strenuous, create a sense of strain, and demand some place of quietness and peace.

## **The Place of Safety**

Now what are we to do? In the midst of a book that is full of the revelations of contrary forces, a book that recognizes spiritual antagonisms, Prov 18:10 blazes brightly. It seems very much alone in this chapter. Yet there is a wonderful fitness that this verse is in the midst of words that seem to have no connection with it. Into the chaos it comes with its suggestion of order; into the darkness it comes with its flaming light; into a sob and a sigh it comes with its song. As the world commemorates the dreadful September 11 attack in America, this verse provides a new hope: "The name of Jehovah is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it and is safe."

I know you remember the use the Hebrew people made of that name, Jehovah. They never pronounced it as we do. The fact that they never pronounced it has created difficulty as to what the full name really was. On the pages of the Hebrew ancient writings, this particular name, which the proverb calls a strong tower,

stands revealed by four consonants (YHWH) with no vowels. And this indicates a reverent reticence in the pronunciation of a name so full of rich suggestiveness. And we all know from our study of the Hebrew Bible that the name YHWH was never linked with any qualifying or distinguishing adjectives. We never read, "the Jehovah" or "my Jehovah" or "the living Jehovah."

We find "the Lord" (Adonai) or "my God" (Elohim) or "the living God" (Elohim), but never "the," "my," or "the living" Jehovah. The Name always stands alone as the Tetragrammaton, four consonants from which the light seems to break. There was a singular reticence and reverence in the use of the Name, Jehovah, yet it was the very center of Hebrew religion; and the measure in which these people rose to any height of religious life was the measure in which they saw the light of that Name, and took refuge or shelter in its signification, and was made strong by everything it said to them.

I am not certain as to how you interpret the name Jehovah. To my very humble knowledge, Jehovah means, "the One who becomes to His people all they need." To me, it suggests the adaptation of Infinite Being to finite being in order to bring about the strengthening of the finite being with all the strength of the Infinite Being.

It is difficult to follow that line and to discover the meaning of the tetragrammaton, then let us turn to the Name as it is illustrated for us in the OT in five pictures.

The first is that of Abraham on the mountain with Isaac. On that mountain, Mt. Moriah, the heart of the loving father trembles as his hand, grasping the knife to sacrifice his one and only son, also trembles.

The second picture shows Moses on a mountain. In the valley are the hosts that he has led from Egyptian slavery, engaged in deadly combat with the Amalekites. Moses' hands are lifted up in prayer, and while they are so lifted, the Israelites prevail, but when he drops his hands, the enemy prevails.

The third picture focuses on Gideon, the peaceful farmer, suddenly called to national service, commanded to gather an army and to strike a blow that will break the power of Midian.

The fourth picture reveals a prophet in prison. Jeremiah, commissioned to execute a message of judgment, is unjustly imprisoned. There seems to be not one single gleam of hope. But from the prison house he sings a song of hope.

The final picture is of another prophet, an exile from his homeland, Ezekiel. Looking through the clouds and darkness which engulfs him, he records a rapturous vision of hope.

You all know these pictures: Abraham on Moriah; Moses on the mountain with uplifted hands; Gideon fighting the Midianites; Jeremiah in the midst of utter failure; and Ezekiel in exile by the river bank.

All these great men understood fully the meaning of our verse, "The name of Jehovah is a strong tower; The righteous runneth into it and is safe."

In connection with these five pictures, I find the name Jehovah properly illustrated:

Abraham on Moriah declared, "Jehovah-jireh," "The LORD will provide" (Gen 22:14).

Moses on the mountain said, "Jehovah-nissi," "The LORD my Banner" (Exod 17:15).

Gideon, facing the conflict roared, "Jehovah-shalom," "The LORD send peace" (Judg 6:24).

Jeremiah, in the dungeon of his prison cell exulted, "Jehovah-Tsidkenu," "The LORD our Righteousness" (Jer 33:16).

Ezekiel, by the bank of the river exclaimed, "Jehovah-shammah!" "The LORD is there" (Ezek 48:35).

### **Conclusion**

You may have your own interpretation of Prov 18:10. All I know is that in these pictures, I find the meaning of the text, which is full of value: "The name of Jehovah is a strong tower; The righteous runneth into it and is safe." I do not know what problems you have; I do not know what difficulties you are in. All I know is that Jehovah never changes. He is still the same Strong Tower for us to take refuge in, even as we continue to struggle with the strain and stress of life. Take Jesus' comforting words to heart, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33 NIV).