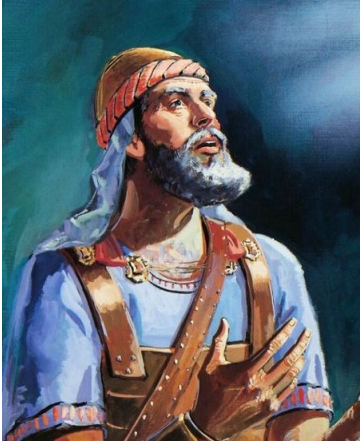


Ellen G. White

The Conditions of Strength



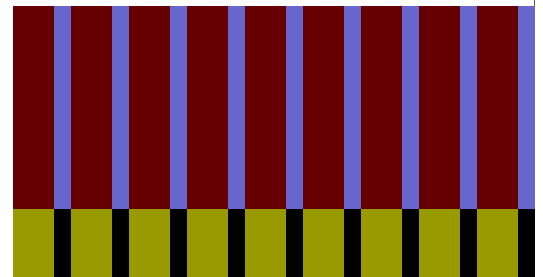
Joshua

Three thousand of the warriors of Israel had gone up to besiege the little city of Ai. Joshua, their leader, had not expected defeat or disaster. He had seen the waters of the Jordan roll back to make a path for the advancing tribes of Israel. He had seen the invisible Commander of this great people, the mighty Angel, "the Captain of the Lord's host," stand with drawn sword ready to give victory to their hands. He had beheld how the walls of Jericho trembled and fell to the ground, as they compassed the city the seventh time, and sounded the trumpets, and gave a mighty shout. He had witnessed the triumph of his people as they marched into the stronghold of the enemy, and laid the city in ruins; and he had no other thought than that victory would crown their efforts to subdue the city of Ai. But to his great dismay, the once conquering corps break rank in precipitous flight. He sees Israel discomfited, retreating before the men of Ai. The battle is abandoned, and thirty-six of his bravest warriors lie

dead on the deserted field of conflict. {RH March 20, 1888, par. 1}

Perplexed and troubled, Joshua fell on his face before the Lord. He rent his clothes in token of his grief and disappointment. He lamented before God. The ark, the strength of Israel, had not prevailed as in former times. The name of Jehovah would be brought into dishonor before the nations. The hearts of the people were melted with fear, and there was no more courage to go forward to possess the land of promise. Oh, what a cloud of sorrow swept over the soul of the servant of the Lord! Had God, the living God, forsaken his people, and given them up to calamity and

evil. {RH March 20, 1888, par. 2}



There are many in this day that would designate Achan's sin as of little consequence, and would excuse his guilt; but it is because they have no realization of the character of sin and its consequences, no sense of the holiness of God and of his requirements. The statement is often heard that God is not particular whether or not we give diligent heed to his word, whether or not we obey all the commandments of his holy law; but the record of his dealing with Achan should be a warning to us. He will in no wise clear the guilty. Says Paul, "Now

all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." {RH March 20, 1888, par. 4}

The children of Israel often repeated this experience in their history.

Not profiting by the examples of those who had sinned, nor being warned by the judgments that had fallen upon the transgressors, they lightly regarded the precepts of Jehovah, and came under condemnation. The nation that, through the favor of God, had gone forth as invincible and victorious, because of disobedience lost their power, their defense departed from them, and they became the proverb of the heathen and the prey of their enemies. {RH March 20, 1888, par. 5}

The sons of Eli ministered in holy office, and stood before God as priests to offer sacrifice for the sins of the people; but they gave little heed to his commandments, and set aside the rules that were to govern the services of the sanctuary. In so doing they cast contempt upon the great sacrifice to come; for these priests had so long practiced iniquity that they had lost all sense of the significance of this service. {RH March 20, 1888, par. 6}

The people had regarded the priests with deference, as the servants of the Most High; but through the influence of these unscrupulous men, they were led to abhor the offering of the Lord, and neglect the services of the tabernacle. The pernicious effect of their evil ways was seen throughout the tribes of Israel. The requirements of God were little heeded, and transgression spread from priest to people, till the nation was defiled. {RH March 20, 1888, par. 7}



At this time, war was declared against them by the Philistines, who were ever aggressive; and though they had been punished repeatedly by the hand of the Lord, for their oppression of Israel, they were still hostile and unsubdued. The armies of Israel pitched tents at Ebenezer. They

had little fear of failing in this conflict; for they had often put the armies of the Philistines to flight. But the Lord was not with them. They had not honored God, and he could not honor them. The priests had degraded his worship, and the people had transgressed his laws. He could not cover them in the time of trouble, nor be their defense in battle. Their strength had departed. "The Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men." The people were terrified and in dismay, and when they came "into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us today before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." {RH March 20, 1888, par. 8}

The Lord had given no command that the ark should come into the army, but the Israelites felt confident that victory would be theirs, and uttered a great shout as it was borne into the camp by the sons of Eli. The Philistines had heard of the wonders that had been wrought for Israel, and they were afraid: "For they said, God is come into the camp.... Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews. And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen, and the ark of God was taken: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain." {RH March 20, 1888, par. 9}

The greatest and most terrifying calamity that could occur, had befallen Israel. The ark of God had been captured, and was in the possession of the enemy. The glory had indeed departed from Israel when the symbol of the abiding presence and power of Jehovah was removed from the midst of them. With this sacred chest was associated the most remarkable and wonderful revelations of God's truth and power. In former days miraculous victories had been achieved wherever it appeared. It was shadowed by the wings of the golden cherubim, and the unspeakable glory of the shekinah, the visible symbol of the most high God, had rested over it in the holy of holies. But now it had brought no victory. It had not proved to them a defense on this occasion, and they mourned throughout Israel. {RH March 20, 1888, par. 10}

They had not realized that their faith was only a nominal faith, and had lost its power to prevail with God. The law of God, contained in the ark, was also a symbol of his presence; but they had cast contempt upon the commandments, had despised their requirements, and had grieved the Spirit of the Lord from among them. When the people obeyed the holy precepts, the Lord was with them to work for them by his infinite power; but when they looked upon the ark, and did not associate it with God, nor honor his revealed will by obedience to his law, it was no more to them than a common box. They looked to the ark as the idolatrous nations looked to their gods, as if it possessed in itself the elements of power and salvation. They transgressed the law it contained, for their very worship of

the ark led to formalism, hypocrisy, and idolatry. Their sin had separated them from God, and he could not give them victory until they had repented of and forsaken their iniquity. {RH March 20, 1888, par. 11}

It was not enough that the ark and the sanctuary were in the midst of Israel. It was not enough that the priests offered sacrifices, and that the people were called the children of God. The Lord does not regard the requests of those who cherish iniquity in their hearts, and it is written that "he that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." {RH March 20, 1888, par. 12}

We may learn from these examples of God's dealing with ancient Israel, that the controversy for truth will have little success when sin is upon those who advocate it. Men and women may be well versed in Bible knowledge, as well acquainted with the Scripture as were the Israelites with the ark, and yet if their hearts are not right before God, success will not attend their efforts. God will not be with them. They do not have a high sense of the obligations of the law of Heaven, nor do they realize the sacred character of the truth they are teaching. The charge is, "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." {RH March 20, 1888, par. 13}



ELLEN G. WHITE

It is not enough to argue in defense of the truth. The most telling evidence of its worth is seen in a godly life; and without this the most conclusive statements will be lacking in weight and prevailing power; for our strength lies in being connected with God by His Holy Spirit, and transgression severs us from this sacred nearness with the Source of our might and wisdom. We are to bring to the attention of the world the truth for this time; and if we should see the work advance, we must be sure that there is no accursed thing among us.

Says Paul, "Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? ... Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonorest thou God?" {RH March 20, 1888, par. 14}

The Israelites forgot that their strength was in God, and not in the ark, and those who advocate the truth today, will have to learn that their power is not in the clearness of their arguments; not in the reasonableness of their doctrines, though these be sustained by the word of God; not in their belief in the law and the truth of its claims, but in obedience to all of its requirements, through the faith of the Son of God. {RH March 20, 1888, par. 15}

Let us take heed to the warning of the past, remembering that God requireth truth in the secret hearts of his followers; for only that worship is acceptable that is rendered in spirit and in truth. He that hath clean hands and a pure heart will realize the aid of heavenly power, and will see of the salvation of God; but let no one think that God will favor those who go contrary to his word; for he says, "Thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you." {RH March 20, 1888, par. 16}

Let us take heed to the warning of the past, remembering that God requireth truth in the secret hearts of his followers; for only that worship is acceptable