

IN TIMES LIKE THESE

"And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none" (Ezekiel 22:30).

Although God is longsuffering and gracious, there are times when nothing is left for Him to do except to let judgment fall. There have been many such occasions throughout history. On one such occasion God directed Ezekiel to point up the national disaster in these especially meaningful words: "And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none."

Perhaps Ezekiel saw gaping holes in the walls of Jerusalem, and men working feverishly in the gaps to build the defenses again. That pictured to him the moral and spiritual conditions behind the national calamity.

Ezekiel vividly compared the great evils of his day with enormous breaches in the walls of Jerusalem. He saw his people like a besieged city in imminent peril of overthrow. The reason for this condition was not far to seek. For years the nation had been in a state of moral decline.

Awful conditions prevailed in Ezekiel's time. The total failure of the nation was imminent because all standards of righteousness had been discarded. The nation was fast plunging into chaos and destruction. Prophets, priests, princes and people failed God. The prophets shamelessly exploited the people. The priests broke the law they were appointed to maintain and secularized life, blotting out the distinction between holy and profane and clean and unclean. The princes took advantage of every opportunity to enlarge their own holdings. The masses of the people, who were no better than their guides and leaders, were characterized by robbery and oppression. The national situation was a striking illustration of the truth that sin in a people is not only a reproach and shame, but the fountain of misery and suffering in which all of the people suffer, the innocent as well as the guilty. It is not enough merely to lament evil conditions in our national life. We must remember that conditions are the source of misfortune and suffering for all the people.

The perverseness, adultery, impiety, contempt for God, injustice, and oppression of the people called forth the judgment of God. Every man brings judgment upon himself. Even in the courts of our land, the court only finds whether or not one is guilty of violating the law of the state or of the nation. Every person pronounces judgment upon himself by what he does, and the same is true of a nation. There has never been a sin committed that ever paid in good coin, from the first one committed by Adam until now, and there never will be one that will pay.

In Ezekiel's day there was a great need for a man to stand in the gap and build up the walls of truth and right. But instead, the prophets, priests, princes and people were breaking down rather than building up the moral and religious lives of the citizens. The people folded their hands with a sigh of resignation and despair and said, "It is useless to attempt anything further." As conditions steadily drifted from bad to worse, the people said, "It is now every man for himself, and we must get what we can from the wreckage; we must take our chance while we have it." Meanwhile, God was looking for a man to "stand in the gap" and avert the crisis that was manifestly coming upon the country, but the tragedy of it was that He could not find a single trustworthy man. Just one righteous intercessor would have saved the nation, but there was not one to be found. But it had not always been so with the nation.

When Israel was enslaved, and contented in slavery, God raised up Moses to stand in the gap. Choosing to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, Moses was guided and upheld by spiritual forces. Through him the plagues fell upon Egypt, and the Red Sea was cleft. He led the people through the wilderness; and when they fell away from God and worshiped the golden calf, Moses fell on his face to plead with God for the people. Perhaps in all history there is not a finer example of a man standing in the gap.

Another such man was Samuel, the last of the Judges and the first of the Prophets. He was raised up in an hour of national decline and corruption. He repaired the gaps and the rents in the hedge of national life and safety and brought the people back to God.

Another man to stand in the gap was Elijah. At Carmel he met and conquered the priests of Baal and overthrew idolatry; he defied the wicked Ahab and Jezebel; and, by the sheer force of one man's righteous personality, proclaimed the Word of the Lord, and by doing so built up the hedge and held the nation together.

We have parallels to this in secular history. In the darkest hour of his nation's history Prime Minister Winston Churchill was raised up in England to stand in the gap, to speak to the souls of his countrymen and to strengthen them to stand in that awful hour. There was a man, whatever his faults as seen by his contemporaries, or however politically rejected by his countrymen, who will go down in history as a man who stood in the gap.

There is a striking parallel between conditions of life resulting from a departure from God in those Old Testament days and conditions of life which obtain today. All about us today moral and religious decay are all too evident. Ordinary standards of morality are set aside, and people boast of a new age, and of a new manner of life. As we look out over our world we begin to wonder just how many gaps there are in the hedge and whether it is too late to make it up and for God to still find enough people to keep back the waters of judgment which already seem to be moving in upon us as American people.

If you will read the list of evils which Ezekiel mentioned as existing in Jerusalem, you will be impressed with the fact that practically all of them are duplicated in America today. God has blessed America in a singular way. He has hedged us about with two oceans. He laid the foundation of the nation in the faith of godly men. He gave us the Lord's Day, the Bible, the churches, the schools, etc. Yet now how many gaps there are in the national hedge. There are so many gaping holes in our homes, our churches and our schools. People are needed to stand in the gaps. It is important that we remember that God said: "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). Sin contributes to the destruction of the sinner, whether the sinner be an individual, a family, an organization, or a nation.

The French Premier Petain said that for twenty years France had gone off following the way of pleasure. In doing for themselves the things which the flesh called for they not only forgot their nation and forgot to prepare against an enemy, but they forgot God. Many of us can well remember the tragic consequences of their folly. Turn back the pages of Roman history and look at Rome at the time of her zenith and subsequent fall. She fell because of the sin within and not because of an enemy without. There is no more nearly parallel case in all history than we have of Rome and the present-day America. Here we have gone pleasure-mad, and we resent anything that would curb our participation in worldly activities and bring us back to a close walk with God in the way that God has laid out that we should walk.

In the long ago God sought for a man to stand in the gap so that the awful catastrophe might be averted. A bold, courageous, and faithful champion of righteousness was sorely needed. God looked at every man among all of the tribes in search of one who would stand in the gap, but He could not find one. God has always been searching for men. He sought for the very first man. In the Garden of Eden God called unto Adam, and said unto him, "Where art thou?"

Men are indispensable to God when it comes to bringing human need and the divine supply together. The human need can only be met by the divine supply, which must come from God to those in need through the individuals who fill up the gap. Men are indispensable to God in bringing others to know Christ. God is looking for men of dedication, vision, conviction, strength and dependability. Are you ready and willing to stand in the gap for God in times like these? John G. Holland wrote wisely when he penned the words:

"God give us men. A time like this demands
Strong minds, great hearts, true faith ready hands.
Men whom the lust of office does not kill,
Men whom the spoils of office can not buy,
Men who possess opinions and a will,
Men who have honor; men who will not lie.
Men who can stand before a demagogue
And damn his treacherous flattery without winking,
Tall men, sun-crowned, who live above the fog
In public duty and in private thinking,
For while the rabble with their thumb-worn creeds,
Their large professions and their little deeds,
Mingle in selfish strife, lo freedom weeps,
Wrong rules the land and waiting justice sleeps."

The need today for men to stand in the gap for God and for right is an urgent one. God is seeking for men to stand in the gap for Him and to rebuild the breached doctrinal bulwarks, spiritual defenses and moral standards. He challenges us to stand in the gap of home, church and country.

"Ye that are men now serve Him,
Against unnumbered foes;
Let courage rise with danger,
And strength to strength oppose."

We need somebody to stand in the gap of our own lives, those gaps made by time, adversity, sin, sorrow and death. Man can do much for man in the time of trouble and sorrow. Yet, there are gaps in life that no man can ever fill. There is the final rent and gap of death. Then we need that One to stand in the gap Who said: "I am the resurrection and the life." Christ came and took upon Himself our nature, became obedient unto death, was wounded for our transgressions, and died on the cross. He took in His own body and soul all the darts and shafts of retribution and judgment, and now we are forgiven and justified because we have believed on Him. Christ is the One who stood in the gap for us. He alone could do it.

"There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin
He only could unlock the Gate of Heaven
And let us in."

Christ is the One who stood in the gap for us, and stands in the gap forever. He comes to us in our sad plight and poverty, in all of our spiritual needs and bankruptcy, and tells us: "I will take care of you. I have already made atonement for you. I have answered the law of God in your behalf. Every demand I have met. I will do this for everyone who believes on me, trusts in me, yields his life to me, and surrenders himself to me." Won't you accept Him and link your life on to Him as now we sing?