

## 495 Numbers 32.23

In the Book of Numbers Chapter 32, we are told how Moses dealt with the request of the tribes of Reuben and Gad to be given the lands of Jazer and Gilead as their possession, which, crucially, lay on the east side of the Jordan (32.1-5). Moses agreed, on condition that their armed men would cross the Jordan and fight with the rest of the brethren in the conquest of the Promised Land “until the land be subdued before the LORD” (32.22a, KJV): “then afterward, ye shall return, and be guiltless before the LORD, and before Israel ... But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out” (from 32.22-23).

Those final few words, “be sure your sin will find you out”, express a central, unfailing scriptural truth, with numerous scriptural examples as evidence. Man in his fallen, sinful nature, possesses two basic instincts: first, to commit sin, in any number of ways, whenever that seems to suit; and second, to cover up this sin, and if found out, to deny it, shrug it off, or blame someone else.

It starts with “the Fall” in Genesis 3: Eve is deceived, Adam deliberately sins; they cover up their nakedness and hide (3.1-8). The LORD God finds them and decrees punishment, on the serpent (vv.14-15), on the woman, and on Adam (vv.16-24).

The consequences of their sin quickly followed. “[Am] I my brother’s keeper?”, asks Cain, after murdering his brother (Genesis 4.9b). “God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants”, admits Judah, concerning the complicity of him and his brothers in selling Joseph to the Midianites (Genesis 37.28; 44.16b). Weak Aaron mumbles to his brother Moses, “... then I cast (the gold) into the fire, and there came out this calf”. Well, fancy that! (Exodus 32.24b).

Achan hid “a bit of loot” from the battle against Ai in the earth under his tent – surely, no harm done? (Joshua 7.20-21). But much harm was done: the children of Israel were defeated (7.4-9); the LORD told Joshua, “Israel hath sinned ... Up, sanctify the people ...” (from 7.10-15). The net slowly closed in, and Achan and his household suffered the fearful punishment due to them (7.22-26).

Then we can mention King Saul and “this bleating of the sheep” in Samuel’s ears (I Samuel 15.13-23; also 28.7-20); King David’s sins regarding Bathsheba and Uriah, firmly exposed by Nathan (II Samuel

11.2-12.15); Ahab, Naboth, Jezebel and Elijah (I Kings 21.17-23); Gehazi (II Kings 5.20-27); and Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 36.20-31 / II Kings 24.1-6).

In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus frequently speaks of “sin being found out”, and of judgment and punishment for sin (egs., Matthew 23 / Luke 10.12-16; 12.1-5); and the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was duly found out, with instant consequences (Acts 5.1-11).

We also have numerous post-Bible examples of people who assume that they can behave as they wish. Some examples from recent times include Stalin, Hitler, Milosevic, Karadic, Pol Pot and now Putin; sexual sinners such as John Profumo, John Kennedy, Cecil Parkinson, John Major, Bill Clinton, Prince Charles, Prince Andrew (though denied), Matt Hancock, and Donald Trump; and political “slippery fish” such as Richard Nixon and now Boris Johnson. Just look at how much our Prime Minister has thrown away because of his casual attitude to truth and falsehood and to right and wrong, quite apart from the damage he has done to his party and country: “Be sure your sin will find you out, Prime Minister” – and, “sure as eggs”, it has done so, yet he still showed not a shred of remorse in his resignation statement.

From this selection of scriptural and post-scriptural examples we are reminded of the old, central truths that sin matters, that it is found out and, if left un-dealt with, it brings the punishment of death. This death does not mean extinction, but rather a conscious permanent separation from Almighty God our heavenly Father both in this life and the next (egs., Romans 6.23 / Luke 16.19-31 / Revelation 20.11-15). If and when people realise the gravity of their situation because of their unforgiven sins, the Christian Gospel suddenly makes sense: sin has to be dealt with while there is still opportunity, and is graciously forgiven by God the Father when sought by faith alone in Christ alone (eg., I John 1.7-2.2).

In our own lives, singly and together, we are to “adorn the doctrine of Christ in all things”, being “blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life” to others (from Titus 2.10b / Philippians 2.15-16a).

Let us pray that Boris Johnson, amidst the wreckage that his sins have caused, will accept from the Lord the gift of the faith which he so deeply

needs – and will then humbly place that faith in the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

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