

SERMON: A THOUGHT-PROVOKING TEXT (A Black History Sermon)

1ST Kings 22:48

Jehoshaphat made ships of Tharshish to go to Ophir for gold: but they went not; for the ships were broken at Ezion-geber.

Introduction

This text tells of the ill-fated plans of King Jehoshaphat to send ships to Africa to purchase gold. To refresh our memories, Ezion-geber, the place from which the ships were to have set sail, was one of the main ports of ancient Israel. Their destination was to have been Ophir, which was located in East Africa. In ancient Biblical times, the city of Ophir was part of the Ethiopian empire. This empire extended throughout much of the African continent and to southern Arabia. In ancient Biblical times, the gold of Ophir was the best to be found anywhere. There are numerous references in the Old Testament to the gold of Ophir. The apocryphal book of Sirach and many secular references refer to the beauty and the quality of the gold of Ophir.

Jehoshaphat was not the first Jewish king to send ships to Ophir for gold. Solomon sent a fleet of ships to Ophir and David his father personally owned great quantities of gold from Ophir.

Our text tells us that the plan of King Jehoshaphat to send ships to Africa to bring back gold was never realized because the fleet that he built was shipwrecked even before it set sail from Ezion-geber. Jehoshaphat had to face the reality that he had built ships that would never sail the oceans. Maybe the ships were sabotaged. Maybe poor piloting caused the ships to collide, irreparably, in the harbor. Perhaps it was faulty designs or poor construction workmanship. The bottom line is simple: the ships did not leave the harbor. They did not fulfil their intended purpose.

This text is very thought provoking – or should I say emotion evoking. As we read this verse in the Biblical context and in the context of Black History, we can easily ride an emotional rollercoaster. So, let's review a few of the thoughts and emotions this verse can engender. I am sure many more will come to mind.

Exposition

1. Africa and the Holy Land Are Very Close.

(Geographically and Culturally.)

2. We Are Reminded Of The Ship That Brought The First African Slaves To America In 1619.

(This Ship did sail. Many More Slave Ships Sailed After It.)

3. Metaphorically, Every Person Is A Ship.

(Let's Make Sure It Leaves The Harbor To Fulfill Its Purpose.)

(Every Person Who Was Impeded By The Barriers Of Discrimination Whether Because Of Race Or Gender Is A Ship That Did Not Sail.)

(Every Young Life Taken By Violence Is A Ship That Did Not Sail.)

(Every Qualified Black Athlete Before Jackie Robinson Was A Ship That Did Not Sail.)

4. In Spite Of Discrimination, Segregation, And Racial Hatred We Had Many Ships To Sail. Most Are Sailing As I Speak. Praise The Lord!

(Black Churches, The Singing Of Spirituals, Historically Black Colleges And Universities, The Creation Of Jazz, The Harlem Renaissance, Sororities, Fraternities, Thriving Businesses, And The List Goes On.)

Closing Thoughts

The beauty of our culture is that historically we could praise God in spite of our excruciating pain. Yes, there was praise despite the pain. Our ancestors shed tears of sorrow when they sang the blues, but they shed tears of joy when they sang the spirituals and the jubilee songs. They sang about romantic love with their rhythm and blues songs, but they moved up higher on Sunday morning and sang ***I really Love the Lord, He Heard My Cry***. On Saturday they feasted on chitlins, pig feet, and ox tails, but on The Lord's Day they donned their Sunday best and then feasted on the Word of God and had some "good church." Then after the spiritual feast, they had a repast and ate fried chicken and potato salad. They washed it down with sweet tea and lemonade. They had joy in the midst of sorrow. They worshipped in the midst of their woes. Our ancestors found a way to sing the Lord's song in a strange land. They sang the Lord's

song not to entertain their captors, but rather to strengthen each other and to give God their best praise.

Thank God many of our ships have sailed. Many are still sailing in spite of the severe storms on the seas of life. We are experiencing things that our ancestors prayed for but never experienced. Sail on in Jesus' name. Sail on! Sail the high seas of Christian love. Sail on! Sail the high seas of forgiveness. Sail on! Sail the high seas of integrity. Sail on! Sail the high seas of thanksgiving and gratitude. Give God Glory! Give God All The Glory!

Related Scriptures

Job 22:24; Job 28:12-16; Psalm 45:9; Isaiah 13:12; 1st Kings Chapter 9 and 10; 1st Chronicles 29:4

End Note

The King James Version reads "ships of Tharshish." A better rendering for us would be "Tharshish-type ships." The first of these ships were built in the city of Tharshish and were known for their rugged seaworthiness and were equipped to carry large amounts of cargo on long voyages. All of the other territories and nations, including Israel, began to model their ships after the ships built in Tharshish. Remember, Jonah wanted to flee to Tharshish, probably, so he could board one of those ships, because he knew they could go on long, extended voyages. Remember, Jonah was trying to get away from the presence of God.

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