

Foes Without; Fears Within

By Jim Elliff



Civil War broke out. (Have you known *war*, real human disruption and conflict, even if on a small scale?)

It is fair to call it “breaking out,” as if it were a plague that was destined to take the lives of many cherished family members and friends, and to leave its rotting smell everywhere. It broke out, indeed.

The odds were two to one. Four hundred thousand troops on one side; eight hundred thousand on the other. It was another Middle Eastern conflict, but this time, internal. As always, it was religious.

The smaller southern troops arranged themselves on a mountain called Zemaraim in the hill country, just inside enemy territory. From this position they made public declarations to their enemy, their brothers who had neglected and abused the ancient rights and religious orientation that had, for so many years, bound them tightly.

Their commander decried his brothers’ rebellion, their breaking of covenant, their establishment of other priests not of the proper lineage. He warned of the anger of God against them since they had designed another system of religion. “You have forsaken Him,” he declared.

Then he made this solemn assertion: “Now behold, God is with us at our head . . . O sons of Israel, do not fight against the Lord your God of your fathers, for you will not succeed.”

It was as if Abijah, Judah’s king, was warning with a secret hope that the king of Israel, rebellious Jereboam to the north, would repent before God would rain justice upon him. To fight against God was a serious error and would bring pounding consequences. When you fight against us, Abijah was avowing, you fight against God Himself.

His predictions were true. Though Jereboam set an ambush behind Judah’s army as well as in front, Jereboam did not reckon on the strength of this half-sized enemy from the south when God was fighting for them. Judah cried to the Lord and the priests blew the trumpets. Only God could deliver from such a fierce foe. And He did. “God gave them into their hand.” Abijah “defeated them with a great slaughter, so that 500,000 chosen men of Israel fell slain.”

Then these words were recorded by the human author of this history: “. . . and the sons of Judah conquered because they trusted in the Lord, the God of their fathers.”

Is there a lesson in this dramatic passage from 2 Chronicles 13? Most certainly. Any believer can apply Abijah’s plan:

Say the truth without compromising (vs. 12)

Jesus reminded his followers, “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). When our enemies fight against us, if we are standing on God’s ground and on His truth, they are fighting against God. Whether God delivers by giving you grace to cope or by removing the enemy (the first takes perpetual grace), you do not need to fear. Say to yourself, and to others, that God is big enough to handle His battles. He will win, however He chooses to accomplish His victory. Your enemies will not rule over you—even, sadly, if they are the members of your own household or a familiar friend (Mt. 10:34-36; Ps. 55:12-15). You are indomitable in Christ. Humbly repeat that to yourself, and to your godly friends, and, if necessary and appropriate, even to those who oppose you.

Cry out to God with all your heart (vs.14).

When your enemies come down on you, let your prayers be even more fervent. Our normal sedate composure in prayer should be laid aside. Only crying out will do. Forget decorum. God never turns away His ear from those who passionately cry out to Him. Study it in the Bible, and you will find this to be so. “A broken and contrite heart, O Lord, you will not despise” (Ps. 51:17). It is the “fervent prayers of a righteous man” that James promises will accomplish much (James 5:16). English preacher Charles Spurgeon, who had many nights of crying out to God, once said, “To pray without fervor is like hunting with a dead dog.”

Rely on God regardless of the apparent strength of the opposition (vs.18).

Abijah and the army of Judah won their victory because God won it for them. It was trust that routed an enemy double their size. It can be no other way. Doesn’t God include many such stories in the Bible history precisely for the purpose of bolstering our confidence in Him? Sometimes God allows our enemy’s powers to grow in order to make this lesson known all the better. If it will be won, God will have to do it. There is no use in even considering trust in yourself. “Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord” (2 Chron. 20:17).

You won’t make it through life without conflict. If for no other reason, your “set apart” life will cause trouble. “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). Civil war may break out.

Whatever the assault, believer, He is with you. No battle is fought alone if you are weak enough to trust in God.