

"A ROARING LION"

BY B. G. ECHOLS

Every man who lives has a battle to wage. Fortunately, very few are ever made to engage in physical combat, but everyone battles over his soul. Either we battle against the powers of wickedness to keep our lives holy and pleasing to God, or we battle against God and His righteousness. The child of God is one who has renounced the devil and is fighting for God. But the devil does not give up without a struggle. He lurks about seeking to gain back as many as possible. The devil can be defeated by steadfastness in the faith and with God's help. Satan wants to get each Christian back into his service. Thus Peter's admonition: "Be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom withstand stedfast in your faith, knowing that the same sufferings are accomplished in your brethren who are in the world" (1 Peter 5:8, 9).

We must be free from any intoxication of mind, whether excitement or anxious care, that distracts our minds from seriousness. If we are not sober, we cannot be watchful. Thus we must maintain a well-balanced disposition and serious thinking. Peter may well remember the Lord's appeal to him in the garden (Mt. 26:40). Knowing his failure, he wants us to avoid his mistake. Watchfulness is needed because the future is uncertain. We must not allow Satan to surprise us into apostasy. Five minutes off guard may cost the loss of our virtue. Knowing the frailty of our nature and the certainty of judgment, let us always be on guard for Satan's snares, and stay even closer to God.

"Adversary" signifies an opponent. "Devil" includes the idea of false accusation reminding us that he is a liar (Jn. 8:44). The devil is pictured in various ways to help us understand his ways and prepare ourselves to resist. Sometimes he transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). Peter compares the devil to a lion. There must be something about a lion that made this a good comparison.

Lions are no longer found in most of the areas in which the Bible events took place, but at one time

they were found over most of the territory. In the O.T., lions sometimes took a prominent place in events. Thus comparing the devil to a lion made the danger more vivid to the first readers. This comparison will also help us when we consider some characteristics of the animal we call "King of the beasts."

Peter speaks of the devil "walking about" which literally means to "prowl about," not daring to enter the fold where the sheep are, but ready to spring upon and devour any wanderer from the fold. In the devil's "seeking" we see the persistence with which he searches out his victims. In stalking its game, a lion creeps stealthily upon its quarry either from the side or rear. When he is fairly sure of taking his prey, he rushes upon it at a speed of about 35 mph. This is much the way the devil works. A lion can strike a full grown zebra and knock it to the ground. In opposing the devil we cannot depend on our own strength. He can knock us down.

Lions do most of their stalking at night, but will catch an animal in daylight if they have an opportunity. Man-eating lions attack only at night. We often give the devil opportunities to take us. The devil never comes openly to us. Once a lion gets the taste of human flesh, it craves more. Once the devil gets you, he will surely come back again and again. Lions are highly intelligent and are quick to learn. This is why they are trained for circuses. The devil is not stupid, and without God's word we cannot defeat him. Thus our adversary is sly and subtle as he was in the garden of Eden. He is also deadly and vicious. He is strong and once he has you sighted, he moves with rapidity to the kill.

Satan looks eagerly for any lost sheep who wanders from the fold. He never rests. To "devour" is to drink down or swallow up. It implies utter destruction. Be sure his eye is fixed on you. He intends to destroy your faith, your purity, your peace, your good name, and your soul. He has access to you. He knows your feelings, and all your circumstances. Only God can know more and do more than he. So you must cast your care on God. Satan inspires per-

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secution, not because he is merely wanting your body to suffer, but because he wants your soul to be lost and he uses bodily harm as his instrument. Thus the need for watchfulness and resistance. If he can win your soul by making things peaceful for you, he will do that. This is the enemy we must defeat and Peter tells us how.

To be steadfast is to be rock-like in firmness. Here is one case where stubbornness is commendable. Only faith in God gives that steadfastness. Only faith can lead us to an unwavering stand against sin (Eph. 6:16). Faith is trustfulness. Only a firm faith will survive. We can totally rely on God to take care of us in all situations. Faith sets the Lion of the tribe of Judah against the lion of the bottomless pit. The delivering Lion will defeat the devouring lion. Our defeats by Satan can be traced to our lack of trust in God. You cannot run away from a lion as he can overtake you. You must face him with your weapon ready (Jas. 4:7, 8). We live in a state of war with Satan and our hope lies in taking up the whole armor of God that we may stand. Our trials are no greater than the trials of other brethren. Their natural strength is no greater than ours. The grace that sustains them will sustain us. God's hand is not shortened. The real cause of all persecution of God's people is Satan who works through human instruments in his attempt to destroy God's people. Remember the Savior has experienced all the horrors which can ever be in death, and He triumphed. In Him we will win the victory (1 Cor. 15:58).

CONSIDER THIS:

DEATH ... by Bill Crews

I refer to physical death, not spiritual. I refer to the death of the physical body. "The body apart from the spirit is dead" (Jas. 2:26). "And it came to pass as her soul was departing, for she died" (spoken of Rachel in Gen. 35:18). "And the dust (referring to the physical body which was made of the dust of the ground - Gen. 2:7, bc) returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit unto God who made it" (Eccl. 12:7)

Death is appointed for all. "And inasmuch as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment; so Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him, unto salvation" (1-Heb. 9:27). While death is an appointment awaiting all men, the Bible nowhere teaches that each person has been appointed a set time to die (that is from Calvinism which teaches that God has foreordained all that comes to pass among men and angels). Death is referred to as "the way of all the earth" (Josh. 23:14; 1 Kgs. 2:2; etc.)

We know that death is coming. "For the living know that they shall die" (Eccl. 9:5). The Bible teaches this; history teaches this; our own experiences in life teach this. All living things must, eventually, die.

We cannot know when or how; it could occur at just about any time by any number of means. "There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power over the day of death" (Eccl. 8:8). Life is uncertain; fatal diseases and fatal accidents surround us. Death can come swiftly or it can linger.

We cannot prevent it or postpone it, at least not indefinitely. Many have tried. Some have claimed that they had found a way to live for ever and announced that they would live for ever. One man even built an imposing house in which he declared that he would live for ever. But all of these died.

Jesus conquered death in His triumphant resurrection, never to die again and becoming the assurance of our resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20-22, 55-57). "But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." No one need live and die in sin because of His sacrifice for our sins, and no one need live in fear of death because He overcame the one who had the power of death (Heb. 2:14-15).

Balaam, as a prophet of God, was led to say, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his" (Num. 23:10). He realized neither; he could have had both. Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, lived such a wicked life (as soon he was placed upon the throne, he slew all of his brothers; he married Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel) that God raised up enemies against him and smote him with a horrible and fatal disease. The Scriptura says, "He departed without being desired" (2 Chron. 21:20) at the age of forty. Later Josiah, son of Amon and a righteous king who repaired the temple and called upon his people to keep the law of the Lord, died, and "all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for him" (2 Chron. 35:24).

When we come to die, will no one care, or will we be mourned and missed? Will we die the death of the righteous, and will our last end be like his? Will we die in the Lord (Rev. 14:13). Or will we die out of Christ, unprepared, and without hope. We decide by the way we live our lives day by day.