1 Kings - Commentaries by Christopher Knapp

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Ahaziah

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Whom Jehovah holds

1 Kings 22:40, 49, 51-53; 2 Kings 1

Contemporary Prophets: Elijah

The fear of the Lord prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened. Prov. 10:27

Scripture records a dark catalog of iniquity concerning Ahaziah. Yet it is only what might be expected of the offspring of such a couple as Ahab and Jezebel. So matched in wickedness were his parents that nothing short of a miracle of grace could have made him anything better than the description given of him here:

Ahaziah the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned two years over Israel. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. For he served Baal, and worshiped him, and provoked to anger the Lord God of Israel, according to all that his father had done (1 Kings 22:51-53).

“And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber, that was in Samaria, and was sick: and he sent messengers, and said unto them, Go, inquire of Baal-zebub [‘lord of flies] the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover of this disease.” Ekron was the northernmost of the five chief Philistine cities, and contained the shrine and oracle of the vile abomination called Baal-zebub (the Beelzebub of the New Testament). Men love the gods that are most like unto themselves, so it is not surprising to see Ahaziah sending to this miserable Philistine god. But the sick king’s messengers never reached the oracle. The God of Israel Himself, sending His prophet to intercept the king’s messengers, answered his question.

But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron? Now, therefore, thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die (2 Kings 1:3-4).

The messengers returned to their royal master, and related what had taken place and the prophet’s message. “What manner of man was he which came up to meet you, and told you these words?” the king inquired. “And they answered him, He was a hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite.” In his perverse folly, Ahaziah ordered at once that the prophet be apprehended. But now the strong hand of Jehovah must be felt by the perverse king and his haughty captains: twice the captains with their fifty men are consumed by fire from heaven. But, as the third captain humbly pleads for his own life and the lives of his men sent out to arrest Jehovah’s prophet, the angel of the Lord bids Elijah, “Go down with him: be not afraid of him. And he arose, and went down with him unto the king.” There, in the presence of the king, Jehovah’s judgment is unflinchingly repeated to him.

“So he died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken. And Jehoram reigned in his stead in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah; because he had no son.” This Jehoram, also known as Joram, was another son of Ahab (2 Kings 3:1) and therefore brother of Ahaziah.

“Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?” Yes, and they, with the wicked acts recorded here, are written in God’s books above, as well as all the deeds and doings of every man’s life, whether it be good or evil. Solemn facts for us all!

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Jehoram

Exalted by Jehovah

1 Kings 22:50; 2 Kings 8:16-24; 2 Chron. 21

Give not thy... ways to that which destroyeth kings. Proverbs 31:3

Of the seven sons of Jehoshaphat, Jehoram was the oldest, and his father gave him the kingdom. It would seem, from 2 Kings 8:16, that he associated Jehoram with him on the throne during his lifetime. Jehoshaphat probably foresaw and feared what was likely to occur after his death; to avert, if possible, any such disaster, he endeavored to have the throne well secured to Jehoram before his decease. To conciliate his remaining six sons, he “gave them great gifts of silver, and of gold, and of precious things, with fenced cities in Judah” (2 Chron. 21:3).They were not, probably, all children of one mother, as two of them bear exactly the same name—Azariah. This would make dissension among them all the more likely, and it is a warning to all to see Jehoshaphat ending his days with this threatening storm cloud hanging over his house.

The chaos and evil of Jehoshaphat's reign was the result of his ill-advised alliance with the ungodly house of Ahab, and what he sowed he, by dread anticipation at least, reaped. Actually his posterity were made to reap it in a most terrible way. "Now when Jehoram was risen up to the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself, and slew all his brethren with the sword, and divers also of the princes of Israel" (21:4). He had married the daughter of a "murderer" (2 Kings 6:32), and as a natural consequence he soon soaked his own hands in blood. "Jehoram was thirty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab: for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife: and he wrought that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD" (2 Chron. 21:5-6).

Decadence of power at once set in, which the neighboring nations were quick to perceive and take advantage of. "In his days the Edomites revolted from under the dominion of Judah, and made themselves a king. Then Jehoram went forth with his princes, and all his chariots with him: and he rose up by night, and smote the Edomites which compassed him in, and the captains of the chariots" (8-9). This happened at Zair (2 Kings 8:21), in Idumea, south of the Dead Sea. He barely escaped destruction or capture, being surrounded by the enemy. He managed to extricate himself by a night surprise, but the expedition was a failure. "So the Edomites revolted from under the hand of Judah unto this day" (2 Chron. 21:10). The spirit of rebellion spread: "The same time also did Libnah revolt from under his hand; because he had forsaken the LORD God of his fathers."

His attitude toward idolatry was the exact reverse of that of his father. "He made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication, and compelled Judah thereto," or, "seduced Judah." He undid, so far as lay in his power, all the good work of his father Jehoshaphat. But how dearly he paid for his wickedness!

And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet [evidently written prophetically before his translation], saying, Thus saith the LORI) God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, but hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, which were better than thyself: Behold, with a great plague will the LORD smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods: And thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day (12-15).

Elijah's ministry and field of labor had been, it would seem, exclusively among the ten tribes, the kingdom of Israel. But the servant of God is used here for a message to the king of Judah. And as it was prophesied to him, so it came to pass.

The LORD stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians, that were near the Ethiopians: And they came up into Judah, and brake into it, and carried away all the substance that was found in the king's house, and his sons also, and his wives; so that there was never a son left him, save Jehoahaz [called Ahaziah in 2 Chron. 22:1], the youngest of his sons. And after all this [terrible as the stroke was] the LORD smote him in his bowels with an incurable disease. And it came to pass, that in process of time, after the end of two years, his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness: so he died of sore diseases. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers (16-19).

What a terrible recompense for his murders and idolatries! God made a signal example of him, that his successors might "see it and fear."

"Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years, and departed without being desired [regretted]. Howbeit they buried him in the city of David, but not in the sepulchers of the kings." He is one of the most unlovely of all the kings of Judah. Although his name means "exalted by Jehovah," he was for his wickedness thrust down to a dishonored grave. He took the kingdom when raised to its highest glory since the days of Solomon, and left it, after a reign of eight short years, with Ichabod ("the glory is departed") written large upon it.

The proverb, "One sinner destroyeth much good" (Eccl. 9:18), was sadly exemplified in this unhappy Jehoram's life. The lifetime's labor of a devoted man of God may be easily and quickly ruined or marred by some such sinner. We see this illustrated in the case of Paul. After his departure, "grievous wolves" entered in among the flocks gathered by his toils and travail. Also men arose among them, "speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). And even before his martyrdom he wrote, weeping, of "the enemies of the cross of Christ," and was compelled to say, "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." Also, "All they which be in Asia are turned away from me." And one has only to compare the writings of the earliest Greek fathers with the writings of the apostle, to see how widespread and complete was the departure from the truth of Christianity. "Nevertheless [blessed word!] the foundation of God standeth sure." "And," the exhortation is, "let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2:19). Oh, let not me be the sinner to "destroy the work of God" (Rom. 14:20).

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Ahab

Brother of [his] father

1 Kings 16:29-17:1; 18:1-22:40; 2 Chron. 18

Contemporary Prophets: Elijah, and Micah son of Imlah

When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth; but the righteous shall see their fall. Prov. 29:16

"And in the thirty and eighth year of Asa king of Judah began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel: and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty and two years. And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria."

Ahab was not the first to introduce Baal worship in Israel: it had been known among them since their entrance into the land. But under his rule and the powerful influence of Jezebel, his wife, it became the established form of idolatry, as calf worship was made under Jeroboam. Baal was the sun god of the ancient inhabitants of the land (as of the Phoenicians), and his worship was accompanied by the most obscene rites and impurities.

Dius and Menander, Tyrian historians, mention Ithobalus, a priest of Ashtoreth during Ahab's time. They wrote that Ithobalus murdered Pheles, and became king of Tyre. This was in all probability Jezebel's father. Her zeal for the spread and maintenance of the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth, or Astarte (female consort of Baal), is therefore easily accounted for. It would also explain her inveterate hatred of the holy worship of Jehovah, and her murderous designs against His prophets. Her name means "chaste"—Satan's counterfeit or ridicule, as it were, of purity. Was it the hope of strengthening his kingdom, or her seductions with the attractions of her painted face, that led Ahab into this alliance? Behind it all, we may be sure, Satan was seeking by this new move to utterly corrupt and destroy God's people and His truth from the earth. "And Ahab made a grove"—Asherah, an image or pavilion to Astarte—"and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him."

"In his days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram ['father of height'] his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub ['aloft], according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun." Jericho properly belonged to Judah. Hiel, instead of remaining at Bethel within his sovereign's realm, presumed to fortify (for this is what build means here) the city for his master Ahab, that he might command the channel of Jordan. For this disobedience and disregard of God's word (see Josh. 6:26) the threatened judgment fell on his first and lastborn sons. Hiel means, "God liveth," and he discovered to his sorrow that Jehovah was the living God, whose word will stand, and none can transgress it with impunity. Every transgressor, and all "the sons of disobedience," will find that He is always true to His word. "Hath he said, and shall he not do it? or bath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Num. 23:19) His prophecy concerning Jericho, spoken through Joshua five hundred years before, was fulfilled on the house of Hiel (Josh. 6:26).

But God, who did not wink at Ahab's or the nation's wickedness, would yet seek through discipline to turn them back from their folly, and sent to them His servant Elijah. "And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word" (1 Kings 17:1). Jehovah, not Baal, was Israel's God, in spite of Jezebel's seemingly successful attempt to force her Canaanitish gods on them; and Ahab would be made to know it. God used a millennial form of discipline to teach him this (see Zech. 14:17). For three and one half years the land lay under the divine condemnation of drought and famine. This drought appears to have extended even to Gentile lands, for it is mentioned in the annals of the Greek historian Menander (Josephus Antiquities 8.13.2).

And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth....And Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor [steward] of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly: For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah took a hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.) And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: [perhaps] we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts (1 Kings 18:1-5).

Ahab, as someone has said, cared more for the beasts of his stables than for his poor, starving subjects.

One wonders how a man like Obadiah, whose name means "worshiper of Jehovah," came to hold office under such an abandoned idolater as Ahab. But there were also saints in Nero's palace, whose salutations were considered worthy of apostolic mention. Godliness, as has been quaintly said, "is a hardy plant, that can live amidst the frosts of persecution and the relaxing warmth of a corrupt court, and not merely in the conservatory of a pious family."

"As Obadiah was in the way," Elijah suddenly appeared before him, and gave him a terse message for his master: "Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here." The poor lord high chamberlain, knowing well the murderous character of his master, trembled for his life.

He said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me? As the Lord thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not. And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me (9-12).

He evidently knew that the husband of Jezebel set little value on any of his subjects' lives, and in his present temper would not hesitate, on the least provocation or suspicion, to slay him without mercy.

Assured by Elijah that Ahab would find him, Obadiah delivered his message. "And Ahab went to meet Elijah. And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" What audacity! Elijah answered, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim" (or, the Baals).

The prophet then proposed to test publicly on Mount Carmel whether Jehovah or Baal were God. To this the king accedes. "So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto Mount Carmel." The test was accordingly made, to the utter discomfiture of the Baal prophets. "Jehovah, He is God! Jehovah, He is God!" all the people cried; and at Elijah's command the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal are led down to the brook Kishon, and slain there (1 Kings 18).

Since the people once again acknowledged Jehovah as God, and the prophets of Baal were destroyed, the purpose of the drought was accomplished. "And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain." Years later, James called our attention to the prophet's intercessory prayer: "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth...and he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain" (James 5:17-18).A cloud, "like a man's hand" at first, soon filled the whole sky: the prayer is answered, and in the power of the Spirit of faith Elijah sends the word by his servant, "Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not. And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel" (1 Kings 18:44-45).

Jezebel's indomitable will is now stirred to passion. Enraged, she threatened with an oath to make Elijah's life like that of her slaughtered priests, and he in fear flees from the kingdom. She was evidently the real ruler in Israel, for Ahab, so far as Scripture informs us, did not make even the mildest kind of protest against her murderous threat.

Ahab's weakness is further demonstrated by his servile answer to the besieging king of Syria:

And Ben-hadad the king of Syria gathered all his host together: and there were thirty and two kings with him, and horses, and chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria, and warred against it. And he sent messengers to Ahab king of Israel into the city, and said unto him, Thus saith Ben-hadad, Thy silver and thy gold is mine; thy wives also and thy children, even the goodliest, are mine. And the king of Israel answered and said, My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have (20:1-4).

And when the messengers returned with more insolent demands, the king would probably have submitted to the humiliating conditions proposed, had not his more spirited and patriotic subjects advised otherwise saying, "Hearken not unto him, nor consent." A wicked man is never really anything but a weak man. It is only "the righteous who are bold as a lion" (Prov. 28:1). When Ahab refused the king of Syria his unsoldierly demand, he said half apologetically, "This thing I may not do." He did not use the bold, intensive "will not" that was used by the three Hebrew children when they were under more helpless circumstances, and to a more powerful king (Dan. 3:18). Angered at even this meekly-put refusal "Ben-hadad sent unto him, and said, The gods do so unto me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me." Then, more nobly, poor Ahab answered: "Tell him, Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off." Provoked at this reply, Ben-hadad, under the influence of drink, gave the mad order for instant attack on the city. But God's time for the humiliation of insolent Benhadad had come:

And, behold, there came a prophet unto Ahab king of Israel, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou seen all this great multitude? behold, I will deliver it into thy hand this day; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord. And Ahab said, By whom? And he said, Thus saith the Lord, Even by the young men [Hebrew: servants] of the princes of the provinces. Then he said, Who shall order the battle? And he answered, Thou (1 Kings 20:13-14).

God would humiliate Ben-hadad, not by any show of strength through the seven thousand soldiers left to Ahab, but by the servants of the princes of the provinces, who numbered two hundred and thirty-two. "And they went out at noon. But Benhadad was drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings"-the thirty-two kings that helped him.

And the young men of the princes of the provinces went out first; and Ben-hadad sent out, and they told him, saying, There are men come out of Samaria. And he said, Whether they be come out for peace, take them alive; or whether they be come out for war, take them alive. So these young men of the princes of the provinces came out of the city, and the army which followed them. And they slew every one his man: and the Syrians fled; and Israel pursued them: and Ben-hadad the king of Syria escaped on a horse with the horsemen. And the king of Israel went out, and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter (20:17-21).

The expression "The king of Israel went out," coming as it does after the account of the victory of the young men and the small army, seems to imply that though, according to the prophet's word, Ahab would order the battle, he remained cautiously behind until the rout of the besiegers had begun. Then, when danger was past, he came out from his place of security within the city walls, and assisted in slaughtering an already defeated foe. God gave his army victory, that he might have another proof in addition to that already offered on mount Carmel—so condescending and gracious is He—that He was Jehovah, the unchanging One. Through this victory He would also encourage and foster any little faith that might, as a result of the recent demonstration on Mount Carmel, have sprung up in the hearts of the nearly apostate nation. God calls trust in Him "precious faith" (2 Peter 1:1), so highly does He value it. In how many ways does God seek to gain and hold the confidence of men, for their everlasting good and glory! Do you have that precious faith?

"And the prophet came to the king of Israel, and said unto him, Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against thee." What patient, marvelous grace is God's! His goodness would lead men to repentance. So He sent His prophet, even to Ahab, to warn him of what the Syrians would do. "And it came to pass at the return of the year, that Ben-hadad numbered the Syrians, and went up to Aphek, to fight against Israel." Aphek lay about six miles east of the Sea of Galilee, on the direct road between the land of Israel and Damascus, and was a common battlefield of the Syrian kings (see 2 Kings 13:17).

And the children of Israel were numbered, and were all present, and went against them: and the children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of kids; but the Syrians filled the country. And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the Lord, Because the Syrians have said, The Lord is God of the hills, but He is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thy hand, and ye shall know that I am Jehovah [another demonstration that Jehovah was the God of Israel] (1 Kings 20:27-28, italics added).

For a whole week the two hostile armies lay encamped against each other. When they joined battle on the seventh day, the "two little flocks of kids," with God on their side, destroyed a host of a hundred thousand men. And the remnant of the defeated army, numbering twenty-seven thousand, that escaped being slaughtered by those whose land they had invaded without provocation, fled into the city of Aphek where a wall fell on them. The method is unimportant with Israel's God, Jehovah, who is called "the God of battles"; He can save by many or by few. When a mere handful (a few thousand) does not completely destroy a vast army, He can shake down a wall on those who escaped, and thus complete the deserved destruction.

This was the third occasion, within a short space of time, on which God would convince the king of Israel and his people that He was what His prophets proclaimed Him to be-Jehovah, the God of Israel. He insists that, among men, "in the mouth of two or three witnesses," every word shall be established; and He will not Himself use an easier rule in His dealings with the sons of men. Ahab had this threefold testimony given him, but he entirely failed to profit by it. He was ensnared by Ben-hadad's guile after God had placed him in his power; he not only let him live, but said, "He is my brother." It was the beginning of his final downfall.

A prophet now, by skillful ingenuity, brings before Ahab what he had done. Having induced a fellow prophet to smite him, so that in smiting he wounded him, he then disguised himself, and hailed the king as he was passing by. "And he said, Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy

life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver. And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone." Ahab probably thought the beggar appealed to him in fear for his life or the ruinous fine. Then he, like David before, pronounced his own sentence:

And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall thy judgment be; thyself hast decided it. And he [the prophet] hasted, and took the ashes away from his face; and the king of Israel discerned him that he was of the prophets. And he said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people. And the king of Israel went to his house heavy and displeased [sullen and vexed, N.TR.], and came to Samaria (40-43).

He made the same fatal mistake that king Saul made when he spared Agag. His calling the enemy of Israel my brother and taking him up into his chariot, may have sounded well and looked liberal to men like himself, who would applaud his conduct as magnanimous; but in God's eyes it was unpardonable disobedience, for which he and the nation would be made to suffer. Men might praise him, but of what worth are human applause to the man whose conduct God condemns? Ahab was not the last of that generation who love "the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:43).

From that time Ahab appears to be given up of God: first, to covetousness and murder, and then to make war with and be slain by that nation whose blaspheming king he had called my brother and permitted to escape.

The first, his coveting of Naboth's vineyard, and the false accusation and murder of that righteous man, form one of the most painful and soul-stirring chapters in human history, whether secular or inspired.

And it came to pass after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money (1 Kings 21:1-2).

Naboth fearlessly refused the king's offer and said: "The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee." This was not obstinacy on Naboth's part, as some have supposed; nor yet a stubborn refusal to surrender his legal rights to do his king a favor. He was contending, not for his own rights (which scarcely becomes one who owes his all to God's free grace), but for God's, and those of his successors. "The land shall not be sold forever," God had said. Merciful provision was made in the law for a man who might have become reduced to extreme poverty. He was permitted to sell the land, but only to the year of jubilee, when it was to revert back to the original owner or his heirs. Naboth could not plead poverty so had no excuse to sell his vineyard, even to the king. There was also a law relating to property within a city's walls, which if sold, must be redeemed within a year, or remain the possession of the purchaser forever (see Lev. 25). If Naboth's vineyard, adjoining Ahab's palace, lay within the city walls, it would, if sold, pass for all time out of the hands of Naboth's heirs. Be that as it may, his firm refusal to sell out to his royal neighbor was a matter of conscience.

Araunah's sale of his threshing floor to David, and Omri's purchase of the hill of Samaria cannot be called parallel cases. In the first instance Araunah, though a Jebusite (a Gentile), seemed fully to understand David's purpose, and agree with it. It was therefore surrendering and offering his property to the Lord Himself (2 Sam. 24:15-25). In the second, the moral condition of the nation was such that Shemer, an Israelite, was probably unconcerned as to what God had said concerning the disposal of his land (1 Kings 16:24). Naboth was right, both toward God and toward his family ties, whatever his critics may be disposed to say to the contrary. His resolute adherence to the right, cost him both his good name and his life.

"And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread." His petulant conduct was inappropriate for anyone-much less a king; it was rather that of a spoiled child, peevish and in ill humor because thwarted in his desire by one of his subjects.

"But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread?" Informed as to the cause of his dejection, her daring spirit finds a ready way out of Ahab's difficulty. "And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel?" Alas, was it not she that governed it really, with more daring ungodliness than Ahab, her puppet husband? "Arise," said she, "and eat bread, and let thy heart be merry. I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." Herself the daughter of a Gentile king, she was thoroughly schooled in court methods of disposing of refractory subjects. She had not learned, as David in God's school, that kings should be the shepherds of the people. Might made right in the kingdoms of the nations, and she would show her Hebrew husband how quickly Naboth's objections to the king's demands could be overcome, in spite of anything or everything written in the Mosaic code.

So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth. And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people: and set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die (1 Kings 21:8-10).

How base could such men be, to lend themselves as willing tools to her perfidious designs, and carry out her instructions to the letter! Yet, public conscience might rebel at open murder, therefore some appearance of justice had to be given her act. Furthermore, the nation may still have been experiencing the moral effect of the events on Mount Carmel, so this nefarious patron of Baal had to proceed in her wickedness with a measure of caution. "And the men of his city, even the elders and the nobles who were the inhabitants in his city, did as Jezebel had sent unto them, and as it was written in the letters which she had sent unto them."

Jezebel had had her will, but oh, the dreadfulness of using God's institution to carry out the will of the flesh! She knew the penalty for blasphemy against Jehovah was death (Lev. 24:16). She would find associates to prove Naboth guilty of this, and thus avenge herself on the man who had dared to say no to the desire of power. But, according to Jewish teachers, if Naboth were found guilty of blasphemy alone, his property would fall to his heirs the same as if he had died under ordinary or natural circumstances. To secure the vineyard, a further charge—one of treason—must be trumped up against him; in such a case the estate of the condemned man went to the royal exchequer. So Naboth was accused of blasphemy both against God and the king (see Ex. 22:28). And when the dark deed was done, the instigator of it coolly sent to her husband saying, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead. And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of

Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it" (1 Kings 21:15-16).

But Naboth's God was not dead; He was still the God "that liveth and seeth," as Ahab was soon to know.

And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine (17-19).

Like most wicked men when reproved, Ahab considered the fearless messenger of God as an enemy. "Halt thou found me, O mine enemy?" he asked. "Is it thou, the troubler of Israel?" he had asked the faithful prophet on a former occasion (1 Kings 18:17, N.TR.). Here, since he could no longer link the nation with himself in his guilt, he acknowledged the personal character of the prophet's ministry, and called him his (not the nation's) enemy.

And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord. Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every [male], and him that is shut up and left in Israel, And will make thy house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin (20-22).

Judgment on Jezebel also is then pronounced. "And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly." Ahab is really affected, though superficially no doubt, by the prophet's declaration. God, who ever approves even the slightest indication of repentance in transgressors, said to Elijah, "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house."

We have now the closing incident in the life of this king of Israel, who "did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up."

"And they continued three years without war between Syria and Israel." In the third year, Jehoshaphat king of Judah (now linked to the house of Ahab by the marriage of his son and heir-apparent to the throne, Jehoram, to Athaliah, Ahab's daughter) came down on a friendly visit to the Israelite capital. Ahab saw in the presence of so powerful an ally a splendid opportunity to use him for the extension of his kingdom. So he said to his servants, "Know ye not that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria?" Ramoth-gilead was an important fortress, directly east of Samaria, and about twenty miles back from the Jordan. It was occupied during Solomon's magnificent reign by Ben-Geber, one of his twelve commissariat officers (1 Kings 4:13). Ben-hadad I, had taken it from Omri, according to Josephus (Antiquities 8.15.3). On Ahab's proposing to jointly recover this place to their family (now united), Jehoshaphat at once acceded, saying, "I am as thou art." The four hundred court prophets all declared the success of the expedition a foregone conclusion. "Go up," they said unanimously; "for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king" (2 Chron. 18:5 has "God," instead of "the Lord," as in 1 Kings 22:6: see Author's Introduction). Ahab's ally did not appear entirely satisfied with such offhand, emphatic prophecies of good fortune; he had evidently some misgivings of conscience, and was suspicious of this crowd of state-paid "peace-and-safety" preachers. So he cautiously asked if there was not another of Jehovah's prophets within call, of whom they might further inquire. "There is yet one man," answered Ahab, "Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." And the good-natured king of Judah, ever willing to interpret in the best way others' deeds or words, replied, "Let not the king say so." "Hasten hither Micaiah the son of Imlah," Ahab commanded his officer.

The two ill-matched kings sat each on his throne, arrayed in his robes of state, in an open space at the entrance of the gate of Samaria. Before them were gathered all the pseudo-prophets, prophesying their lies before their royal master and his uneasy confederate. One of the deceivers, striving after dramatic effect, had made iron horns, saying, "Thus saith the Lord, With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them." "Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper," they all with one voice said: "for the Lord shall deliver it into the king's hand."

Next the unpopular prophet was unceremoniously brought into the presence of the consulting kings. In ironical agreement with what the time-serving four hundred had been saying, he also said, "Go, and prosper!" Ahab was quick to understand his irony, and adjured him (put him under oath) in Jehovah's name, to tell him nothing but that which was true. "And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the Lord said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace." "Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?" said Ahab to Jehoshaphat, on hearing this solemn announcement. Jehovah's prophet next sets before them his vision of a scene in Heaven: the lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets to allure him to his death. But this is more than Ahab can bear, and he orders at once that Micaiah be thrust into prison, and to be fed with the bread and water of affliction until he returned from his expedition in peace. "And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you" (1 Kings 22:28).

Could all this take place in the presence of Jehoshaphat, and he not protest? We know not. Scripture is silent here. But sadly, what may not even a child of God stoop to when he is away from God, in evil company!

The two kings now proceed to Ramoth-gilead, and Ahab's treachery and cowardice again appear. He artfully disguised himself, while inducing the unsuspecting Jehoshaphat to appear in battle in his royal robes. Corrupt and contemptible trickery! He protected his own person at the probable sacrifice of his generous friend. But "the unjust knoweth no shame," and living for self destroys all nobleness of character. The unhappy monarch had also been under Jezebel's influence too long to have any honor remaining in him. Besides, he probably feared Micaiah's prophecy more than he believed his own prophets. The Syrians, assuming Jehoshaphat to be the king of Israel, crowded close around him for a time. But God delivered him, and they perceived their mistake. And one of the soldiers drew a bow at random, and smote the king of Israel between the sections of his armor. "Wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thy hand, and carry me out of the host: for I am wounded." And at even, at the time of the going down of the sun, he died; "and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot." The day was lost to Israel, and the humiliated army returned leaderless from the ill-fated campaign.

“So the king died, and was brought to Samaria: and they buried the king in Samaria. And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his armor; according unto the word of the Lord which he spake” (37-38). God’s arrow found him, in spite of his disguise. And his colleague, though for a time a conspicuous target for every archer in the Syrian army, escaped. How true the couplet, “Not a single shaft can hit, / Till our all-wise God sees fit.” None who make God their trust need ever fear “the arrow that flieth by day” (Psa. 91:5).

“Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, and the ivory house which he made, and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?” He was evidently a man of luxurious tastes, which appears to have been also characteristic of his successors (see Amos 3:15). His moral character, as given in the parenthetic passage of 1 Kings 21:25-26, is a fearfully black one. “But [or surely] there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up [Hebrew: urged on]. And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all things as did the Amorites, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel.” As his name means, Ahab was a true “brother (or friend) of his father” Omri, in his excessive wickedness.

The Moabite stone mentions Omri’s son; his name also appears on the Assyrian Black Obelisk as “Ahab of Jezreel.”

“So Ahab slept with his fathers; and Ahaziah his son reigned in his stead.”

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Omri

Heaping

1 Kings 16:15-28

Contemporary Prophets: Elijah (?)

The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just. Prov. 3:33

Civil war, that most deplorable of all forms of armed conflict, followed Omri’s assumption of the throne of Israel. We read that “all Israel made Omri, the captain of the host, king over Israel that day” in the camp—that is, the army that was encamped against Gibbethon. But a part of the tribes championed the cause of Tibni. “Then were the people of Israel divided into two parts: half of the people followed Tibni the son of Ginath, to make him king; and half followed Omri.” Omri would be thus, during the four years’ contest, in the position of military dictator. And with the soldiery at his command, he could hardly fail to prevail in the end against his adversary, whose death probably put an end to the conflict. Then Omri as king began a new dynasty.

In the thirty and first year of Asa king of Judah began Omri to reign over Israel, twelve years: six years reigned he in Tirzah. And he bought the hill Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver, and built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill, Samaria [Hebrew: Shomeron] (1 Kings 16:23-24).

In the siege of Tirzah, Omri may have seen its undesirability as a capital, from a military standpoint; or the pride of founding a new capital may have led him to choose the hill of Shemer. It lay about six miles to the northwest of Shechem, the old capital. The situation of Shemer, according to Josephus, combined strength, fertility, and beauty. The hill was six hundred feet above the surrounding country, and “the view,” one writes, “is charming.” But more attractive to the Christian heart, is the site of the old capital, Shechem, near the place where our Lord, “wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well.” And there, in the ears of Jacob’s erring daughter, He told of the free-giving God and of that living water, which if a man drink, he shall never more thirst (John 4).

“But Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all that were before him. For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin, to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger with their vanities” (idolatries). He seems to have formulated laws making Jeroboam’s calf worship or other forms of idolatry obligatory throughout his realm. These laws remained in force until the end of the kingdom, more than two hundred years later. “For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab”—that is, Baal worship (Mic. 6:16). Such yokes men willingly bear and even cling to, so prone is the human heart to idolatry.

Omri was founder of the fourth and most powerful of the Israelite dynasties-combining ability with the establishment of the basest idolatry. He formed an alliance with Ben-hadad I king of Syria, who had streets made for, or assigned to, him in Samaria (see 1 Kings 20:34). Samaria is called on the Assyrian monuments Beth Omri (“house of Omri”), in agreement with 1 Kings 16:24. On the black obelisk, however, Jehu is mistakenly called “son of Omri.” His name appears on the Dibon stone, on which Mesha states that Omri subjected and oppressed Moab until he, Mesha, delivered them out of his hand.

“Now the rest of the acts of Omri which he did, and his might that he showed, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?” He used his might, not to Israel’s deliverance, but for the furtherance and establishment of idolatry, to Israel’s ruin. His name was common to three tribes, Benjamin, Judah, and Issachar (see 1 Chron. 7:8; 9:4; 27:18); so it is not certain out of which tribe Omri came-though probably from Issachar (like Baasha). The murderous Athaliah, his granddaughter, is usually linked with his name in Scripture (see 2 Kings 8:26; 2 Chron. 22:2).

“So Omri slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria. And Ahab his son reigned in his stead.” Omri means “heaping”; by his iniquity he helped to heap up wrath against his dynasty. God executed His indignation 36 years later on his great-grandson Joram, to the total extinction of the guilty house.

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Zimri

Musical

1 Kings 16:9-20

Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved: but he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once. Prov. 28:18

“In the twenty and seventh year of Asa king of Judah did Zimri reign seven days in Tirzah. And the people were encamped against Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines. And the people that were encamped heard say, Zimri hath conspired, and hath also slain the king: wherefore all Israel made Omri, the captain of the host, king over Israel that day in the camp.”

“The triumphing of the wicked is short” (Job 20:5).This was sharply exemplified in the case of Zimri, who triumphed just one week. He appears to have had no support from the people, who knew his character and desired not his rule. News of his assumption of the crown had no sooner reached the army at Gibbethon than they rejected his claims by proclaiming their commander-in-chief, Omri, king.

And Omri went up from Gibbethon, and all Israel with him, and they besieged Tirzah. And it came to pass, when Zimri saw that the city was taken, that he went into the palace of the king’s house, and burnt the king’s house over him with fire, and died, For his sins which he sinned in doing evil in the sight of the Lord, in walking in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin which he did, to make Israel to sin (1 Kings 16:17-19).

Murderers are generally desperate characters; and when it is beyond their power any more to destroy the lives of others, they, like wretched Zimri, frequently destroy their own. Satan was a murderer from the beginning, and he knows how to goad them on to their destruction-body and soul. He knows the suicide’s destiny after death. We read that Judas, the traitor who committed suicide, went “to his own place” (Acts 1:25)—the place where the unbelieving, the abominable, murderers, and such like, have their place—in the lake of fire (Rev. 21:8).

Zimri’s perfidy became a byword in Israel. The infamous Jezebel could refer to him and say, “Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?” (2 Kings 9:31). “Treason is punished by treason,” one has said, “and the slayer is slain.” In Zimri was fulfilled the true proverb, “A man that doeth violence to the blood of any person shall flee to the pit; let no man stay him” (Prov. 28:17). Let Zimri’s end warn traitors and intentional murderers of kings.

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Elah

An oak

1 Kings 16:8-14

Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner. Prov. 11:31

“In the twenty and sixth year of Asa king of Judah began Elah the son of Baasha to reign over Israel in Tirzah, two years. And his servant Zimri, captain of half his chariots, conspired against him, as he was in Tirzah, drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza, steward of his house in Tirzah. And Zimri went in and smote him, and killed him, in the twenty and seventh year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned in his stead.”

Of the house of Jeroboam God had said: “I will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam as a man taketh away dung, till it all be gone”-so would it be with Baasha who had removed the remnant of Jeroboam’s house by murder. “Drinking himself drunk” was Elah’s occupation at the time of his assassination. Dissipation does not appear to have been the special sin of the kings of Israel and Judah generally (nor has it ever been characteristic of the Jewish race), as was the case with so many of their Gentile neighbors-for example, Ben-hadad with his thirty-two confederate kings “drinking himself drunk in the pavilions” (1 Kings 20:16).

Josephus wrote that Elah was slain while his army was away at the siege of Gibbethon, begun in his father Baasha’s day (Antiquities 8.12.4). His murder was perpetrated in the house of his steward Arza (“earthliness”), who was probably as given to self-indulgence as his master (contrast Ahab’s steward Obadiah, 1 Kings 18:3).

His murderer Zimri at once began to massacre all the house of Baasha, sparing none of his family or friends. It was complete extermination, even as God had ordained it should be.

Thus did Zimri destroy all the house of Baasha, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake against Baasha by Jehu the prophet, For all the sins of Baasha, and the sins of Elah his son, by which they...made Israel to sin, in provoking the Lord God of Israel to anger with their vanities [idolatries] (1 Kings 16:12-13).

Thus the house of Baasha, like that of Jeroboam before him, became extinct-to Jewish minds, the greatest calamity that could overtake a man.

In less than fifty years the first two dynasties of Israel’s kings had come to an end and every member of their families been exterminated. God meant to make their doom an example to those who would follow their ungodly ways. They stand as beacons, in these records, to warn all rulers and subjects away from the rocks on which these kings were wrecked to their everlasting ruin. “Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein” (Hos. 14:9). The usual formula ends the record of Elah’s worthless life (1 Kings 16:14).

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Baasha

He who seeks, or lays waste

1 Kings 15:27-16:7; 2 Chron. 16:1-6

Contemporary Prophets: Jehu son of Hanani

The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil. Prov. 16:4

“In the third year of Asa king of Judah began Baasha the son of Ahijah to reign over all Israel in Tirzah, twenty and four years.” With the beginning of a new dynasty, and the sad history of that which had been before him, one might hope that Baasha would have taken a different course, and turned to Jehovah. Alas, we read: “And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin” (1 Kings 15:33-34).

He was of Issachar, and had the tribal characteristic—an eye for what appeared pleasant (Gen. 49:15). So he made beautiful Tirzah (which some derive from ratzah, “pleasant”; see Sol. 6:4) the royal residence during his reign. Whatever he may have known of God’s purpose in the cutting off of Jeroboam’s house, his motive was not one of righteousness (like Jehu’s, later), for he was no better than those he murdered, and continued to walk in their sin.

Then the word of the Lord came to Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha, saying, Forasmuch as I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel; and thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam, and hast made my people Israel to sin, to provoke me to anger with their sins; Behold, I will take away the posterity of Baasha, and the posterity of his house [a terrible thought to an Israelite!’ and will make thy house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Him that dieth of Baasha in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth of his in the fields shall the fowls of the air eat (1 Kings 16:1-4).

His doom, and that of all his house, is here solemnly pronounced. “Out of the dust” implies Baasha’s lowly origin. How often do revolutionists imagine that because the obnoxious ruler is of noble birth, or royal lineage, the remedy is to put in the place of power one of their own class and rank! And how soon are they made to learn that “a servant when he ruleth” is the very worst type of tyrant known (Prov. 30:21-22). No, it is not a question of natural birth, whether high or low, but of new birth and ruling in the fear of God, which gives to any favored land such sovereigns as “Victoria the Good.” Baasha was of plebeian stock, yet his name, “he who lays waste,” tells only too accurately what kind of a ruler he proved himself to be.

There was war between Baasha and Asa king of Judah all their days. He made a league with Benhadad king of Syria, and built or fortified Ramah on his southern border to prevent, if possible, the migration of his subjects to Judah, where they were attracted by the prosperity enjoyed under Asa.

“Now the rest of the acts of Baasha, and what he did, and his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? So Baasha slept with his fathers, and was buried in Tirzah: and Elah his son reigned in his stead.” And then a supplementary verse is added to emphasize the fact that it was because of his idolatries and murder of the house of Jeroboam that God judged him and his family:

And also by the hand of the prophet Jehu the son of Hanani came the word of the Lord against Baasha, and against his house, even for all the evil that he did in the sight of the Lord, in provoking him to anger with the work of his hands [his idols], in being like the house of Jeroboam; and because he killed him (1 Kings 16:5-7).

God, who looks on the heart, saw him but as an assassin for the accomplishment of his ambitious designs, slaying king Nadab and the entire house of Jeroboam.

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Nadab

Willing

1 Kings 15:25-31

The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish. Prov. 14:11

“And Nadab the son of Jeroboam began to reign over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned over Israel two years. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin.”

The sons of Jeroboam, together with their father, had rejected God’s ordained priesthood, and had “cast them off from executing the priest’s office unto the Lord” (2 Chron. 11:14). So Nadab followed in his father’s ways; but God did not permit him to continue long in his wickedness. “And Baasha the son of Ahijah, of the house of Issachar, conspired against him; and Baasha smote him at Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines; for Nadab and all Israel laid siege to Gibbethon” (1 Kings 15:27).

Gibbethon was a town in Dan, allotted to the Levites of the family of Korah (Josh. 19:44; 21:23). It bordered on the land of the Philistines, and was probably seized by them on the emigration of the Levites to Judah. Gibbethon means “lofty place,” and it was while seeking to recover it to the crown, that Nadab was treacherously slain. But it was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Ahijah, “The Lord shall raise him up a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam that day: but what? even now” (1 Kings 14:14).

“In the third year of Asa king of Judah did Baasha slay him, and reigned in his stead” (1 Kings 15:28). Once on the throne, Baasha began to execute the judgment of Jehovah against the remaining members of the house of Jeroboam, according to the aged Ahijah’s word.

And it came to pass, when he reigned, that he smote all the house of Jeroboam; he left not to Jeroboam any that breathed, until he had destroyed him, according unto the saying of the Lord, which he spake by his servant Ahijah the Shilonite: because of the sins of Jeroboam which he sinned, and which he made Israel sin, by his provocation wherewith he provoked the Lord God of Israel to anger.

So ended the first of the nine dynasties that for 250 years ruled (or misruled) the kingdom of Israel. Nadab’s name means “willing,” and he appears to have been too willing to continue in and perpetuate the sin of his iniquitous father. He is not once mentioned in the book of Chronicles, nor is there any record in that book of his father’s lifting up his hand against king Solomon, as in the Kings. The inspired record of

his uninteresting reign ends with the usual formula used in Kings: “Now the rest of the acts of Nadab, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?”

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Jehoshaphat

He whom Jehovah judges

1 Kings 15:24; 22:41-50; 2 Kings 8:16; 2 Chron. 17:1-21:3

Contemporary Prophets: Jehu son of Hanani, Jahaziel the Levite, Eliezer son of Dodavah

Mercy and truth preserve the king: and his throne is upholden by mercy. Proverbs. 20:28

The first thing recorded of Jehoshaphat is that he “strengthened himself against Israel. And he placed forces in all the fenced cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim, which Asa his father had taken” (2 Chron. 17:1-2). He began his reign with a determined opposition to the idolatrous northern kingdom.

This was in the fourth year of Ahab. A few years later all this opposition ceased, and we read, “Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel” (1 Kings 22:44). This peace was brought about, evidently, by the marriage of Jehoshaphat’s son Jehoram to Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and the notorious Jezebel. Alas for Jehoshaphat and his posterity, that he ever gave his consent to this unholy alliance, and made peace with him “who did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him” (1 Kings 16:30)! But such is man, even at his best, “wherein is he to be accounted of?”

But like Asa his father, he made a bright beginning:

And the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David [that is, before his sin in the matter of Uriah the Hittite] and sought not unto Baalim; But sought to the LORD God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel. Therefore the LORD stablished the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents; and he had riches and honor in abundance. And his heart was lifted up [encouraged] in the ways of the LORD: moreover he took away the high places and groves out of Judah (2 Chron. 17:3-6).

This last statement does not contradict what is said in 1 Kings 22:43. The high places and groves used for the worship of Baalim were removed; “nevertheless the high places [dedicated to Jehovah] were not taken away; for the people offered and burned incense [to the true God] yet in the high places” (compare 2 Chron. 20:33). He abolished idolatry, but the people could not be brought to see the unlawfulness and danger of offering sacrifices elsewhere than at Jerusalem. Deut. 12 Condemned this practice, and it was probably to instruct the people regarding worship and related matters that he inaugurated the model itinerary described in 2 Chron. 17:7-9.

Also in the third year of his reign he sent to his princes, even to Benhail, and to Obadiah, and to Zechariah, and to Nethaneel, and to Michaiah to teach in the cities of Judah. And with them he sent Levites...and with them Elishama and Jehoram, priests. And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of the LORD with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people.

By this little group of princes, Levites, and priests—sixteen in all—Jehoshaphat did more toward impressing the surrounding nations with a sense of his power than the largest and best-equipped standing army could have secured to him.

And the fear of [Jehovah] fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat. Also some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents and tribute silver; and the Arabians brought him flocks, seven thousand and seven hundred rams, and seven thousand and seven hundred he goats.

This was the promise of God, through Moses, fulfilled to the Israelites. If they diligently obeyed and stuck with Jehovah, He would, He said, “lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land” (Deut. 11:22-25).When the patriarch Jacob ordered his family to put away the strange gods that were among them, “the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them” (Gen. 35:5). And it was when the infant church at Jerusalem “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers,” that “fear came upon every soul”

(Acts 2:42-43). In obedience is power, and only right makes might in the nation or church that has God for its help.

“And Jehoshaphat waxed great exceedingly; and he built in Judah castles, and cities of store. And he had much business in the cities of Judah.” It was an era of great commercial prosperity, and the kingdom was in the zenith of its power and glory. He had an organized army of over a million men “ready prepared for the war” (2 Chron. 17:12-19).

Then the cloud descended over this noonday splendor of the king and kingdom.

Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance, and [he allied himself with Ahab by marriage.] And after certain years he went down [yes, it was “down” morally, as well as topographically] to Ahab to Samaria. And Ahab killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people that he had with him, and persuaded him to go up [against] with him to Ramoth-gilead. And Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, Wilt thou go with me to Ramoth-Gilead? And he answered him, I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war (2 Chronicles 18:1-3).

It was a sad come-down for the godly king of Judah. Think of him saying to a wicked idolater like Ahab, “I am as thou.” And he not only put himself down to Ahab’s base level, he compromised his people also by saying they were as Ahab’s people all of whom, excepting seven thousand men, were bowing the knee to Baal. Such conduct and language from a man like Jehoshaphat seems almost incredible. But “who can understand his [own] errors?” It is often much more difficult to see our own mistakes, than those of others.

Ahab evidently had fears for Jehoshaphat's scruples of conscience, and was prepared to meet them. So the feast prepared for him and his group was given a religious character (the word for killed is sacrificed). An apostate people or church will go to almost any length of seeming compromise to entice and draw the faithful into fellowship or alliance with them. What must have godly men like Elijah thought of all this? It is little wonder that when fleeing from the murderous wrath of Jezebel he feared to trust himself anywhere within the realm of Judah (see 1 Kings 19:3-4. Beersheba was on Judah's southern border.) Many would, no doubt, loudly praise the king of Judah for what they would term his large-heartedness and freedom from bigotry. The four hundred false prophets (Israel's clergy) could also quote from Psa. 133, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" and say how the world was growing better, and the millennium soon to come. Yes, and the cry today is for "union" (unity they know little of, and care less for), amalgamation, good fellowship. The false teachers cry, "away with dogma" (Scripture, they really mean), "let doctrine die the death, and let twentieth century enlightenment make us ashamed of the conduct of our forefathers who fought, suffered, and died for the truth." "What is truth?" was Pilate's idle question—the answer to which he had neither heart nor conscience—while before him Jesus witnessed that good confession, declaring what men of today would condemn as bigotry of the most pronounced kind: "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice" (John 18:37). But it is come to pass today that "truth is perished in the streets."

But to return to Jehoshaphat. He is not altogether at ease in his mind about this contemplated attack on Ramothgilead ("A fortress commanding Argob and the Jair towns, seized by Ben-hadad I from Omri." Josephus). His consent to accompany Ahab was, no doubt, hastily given, and probably during the warmth and excitement of the good fellowship at the banquet tendered in his honor. It is impossible not to violate a godly conscience, once we accept the fellowship of the wicked.

Too late Jehoshaphat inquired of Jehovah. A prophet, Micaiah, fearlessly foretold the failure of the enterprise. But he was only one against four hundred; "So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead" (2 Chron. 18:28). But for God's mercy Jehoshaphat would have lost his life. Jehovah heard his cry for help, and delivered him; "and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem," a humbler, a wiser, and, we trust, a grateful man (19:1).

But God had a message of rebuke for him.

And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD. Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou halt taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God (2 Chronicles 19:2-3).

Hanani, Jehu's father, had gone to prison for his faithfulness to Asa on a similar occasion, not fearing the wrath of the king (2 Chron. 16:7-10). The son of Asa, unlike his father, did not persecute his reprover; but much humiliated by his late experience, it would seem from what immediately follows that he profited by the rebuke. "And Jehoshaphat dwelt at Jerusalem: and he went out again through the people from Beer-sheba to mount Ephraim, and brought them back unto the LORD God of their fathers." He "went out again." This implies that he had lapsed spiritually, and was now restored, repentant, and doing the "first works." The work of reforming the nation is resumed on his recovery. Like his great progenitor David, when the joy of God's salvation was restored to him, he vowed to "teach transgressors [God's] ways; and sinners shall be converted unto [Him]" (Psa. 51:12).

Jehoshaphat also set judges in all the fortified cities of the land. He charged them solemnly, saying, "Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts" (2 Chron. 19:6-7). He established in Jerusalem what was probably a court of appeals composed of Levites, priests, and chiefs of the fathers of Israel (2 Chron. 19:8). To these he also gave a wholesome charge:

Thus shall ye do in the fear of the LORD, faithfully, and with a perfect heart. And what cause soever shall come to you of your brethren that dwell in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and judgments, ye shall even warn them [that is, enlighten, teach, see Ex. 18:20] that they trespass not against the LORD, and so wrath come upon you, and upon your brethren: this do, and ye shall not trespass. And, behold, Amariah the chief priest is over you in all matters of the LORD; and Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the ruler [prince] of the house of Judah, for all the king's matters: also the Levites shall be officers before you. Deal courageously, and the LORD shall be with the good (2 Chron. 19:9-11).

"Matters of Jehovah" related to God's word or precepts; "the king's matters" to the civil things; and "controversies" were matters that came under the jurisdiction of the crown. "The Levites were to be shorterim, 'officers,' literally scribes, keeping written accounts; assistants to the judges, etc." (Fausset). All this would make for righteousness, and truly, "righteousness exalteth a nation," or any other body of people.

Satan could not stand idly by and witness this without making some attempt to disturb or destroy. "It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle" (2 Chron. 20:1). It was Satan, no doubt, who moved these neighboring nations to invade the land of Judah—whatever their motive may have been, whether jealousy, envy, greed, fear, or any other of the inciting causes of war among the nations of the earth. Scouts detected the movement and reported it to Jehoshaphat. "Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea, on this side Syria; and, behold, they be in Hazezon-tamar, which is Engedi." They might well exclaim, "Behold," for Engedi was only twenty-five miles south of Jerusalem. The allies were almost upon them, "and Jehoshaphat feared." But though so nearly taken by surprise, the startling news did not create panic among the people. They were in communion with Jehovah. The king "set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the LORD: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD" (3-4).

A great prayer meeting was held in the temple enclosure. The king himself prayed; and a most wonderful prayer it was (6-12).

[Jehovah], God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?...we stand before this house, and in thy presence (for thy name is in this house,) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help.... for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee.

If they did not know what to do, they were then certainly doing the right thing when they cast themselves on God, and their expectation was from Him. “And all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children.” Nor did He disappoint them.

Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah...a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation; And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah... and thou, king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God’s....Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you (14-17).

How these words must have cheered the distressed king and his trembling people. “And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD.” What a sight, to see the king and all his subjects bowed in worship before God for His promised mercy! And the prayer meeting became a praise meeting. “And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high.”

They rose early the next day, and as they went forth to meet the foe, Jehoshaphat said to them, “Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.” He was not a haughty sovereign; for he consulted with his subjects. Then singers were appointed, and those that should praise in holy splendor, as they marched along at the head of the army, saying, “Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth forever.” It is no longer prayer for deliverance, but thanksgiving for assured victory over the enemy.

And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushements against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten. For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them; and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, everyone helped to destroy another (22-23).

Never was a foreign invasion so easily repelled. An ambush set in some mysterious way by the Lord caused a panic among the allies, and they turned on one another to their mutual destruction. The deliverance came in a way altogether unexpected by Jehoshaphat, no doubt; but faith never asks how can or how will God fulfill His promise. It is enough to know that He has promised; the method must be left to Him.

And when Judah came toward the watch tower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multitude, and, behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped. And when Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away the spoil of them, they found among them in abundance both riches with the dead bodies, and precious jewels, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away: and they were three days in gathering of the spoil, it was so much (24-25).

And then, on the battlefield, they hold a thanksgiving meeting. “And on the fourth day they assembled themselves in the valley of Berachah; for there they blessed [Jehovah]: therefore the name of the same place was called, the valley of Berachah [blessing] unto this day.” Fausset described this valley as “a broad, rich vale, watered with copious springs, affording space for a large multitude.”

Psa. 48 is supposed to have been sung in the temple on their return to Jerusalem. “Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat in the forefront of them, to go again to Jerusalem with joy; for [Jehovah] had made them to rejoice over their enemies. And they came to Jerusalem with psalteries and harps and trumpets, unto the house of [Jehovah].”

This miraculous deliverance of Judah had a salutary effect on the nations around them. “And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries, when they had heard that [Jehovah] had fought against the enemies of Israel. So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet: for his God gave him rest round about” (2 Chron. 20:29-30).

Jehoshaphat’s alliance with the king of Israel and the king of Edom for the invasion of Moab was probably after this. It would be incomprehensible that a man of such piety and faith as Jehoshaphat possessed should be repeatedly betrayed into unholy confederacies if we did not know the weakness of the flesh. It is no better in the saint than in the sinner, and is ever ready to betray the saint into wrongdoing unless he watches against it in the spirit of humility and self-distrust. In both the Old and New Testaments, God’s people are warned against the alliances of believers with unbelievers, of which

Jehoshaphat’s history is a sad and solemn example. God had particularly forbidden and warned Israel against idolatry and intermarriages with the nations around, knowing full well how easily their weak heart would follow in the evil ways of the nations (see Deut. 7:3-11; Ex. 20:4-5). In like manner, but in a more spiritual way, are we Christians exhorted and warned against all unequal yokes with unbelievers (see 2 Cor. 6:11-18; 2 Tim. 2:20-21; 1 Peter 2:11-12; 1 John 2:15-17).

Jehoshaphat almost repeated his former alliance with Ahab. It will come before us again as we look at King Jehoram, so we do not stop to dwell on it here. These compromising entanglements appear to have been a special weakness with Jehoshaphat. He allied himself to Ahaziah, Ahab’s son (“who did very wickedly”), to build ships to go to Tarshish. They were made at Ezion-geber where Solomon had his navy built (1 Kings 9:26). “Then Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mare-shah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, [Jehovah] hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish” (2 Chron. 20:37). Psa. 48:7 seems to allude to this. Thus he linked himself during his reign with three kings of the wicked house of Ahab, to his humiliation and sorrow; first with Ahab himself, and then with his sons Ahaziah and Joram or Jehoram. No good came of any of these associations. The ships built in partnership were hardly launched before they were broken at Ezion-geber—“the devils backbone” (Fausset) (1 Kings 22:48).There is always something of the wiles or power of Satan in these unequal yokes. Child of God, beware of them!

Jehoshaphat reigned twenty-five years, and died at the age of sixty. His mother, Azubah, was the single Scripture namesake of Caleb’s first wife (1 Chron. 2:18).

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Asa

Healing or Cure

1 Kings 15:9-24; 2 Chron. 14-16

Contemporary Prophets: Azariah son of Oded, Hanani, Jehoram

Better is a poor and a wise child, than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished. Ecclesiastes. 4:13

Asa's name means "healing" or "cure," and indicates the reformation and consequent rest effected by him during the earlier portion of his reign. He made a most excellent beginning.

And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God: For he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves: And commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment. Also he took away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the images: and the kingdom was quiet before him (2 Chron. 14:2-5).

But he did not stop there; he did more:

He built fenced cities in Judah: for the land had rest, and he had no war in those years; because the LORD had given him rest. Therefore he said unto Judah, Let us build these cities, and make about them walls, and towers, gates, and bars, while the land is yet before us; because we have sought the LORD our God, we have sought him, and he hath given us rest on every side (6-7).

He was no mere iconoclast. If he had the zeal to break down the images, he had also the wisdom to build fortified cities. To expose evil is very well, but to furnish the soul with truth is what protects it from the invasion of the enemy. They redeemed the time, as we are bidden to do in Eph. 5:16, "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." So God was with them. Encouraged by the king's words and example, the people entered heartily into the blessed work of building and fortifying.

Well would it have been for the sixteenth century churches had they been as wise after the Reformation, during the rest that followed, and built and fortified themselves in defense of "the faith once for all delivered to the saints." But alas, they slept; and when the hosts of worldliness, ritualism, and rationalism appeared at their borders, they were utterly unprepared and powerless to repel them. They were not, like Judah, prepared and able to resist the enemy when he came.

And there came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with an host of a thousand thousand, and three hundred chariots; and came unto Mareshah. Then Asa went out against him, and they set the battle in array in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. And Asa cried unto the LORD his God, and said, LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O LORD, thou art our God; let not man [Enosh, frail, mortal man] prevail against thee. So the LORD smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled (9-12).

The monuments do not make clear just who this Zerah was. A king called Azerch Amar was reigning over Ethiopia about this time, and the inspired chronicler may have given the Hebrew form of his name.

The greatness of Egypt, which Shishak had raised, diminished at his death. His immediate successors were of no note in the monuments. Zerah seems to have taken advantage of Egypt's weakness to extort permission to march his enormous force, composed of the same nationalities (Ethiopians and Lubians) as those of the preceding invader, Shishak, through Egypt into Judah (Fausset).

Others identify him with Osorkon II, one of Shishak's successors. He was son-in-law to Osorkon I, king of Egypt, and ruled in right of his wife. He was, if this be true, an Ethiopian ruling his own country jointly with that of his wife's (Egypt). And the invasion would then probably be caused by Asa's refusal to continue paying the tribute imposed on his grandfather Rehoboam by Shishak. But it was one thing for Shishak to invade the land of Judah "because they had transgressed against the LORD" (2 Chron. 12:2), and quite a different matter when Zerah came against them unprovoked. He met his just punishment from God, who loves and defends His people; he was defeated therefore, and his immense army, numbering more than a million, was utterly destroyed.

Asa's faith rose to blessed heights on this occasion. Though he was in control of a fine army of over a half million "mighty men of valor," he took the place of entire dependence on God, and made the conflict a matter between God and the enemy. Such faith can never be disappointed.

On Asa's triumphant return to Jerusalem the Spirit of God came on Azariah ("whom Jehovah helps") the son of Oded, and he went to meet him, not as a court flatterer, but with a solemn yet cheering word of admonition (2 Chron. 15). He said, "Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you." It was "a word in season"; for it has been truly said that we are never in greater danger than immediately after some great success, even though it be truly from God in answer to genuine faith. David is a sad example. In the chapters preceding that which records his sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11) we read of his continued series of brilliant victories over his enemies. He defeated and subdued the Philistines, Moab, Hadarezer king of Zobah, the Syrians, the Ammonites, and Amalek. Then, as if resting in these victories, his watchfulness was relaxed and the mighty fell. And Asa, his descendant of the fifth generation, was graciously warned of God lest he should also fall into similar condemnation.

Azariah then reminded them that in days gone by ("hath been," 2 Chron. 15:3, should be "was"—evidently referring to the days of the Judges) when in apostasy and distress, the people turned to Jehovah God of Israel (see Judg. 5). They sought Him and He was found of them. "Be ye strong therefore," he said, "and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded." Asa had probably met with opposition in his reformatory work, and was in danger of failing to continue it to its completion. So he was exhorted to be firm, for there would be a sure reward for his deeds of restoration of the uncorrupted worship of Jehovah in his realm.

And when Asa heard these words, and the prophecy of Oded the prophet [the Vulgate and Syriac manuscripts read, "Azariah son of Oded"], he took courage, and put away the abominable idols out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken from mount Ephraim, and renewed the altar of the LORD, that was before the porch of the LORD (2 Chron. 15:8).

This was the altar on which Solomon offered burnt offerings when he brought his Egyptian bride into the house that he had built for her (2 Chron. 8:12). It had evidently been removed, or allowed to fall into disuse or decay before being rebuilt by Asa.

His great victory over Zerah had its effect on many among the revolted tribes (for nothing wins God's people like God's blessing), and "they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that the LORD his God was with him" (15:9). Stimulated by these additions to their ranks, the people entered into a covenant "to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul." The tide of reformation ran high—too high, it is to be feared; for they determined "that whosoever would not seek the LORD God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman." This severity was hardly appropriate coming from a people who had only a short time before been themselves guilty of just such omission. They were excessively demonstrative also. "And they sware unto the LORD with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets." Such demonstrations were no new thing in Israel. They had been heard before at Sinai and elsewhere, and always with like results—more saying than doing; much promise, and little performance; great anticipation, and scant realization. But there was evident sincerity, and even reality, though mixed with much that was superficial. God, who can discern what is of Himself even when mingled with what is only of the flesh, rewarded them. "And all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them: and the LORD gave them rest round about" (15).

Asa was no respecter of persons. He spared not his own mother (or grandmother), but deposed her for her idolatry. "And also concerning Maachah the mother of Asa the king, he removed her from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove: and Asa cut down her idol, and stamped it, and burnt it at the brook Kidron." It is in a man's own family circle that his faithfulness is put fairly to the test. Levi was "proved at Massah," where he "said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children" (Deut. 33:8-9). Gideon too began his work for God by breaking down the altar of Baal that his father had set up. And in the apostolic church men could not serve as elders or deacons if they had not properly regulated homes. And He who was called "Faith-fill and True" said, when occasion required, "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?" (Matt. 12:48.)

"In the six and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah, and built Ramah, to the intent that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah" (2 Chron. 16:1). This verse, when compared with 1 Kings 15:33 and 16:8, presents a chronological difficulty. Baasha must have been dead ten years before the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign, according to the above references. And we cannot be always falling back, in these seeming discrepancies, on a supposed error in transcription. The only apparent way out of the difficulty is to take "the six and thirtieth year" to date from the beginning of Judah as a separate kingdom from Israel. This would make the event to occur in the sixteenth year of the actual reign of Asa and shortly after the occurrences of the preceding chapter. Ramah was on the high road from the northern kingdom. It would be natural for Baasha to take immediate steps to fortify this key city on the frontier, and thus check any further secessions to Asa from his dominion.

Then Asa brought out silver and gold out of the treasures of the house of the LORD and of the king's house, and sent to Benhadad king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus, saying, There is a league between me and thee, as there was between my father and thy father: behold, I have sent thee silver and gold; go, break thy league with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me (2 Chron. 16:2-3).

It is difficult to account for this sudden defect in Asa's faith. He had only recently, with God's help, completely destroyed the immense army of Zerah the Ethiopian. Now, before an enemy not half so formidable, his faith fails, and he depends for deliverance on an arm of flesh. Had not his father Abijah, in dependence on the Lord, defeated a former army of Israel double the size of his own? It was the beginning of Asa's downfall; for though the desired deliverance was obtained (for "Benhadad hearkened unto King Asa," and Baasha "left off building of Ramah, and let his work cease"), it cost him the rebuke of God and wars to the end of his reign.

And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thy hand. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubim a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because thou didst rely on the LORD, he delivered them into thine hand. For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect [or sincere] toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars (16:7-9).

"Therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thy hand." Instead of calling on Benhadad for help, Asa could have subdued him, as "escaped out of thy hand" implies. David had reigned over Damascus, and only in the days of Solomon's degeneracy did Syria begin to exist as a separate and independent kingdom (see 1 Kings 11:23-25). Its first king "was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon... and he abhorred Israel, and reigned over Syria." This continued to be the attitude of Syria toward Israel; but it was in God's heart to use Asa to destroy this heathen power, which in future days caused His people so much sorrow and distress (see 2 Kings 8:11-13). But he missed his opportunity; and when charged by Hanani with folly, he committed the seer to prison for his faithfulness. "Then Asa was wroth with the seer, and put him in a prison house; for he was in a rage with him because of this thing. And Asa oppressed some of the people the same time" – the seer's sympathizers, probably (2 Chron. 16:10). His petty anger (at what he knew only too well to be the truth) betrayed a low condition of soul from which he never evidently recovered; and his end was humiliating as his beginning had been brilliant. "And Asa, in the thirty and ninth year of his reign, was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great: yet in his disease he sought not to the LORD, but to the physicians" (12). In all this record, let us hear and take to ourselves the Lord's word, "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear."

It is easily seen why the chronicler should write of Asa's acts "first and last" (2 Chron. 16:11). "Ye did run well: who did hinder you?" might be asked of many besides the Galatians and Asa. Important as a good beginning is, it is not all: we are called to run with endurance the race that is set before us. But when God's people become diseased in their feet, they cease to run well; and though they may try various expedients, such as ritualism, revivalism, the union of churches, etc., to recover themselves, they are every one of them physicians of no value. "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation," wrote a notable backslider (Psa. 51:12). It is Jehovah who says through His prophet, "I will heal their backslidings."

There was a great funeral made over Asa, and he appears to have been sincerely lamented by his people.

And Asa slept with his fathers, and died in the one and fortieth year of his reign. And they buried him in his own sepulchers, which he had made for himself in the city of David, and laid him in the bed which was filled with sweet odors and divers kinds of spices prepared by the apothecaries' art: and they made a very great burning for him (2 Chron. 16:13-14).

Asa's history reveals his weaknesses: God, in His comments on his character, gives no hint of them (2 Chron. 20:32; 21:12). He loves to commend whatever is lovely in His servants' lives, and only when necessary exposes their failures and follies. May we in this, as in all things else, be "imitators of God" (Eph. 5:1).

Jer. 41:9 refers to a pit (or cistern) made by Asa “for fear of Baasha king of Israel.” God would thus, in this incidental way, remind us by this last historical notice of king Asa what was the beginning of his decline—“the fear of man [which] bringeth a snare” (Prov. 29:25).

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Abijah

Jehovah is my Father

1 Kings 15:1-8; 2 Chron. 13

Contemporary Prophets: Iddo

Great deliverance giveth he to his king; and showeth mercy to his anointed, to David, and to his seed for evermore. Psalm 18:50

Abijah’s reign was a brief one. He outlived his father Rehoboam by only three short years. His mother Maachah was a daughter or granddaughter of Absalom. (We should remember that family relations are not so scrupulously mentioned in Scripture as it is our custom now to do. Thus blood relations are often mentioned as “brother” and ancestors as “father” or “mother.”) Abijah (Abijam in Kings) was thus descended from David on both his father’s and his mother’s side. His mother however turned out to be an idolatress (1 Kings 15:13).The form of her name Maachah, which means “oppressor:” is altered in Chronicles to Michaiah—“Who is like God?” She is said here, too, to be a daughter of Uriel, meaning “light” or “fire of God.” The reason for this will be understood by referring to the Author’s Introduction. There is also no account of Abijah’s wickedness in Chronicles. In Kings, on the other hand, there is nothing recorded of him but his sin. “He walked,” it says there, “in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father” (1 Kings 15:3).

He was evidently a man of considerable spirit, for he had barely settled himself in his throne before he began a war with his father’s old adversary Jeroboam. His army numbered 400,000 “chosen men,” while Jeroboam’s was 800,000 “mighty men of valor” (2 Chron. 13:2-3).

A wonderful battle ensued, and it was preceded by a very wonderful speech from Abijah. He stood on the top of Mount Zemaraim, in Mount Ephraim, somewhere along the northern border of his kingdom. For terseness, accusation, warning, and appeal the address is unsurpassed by anything in any literature of any time (2 Chron. 13:4-12). Its merit was recognized even in his own day, for the prophet Iddo did not neglect to record the eloquent king’s sayings. We shall not attempt to analyze it. Nor does it require any analysis for it is simple as it is weighty and powerful. Though true in all its statements, it lacks frankness. He said,

Hear me, thou Jeroboam, and all Israel; Ought ye not to know that the LORD God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David forever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt? Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of David, is risen up, and hath rebelled against his lord (4-6).

The gathered hosts who listened to him knew well the truth of this. But, either intentionally or unconsciously, he ignored the root of all this strife—his grandfather’s sins. He also ignored the fact that God had forbidden his father Rehoboam to make war on the separated tribes, saying, “This thing [the schism] is from me.” He knew how to make his own position appear right and good, but he completely ignored the judgment of God on his own tribes and on the house of David because of its own sins; how unlike the humble and confessing spirit of his father David. His speech reflected wisdom, but a cold wisdom apart from the spirit of grace.

But he continued: “And there are gathered unto him vain men, the children of Belial, and have strengthened themselves against Rehoboam the son of Solomon.” Strong words these, spoken before an army of valiant men twice the size of his own! He was determined to make them realize that however strong they are, their origin in separation from his own tribes is not of God. This, of course, would also greatly strengthen his own adherents, and he was doubtless speaking for their ears as well as for those of his enemies. Ignoring the judgment of God on the nation, he made the plea that his father Rehoboam “was young and tenderhearted, and could not withstand them. And now ye think to withstand the kingdom of the LORD in the hand of the sons of David.” He seemed to say, You might deter my fainthearted father from punishing you and reducing you to submission, but you have a different man to deal with now.

Then follows that which, together with Jehovah’s love for the house of David, secured Abijah’s victory and Jeroboam’s awful defeat:

And ye be a great multitude, and there are with you golden calves, which Jeroboam made you for gods. Have ye not cast out the priests of the LORD, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and have made you priests after the manner of the nations of other lands? So that whosoever cometh to consecrate himself with a young bullock and seven rams, the same may be a priest of them that are no gods. But as for us, [Jehovah] is our God, and we have not forsaken him. [However true this might be outwardly, we have seen already the Spirit’s testimony as to the inward or real condition in Judah as declared in 1 Kings 14:22-25.] And the priests, which minister unto the LORD, are the sons of Aaron, and the Levites wait upon their business: And they burn unto [Jehovah] every morning and every evening burnt sacrifices and sweet incense: the shewbread also they set in order upon the pure table; and the candlestick of gold with the lamps thereof to burn every evening: for we keep the charge of [Jehovah] our God; but ye have forsaken him. And, behold, God himself is with us for our captain, and his priests, with sounding trumpets to cry a alarm against you. [Then he closed with a brief but eloquent appeal:] Children of Israel, fight ye not against [Jehovah] the God of your fathers; for ye shall not prosper! (2 Chron. 13:8-12)

On the one hand, all this is inspiring; on the other, had it been true in their heart-relations with Jehovah as it was true in the outward sense, they would not have been found facing their brethren for battle and about to be engaged in dreadful carnage. But while God could not have put His seal on the state of Abijah’s soul and the tribes with him, He must vindicate the righteousness of all that is said against Jeroboam and his followers. So though “orthodoxy” be away from God in heart, yet its battle against antichrists must for the time being be acknowledged and helped. The house of David is loved, and must be sustained—Christ is dear to God, and all who fight for Him must be upheld, though God may have something against them too. So Abijah won a great victory, and Israel suffered a most humiliating defeat. More than half their army is slain, and it was more than sixteen years before they again attempted to make war on the house of David. “Thus the children of Israel were brought under at that time, and the children of Judah prevailed, because they relied upon the LORD the God of their fathers” (18). God

acknowledges whatever good He can find among His people.

Abijah also took three cities, Bethel, Jeshanah, and Ephron with their dependent villages from Israel. Neither did Jeroboam ever recover from the effects of his defeat and soon after he was struck by Jehovah and died.

When not more than forty years old, Abijah died. Like his father before him, he was unfortunate in not having a good mother. He is called Abijam in Kings. God would not let His name be called upon him there, because there it is only the dark side of his life which is told. God is jealous of His name. It is a holy name, and He would not have it dishonored by the sins of those who are called by that name. May all His people everywhere give heed to this. The holy name of Christ (Christian) is given us. May we never by any act of ours bring a stain of reproach on it!

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Rehoboam

Liberator, or enlarger, of the people

1 Kings 12:1-24; 14:21-31; 2 Chron. 10-12

Contemporary Prophet: Shemaiah

In the multitude of people is the king’s honor: but in the want of people is the destruction of the prince. Proverbs. 14:28

Rehoboam was not what we call a strong character. He was, in the beginning of his reign at least, as his own son Abijah said to Jeroboam, “young [inexperienced] and tenderhearted, and could not withstand [the troublers of his kingdom]” (2 Chron. 13:7). Why Solomon should have chosen him as his successor is not clear. It is difficult to believe that he had no other sons; yet it is a fact that Rehoboam is the only one mentioned (1 Chron. 3:10). His father seems to have had misgivings concerning his ability to rule the kingdom (see Eccl. 2:18-19; 4:13-16). And it was probably not a question of favoritism; for Pharaoh’s daughter, and not Naamah the Ammonitess (Rehoboam’s mother), appears to have been Solomon’s preferred wife. But if Rehoboam was his only son, he had no choice; so we read “Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead” (1 Kings 11:43).

Weakness and vacillation marked his reign from the beginning. His going to Shechem to be crowned was evidently a concession to conciliate the already disaffected tribes to the north. He might have succeeded in his efforts to allay the dissatisfaction caused by the enforced levy of labor by his father (see 1 Kings 11:28), had he wisely and humbly heeded the advice of the aged men who had been his father’s honored counselors. They, from long experience, knew the temper of the people well. In petitioning for the lightening of their burdens, they were only doing what any people not reduced to the condition of slavery, or serfdom, might have asked. Had the newly crowned king granted them their reasonable demands and been kind to them and spoken pleasantly to them, they would, as the old cabinet ministers said, have been his loyal subjects forever. But he forsook their wise counsels. He was influenced by a handful of callow novices and young court favorites, who, like himself, thought more of the rights of the king than of his responsibility to govern righteously. So he replied with as rash and insolent a speech as was ever uttered from the throne to a civilized nation. The outraged people answered in the same spirit as the king; and we have the sad, ominous cry, “What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David” (1 Kings 12:16; see also 2 Sam. 20:1).

Though truly thankful to God that we are privileged to live under a form of government that gives us fullest freedom, we have no quarrel with absolute monarchy. But while God enjoins subjection to the powers that be, tyranny over the souls and bodies of men is nowhere countenanced in His word and rulers who attempt it must suffer the results. There are many proofs of this in Scripture, as in history. Government is of God and therefore of divine appointment; but God frowns on all abuse of power.

Rehoboam found it hard to believe that the ten tribes had really refused his yoke. He flattered himself, no doubt, that they would not dare to rebel against his authority. It could not be possible, he might have thought, that these provincials should not readily and meekly submit to his chastening with scorpions. So he confidently sent to them Hadoram to collect the imposed assessment. This ill-advised act brings matters to a crisis, and the old collector general, who had served in this office under Rehoboam’s father Solomon and his grandfather David, is stoned by the exasperated people. So the king, who had boasted so haughtily that his “little finger” should be “thicker than his father’s loins,” ingloriously “made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem” (1 Kings 12:18).

It must have been evident to him now that the rebellion was a very real and formidable one, and not a mere passing wave of discontent that would quickly die away of itself and be forgotten. But such an immense loss, such terrible results occurring so unexpectedly, were not so easily submitted to. Force may yet avail. There is the army, one hundred and eighty thousand strong. These malcontents would soon be made to feel the effect of its invincible power. Might must make right, if right cannot be demonstrated in any other way. But the God of peace, who loves His people even when misguided and in error, warned the king of Judah (note the intentional limit of his title, 2 Chron. 11:3) by the word of the man of God, Shemaiah, saying, “Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me” (1 Kings 12:24).

Under the government of God this division of the kingdom was the punishment for the sins of Solomon (1 Kings 11:29-33), occasioned by the folly of Rehoboam; it must therefore stand. To fight to bring back the unity of the nation, good as the purpose might seem, was to fight against God. Rehoboam ought to have been thankful that God’s love to David had left him even two tribes. And he appears to have been, for the two tribes “hearkened therefore to the word of the LORD,” He proceeded to secure what had been left him. He built, or garrisoned, fifteen cities within his decreased territory, “and he fortified the strong holds, and put captains in them, and store of victuals, and of oil and wine. And in every several city he put shields and spears, and made them exceeding strong” (2 Chron. 11:11-12). The successful rebel may sometimes turn invader, and Rehoboam (wiser now) guarded against this. There was war between him and the insurrectionist leader Jeroboam all their days, and the son of Solomon had to vigilantly guard what remained to him.

The priests and Levites remained faithful to Jehovah, to His house and worship at Jerusalem, and to the house of David, which was by the election of God the royal one. They left the land of Israel to dwell in Judah and Jerusalem. Others too, who had set their hearts to seek the God of Israel, deserted the cause of the secessionists, and flocked to Rehoboam's standard. For three years all went well, and they walked "in the way of David and Solomon." But their goodness (like all that is of the creature merely) was as the early dew and like the morning cloud, and passed quickly away. Subdued, no doubt, and humbled by the loss of the greater portion of his kingdom, Rehoboam walked for a time in fear and dependence. But even serious lessons like this are soon forgotten by most, and before five years had passed both king and people had lapsed so far into idolatry as to be brought to the very verge of apostasy from Jehovah.

And Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done. For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree. And there were also sodomites [men consecrated to impurity] in the land: and they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD cast out before the children of Israel (1 Kings 14:22-24).

And for this reason God sent Shishak king of Egypt against them. Solomon had joined affinity with Pharaoh by marrying his daughter. Whether Solomon did this merely to please himself, or with the expectation of strengthening his kingdom by an alliance with so powerful a country, it all came to nothing, as do all such ways where God's word is disobeyed or ignored.

Shishak overthrew Pharaoh, the father-in-law of Solomon, thus ending that dynasty. He became the new king who did not know Solomon nor his successor. Influenced probably by Jeroboam, he marched against Jerusalem with a vast army of twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand horsemen, besides an innumerable host of footmen (2 Chron. 12:3). Realizing the utter hopelessness of his position, and not having faith in God, Rehoboam offered no resistance to the advance of Shishak. In fear for his life, he huddled with the princes of Judah at Jerusalem and awaited the coming of the Egyptian army.

It is now God's time to speak to their consciences, and Shemaiah the prophet appeared before them with this message of conviction: "Thus saith the LORD, Ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak." (12:5). They humbled themselves then and said, "The LORD is righteous," and a partial deliverance was promised them. God said, "I will not destroy them." "The princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves," says the Word. It would seem the princes took the lead (from their being mentioned first) in this humiliating, yet becoming, confession. The king was slower, the roots of his former arrogance still lingering unjudged within his heart.

Note what God says: "I will not destroy them" (12:7). Shishak was only His whip, like the Assyrian at a later date, whom God, by His prophet Isaiah, called "the rod of mine anger" and "a razor that is hired." In calamities like these, it is necessary to see beyond the instrument, and know the hand that uses it for blessing. But though their lives were spared, they must become servants (tributary) to Shishak, "That they may know," God says, "my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries." When one is truly submissive, he will find the Lord's yoke is easy; if His saint refuses to wear it, he must learn by humiliating and painful experience what the yoke of the enemy is like. So Shishak took away all the temple treasures, and those of the royal palace. He also took with him the five hundred shields of gold that Solomon had made. Rehoboam made in their stead shields of bronze, and with these he pathetically tried to keep up former appearances. It is like souls who, when despoiled of their freshness and power by the enemy, laboriously endeavor to keep up an outward appearance of spiritual prosperity. Or like a fallen church, stripped of its strength and robbed of its purity, it seeks to hide its helplessness and cover its nakedness with the tinsel of ritualism and spurious revivalism. It looks for anything that promises to give it some appearance of justification for saying, "I am rich, and increased with goods."

There is little more to say of Rehoboam. Whatever was in his father's mind when naming him "Liberator" or "Enlarger of the People," he failed utterly to become either. He enslaved the nation to Shishak by his sins, and decreased the numerical strength of his kingdom by more than three million through his folly at the very outset of his reign. He followed his father's shameful example in taking many wives. He displayed wisdom however in distributing his sons over the countries of Judah and Benjamin, placing them in the garrison towns, and providing them food in abundance (2 Chron. 11:23). He probably remembered and was desirous to avoid such scenes as had occurred at the close of his grandfather David's life in connection with his sons (see 1 Kings 2).Would God that Christians had always as much spiritual wisdom as Rehoboam manifested natural wisdom in this. Were God's people well fed with truth, and consecrated to Christ through the various services of His kingdom, there would be less strife among us. But sadly, it is still too often true that "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light" (Luke 16:8). Rehoboam's wisdom was rewarded when, at the end of his seventeen years' reign, his son Abijah quietly assumed the crown without opposition from his many brothers.

Rehoboam died at the age of fifty-eight. The Spirit's last comment on his character is significant: "And he did evil because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD" (2 Chron. 12:14). There we are told in a single sentence the whole secret of his failure, both as king of Judah, and servant of Jehovah, who gave him this exalted position—"He [applied] not his heart to seek [Jehovah]." May God in His grace, help us to apply our hearts to seek first and always His kingdom and righteousness. Only so shall we be kept from evil, and preserved from making the record of our lives read anything like Rehoboam's—one sad succession of decline and failure.

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Jeroboam I

Whose people is many

1 Kings 11:20, 26-40; 12-14; 2 Chron. 10; 13:1-20

Contemporary Prophets: Ahijah, The Man of God out of Judah, The Old Prophet of Bethel

The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot. Prov. 10:7

Jeroboam is an example of what is not at all uncommon in the East-a man exalted from a comparatively low station in private or public life to the highest, or one of the highest, positions in the land. We have Scriptural examples of this, such as Joseph, and Moses; and secular history mentions not a few. Let us see how Jeroboam's elevation came about: And Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite of Zereda, Solomon's

servant, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow woman, even he lifted up his hand against the king. And this was the cause that he lifted up his hand against the king: Solomon built Millo [LXX, `the citadel'], and repaired the breaches of the city of David his father. And the man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valor: and Solomon seeing the young man that he was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge [or, levy] of the house of Joseph [that is, Ephraim and Manasseh] (1 Kings 11:26-28).

This naturally gave him a place of importance in the eyes of his fellow countrymen, and prepared the way for what was soon to follow. They evidently resented this enforced labor. "Thy father," they afterward said to Rehoboam, "made our yoke grievous." They spoke of it too as a heavy yoke (1 Kings 12:4). There is no certain evidence that this was really so. What was being done by their labor was for the glory and security of the kingdom, whose prosperity would profit all (see 1 Kings 4:25). It is possible, however, that they were set to work on what served only for self-gratification; for when men depart from the right way, as Solomon did, they soon become oppressive. This would furnish some justification for their discontent, which Jeroboam would take no pains to allay. He probably had discernment sufficient to see how final circumstances were gradually shaping themselves, and had his own personal ambitions in mind, as shall be presently seen.

And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they two were alone in the field. And Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces: And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee...because that they have forsaken me, and have worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways, to do that which is right in mine eyes, and to keep my statutes and my judgments, as did David his father...And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee (1 Kings 11:29-38).

It was a solemn word, to which Jeroboam ought to have given earnest heed. Had he done so, he would never have come to his own melancholy end, nor would his dynasty have been so suddenly and violently terminated-before the second generation had barely begun.

Whether news of Ahijah's prophecy reached the ears of Solomon, or the elated Jeroboam betrayed the secret by some overt act of rashness or insubordination, we are not told. But we read, "Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam. And Jeroboam arose, and fled into Egypt, unto Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon." In 1 Kings 11:26 we read, "He lifted up his hand against the king." Jeroboam may have led some abortive attempt to raise a rebellion, perhaps to hasten the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning him (compare 2 Sam. 20:21). How unlike David, the man after God's own heart, who would not injure a hair of the condemned king's head, or raise a finger to bring the kingdom to himself even though he had been anointed and chosen by the prophet Samuel to supersede Saul! David was a man of faith; and faith—that precious gift of God—ever waits on God for His time and way to fulfill His promises.

But Jeroboam knew nothing of faith. He had aspired secretly after power over his brethren, as the expression, "according to all that thy soul desireth," clearly shows (1 Kings 11:37). He probably sought the fulfillment of Ahijah's prophecy with pride's feverish haste, therefor he was compelled to seek an asylum in Egypt, under the protection of Shishak. This king had but recently overthrown the late dynasty with which Solomon had unlawfully allied himself by marriage. Ahijah had distinctly said that Solomon would be "prince all the days of his life," and it was only out of his son's hand that the kingdom would be taken and transferred to Jeroboam. But like a willful, impatient child, he could not wait, and took the case out of God's hand to undertake for himself.

How long Jeroboam remained in Egypt is not known; but we read that on the death of Solomon he returned and was present at Rehoboam's coronation, when the rebellion was consummated. "And Rehoboam went to Shechem: for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king.... And Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came, and spake unto Rehoboam." The time was ripe. Solomon's incompetent son and successor, instead of heeding his father's wholesome proverb, "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger," displayed his lack of wisdom and fitness to govern a liberty-loving people. As a consequence, he precipitated the separation of the already alienated northern tribes. Rehoboam weakened and almost ruined a kingdom that had but recently extended from the Nile to the Euphrates, a distance of more than 450 miles, acknowledged by the surrounding nations as one of the most powerful empires of the earth.

The details of that memorable schism need not be entered into here, (see chapter on Rehoboam in the companion volume Kings of Judah.)We have dwelt on the cause from the human or circumstantial side chiefly; the divine side is also given: "Wherefore the king [Rehoboam] hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the Lord, that he might perform his saying, which the Lord spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat" (1 Kings 12:15).

Jeroboam became the spokesman of the disaffected tribes in the presentation of their petition, whose rejection snapped the already overstrained link that bound the tribes together. Though only presenting the people's petition, it is nevertheless probable that Jeroboam was not idle, but like an artful politician, busy behind the scenes until the coveted crown became his: "And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel" (1 Kings 12:20). He made historic Shechem his capital, and fortified it. He also made Penuel an important strategic point. Penuel means "the face of God," which should have reminded him of God's past dealings with the scheming Jacob (Gen. 32:31). Someone described Shechem: "The situation is lovely; the valley runs west, with a soil of rich, black vegetable mold, watered by fountains, sending forth numerous streams, flowing west: orchards of fruit, olive groves, gardens of vegetables, and verdure on all sides, delight the eye"—the very spot for a man bent on self-pleasing, and aspiring to a life of luxury.

But the newly crowned king quickly manifested that he did not hold his kingdom in faith as a trust from God. "And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David" (the all-seeing eye of God reveals what was going on in his heart, which had never been anything but an evil heart of unbelief). He continued, "if this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah." "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." This man had neither trust in God, nor confidence in his fellows. He was like former king Saul who, departing from God, began to be suspicious of everybody around him. Jeroboam evidently felt that he had no real hold on the people's affections, and that his tenure of the crown was very precarious. He therefore wickedly devised a plan (which, sadly, proved all too successful) to prevent a return of the tribes to their former allegiance to the house of David.

Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan (1 Kings 12:28-29).

The old limits of the land were from Dan to Beersheba. Bethel lay near the southern border of Jeroboam's kingdom, and about twelve miles north of Jerusalem; while Dan was in the far north, at the sources of the Jordan. Thus by placing the calves at these extreme limits of his dominion, with the pretext of giving all an easy access to a place of worship, the uneasy king hoped to prevent their return to Judah's God and kingdom. His kingdom, unlike Judah with its temple at Jerusalem, had no divine center. In fact, it was a circumference without a center, and its worship a matter of convenience and expediency.

"And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan" (Bethel was taken from Jeroboam by Abijah; see 2 Chron. 13:19). "And he made a house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi." This was a direct violation of the law of God in reference to the priesthood (see Num. 18:1-7). And he did not stop there; he evidently regarded the legitimate priests and the Levites with special suspicion and rejected their services. "For Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priest's office unto the Lord: and he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made" (2 Chron. 11:14-15). Abijah, in his speech before the battle with Jeroboam, said to him and his followers,

Have ye not cast out the priests of the Lord, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and have made you priests after the manner of the nations of other lands? so that whosoever cometh to consecrate himself with a young bullock and seven rams, the same may be a priest of them that are no gods (2 Chron. 13:9).

The error of the organized church, Protestant and Catholic, is the assumption of all priestly functions by a humanly consecrated few, to the exclusion of every member of the church, every one of which is a priest, according to the testimony of Scripture (see 1 Peter 2:5, 9). The priesthood of believers is not a continuation or an amplification of the Jewish priesthood, but one of an entirely different order—"a royal priesthood." Christ is the great High Priest of whom Aaron was the type, and every true believer a priest of the same spiritual family, typified by Aaron's sons. Heb. 5:4 has its direct application to the high priesthood only, though the principle may be applied to ministry; but to Christian priesthood proper the verse has no application whatever, for a believer is a priest, not by special call, but solely by virtue of his link with Christ by faith.

Lessons from Jeroboam's act as to the priesthood can surely be learned by both Catholicism and Protestantism, but the right of a class among God's people to the exclusive exercise of priestly or ministerial functions is certainly not one of them. On the contrary, his action illustrates just what these groups have done-shutting out the body of those who are truly the children of God, and therefore truly priests, and consecrating to the office men who have never been born of God, and have no right or qualification whatever therefore to the privilege.

Viewed even as a stroke of policy, this ejection of the Lord's priests and the Levites was a blunder. Almost all of them went over to Jeroboam's rival, and thereby strengthened the kingdom of Judah. By being overly anxious to preserve his power, he lost what was no doubt the choice part of his kingdom. Similar to this was the banishment of the Huguenots from France—the most intelligent, enterprising and God-fearing portion of its citizens—an act from which that country has never yet fully recovered, and perhaps never will. The Netherlands and other parts of the Continent suffered the same in the persecution of those of the Reformed persuasion. And in England none were more faithful and true than those stalwart sons who for conscience' sake forsook the land they loved, and sought an asylum among the desolate wildernesses of America.

Other unlawful innovations were introduced by Jeroboam.

So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense (1 Kings 12:33).

This feast of Jeroboam's was in imitation of the feast of tabernacles, which God had commanded to be observed in the seventh month: the eighth was the month which Jeroboam "had devised of his own heart"—always deceitful and desperately wicked. How many practices and customs in Christendom have been devised of men's own hearts and have no foundation in Scripture! For many seem to imagine that it is quite permissible in spiritual things to do "every man that which is right in his own eyes," instead of "Thus saith the Lord." God condemned Israel for doing that which He said, "I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart" or "mind" (Jer. 7:31; also, 19:5; 32:35). It is the thoughts of God's heart, not mine, that I am to heed and put into practice. These He has revealed in His Word, and it is our happiness and wisdom to heed that, and not the commandments and doctrines of men.

"And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the Lord unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense." If Jeroboam would not have Jehovah's priests, God sends His prophet into his land.

And he cried against the altar in the word of the Lord, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord: Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee. And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the Lord hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out (1 Kings 13:1-3).

It was a bold message, but delivered in faithfulness. It was directed not against the king, but the priests, though the king seemed to feel the force of its application to himself.

And it came to pass, when king Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, which had cried against the altar in Bethel, that he put forth his hand from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him. The altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the Lord (4-5).

Jeroboam had forgotten, or ignored, the reproof administered by God to kings almost a thousand years before; "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm" (Psa. 105:14-15). He was quickly reminded of his error, and entreated pardon. "And the king answered and said unto the man of God, Entreat now the face of the Lord thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again." But it was his heart that had need of healing, rather than his hand. In this he was like the mass of men today, who look more to the hand and its deeds than

the heart of sin that prompted the evil acts. The penitent publican struck his breast, as if to express that there, from within, came all the transgression, iniquity, and sin.

However Jeroboam was in a measure humbled, and his appeal for the prophet's intercession was regarded: "And the man of God besought the Lord, and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as it was before." He who would have persecuted the prophet, now would entertain and give him a reward for his healing. "And the king said unto the man of God, Come home with me, and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a reward." But, like Daniel, who nobly answered king Belshazzar, "Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another" (Dan. 5:17), so also the man of God refused to be patronized (take note, all ye servants of the living God), saying,

If thou wilt give me half thy house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: for so it was charged me by the word of the Lord, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou tamest. So he went another way, and returned not by the way that he came to Bethel (1 Kings 13:8-10).

It is not our purpose to follow the history of the man of God, who was seduced to his death by the lie of the apostate old prophet of Bethel (1 Kings 13:11-32). But the narrative is full of wholesome instruction for us all, to adhere strictly to the word of God and not be beguiled away from the simple path of obedience by the deceptions of men, professed "prophets" though they be; yea, be it an angel from Heaven even, "let him be accursed" that perverts or contradicts the word of God. This history should be pondered by all for like all things written in God's Word, it was written for our warning and instruction.

Jeroboam gained no lasting lesson from the prophet's faithful testimony, or the mercy shown him in the restoration of his withered hand, for we read, "After this thing [the prophet's death?] Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places. And this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth" (1 Kings 13:33-34).

The threatened destruction of Jeroboam's house now begins.

At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam fell sick. And Jeroboam said to his wife, Arise, I pray thee, and disguise thyself, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam; and get thee to Shiloh: behold, there is Ahijah the prophet, which told me that I should be king over this people. And take with thee ten loaves, and cracknels, and a cruse of honey, and go to him: he shall tell thee what shall become of the child (1 Kings 14:1-3).

Jeroboam's troubled spirit did not turn to the old prophet of Bethel, or to others like him in Israel, but in his distress he turned to Jehovah's prophet—a not uncommon thing with sinners. This is a striking witness of the power of conscience, as well as a testimony to the influence of a righteous man in the midst of abounding evil. Ashamed probably to have it known among his subjects that he preferred to consult a prophet of Jehovah before those of his own idolatrous system, Jeroboam sent his wife in disguise; or since Shiloh with Bethel and other neighboring towns had been taken by Abijah king of Judah (see 2 Chron. 13:19), she would be entering enemy territory. Or could it be that, conscious of guilt and afraid of bad news, he hoped to deceive the prophet? Whatever his reason, Jeroboam's wife complied with her husband's command.

And the Lord said unto Ahijah, Behold, the wife of Jeroboam cometh to ask a thing of thee for her son; for he is sick: thus and thus shalt thou say unto her: for it shall be, when she cometh in, that she shall feign herself to be another woman.

And it was so, when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, that he said, Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another? for I am sent to thee with heavy tidings. Go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people, and made thee prince over my people Israel, and rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it thee: and yet thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes; but thou hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back. Therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone. Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat: for the Lord hath spoken it. Arise thou therefore, get thee to thine own house: and when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die. And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam (1 Kings 14:5-13).

Heavy tidings these were indeed to a mother's heart! She was possibly a good woman, to have a son in whom God saw "some good thing toward the Lord." Sad indeed must have been her journey back to the city and her dwelling, on entering which her son would die! "And Jeroboam's wife arose, and departed, and came to Tirzah: and when she came to the threshold of the door, the child died; and they buried him; and all Israel mourned for him according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by the hand of his servant Ahijah the prophet." Abijah ("Jehovah is my Father") was his name; and his heavenly Father called him home. It was an instance of the righteous being "taken away from the evil to come." And it is written, "He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness" (Isa. 57:1-2). We shall expect to meet and greet thee, Jehovah's little child, in that bright morning when for those who have part in the first resurrection there shall be no more evil to come.

Jeroboam's battle with king Abijah, and his crushing defeat, have been entered into elsewhere (see ABIJAH, Kings of Judah), so need not be repeated here. Both the battle and his child's death must have occurred toward the close of his reign (see 2 Chron. 13:1). Thus disaster and sorrow would combine to help hasten his end; and we read, "Neither did Jeroboam recover strength again in the days of Abijah: and the Lord struck him, and he died." God chastened him through two Abijahs; one of his own house, and the other of the house of David-terribly significant to him who had cast that same Jehovah behind his back.

"And the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he warred, and how he reigned, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel." This is that Jeroboam who "drave Israel from following the Lord, and made them sin a great sin" (2 Kings 17:21). God has placed the stamp of eternal infamy on his name.

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