2 Kings - Commentaries by Christopher Knapp

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Ahaziah

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

(Jehoahaz or Azariah)

Sustained by Jehovah

2 Kings 8:24-27; 9:27-29; 2 Chron. 22:1-9

For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. Psalm 48:4

Ahaziah must have reigned as his father's viceroy during the last year of the latter's sickness. This is evident from a comparison of 2 Kings 8:25 with 9:29. He was the youngest and only remaining son of Jehoram (2 Chron. 21:17). "Two and twenty years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign." ("Forty and two" in 2 Chron. 22:2 is doubtless a transcriber's error. His father was only forty at his death.) "And he reigned one year in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Athaliah, the daughter [or granddaughter] of Omri king of Israel. And he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did evil in the sight of the Lord, as did the house of Ahab: for he was the son in law of the house of Ahab" (2 Kings 8:26-27). His mother, in some way or other, escaped the fate of the rest of Jehoram's wives (who were carried away captive at the time of the Philistine-Arabian invasion), and "was his counselor to do wickedly."

2 Chron. 22:4 seems to give a slight hint that his father Jehoram repented during his last sufferings, and had broken away somewhat from the house of Ahab; "for they were his [Ahaziah's] counselors after the death of his father to his destruction." His father's death removed the check, and he at once united himself with his mother's relatives in their sins and warfare. "He walked also after their counsel, and went with Jehoram the son of Ahab king of Israel to war against Hazael king of Syria at Ramoth-gilead."

This friendship cost him his life.

And the Syrians smote Joram [the king of Israel].And he returned to be healed in Jezreel because of the wounds which were given him in Ramah [or Ramoth], when he fought with Hazael king of Syria. And Azariah [Ahaziah] the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Jehoram the son of Ahab at Jezreel, because he was sick. And the destruction of Ahaziah was of God by coming to Joram: for when he was come, he went out with Jehoram against Jehu the son of Nimshi, whom the LORD had anointed to cut off the house of Ahab (2 Chron. 22:5-7).

Ahaziah saw his uncle Jehoram slain in his chariot, and tried in vain to make his escape from the hot-headed Jehu. "He fled by the way of the garden house. And Jehu followed after him, and said, Smite him also in the chariot. And they did so at the going up to Gur, which is by Ibleam. And he fled to Megiddo, and died there. And his servants carried him in a chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him in his sepulcher with his fathers in the city of David" (2 Kings 9:27-28).The account in Chronicles says, "he was hid in Samaria." There is no discrepancy here, for when he fled to the garden house (Bethzan), he escaped to Samaria (or the kingdom of Samaria) where were his "brethren" and the princes of Judah. Thence, followed by Jehu, he was pursued to the hill Gur, and slain. "And when they had slain him, they buried him: Because, said they, he is the son of Jehoshaphat, who sought the LORD with all his heart" (2 Chron. 22:9). His being the grandson of Jehoshaphat was all that saved his body from being eaten by unclean dogs, like the bodies of his great-aunt Jezebel and her son Jehoram.

"So the house of Ahaziah had no power to keep still the kingdom." And with these cheerless words the record of the reign of Ahaziah closes. He was the seventh from Solomon, and the first king of Judah to die a violent death. His name is the first of the royal line omitted in the genealogy of Matt. 1. The first of the three names given him, Jehoahaz—"whom Jehovah helps"—is markedly at variance with his character. This may be the reason why he is called by that name only once in Scripture (2 Chron. 21:17).

He died at the early age of twenty-three. It was not part of Jehu's commission to slay the king of Judah, but he was found among those doomed to destruction and consequently shared their fate. And God's call to His own in that system of iniquity where the spiritual Jezebel teaches and seduces His servants is, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4, italics added). Oh that all God's people might even now lay this call to heart, and separate themselves from that which is fast shaping itself for its ultimate apostasy and doom!

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Zedekiah

Righteousness of Jehovah

2 Kings 24:17-25:21; 2 Chron. 36:11-21

Contemporary Prophets: Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Obadiah

Her king and her princes are among the Gentiles: the law is no more: her prophets also find no vision from the Lord. Lamentations 2:9

"And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his father's brother king in his [Jehoiachin's] stead, and changed his name to Zedekiah. Zedekiah was twenty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem" (2 Kings 24:17-18).

Zedekiah was Josiah's youngest son, and full brother of Jehoahaz. He was, at his father's death, only ten years old.

Nebuchadnezzar changed his name (as a token of his vassalage) but did not give him the name of some heathen deity, as in the case of Daniel and the three Hebrew children. He “had made him swear by God,” and his new name—Zedekiah meaning “Righteousness of Jehovah”—may have been given him to remind him of his oath (2 Chron. 36:13). Or the name may have had some connection, even in the heathen king’s mind, with Jehovah’s righteousness in taking from this wicked people (called by His name) their political independence, and subjecting them to his dominion.

“Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon” (2 Kings 24:20). He had no real faith in Jehovah, Israel’s covenant-keeping God, and therefore did not hesitate to break his covenant with Nebuchadnezzar. But how dearly he paid for this violation of his oath! “And it came to pass, in the ninth year of his reign...that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem... and the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah” (2 Kings 25:1-2).

The occasion of this rebellion was Zedekiah’s hope of assistance from the king of Egypt (see Ezek. 17:11-21). He also vainly attempted to form an alliance with the surrounding nations, for the purpose of ridding himself, and them, of the yoke of the Babylonian king (see Jer. 27:1-11. Various ancient manuscripts have the name Zedekiah for Jehoiakim in 27:1. Compare with verses 3 and 12 and 28:1). Pharaoh-hophra attempted to relieve Zedekiah during the siege, but was driven back into Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar’s army, who then returned and reoccupied Jerusalem (see Jer. 37:5-10). It was a terrible siege, lasting eighteen months; famine and pestilence prevailed. Mothers boiled and ate their own children (Lam. 4:10). According to Josephus, at midnight the Chaldees gained entrance into the city, and the fugitive king was captured. He and his sons were brought to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, “on the high road between Palestine and Babylon, where the Babylonian kings remained in directing the operations of their armies in Palestine and Phenicia” (Fausset).

Here his terrible punishment was meted out to him for his deceit in violating his solemn compact with his master. After seeing his own children slain before him, his own eyes were dug out of their sockets, and he was bound “with double chains of bronze” (2 Kings 25:7, literal translation), and led off to Babylon. So the two seemingly contradictory prophecies of Jeremiah (32:4) and Ezekiel (12:13) were literally fulfilled. At Babylon he was cast into prison “till the day of his death” (Jer. 52:11). “Until I visit him” (Jer. 32:5) might imply that he was finally set at liberty, but “till the day of his death” precludes any such interpretation. It is more agreeable to take the expression to mean that God in mercy would visit him with repentance and a true knowledge of Himself as He did to Manasseh before him. How often God has used the stern hand of his government to break down the pride and rebellion of the heart, and through such “visitation” bring to the penitent soul the truest of all liberty—deliverance from the bondage of sin. So would his soul be set free, though his body remain in bondage. Adapting Richard Lovelace’s poem, we could say:

Josephus said Nebuchadnezzar “kept Zedekiah in prison until he died; and then buried him magnificently.” This agrees with Jer. 34:5; “Thou shalt die in peace: and with the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings which were before thee.”

Zedekiah has been justly characterized as weak, vacillating, and treacherous. His weakness and subserviency to his princes mark him as a man wholly unfit to wear a crown, or sit on a throne: “Behold he [Jeremiah] is in your hand,” he said to them, “for the king is not he that can do anything against you” (Jer. 38:5). He was hypocritical also. He feigned a desire for the prophet’s prayers, saying, “Pray now unto the LORD our God for us” (Jer. 37:3). He pretended too, at times, to have confidence in the prophecies of Jeremiah (“Inquire, I pray thee, of the LORD for us,” Jer. 21:2), which when delivered, he refused to heed or believe. “He did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the LORD” (2 Chron. 36:12). He was not so openly wicked as his three predecessors perhaps, and not willingly given to persecution. This is probably why Josephus, judging after the standards of men, wrote of “his gentle and righteous disposition.” But the Lord sees not as man sees, neither are His thoughts man’s thoughts. He said, “He stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel?” So God took him away in His anger.

The temple was burned to the ground, and only a miserable remnant of the nation was left in the land: “The captain of the guard left of the poor of the land to be vinedressers, and husbandmen” (2 Kings 25:12). Rebellion arose even among these, and for fear of the Chaldees they fled to the land of Egypt, only to miserably perish there, as Jeremiah had faithfully and tearfully warned them.

For seventy years the land lay desolate, after which a remnant was permitted to return. Six hundred years later wise men came from that very land of the East, inquiring where they might find Him that was “born King of the Jews.”

Until that day the godly remnant of His heritage could only pray, in the words of David—the type of that coming King —“Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just” (Psa. 7:9). “Even so, come, LORD JESUS”!

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Jehoiachin

Jehovah will establish

2 Kings 24:8-17; 25:27-30; 2 Chron. 36:9-10

Contemporary Prophets: Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Ezekiel

He looseth the bond of kings, and girdeth their loins with a girdle. Job 12:18

“Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. And his mother’s name was Nehushta, the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done” (2 Kings 24:8-9).Various English versions of 2 Chron. 36:9, as well as the Septuagint and Vulgate, make him eight years old at the beginning of his reign, instead of eighteen. But some Hebrew manuscripts, Syriac, and Arabic, read “eighteen” in Chronicles; so eight must be an error of transcription. All the internal evidence is in favor of eighteen.

His character was no different from that of his two predecessors. It is the same sad, unvarying record: “He did that which was evil.” How the godly must have longed for that King mentioned by Isaiah, who would reign in righteousness! They little knew or even suspected, perhaps, all that their nation would have to suffer, and the long, weary centuries—in fact, millennia—that would have to wear themselves away before

that day of righteousness and peace would come. But there was something about even this wicked king that could give them hope—his name, “Jehovah will establish.” They might not know the time; but they were assured of the fact. And so they could with patience wait for it.

Nehushta, his mother’s name, means “copper.” It refers to anything of copper, whether a copper coin, or a copper mirror or fetters: and both she and her son, with all his family and retinue, were carried captive to Babylon.

“And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, and his servants did besiege it. And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers: and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his [Nebuchadnezzar’s] reign. And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king’s house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, as the LORD had said. And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valor, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land. And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king’s mother, and the king’s wives [wives, confirming his age as eighteen not eight], and his officers, and the mighty of the land, those carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon” (2 Kings 24:11-15).

This was all “as the LORD said,” through His prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 20:5). Heaven and earth will pass away and perish, but not one word of God.

The temple was despoiled of its remaining treasures. A few years before, the king of Babylon had carried away the solid and smaller vessels (2 Chron. 36:7). On this occasion he (literal translation) “cut the gold off” the larger plated vessels-the ark, the altar of incense, the showbread table, etc. There is no contradiction here, or anywhere in Scripture, for “the Scripture cannot be broken.” The king’s mother would be the queen mother mentioned in Jer. 13:18.

The Babylonian captivity dates from Jehoiachin’s reign. He never returned from his captivity. There he spent thirty-six years in prison until the death of Nebuchadnezzar in his eighty-third or eighty-fourth year, after a reign of forty-three years. His son Evil-merodach succeeded him on the throne. This son had once been himself shut up in prison by his father, where he probably made the acquaintance of the royal Hebrew captive. He was not like the ungrateful butler who when released from prison forgot Joseph; he remembered his old prison companion.

And it came to pass in the seven and thirtieth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, in the five and twentieth day of the month, that Evil-merodach king of Babylon in the first year of his reign lifted up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah, and brought him forth out of prison, and spake kindly unto him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon; and changed his prison garments: and he did continually eat bread before him all the days of his life. And for his diet there was a continual diet given him of the king of Babylon, every day a portion until the day of his death, all the days of his life (Jeremiah 52:31-34).

He was not the first king of David’s house to be held a prisoner in Babylon. Some time before, his father’s great-grandfather, Manasseh, was brought a prisoner, and there in his affliction he sought and found the Lord. Whether Jehoiachin ever did so, we cannot say. His name (as Jechonias) is the last of the kings of Judah, mentioned in the list of Matt. 1. The next is “Jesus who is called Christ,” anointed King, not of Israel or the Jews only, but of the nations also (Rev. 15:3).

Jeremiah said of Jehoiakim, (Jehoiachin’s father) “He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David” (Jer. 36:30). The word sit here means to “firmly sit” or “dwell,” and Jehoiachin’s short three-month reign was surely not that. And Zedekiah, Jehoiachin’s successor, was Jehoiakim’s brother, not his son.

Though, like his father, “he did evil in the sight of the LORD,” Jehoiachin appears to have been a favorite with the populace. Jeremiah ironically inquired “Is this man Coniah a despised broken idol [or, vase]?” (In 1 Chron. 3:17 Jehoiachin is called Jeconiah, of which Coniah is an abbreviation.) But he immediately added, “Is he a vessel wherein is no pleasure?”-which is really what he was in God’s eyes. “Wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into a land which they knew not? O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD: Thus saith the LORD, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah” (Jer. 22:28-30). Childless here does not mean without descendants (for the prophecy itself mentions “his seed”) but “no direct lineal heir to the throne” (Fausset). Matt. 1:12 shows conclusively that he had descendants (“Jechonias begat Salathiel”), as does also 1 Chron. 3:17 (“The sons of Jeconiah; Assir,” etc.). The prophecy of Jeremiah probably refers to his uncle’s succeeding him to the throne instead of his son Assir—his firstborn probably; or it may have been a prophecy of Assir’s premature death. This may be why Assir is not mentioned in the genealogy in Matthew Anyway, God made no mistake. He speaks, and it is done; He commands, and it stands fast. “And the word of our God shall stand forever.”

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Jehoiakim

Whom Jehovah will raise

2 Kings 23:34-24:6; 2 Chron. 36:5-8

Contemporary Prophets: Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Ezekiel

His confidence shall be rooted out of his tabernacle, and it shall bring him to the king of terrors. Job 18:14

Jehoiakim was a most unlovely character—treacherous, ful, and blood-thirsty. He was several years Jehoahaz’ senior, and was not born of the same mother. “And his mother’s name was Zebudah [‘gainfulness], the daughter of Pedaiah of Ramah.” The mother’s name was a good prediction of her son’s behavior. He taxed the land to get the money demanded by Pharaoh: “he exacted the silver and the gold of the people of the land, of every one according to his taxation, to give unto Pharaoh-Necho.” Having been slighted by the people in their choice of his younger half brother, he would make no effort to ease the people’s burdens, but rather increase them. He was in no way under obligations to them; and having behind him the power of Egypt, he had little to fear from them (see 2 Kings 23:34-35).

His wickedness is depicted figuratively in Ezek. 19:5-7. He too, like his deposed predecessor, “became a young lion, and learned to catch the prey, and devoured men. And he knew their desolate palaces, and he laid waste their cities; and the land was desolate, and the fullness thereof, by the noise of his roaring.” His violence and rapacity are graphically represented here.

In the fifth year of his reign a fast was proclaimed among his subjects (the king seems to have had no part in it), and Baruch, Jeremiah’s assistant, read in the ears of all the people the message of God to them from a book. Informants told the king what was being done, and he ordered the book brought and read before him.

Now the king sat in the winterhouse in the ninth month: and there was a fire on the hearth burning before him. And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife [Hebrew: “scribe’s knife”], and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth. Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words (Jer. 36:22-24).

It was an act of daring impiety, especially for a Jew who was taught to look upon all sacred writing with greatest reverence. But Jehoiakim was fast hardening himself past all feeling, and no qualms of conscience are perceptible over his sacrilegious act. Jeremiah sent him a personal and verbal message, more awful than any king ever heard.

And thou shalt say to Jehoiakim king of Judah, Thus saith the Lord; Thou hast burned this roll, saying, Why hast thou written therein, saying, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast? Therefore thus saith the LORD of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity (29-31).

He also attempted to put Urijah the prophet to death because he prophesied against Jerusalem and the land. The prophet fled to Egypt, but Jehoiakim sent and fetched him, and “slew him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people” (Jer. 26:23). His bitter hatred of God and His truth vented itself even on the body of His slaughtered servant, denying it the right of burial among the sepulchers of the prophets. In just retribution God repaid him in kind for his murder and insult. “Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah: They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! [as in family mourning] they shall not lament for him, saying, Ah lord! or, Ah his glory! [public mourning] He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem” (Jer. 22:18-19). And so it happened to him: Nebuchadnezzar defeated and drove out of Asia Jehoiakim’s master, Necho (see 2 Kings 24:7). “In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years: then he turned and rebelled against him” (2 Kings 24:1). And though Nebuchadnezzar could not immediately punish him, his punishment came from another quarter. “The LORD sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servants the prophets.”

Scripture (historically) is silent regarding his end. 2 Chron. 36:6 states that Nebuchadnezzar “bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon.” It does not say he was taken there. He may have been released after promising subjection to his conqueror. But even if it could be proven that he was actually carried to Babylon, it would in no wise contradict what is recorded in 2 Kings 24:6 (“So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers”). He might easily have returned to Jerusalem, as other Jewish captives at a later date did. And though there is no historical record in Scripture concerning his death, this does not prove that the prophecies of Jeremiah concerning his end were not fulfilled to the letter. We do not really need the history of it, for prophecy in Scripture is only prewritten history—the advance sheets, we might say. It is enough to know what God had foretold concerning it; the fulfillment is certain. Josephus stated that Nebuchadnezzar finally came and slew Jehoiakim, “whom he commanded to be thrown before the walls, without any burial” (Antiquities 10.6.3). “So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers” simply expresses his death; it is a distinct expression in Scripture from “buried with his fathers,” as a comparison of 2 Kings 15:38 and 16:20 will readily show. So the king who denied the prophet’s body honorable burial was himself “buried with the burial of an ass.” He mutilated and burnt God’s book, and his body was in turn torn and burnt unburied in the scorching sun.

His wicked life was a sad contrast to that of his righteous father. Jeremiah asked, “Did not thy father eat and drink [lived plainly], and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the LORD” (Jer. 22:15-16). Necho changed his name, but could not change his nature.

“Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and his abominations which he did, and that which was found in him, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah: and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead” (2 Chron. 36:8).

His name, like that of his brother, is omitted from the royal genealogy of Matt. 1. “His uncleanness and iniquity” are mentioned in the Apocrypha (1 Esdras 1:42). During his reign (when Nebuchadnezzar took the kingdom) the times of the Gentiles began. And until they are fulfilled, Jerusalem “shall be trodden under foot,” even as it is this day.

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Jehoahaz

(or Shallum)

Jehovah-seized

2 Kings 23:30-34; 2 Chron. 36:1-4

Contemporary Prophets: Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah

The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem. Lamentations 4:12

The regular succession to the throne of Judah ceased with the lamented Josiah. Jehoahaz was not the eldest son of the late king. Johanan and Jehoiakim were both older than he. In Jer. 22:11 he is called, significantly, Shallum (“to whom it is requited”), and by this name he is registered in the royal Judean genealogy (1 Chron. 3:15). He was made king by popular choice: it was the preference of the multitude, not the appointment of God. “And his mother’s name was Hamutal [‘delight’], the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.” He and Zedekiah, the last of Judah’s nineteen kings, were born of the same mother (2 Kings 24:18). He was about nine years older than his brother Zedekiah, though in 1 Chron. 3:15 his name is placed last, probably because of his much shorter reign.

He is likened in Ezek. 19:1-4 to “a young lion, and it learned to catch the prey; it devoured men.” This is the only hint given us as to the character of his sin. Josephus said of him that he was “an impious man, and impure in his course of life” (Antiquities 10.5.2). He was probably guilty of deeds of violence. His name is omitted from among those of our Lord’s ancestors in Matt. 1. Necho, it is said, made Jehoahaz’ half brother Eliakim “king in the room of Josiah his father,” which may imply that God did not recognize Jehoahaz, the people’s choice, as being in a true sense the successor.

“And the king of Egypt put him down at Jerusalem, and condemned the land in a hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold” (2 Chron. 36:3). It is elsewhere stated that he was taken to Riblah in the land of Hamath and bound, which in no wise contradicts what is quoted above. History informs us that after his victory at Megiddo, Necho intended to march to the Euphrates. But hearing of Jehoahaz’ elevation to the throne by popular acclamation, he sent a division of his army to Jerusalem, which deposed him and brought him captive to Riblah, where Necho and his chief forces were. This he did, it is said, because he believed Jehoahaz leaned toward an alliance with Assyria against him.

“And the king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and turned his name to Jehoiakim.

And Necho took Jehoahaz his brother, and carried him to Egypt.” He never returned from Egypt. Jehoahaz (“Jehovah-seized”) had seized the throne that was not his by right, and in turn he was seized by Necho, God’s instrument. He was carried to a land of exile, there to find a grave far from the sepulchers of his fathers.

He was anointed at his coronation, but no extraordinary ceremony could make up for his defective title to the crown (2 Kings 23:30). Men have similar thoughts today. They feel they have no real title to a throne in Heaven with Christ, so they increase forms and elaborate ceremonies. Hence the rapid growth of ritualism. “And the end is not yet.”

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Amon

Training, or skilled

2 Kings 21:19-26; 2 Chron. 33:21-25

Is it fit to say to a king, Thou art wicked? and to princes, Ye are ungodly? Job 34:18

Amon was probably born after his father’s return from Babylon.

Amon was twenty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. And his mother’s name was Meshullemeth, the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh did. And he walked in all the way that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them: And he forsook the LORD God of his fathers, and walked not in the way of the LORD (2 Kings 21:19-22).

He must have had a godly training, as the expression, “he forsook the LORD,” would seem to indicate that he had in his earlier days professed to worship Him. His mother’s name, Meshullemeth (“reconciliation” or “to be safe”), might have reference to his having been born subsequently to her husband’s reconciliation to the Lord, or his safe return from his Babylonian captivity. This would increase Amon’s responsibility—having had such advantages—and consequently enhance his guilt. Her father’s name, Haruz (“earnest”) of Jotbah (“pleasantness”), leads to the supposition that Amon’s mother, like his grandmother, must have been a good woman. But all good women do not always prove to be good mothers. It would be no strange or unusual thing if some of these Hebrew heirs apparent to the throne were permitted to do pretty much as they pleased, and in this way prepared to act the part of self-willed transgressors and rebels against God when the time came for them to take the kingdom. For “a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame” (Prov. 29:15).

There is not one bright spot in this king’s character to relieve the darkness of his life’s brief record. The chronicler wrote that he “humbled not himself before the LORD, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more” (or “multiplied trespass”). So odious did he make himself, even to the backslidden people, that they rid themselves of his unwelcome presence by the hands of assassins. “And his servants conspired against him, and slew him in his own house.” His subjects must have been reduced to desperate straits when they would thus violate God’s expressed prohibition— “Touch not mine anointed” (1 Chron. 16:22). Jeremiah and Zephaniah must have been youths about this time, and the former’s reluctance to take up the prophetic work to which he was called can well be understood when the true condition of affairs in Judah at that time is known. Both could see quite plainly what they might expect if faithful to their trust.

“But the people of the land slew all them that had conspired against king Amon; and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead” (33:25). The center of light and privilege is not always the seat of righteousness and godly sincerity, but often the reverse is true. The unsophisticated citizens of the land are frequently more loyal and upright than the imperious citizens of the palace.

The record of the reign of Amon is most briefly told—in only sixteen verses. And well it should be so. There is enough for our admonition, after the lessons given in his father’s history.

“And he was buried in his sepulcher in the garden of Uzza: and Josiah his son reigned in his stead.” Uzza means “strength”; death, the strong one, overcame this king of Judah, whose name meant “trained,” or “skilled.” Indeed Amon was skilled in wickedness, and was assassinated in

his twenty-fourth year.

“He passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found” (Psa. 37:36).

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Manasseh

Forgetting

2 Kings 21:1-18; 2 Chron. 33:1-20

Contemporary Prophets: Joel

The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. Psalm. 105:20

“Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem: but did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.” His mother’s name was Hephzibah (“my delight is in her,” see Isa. 62:4). She may have been a pious woman, and so her name may have been appropriate to her character. But if so, she had very little influence over her son—unlike the Eunice (“victorious”) of a later day, and many more besides.

Extremes meet here, for Manasseh, one of the worst and most cruel of kings that ever reigned, succeeded Hezekiah, of whom it was said, “After him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him” (2 Kings 18:5). Had this good king been able to foresee the wickedness of his unworthy son, he would doubtless have had no desire to recover from his sickness. Better by far to die childless than beget a son such as Manasseh proved to be. We must not presume to judge God’s honored servant, but it does appear as if Hezekiah would have done better to have meekly submitted to God’s will in his sickness. He could surely have left the matter of his successor with God, as he knew the covenant God had made with David. He may thus have spared the nation that he loved the tears and blood (to say nothing of God’s honor in the matter) that his desired descendant brought to them. Nothing honorable is recorded to have been done by Hezekiah after his recovery from his sickness. True, his healing was in answer to prayer, and a wonderful miracle was done in pledge of it. But so it was with Israel when they requested flesh to eat. “[God] gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul” (Psa. 106:15).A miracle was performed for them too (that of the quails), in order that they might have what they persisted in desiring. But there was only One who ever and always said, “Not my will, but thine, be done” (compare Psa. 21:4).

Manasseh quickly, it would seem, undid the work of his father’s early reign.

For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down, and he reared up altars for Baalim, and made groves, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. Also he built altars [for idolatry] in the house of the LORD, whereof the LORD had said, In Jerusalem shall my name be forever. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom: also he observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. And he set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God (2 Chron. 33:3-7).

It is a terrible portrait to paint of any man; but of a king of Judah, and a son of Hezekiah the good, it seems almost incredible. It makes the heart almost sick, to read the list of his abominations. He “made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel.” It was the worst of all corruptions—the corruption of the best. The higher the fall, the deeper the plunge. Sadly, in the Corinthian church too there was such sin as was “not so much as named among the Gentiles” (1 Cor. 5:1). Solomon wrote, “I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly” (Prov. 5:14). Language like this may sound strange to some—strangely sad, indeed, that such things can be said of God’s church. And what must the surrounding nations have thought of these annals of Judah—“worse than the heathen”? Of Manasseh and Judah it could then truly be said, as the apostle through the Spirit declared seven hundred years later, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you.”

“And the LORD spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken.” He spoke, as usual, through His prophets (2 Kings 21:10).This was their message:

Because Manasseh king of Judah hath done these abominations, and hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did [how terrible], which were before him, and hath made Judah also to sin with his idols: Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab: and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down. And I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies; Because they have done that which was evil in my sight, and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt, even unto this day (2 Kings 21:11-15).

It was an appalling, though absolutely just, indictment and should have brought the nation to repentance. Its threats, if nothing more, should have startled them from their sins. They knew the fate of Samaria—already fallen; and Jerusalem should receive like punishment. The house of Ahab had perished, and their kings would not escape a similar judgment. But the message was evidently lost on them; they proved themselves a more perverse people than the men of Nineveh who one hundred and fifty years before had repented at the preaching of Jonah.

What prophets God used at this time is not known. Possibly Isaiah was still alive, though very aged, and the tradition may be true that says he “was sawn asunder” with a wooden saw. Josephus does not mention this, though he does say that Manasseh “barbarously slew all the righteous men that were among the Hebrews. Nor would he spare the prophets, for he every day slew some of them, till Jerusalem was overflown with blood” (Antiquities 10.3.1). “Moreover,” said the inspired historian, “Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the LORD” (2 Kings 21:16).Wicked as his grandfather Ahaz had been, he did not, so far as we know, redden his hands with blood like this human monster Manasseh. But the reaping came at last, though harvest time was late, perhaps because of the longsuffering patience of God. “Wherefore the

LORD brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon" (2 Chron. 33:11). They refused to hear the word, so they were compelled to feel the rod. As befitted this monster of evil, Manasseh was brought in chains to Babylon.

Scripture gives no hint as to the time of this event, but it appears from Assyrian monuments to have been somewhere about the middle of his reign. It was the old and often demonstrated law of retribution working itself out: the occasion of the sin becoming the instrument of its punishment. Hezekiah sinned in the "matter of the ambassadors" from Babylon, and it is to Babylon that his son Manasseh goes as a captive.

"And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, And prayed unto him: and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that [Jehovah] he was God" (12-13). "He humbled himself greatly," as well he might, for his guilt indeed was very great. No doubt when he was in affliction he admitted the justice of his punishment. "I know, O LORD," he could say, "that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (Psa. 119:75).

We have no details of Manasseh's sufferings in his Babylonian captivity. God takes no pleasure in the punishment of His people, and very tenderly covers with the veil of silence all that can be profitably kept back. He heard Manasseh's bitter cry of repentance and entreaty, and restored him to his kingdom. This was grace indeed—grace abounding.

On his return to Jerusalem he began to build and fortify, and put military commanders in all the fenced cities. But, what was better, "he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the LORD, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. And he repaired the altar of the LORD, and sacrificed thereon peace offerings and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel" (2 Chron. 33:15-16). He undertook to undo, as far as possible, his former works of wickedness. His name Manasseh means "forgetting"; and Josephus wrote: "When he was come to Jerusalem, he endeavored, if it were possible, to cast out of his memory those his former sins against God, of which he now repented, and to apply himself to a very religious life" (Antiquities 10.3.2). But the innocent lives that he had taken he could never restore, nor could he ever wholly undo the evil of his former course. So great had been his iniquity, and that of Judah with him, that God never forgave it nationally (2 Kings 23:26; 24:4; Jer. 15:4). Personally, through his confession and humiliation before God, Manasseh was forgiven. It is good to see the great change in his after life, and that he did not forget his indebtedness to God for His matchless grace to him, as his thank offerings on the restored altar indicate. He was the Old Testament chief of sinners, a type of the sinner in whom God shows forth all longsuffering, to any who would turn to Him in penitence and faith. Newton's lines well express the spirit of his grateful thoughts:

"And Manasseh slept with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzza: and Amon his son reigned in his stead" (2 Kings 21:18). His body found no place of rest among the kings, showing how the consequences of sin follow men even to the grave.

Kings... on the throne; yea, he doth establish them forever, and they are exalted. And if they be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction; Then he showeth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity. If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures. But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge (Job 36:7-12).

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Joram (or Jehoram)

Exalted by Jehovah

2 Kings 1:17; 3:1-27; 6:8-7:20; 9:1-26

Contemporary Prophet: Elisha

The wicked are overthrown, and are not: but the house of the righteous shall stand. Prov. 12:7

"Now Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years. And he wrought evil in the sight of the Lord; but not like his father, and like his mother"—in contrast with his late brother Ahaziah, see 1 Kings 22:52— "for he put away the image of Baal that his father had made. Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom" (2 Kings 3:1-3).There is no discrepancy between "the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat," and "the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat" (2 Kings 1:17). Jehoshaphat made his son joint-king a number of years before his death, (see 2 Kings 8:16) which readily accounts for the seeming contradictions in the above noted passages.

Moab had been tributary to Israel ever since their subjugation by David, more than two hundred years before (see 2 Sam. 8:2). On the division of the kingdom, they appear to have paid their accustomed tribute to Jeroboam, as his kingdom embraced the two and a half tribes east of Jordan, whose territory extended to the kingdom of Moab. "And Mesha king of Moab was a sheep master, and rendered unto the king of Israel a hundred thousand lambs, and a hundred thousand rams, with the wool. But it came to pass, when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel" (2 Kings 3:4-5).The defeat of the allied forces of Israel and Judah at Ramoth-gilead, probably emboldened him to take this step. This revolt of Mesha is mentioned on the Moabite, or Dibon, stone (see also Isa. 16:1). The loss of this enormous annual income must have been keenly felt by Israel, and the attempt to secure its resumption occasioned this unhappy war in which Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, foolishly allied himself to Jehoram.

And king Jehoram went out of Samaria the same time, and numbered all Israel. And he went and sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, The king of Moab hath rebelled against me: wilt thou go with me against Moab to battle? And he said, I will go up: I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses.

This was a sadly compromising declaration to come from the lips of Jehoshaphat, a king of the house and lineage of David. But it was the result of his affinity with the house of Ahab by his son Jehoram's marriage to the infamous Athaliah. So not only do "evil communications corrupt good manners," but also that delicate sense of truthful consistency, so evidently lacking in Jehoshaphat here.

The king of Edom who allied with them was not a native Edomite, but a deputy (1 Kings 22:47) probably appointed by Jehoshaphat (2 Kings 8:20). He formed a party to the expedition in the capacity of a servant, rather than as an independent prince. “And they fetched a compass of seven days’ journey: and there was no water for the host and for the cattle that followed them. And the king of Israel said, Alas! that the Lord hath called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab.” When a man of God such as Jehoshaphat identifies himself with a man such as the king of Israel, distress must come upon them, that victory may be recognized as an act of God’s sovereign grace, and not a spark of honor left to the follower of Jeroboam’s calves.

“But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may inquire of the Lord by him?” Elisha is here, said one of the king of Israel’s servants. “And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the Lord is with him. So the king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, and the king of Edom went down to him.” Even wicked men will cry to God in the hour of their calamity, yet without change of heart. But Elisha had as little respect for or fear of Jehoram, as Elijah his master had had for his idolatrous predecessors.

And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay: for the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab. And Elisha said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee (2 Kings 3:13-14).

Then, as the minstrel played, “the hand of the Lord came upon him,” and he ordered the valley to be filled with ditches, saying, “Thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain: yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts. And this is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord: He will deliver the Moabites also into your hand.” And so, “It came to pass, in the morning, when the meat offering was offered, that, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water.”

It has been suggested that this sudden and abundant water supply was caused by heavy rains on the eastern mountains of Edom, so far away that no signs of the storm were visible to the invaders. In any case it was God’s doing, whatever the physical forces used by Him to bring it about. Faith never concerns itself with the scientific explanation of such occurrences. God could have created the water, had He so ordained. And “he giveth not account of any of his matters,” either to adoring, wondering faith, or critical, questioning unbelief (Job 33:13). A starving man need not concern himself as to how or where the food set before him was obtained by his benefactor. It is his to eat, and be thankful. And anyone who hears of this benevolence should not be occupied with questions concerning the manner or means by which the philanthropist was enabled to do the beggar this kindness. His business should be to admire and laud the spirit of selfless love and mercy that prompted the deed of generosity.

“And when all the Moabites heard that the kings were come up to fight against them, they gathered all that were able to put on armor, and upward, and stood in the border.” When the morning dawned they saw the water as the sun shone upon it in the ditches, and it appeared to them red as blood. “And they said, This is blood: the kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another; now therefore, Moab, to the spoil.” They probably supposed that the Edomites had turned mutinous, and in their effort to free themselves of Hebrew domination, had caused the mutual destruction of the confederate armies. But when they approached the Israelite camp, “The Israelites rose up and smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them.” Their defeat was thorough, crushing, and unexpected. Israel seems now to have exceeded in unmerciful pursuit and pressure on the king of Moab, who in desperation “took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall. And there was great indignation against Israel: and they departed from him, and returned to their own land.”

This was Jehoshaphat’s second act of affinity with the ungodly, and like the first, it ended in failure, or was entirely barren of results (2 Chron. 18). If even sinners wish success in their undertakings they should be careful not to admit into their partnership God’s children, for God’s hand may be on His children for discipline, and ill fortune will attend them. Neither Ahab, nor Jehoram gained anything by having the godly Jehoshaphat as their ally—so jealous is God of His people’s associations.

How strange, yet sadly true, that the history of a country is largely the history of its wars. This maxim is true, not only of the land of Israel, but of its kings especially. Omit the records of their warfare and there would be little to say of any of them. How it all tells of man’s fall and ruin, and of God’s righteous government.

The second important incident recorded of Jehoram’s life is in connection with the invasion of his territory by the king of Syria.

Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp. And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down. And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice (2 Kings 6:8-10).

The prophet seems to look upon Jehoram here with somewhat less disfavor than when on the expedition against the Moabites (see also 2 Kings 3:13). He seems to have been pursued by the king of Syria, and there may have been some change in his conduct too, which Elisha would be quick to notice and encourage in every possible way-so gracious is God in His governmental dealings with the sons of men.

On learning how Jehoram obtained the information by which he was enabled to repeatedly escape the ambushments set for him, the king of Syria sent to apprehend the revealer of his military secrets. In answer to the prophet’s prayer, the Lord blinded the Syrians, and the man they were bent on arresting led them into the very midst of their enemy’s capital. “And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite them? shall I smite them?” But, in New Testament spirit, he answered,

Thou shalt not smite them; wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master. And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master (2 Kings 6:22-23).

The Syrians had heard before that the kings of Israel were merciful kings (1 Kings 20:31); they were now given a demonstration of the mercy of Israel’s God through His prophet’s intervention. And it was not without some effect, for we read, “So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.” Such is the power of grace, even over hardened, heathen soldiers.

“And it came to pass after this, that Ben-hadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria.” This does not in any way contradict what is stated in the preceding verse (2 Kings 6:23-24). Josephus wrote, “So he [Ben-hadad] determined to make no more secret attempts upon the king of Israel” (Antiquities 9.4.4). He afterward made open war upon him, by legitimate methods; no more by marauding bodies and ambushments.

Sadly, Israel’s heart was so hardened that in the famine accompanying the siege, instead of turning to Jehovah, some of the inhabitants in their terrible extremity turned to the horrible deed of eating even their own offspring! (see Lev. 26:26-29; Deut. 28:52-53; which was finally fulfilled under the Romans). “And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, saying, Help, my lord, O king. And he said, If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barn floor, or out of the winepress? And the king said unto her, What aileth thee?” (2 Kings 6:26-28) And then he was told the terrible tale of women deliberately agreeing to boil and eat their own children!

And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes; and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh. Then he said, God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day.

He had sackcloth on his flesh, but murder in his heart. What power of Satan over man’s heart and mind is revealed in this! The heart of the king rose in bitter passion against God, and His prophet would serve to vent the rage of his unrepentant, unsubdued heart. It is not the only occasion in history where rulers have blamed God for national calamities. How often men’s hearts rise against God, rather than humble themselves in repentance, under the pains of what they cannot change or overcome (see Rev. 16:10-11).

The king therefore sent an executioner to carry out his hasty threat. His motive in following after his executioner is not clear. Was it to see the accomplishment of his murderous design, or regret at his reckless order?

But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him; and the king sent a man from before him: but ere the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away my head? Look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door: is not the sound of his master’s feet behind him? And while he yet talked with them, behold, the messenger came down unto him: and he [the king] said, Behold, this evil is of the Lord, what [why, N.TR.] should I wait for the Lord any longer? (2 Kings 6:32-33)

He had professedly been waiting on the God of Elisha, and now when deliverance seemed far off, he throws all faith away, as if to say, It is useless to look to the Lord for deliverance; and the unbelief and passion of his heart break out.

But human extremity is the divine opportunity. When the unbelieving king broke out in fretful despair, the faith of God’s prophet shined out, proclaiming full relief and abundance on the morrow. “Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord, Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria” (7:1). And as the man of God foretold, so it came to pass. A miraculous noise from the Lord frightened the besieging army, supposing it to be a mighty host’s arrival.

For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life (6-7).

Lepers, in the night brought the welcome news to the king, who delayed the deliverance by his unbelief, sending as far as the Jordan-a score of miles away-for proof of the report. Thus was Samaria relieved.

As for Syria, the dynasty of the first two Ben-hadads was soon after ended with the strangling of the king on his sickbed by his prime minister Hazael, who reigned in his stead (2 Kings 8:15). News of this revolution probably encouraged Jehoram to attempt the recovery of Ramothgilead, which his father, fourteen years before, had attacked in vain, with fatal consequences to himself. “And he [Jehoram, king of Judah] went with Joram the son of Ahab to the war against Hazael king of Syria in Ramoth-gilead; and the Syrians wounded Joram. And king Joram went back to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him at Ramah [or Ramoth], when he fought against Hazael king of Syria” (28-29).

He was slain shortly after by Jehu his commander-in-chief. We will read more of this in the chapter of that king’s life (see JEHU; also JEHORAM in Kings of Judah). The dynasty of Omri (the most powerful of the nine that ruled over Israel) ended with Joram. His character was neither strong, nor very marked in anything. He appears to have had leanings toward the worship of Jehovah, but as a patron rather than in heart-subjection to Him as the one true God of Heaven and earth. He evidently considered Elisha’s miracles as matters of speculation, in idle curiosity inquiring of the prophet’s disgraced servant Gehazi. “And the king talked with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done.” These marvelous signs of Jehovah were to him merely material for entertainment, as the miracles of Elisha’s great antitype (John the Baptist) were to Herod (see Mark 6:14, 20; Luke 9:9; 23:8). He counseled Jehoram king of Judah to his destruction (2 Chron. 22:4-5). Such was his unpopularity with his subjects that Jehu had little difficulty in effecting a revolution, and usurping his throne.

He appears to have been, in spiritual matters, one of those undecided, neutral characters who puzzle most observers, and who never seem to know themselves just where they stand or belong. He put away the Baal statue made by his father Ahab, but never became a real believer in Jehovah. The reading of the inspired record of his life leaves the impression on one’s mind that he was, in all matters of faith, both skeptical and superstitious. God, who knew him and his ways perfectly, has caused it to be recorded of him, “He wrought evil in the sight of the Lord.” As such, we and all posterity know him. And as such he will be revealed in the coming day, when great and small shall stand before the throne to be judged, “every man, according to his works.”

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Hoshea

Deliverer

2 Kings 15:30; 17:1-6

Scornful men bring a city into a snare: but wise men turn away wrath. Prov. 29:8

“In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah began Hoshea the son of Elah to reign in Samaria over Israel nine years.” He was the last of the nineteen kings who ruled (or, rather, misruled) Israel. A period of at least eight years (see HEZEKIAH in Kings of Judah) occurred between the murder of Pekah, Hoshea’s predecessor, and his actual assumption of the throne. Why this kingless interval we have no means of knowing, nor how the time was occupied. Josephus, even if we could always trust him, gives us no help here (the usual way of rewriters or would-be improvers of Scripture history), for he passed the subject over in silence. It was probably a period of anarchy in the land, when Hosea’s position was disputed.

But God’s Word has chronicled Hoshea’s wickedness thus: “And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him.” There is nothing in that sentence that could be construed to Hoshea’s credit, for the Assyrian plunderers had in all probability removed and carried away the golden calves of Dan and Bethel (see Hos. 10:5-8). If he did not worship them, or other abominations, it was not because he abhorred idols.

But his evil doings, whatever their character, speedily brought the Assyrian—“the rod of God’s anger”—upon him and his wicked subjects. “Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant, and gave him presents.” He who conspired against his weaker Israelite master attempted the same (to his sorrow) with this powerful Gentile lord. “And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea: for he had sent messengers to so King of Egypt, and brought no present to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year: therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison.”

The siege of Samaria occurred before Hoshea’s imprisonment, even though recorded after. “Hoshea’s imprisonment was not before the capture of Samaria, but the sacred writer first records the eventual fate of Hoshea himself, then details the invasion as it affected Samaria and Israel” (Fausset).

Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes (2 Kings 17:5-6).

This siege and capture of Samaria are recorded on the monuments of Assyria just as they are narrated in 2 Kings 17. What finally became of Hoshea is not revealed, unless he is the king meant in the prophet’s poetic allusion, “As for Samaria, her king is cut off as the foam upon the water” (Hos. 10:7). His name means “deliverer,” and may have a prophetic significance. It serves as a gracious reminder to the now long scattered nation, of that great Deliverer who will “come out of Zion and turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” And then, “all Israel shall be saved” (Rom. 11:26).

In 2 Kings 17:7-23 we are given an instructive and touching review of Israel’s downward course. It has been truly observed that the most dismal picture of Old Testament history is that of the kingdom of Israel. Of the nine distinct dynasties that successively ruled the dissevered tribes, three ended with the total extermination of the reigning family. The kingdom lasted for a period of about 250 years, and the inspired records of those eventful two-and-a-half centuries of Israel’s kings and people furnish us with little more than repeated and fearful exhibitions of lawlessness and evil. Out of the nineteen kings that ruled Israel from the great division to the deportation of the people to the land of Assyria, only seven died natural deaths (Baasha, Omri, Jehu, Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam II, and Menahem); seven were assassinated (Nadab, Elah, Joram, Zachariah, Shallum, Pekaiah, and Pekah); one committed suicide (Zimri); one died of wounds received in battle (Ahab); one was “struck” by the judgment of God (Jeroboam); one died of injuries received from a fall (Ahaziah); and the other, and last (Hoshea), apparently was “cut off as foam upon the water.” To this meaningful array of facts must be added two prolonged periods of anarchy, when there was no king in Israel, every man doing, in all likelihood, “that which was right in his own eyes.”

The kingdom of Judah continued for more than a century and a quarter after the kingdom of Israel had ceased to exist, making its history fully one-third longer than that of the ten tribes. Then it too, like its sister-kingdom, fell into disintegration and decay, and was given up to the first universal empire under the renowned Nebuchadnezzar (see 2 Kings 25, and 2 Chron. 36:15-23). This world monarchy began the “times of the Gentiles,” during which “the most High ruleth [over] the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will” (Dan. 4:25)—setting up over it, at times, even the basest of men (as Belshazzar, the last Darius, Alexander, Nero, etc.). Since that day empire has superseded empire, dynasty has supplanted dynasty, and king succeeded king, as God has said, “I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him” (Ezek. 21:27).We hope His coming will be very soon, and then the eye of weeping, waiting Israel “shall see the King in His beauty.”

But before this, “the willful king,” the “profane, wicked prince of Israel” (the antichrist) must come. And from his unworthy head shall be removed the crown (see Ezek. 21:25-26), to be placed, with many others, on the once thorn-crowned brow of Him who is the King of kings and Lord of lords. That will be our highest joy and glory, to see Him, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ honored and declared by all, as God’s “firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth” (Psa. 89:27).

The Ruler over men shall be just,

Ruling in the fear of God;

And He shall be as the light of the morning,

Like the rising of the sun,

A morning without clouds,

When, from the sunshine after rain,

The green grass springeth from the earth.

For this is all my salvation, And every desire.

(2 Sam. 23:3-5, JND).

“Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Pekah

Watch

2 Kings 15:27-31

Contemporary Prophet: Oded

As righteousness tendeth to life: so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death. Prov. 11:19

“In the two and fiftieth year of Azariah [Uzziah] king of Judah, Pekah the son of Remaliah began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned twenty years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.” How painfully this oft-recurring testimony, like a sad refrain, falls on the ear! But this is the last time. Under Hoshea, Pekah’s slayer and successor, God made “to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel” (Hos. 1:4). And Hoshea, though he did evil, did it “not as the kings of Israel that were before him” (2 Kings 17:2).

“In the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abel-beth-maachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria.” This occurred after Pekah’s unprovoked and cowardly attack on Jerusalem, together with Rezin king of Damascus (see AHAZ in Kings of Judah).And the king of Assyria’s invasion and devastation of his land was his just reward for his fierce anger and evil counsel against the house of David, which he sought to overthrow by conspiracy and revolution (see Isa. 7:4-6).

Pekah slew one hundred thousand Jews in one day (2 Chron. 28:5-6); and God requited him in kind. For as he had so treacherously shed man’s blood, by man was his blood also treacherously shed. “And Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and smote him, and slew him, and reigned in his stead, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah.”

Josephus wrote that Hoshea was a friend of Pekah’s (Antiquities 9.13.1). In his death the prophecy of Isa. 7:16 was fulfilled. His name, meaning “watch,” is from a root, “to open” (as the eyes); figuratively, to “be observant” (Strong). But watch as he might, his very friend in whom he trusted became, in the ordering of God, his slayer; so impossible is it for the wicked to escape their merited retribution from the hand of Him who has said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay” (read Amos 9:1-5).

“And the rest of the acts of Pekah, and all that he did, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.”

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Pekahiah

Jah has observed

2 Kings 15:23-26

The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them: but transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness. Prov. 11:5

“In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekahiah the son of Menahem began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned two years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.” Azariah (Uzziah), King of Judah, during his long reign of more than half a century, saw the death of five of Israel’s kings, three of whom were assassinated, in addition to a period of anarchy lasting at least eleven years. This marked contrast between the two kingdoms is what the prophet probably referred to when he wrote, “Ephraim encompasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit, but Judah yet walketh with God [El], and with the holy things of truth” (Hos. 11:12, N.TR.). This does not mean that all Judah’s ways pleased the Lord, but that unlike apostate Israel, Judah maintained the truth of Jehovah as revealed in the law and symbolized in the temple’s worship and service.

“But Pekah the son of Remaliah, a captain of his, conspired against him, and smote him in Samaria, in the palace of the king’s house, with Argob and Arieh, and with him fifty men of the Gileadites: and he killed him, and reigned in his room.” Pekahiah was assassinated by his captain (shalish, aide-de-camp, probably; “the general of his house,” Josephus says) Pekah, with two of his followers, and a company of fifty Gileadites. Gilead was a direct descendant of Manasseh, oldest son of Joseph, and head of a large, powerful family, to whom Moses gave the conquered territory east of Jordan called Gilead (see Num. 32:39-41; Deut. 3:13; and Judg. 12:4). These Gileadites appear to have been a rough, wild class, a kind of Hebrew highlanders, and ready in Pekahiah’s day for any and all manner of villainy. See Hos. 6:8. They slew the king in his very palace (“with his friends at a feast;” Josephus Antiquities 9.11.1), so bold were they. Pekahiah means “Jah has observed” and implies that God had witnessed the murder of Shallum by Pekahiah’s father Mena-hem, and had avenged that murder in the death of his son (2 Chron. 24:22). His name, like his father’s and grandfather’s, does not occur anywhere else in Scripture.

“And the rest of the acts of Pekahiah, and all that he did, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.” His death ended the seventh dynasty of the Israelitish kings.

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Menahem

Comforter

2 Kings 15:16-22

By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked. Prov. 11:11

Josephus asserted that Menahem was general of the Israelite forces. His coming up from Tirzah to slay Shallum, and afterward starting from Tirzah (where the main army was posted) on his expedition of slaughter against Tiphsah, implies as much. “Then Menahem smote Tiphsah, and all that were therein, and the coasts thereof from Tirzah: because they opened not to him, therefore he smote it; and all the women therein that were with child he ripped up.” Tiphsah was originally one of Solomon’s northeastern border cities, on the Euphrates (1 Kings 4:24). It was doubtless recovered to Israel under Jeroboam II, and was probably in revolt when so cruelly attacked by the war-king Menahem. “Situated on the western bank of the Euphrates, on the great trade road from Egypt, Syria, and Phenicia to Mesopotamia, it was important for Menahem to rescue it” (Fausset). He, in all likelihood, expected by his brutal treatment of the Tiphsahites to strike terror to all who were likely to oppose his tenure of the crown.

In the nine and thirtieth year of Azariah king of Judah began Menahem the son of Gadi to reign over Israel, and reigned ten years in Samaria. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord: he departed not all his days from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. And Pul the king of Assyria came against the land: and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to confirm the kingdom in his hand. And Menahem exacted the money of Israel, even of all the mighty men of wealth, of each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and stayed not there in the land (2 Kings 15:17-20).

This is the first mention of the dreaded “Assyrian” in Scripture. Assyriologists are not perfectly agreed as to just who this Pul of Scripture was. The name (that form of it, at least) is not found on any of the Assyrian monuments. A Phulukh is mentioned in the Nimrud inscription, with whom some would identify him. Berosus mentioned a Chaldean king named Pul, who reigned at just this time, and where the wise cannot among themselves agree we must not venture even to put forth an opinion. Instead we pass on to that concerning which there can be no doubt—his invasion of the land, and the enormous price paid by Menahem for peace. Some suppose that Pul regarded Menahem’s reduction of Tiphsah as an attack on his territory; hence his march against his kingdom. But it is more probable that it was a mere plundering incursion, as most of these ancient military expeditions were, especially those of Assyria. The burden of the levy fell on the rich, which needs not excite much sympathy when we learn from the prophets Amos and Micah how their riches were obtained (see Amos 4:1; 5:11-12; 8:4-6; Mic. 2:2; 6:10-12).

“And the rest of the acts of Menahem, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And Menahem slept with his fathers; and Pekahiah his son reigned in his stead.” Though he probably reigned as a military dictator merely, he evidently died in peace, as the expression “slept with his fathers” implies. The expression “his fathers” implies too that he was an Israelite, though his name Menahem does not sound like Hebrew. It is found nowhere else in Scripture, nor is that of his father (Gadi, “fortunate”)-a peculiar and somewhat remarkable, if not significant, circumstance. A competent and spiritually-minded Semitic philologist would, we believe, find an ample and productive field for original research here, as well as in many other portions of Old Testament Scripture, especially the opening chapters of 1 Chronicles.

Menahem’s name appears on the monuments of Tiglathpileser, though it is thought by some, for various reasons, that the Assyrian chroniclers confused the name of Menahem with that of Pekah—his son’s slayer. But this, like everything of merely human origin, is uncertain. Only in divinely inspired Scripture have we absolute exactitude and certainty; for He who was the Truth declared, “the Scripture cannot be broken.” Hence they “are most surely believed among us” (Luke 1:1).

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Shallum

Requital

2 Kings 15:13-15

Contemporary Prophets: Amos (?)

An evil man seeketh only rebellion: therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him. Prov. 17:11

“Shallum the son of Jabesh began to reign in the nine and thirtieth year of Uzziah king of Judah; and he reigned a full month in Samaria. For Menahem the son of Gadi went up from Tirzah, and came to Samaria, and smote Shallum the son of Jabesh in Samaria, and slew him, and reigned in his stead.” This assassin was not allowed to live long in his ill-gotten power—only for a brief four weeks—and then met the just reward of his crime. His name (a very common one in Israel) means “recompense” or “retribution”; as he requited his predecessor, so did Menahem his successor recompense him. It is the old principle of governmental just retribution exemplified.

This assassination of two rulers, Zachariah and Shallum, within the space of half a year, speaks loudly of the state of anarchy prevailing in the kingdom at the time. It was, as the prophet testified, “blood toucheth blood” (Hos. 4:2). The great prosperity and expansion under Jeroboam II appears to have corrupted the people and caused them to give free rein to their evil desires and violence (see Hos. 4:7).

Those in authority, instead of checking this spirit of lawlessness, found pleasure in it. “They make the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies” (Hos. 7:3). Excessive dissipation marked the conduct of these princes under this monarchy: “In the day of our king, the princes made themselves sick with the heat of wine” (Hos. 7:5, N.TR.). The demoralized condition of public affairs can scarcely be wondered at, when the king himself encouraged the disdain of the lawless: “He stretched out his hand to scorners.” Disintegration and bloodshed followed as a natural consequence. Out of the political chaos and disorder following the death of Jeroboam II, Israel’s most powerful king,

came the undesired Zachariah, and his murderer Shallum. So wickedness brings its own reward, whether it be in a nation, a family, or an individual.

And the rest of the acts of Shallum, and his conspiracy which he made, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Zachariah

Jah has remembered

2 Kings 15:8-12

Contemporary Prophet: Amos

Righteousness keepeth him that is upright in the way: but wickedness overthroweth the sinner. Prov. 13:6

There appears to be (from a comparison of dates) a period of about eleven years unaccounted for, between Jeroboam's death and the beginning of his son Zachariah's reign. This is not surprising when we see what quickly followed his accession to the throne.

In the thirty and eighth year of Azariah king of Judah did Zachariah the son of Jeroboam reign over Israel in Samaria six months. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as his fathers had done: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. And Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him, and smote him before the people, and slew him, and reigned in his stead.

Anarchy probably prevailed during that unrecorded time. Hosea, whose prophecy dates about this time (as regards Israel, see Hos. 1:1), alluded frequently to this season of lawlessness and revolution. See Hos. 7:7; 10:3, 7; 13:10—the last of these reads in the New Translation, "Where then is thy king?" The people were probably unwilling to have Zachariah succeed his father to the throne. He appears to have been quite unpopular with the mass of the nation, for Shallum slew him without fear "before the people." But God has said next to nothing as to this parenthetic period, and we dare not say more. To speculate here would be worse than folly, since God's wisdom has chosen to give us no record of it. Where no useful end is gained, He always hides from the gaze of the curious the sins and errors of His people.

The assassination of Zachariah ended the dynasty of Jehu, five generations in all, and extending over a period of more than a hundred years. But at last God avenged "the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu" (Hos. 1:4). God's eyes were on the sinful kingdom (Amos 9:8), and its sinful kings. And from the time of Jeroboam's death, declension set in, ending less than seventy years later in its final overthrow and dissolution. Prophetic ministry was from this time greatly increased. "Such is the way of our gracious God," an unknown writer said, "that when judgment is near to approach, then testimony is multiplied." The prophecies of Hosea and Amos abundantly testify as to how much God's word was needed in Israel.

And the rest of the acts of Zachariah, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. This was the word of the Lord, which he spake unto Jehu, saying, Thy sons shall sit upon the throne of Israel unto the fourth generation. And so it came to pass.

And thus was it written by the prophet, "At daybreak shall the king of Israel utterly be cut off" (Hos. 10:15, N.TR.).

Zachariah's name—"Jah has remembered"—was strikingly significant. God did not forget the wholesale slaughter of men—many of them perhaps better than their executioner. Though a century had passed, Jah remembered and made the inevitable "inquisition for blood" on the fifth and final member of the murderer's succession.

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Jotham

Jehovah-perfect

2 Kings 15:32-38; 2 Chron. 27

Contemporary Prophets: Isaiah, Micah, Hosea

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

"Jotham was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Jerushah, the daughter of Zadok" (2 Chron. 27:1). Jotham was regent over the kingdom after the judgment of God fell upon his father: "And Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land" (2 Chron. 26:21).This would indicate that Uzziah was guilty of his irreverent trespass in the very last part of his long reign, as Jotham was only a young man of twenty-five at his father's death, and he could not have been judging the people of the land many years before this. His mother's name jerushah ("possessed"), daughter of Zadok ("just"), would seem to imply that she belonged to the Lord, and was considered just before Him. She, like every true mother, would influence her son considerably in the formation of his character. So we read, "And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Uzziah did: howbeit he entered not into the temple of the LORD" (italics added). He avoided the folly of his headstrong father, and did not "rush in where angels fear to tread."

"And the people did yet corruptly" (27:2). The prophecies of Isaiah and Micah contain much detail of the manner of their wickedness, which was indeed great. It probably increased rapidly toward the close of Uzziah's reign, though from the beginning of his rule "the high places were not taken away: as yet the people did sacrifice and burnt incense on the high places" (2 Kings 14:4). True, the sacrifices and incense were offered to Jehovah, but Scripture said that Jerusalem was "the place where men ought to worship." This departure, though probably considered unimportant by many godly Israelites, paved the way for greater and more serious violations of the law. God's people are only safe

as they adhere carefully and closely to the very letter of the word of God. The slightest digressions are often the prelude of wide and grave departures from obedience to God's will as revealed in His Word. The beginning of sin is, like strife, "as when one letteth out water" (Prov. 17:14).

And "he built the high gate of the house of the LORD, and on the wall of Ophel he built much." The high gate led from the king's house to the temple (see 2 Chron. 23:20), and Jotham's building it (rebuilding, or repairing) is very significant. He wished free access from his own house to that of the Lord. He would strengthen the link between the two houses—keep his line of communication open (to use a military figure) with the source of his supplies of strength and wisdom. This is one of the secrets of his prosperity and power.

"Moreover he built cities in the mountains of Judah, and in the forests he built castles and towers." He built where most men would have thought it unnecessary, or too much trouble-in the mountains and forests. He neglected no part of his kingdom, but sought to strengthen and fortify it everywhere. And as a result, he prospered.

He fought also with the king of the Ammonites, and prevailed against them. And the children of Ammon gave him the same year a hundred talents of silver, and ten thousand measures of wheat, and ten thousand of barley. So much did the children of Ammon pay unto him, both the second year and the third. So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the LORD his God (27:5-6, italics added).

That high gate between the palace and the temple was better than a Chinese wall around his kingdom. All real prosperity and power is found in communion with God.

"Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all his wars, and his ways, lo, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah." "All his wars" implies that during his sixteen years' reign he was actively engaged in conflict with enemies, subduing some, like the Ammonites, and repelling the invasions of others (Rezin king of Syria, and Pekah king of Israel). His "ways" too were written. God's saints are called to walk, as well as to war. "I have fought a good fight," said Paul the apostle, "I have finished my course," he also added. This last was his "ways." Ours, like king Jotham's, "are written in the book." May we then take heed to our ways! Jotham is the only one of all the Hebrew kings, from Saul down, against whom God has nothing to record. In this his character is in beautiful accord with his name, "Jehovah-perfect." "All have sinned," God says. But in his public life, Jotham, like Daniel, was perfect or blameless. Daniel's enemies said, "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." Yet this same Daniel said, "I was... confessing my sin" (Dan. 6:5; 9:20). Man saw nothing to condemn: Daniel knew God's eye saw much. And, like the honest man that he was, he put it on record with his own hand that he had sins to be confessed to God.

"And Jotham slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David: and Ahaz his son reigned in his stead." Did Micah have Jotham's death in mind when he wrote, "The good man is perished out of the earth" (Mic. 7:2)? From what follows in that chapter, down to the seventh verse, it would appear so. The violence, fraud, bribery, treachery, and other forms of wickedness described in those verses, is just what prevailed after Jotham, under Ahaz' infamous rule. Jotham was indeed a godly man, and well might the righteous say on his death, "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth" or, "is gone."

The record of Jotham's reign is brief, but full of brightness. His memory, like that of all the just, is blessed (Prov. 10:7). He was the tenth of Judah's kings, and God always claims His tithe; in Jotham, the "Jehovah-perfect," it was found.

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Uzziah

(or Azariah)

Strength of Jehovah

2 Kings 15:1-7; 2 Chron. 26

Contemporary Prophets: Zechariah of 2 Chron. 26:5, Isaiah, Hosea, and Amos

He [the Lord] shall cut off the spirit of princes: he is terrible to the kings of the earth. Psalm 76:12

"Then all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king in the room of his father Amaziah. He built Eloth, and restored it to Judah, after that the king slept with his fathers" (2 Chron. 26:1-2). He is called Azariah ("helped by Jehovah") elsewhere; the names were so nearly equivalent in meaning as to be applied interchangeably to him. He seems to have come by the throne, not in the way of ordinary succession, but by the direct choice of the people. The princes had been destroyed by the Syrians toward the close of his grandfather Joash's reign (2 Chron. 24:23), leaving the people a free hand. "For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof," wrote Solomon, more than a century before. This weeding out was not altogether to be regretted and perhaps not entirely unnecessary. If the princes selfishly "seek their own" things, they are incapable of judging aright; while a needy, suffering people instinctively turn to a deliverer. Their choice here of Azariah was a good one, as the sequel proved.

His first recorded work, the building, enlargement, or fortification of Eloth (Elath), and its restoration to the crown of Judah, was an early pledge of the great industrial prosperity of his reign. It belonged to Edom, and was lost to Judah during the reign of Joram (2 Kings 8:20). It was a seaport on the Red Sea, near Ezion-geber (1 Kings 9:26), and must have made a most important market for the extensive commerce in his administration. Fifty years later it was taken by Rezin king of Syria, who expelled the Jews and occupied it permanently (see 2 Kings 16:6).

"Sixteen years old was Uzziah when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Jecoliah of Jerusalem." His was the longest continuous reign of any of the kings of Judah. Manasseh's reign of fifty-five years was interrupted by his deposition and captivity by the king of Babylon. His mother's name, "Jah will enable," might indicate that she had pious expectations of her son, by the help of God. And in this she would not be disappointed, for "he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah did"—that is, during the earlier portion of Amaziah's reign. "And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper." "Understanding in the visions of God" is

not equivalent to having prophetical visions from God. The Septuagint and other early manuscripts read, “who was (his) instructor in the fear of God,” which is probably the general sense of the expression. Nothing more is known of this prophet, but his record is on high, and the coming day will declare what else, whether of good or bad, was accomplished by him during his earthly life.

From city building for the peaceful purpose of commerce, Uzziah turns to retributive warfare. “And he went forth and warred against the Philistines, and brake down the wall of Gath, and the wall of Jabneh, and the wall of Ashdod, and built cities about [or, in the country of] Ashdod and among the Philistines. And God helped him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians that dwelt in Gur-baal, and the Mehunim.” Thus he avenged the Philistine invasion during the reign of Jehoram (2 Chron. 21:16-17), and punished their allies. In 2 Chron. 21 we read, “The LORD stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians.” This verse did not excuse them for their wrong-doing. They were the unconscious instruments used by God in the chastening of His people. Their motive was entirely of another kind, and after eighty years God meted out to them the punishment their attack on the land of Judah deserved. “God helped [Uzziah] against the Philistines, and against the Arabians.” This is an important principle which must be remembered in any study of God’s ways in government, with either men or nations (see Isa. 10:5-19).

“And the Ammonites gave gifts to Uzziah: and his name was spread abroad even to the entering in of Egypt; for he strengthened himself exceedingly.” He built towers in Jerusalem, and fortified them. He also “built towers in the desert” (the steppe-lands west of the Dead Sea), and cut out many cisterns; “for he had much cattle, both in the low country” (literally, “the Shepheleh,” the low hills between the mountains and the Mediterranean), “and in the plains” (east of the Dead Sea). His wealth seems to have been chiefly in stock and agriculture. He had “husbandmen also, and vinedressers in the mountains, and in Carmel: for he loved husbandry” He was an earnest and successful agriculturist. He probably gave special attention to the tillage of the soil because of the prophecies of Hosea and Amos (his contemporaries) concerning the scarcity about to come (see Hos. 2:9; 4:3; 9:2; Amos 1:2; 4:6-9; 5:16-19).

He also gave attention to military matters, and thoroughly organized his army “that made war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy.” He saw too that his army was thoroughly equipped, as we read:

And Uzziah prepared for them throughout all the host shields, and spears, and helmets, and [coats of mail], and bows, and slings to cast stones. And he made in Jerusalem engines invented by cunning men, to be upon the towers and upon the bulwarks, to shoot arrows and great stones withal. And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong (2 Chron. 26:14-15).

Nevertheless, what is man! After all this well-doing, Uzziah’s heart is lifted up with pride. Then came his act of sacrilege—the dark blot on the record of this otherwise blameless man’s life. “But”—alas, those buts in so many life records of God’s saints!—“when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense”—explicitly forbidden by the law (see Ex. 30:7-8; Num. 16:40;18:7).

And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the LORD, that were valiant men: and they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honor from the LORD God. Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, from beside the incense altar. And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the LORD had smitten him. And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several [separate] house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD (2 Chron. 26:17-21).

It was a fearful stroke from God. Death was the actual penalty enjoined by the law for his crime (Num. 18:7), and leprosy was really that—a living death, prolonged and intensified. “Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed,” was said of Miriam, who was smitten with a like judgment, and for a similar offense. God is holy, and must vindicate His word against every transgressor. He is no respecter of persons, and brings to light, sooner or later, every man’s work and purposes of heart—including those of His best servants (see Num. 12:10-12; 1 Tim. 5:24-25).

The driving motive in this audacious act of king Uzziah’s is not made known. It has been suggested that he wished, like the Egyptian kings, to combine in himself both the office of king and high priest, so appropriating to himself the religious as well as the civil power. But whatever the immediate impelling motive, we know the primary cause of his profane deed. It was pride, the original sin, that hideous parent-sin of all succeeding sins, whether among angels or among men (1 Tim. 3:6; Ezek. 28:2, 17). “He was marvelously helped till he was strong. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction” (italics added). “Strength of Jehovah” was the meaning of Uzziah’s name; and better would it have been for him had he realized that only in His strength is any really strong. “My strength,” says He who is the Almighty, “is made perfect in weakness.” “When I am weak, then am I strong,” wrote one who knew his own utter powerlessness and his Lord’s sufficient strength (2 Cor. 12:9-10). “Be strong in the LORD,” he cautioned his fellow weaklings. Uzziah prospered and because of his prosperity his foolish heart was lifted up with pride. In him was fulfilled his great ancestor’s proverbs, “The prosperity of fools shall destroy them,” and “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 1:32;16:18).

Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first and last, did Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, write. So Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the field of the burial which belonged to the kings; for they said, He is a leper: and Jotham his son reigned in his stead (2 Chron. 26:22-23).

They would not lay his leprous body in their “Westminster Abbey,” but buried him in a field (in earth, perhaps) adjoining the sepulchers of their kings. He died about the time of the founding of Rome. It was “in the year that king Uzziah died” that Isaiah began his full prophetic ministry (Isa. 6:1). The moral condition of the nation during the close of Uzziah’s reign is revealed in the first five chapters of Isaiah. He was also the historiographer of his reign. It is not known in just what year of Uzziah’s reign he was smitten with leprosy. Nor is it certain just when the great earthquake occurred (Amos 1:1; Zech. 14:5). From Amos 1:1, compared with other Scripture chronological references, it is quite certain that it occurred not later than seventeen years after Uzziah’s accession to the throne, and not when he was smitten with leprosy, as Josephus mistakenly affirmed.

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Jeroboam II

Whose people is many

2 Kings 14:23-29

Contemporary Prophets: Hosea, and Amos

The froward is abomination to the Lord: but his secret is with the righteous. Prov. 3:32

The reign of Jeroboam II was the longest and most prosperous of any of the reigns of the kings of Israel.

“In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel began to reign in Samaria, and reigned forty and one years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord...He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher.”

This was the beginning of the ministry of the sixteen prophets whose writings have been preserved to us. Jonah was the earliest of these probably, and appears to have been Elisha’s immediate successor. His prophecy referred to here, of the enlargement of Israel’s coast (border), must have been a very pleasant one to him-a much more welcome work than his commission toward the Ninevites. But God’s servants have no choice. They know the love of Christ and, constrained by that same love, it is their joy to tell it. But they also know the terror of the Lord, therefore they do their utmost to persuade and warn men of “the wrath to come.” It is not grace only that came by Jesus Christ, but grace and truth. And the truth must be made known to men, however unpleasant or unthankful the task. But if done as unto God, it can never be a disagreeable or unwelcome undertaking to the spirit, however painful or unpleasant to the flesh (see 1 Cor. 9:16-17).

“The increase of Israel’s territory under Jeroboam II was considerable; his prosperity in this way corresponding with his name—‘whose people is many.’ ‘The entering in of Hamath’ indicates that the long valley between Lebanon and Anti-lebanon was the point of entrance into the land of Israel for an invading army” (Fausset). “The sea of the plain” was the Dead Sea (Josh. 3:16), making the total distance of his kingdom from north to south almost two hundred miles. He was, no doubt, the deliverer promised under the unfortunate reign of Jehoahaz (2 Kings 13:5). “For the Lord saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter: for there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel. And the Lord said not that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven: but he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash” (2 Kings 14:26-27). This was not for any goodness that He saw in them or Jeroboam their king, but because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (2 Kings 13:23).

“Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, how he warred, and how he recovered Damascus, and Hamath, which belonged to Judah, for Israel, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?” Damascus and Hamath were both capitals of two once powerful kingdoms, and though once subjugated by David (1 Chron. 18:3-6), their recovery to Israel under Jeroboam, more than one hundred and fifty years after their revolt from Judah, speaks eloquently for the success and power of his armies against those hostile nations on his northern border. Hamath, called “the great” in Amos 6:2, was the principal city of upper Syria, and an important strategic point, commanding the whole valley of the Orontes leading to the countries on the south.

Israel was blessed with the ministries of both Hosea and Amos during Jeroboam’s reign. From their writings it will readily be seen that though there was political revival under his rule, there was no real moral or spiritual awakening among the people. Amos was considered a troubler to the peace of the kingdom. He was admonished by Amaziah the priest of Bethel to flee away to the land of Judah, “and there eat bread, and prophesy there,” as if God’s prophet were nothing more than a mere mercenary like himself. He also accused the prophet before the king of having conspired against his life. Jeroboam appears to have paid little or no attention to this charge, being perhaps too sensible a man to believe the accusation, knowing the jealous, self-seeking spirit of the chief priest of the nation (see Amos 7:7-17).

“And Jeroboam slept with his fathers, even with the kings of Israel; and Zachariah his son reigned in his stead.”

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Amaziah

Strength of Jah

2 Kings 14:1-20; 2 Chron. 25

Contemporary Prophets: Several unnamed (two in 2 Chron. 25)

A king ready to the battle. Job 15:24

“Amaziah was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. And his mother’s name was Jehoaddan [‘Jehovah-pleased] of Jerusalem.” He evidently reigned a year jointly with his father (compare 2 Kings 13:10; 14:1; 2 Chron. 24:1) during the latter’s last sickness, when the “great diseases” were upon him.

“And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, but not with a perfect heart” (2 Chron. 25:2). “Yet not like David his father,” it is said; “he did according to all things as Joash his father did” (2 Kings 14:3).This exemplifies the lack of heart devotedness in some of God’s children. He allowed the high places to remain, and the people sacrificed and burned incense on them.

Now it came to pass, when the kingdom was established to him, that he slew his servants that had killed the king his father. But he slew not their children, but did as it is written in the law, in the book of Moses, where the LORD commanded, saying, The fathers shall not die for the children, neither shall the children die for the fathers, but every man shall die for his own sin (2 Chron. 25:3-4).

He made a good beginning in thus adhering closely to the law (see Deut. 24:16). Happy would it have been for him and for his kingdom had he continued as he began. “As soon as the kingdom was confirmed in his hand” (2 Kings 14:5) appears to imply that the state affairs were somewhat unsettled at his father’s death. What follows confirms this thought. “Moreover Amaziah gathered Judah together, and made them captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, according to the houses of their fathers, throughout all Judah and Benjamin.” He began to reorganize the scattered army. “And he numbered them from twenty years old and above, and found them three hundred thousand choice men, able to go forth to war, that could handle spear and shield.”

An expedition against Edom was probably in his mind in this organization of his forces. And trusting the multitude of a host more than the Lord, “he hired also a hundred thousand mighty men of valor out of Israel for an hundred talents of silver.” But God does not want mercenaries in His battles—neither then, nor now. So “there came a man of God to him, saying, O king, let not the army of Israel go with thee; for the LORD is not with Israel, to wit, with all the children of Ephraim. But if thou wilt go [with them], do it, be strong for the battle: God shall make thee fall before the enemy: for,” he added, “God hath power to help, and to cast down” (2 Chron. 25:7-8). He may retain them if he wished, but he has the consequences set before him. God knew the corrupting influence this body of Ephraimites would have on the army of Judah. “Shouldest thou help the ungodly?” the prophet Jehu asked Jehoshaphat. In this case Amaziah reversed the order, and would have the ungodly help him. And, besides, the children of Ephraim were not particularly famous for their courage. “The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle,” was their inglorious record (Psa. 78:9). But Amaziah thinks of the advance wages already paid to these hireling warriors: “But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army [literally, troop or band] of Israel? And the man of God answered, The LORD is able to give thee much more than this” (9).This is a good exhortation for any child of God who may find himself in a position compromising the truth, and who cannot see his way out without serious financial loss. “The Lord is able to give thee much more than this”; and if He does not more than make it up in temporal things, He will repay it in what is infinitely better—in those spiritual things, which are eternal. “To obey is better than sacrifice,” anyway and always.

Amaziah considered the prophet’s advice and separated the mercenaries, and sent them home again. “Wherefore their anger was greatly kindled against Judah, and they returned home in great [fierce] anger.” This refusal of their assistance only revealed their real character. They had long ago turned away from Jehovah; what did they care now for His honor or the good of Judah? So they avenged their supposed insult by falling upon defenseless cities on Judah’s northern frontier. They plundered them, and mercilessly slaughtered three thousand of their own flesh and blood. Such men could not help in God’s army then; neither can men with selfish motives be helpful in Christ’s cause now.

“And Amaziah strengthened himself, and led forth his people, and went to the valley of salt [south of the Dead Sea], and smote of the children of Seir ten thousand. And other ten thousand left alive did the children of Judah carry away captive, and brought them unto the top of the rock, and cast them down from the top of the rock, that they all were broken in pieces” (2 Chron. 25:11-12).

This seemingly cruel treatment of conquered enemies is related without comment. We know nothing of the attendant circumstances, nor the cause of Judah’s invasion. They lived in the cold, hard age of law (“eye for eye, tooth for tooth, nail for nail”), and we must not measure their conduct by the standard we have received from Him who came not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. During the eighteenth century men were hung in enlightened “Christian” England for stealing sheep. Voltaire seems never to have condemned the English for it. Yet what government, for a like offense, would take a human life today? Amaziah’s army may have believed themselves justified in meting out such horrible punishment to the Edomites. But we neither judge nor excuse them for their terrible act. God has left it without comment. It was not God’s act, but Amaziah’s.

He “took Selah [or Petra, the rock, Edom’s capital] by war, and called the name of it Joktheel unto this day” (2 Kings 14:7). “It lay in a hollow, enclosed amidst cliffs, and accessible only by a ravine through which the river winds across its site” (Fausset). Joktheel means “the reward of God” so Amaziah seems to have looked at this captured city as God’s repayment for the one hundred silver talents lost on the worthless Ephraimites. And does not God ever repay His obedient people with abundant increase?

But success with Amaziah (as with most of us) puffed him up. Inflated with his subjugation of the Edomites, he impudently challenged the king of Israel to meet him in combat, saying, “Come, let us look one another in the face” (8). The offended Ephraimites had indeed wantonly wronged some of his subjects; yet for this the king of Israel was less responsible than Amaziah himself, who had hired them to enter his army. In Chronicles 25:17 we read that he “took advice” in challenging the king of Israel. Like his father Joash, he was led into disaster by the counsel of the ungodly. But it was of God, for the punishment of his idolatry. For, before this we read:

After that Amaziah was come from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the children of Seir, and set them up to be his gods, and bowed down himself before them, and burned incense unto them. Wherefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against Amaziah, and he sent unto him a prophet, which said unto him, Why hast thou sought after the gods of the people, which could not deliver their own people out of thy hand? [A child might understand such reasoning.] And it came to pass, as he talked with him, that the king said unto him, Art thou made of the king’s counsel? forbear; why shouldest thou be smitten? Then the prophet forbare, and said, I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened unto my counsel (2 Chron. 25:14-16).

So God let him take other counsel (since he refused His own), that led to his ruin.

To Amaziah’s rash challenge the king of Israel made a scornful reply by the language of a parable. He said:

The thistle that was in Lebanon [Amaziah] sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon [Joash], saying, Give thy daughter to my son to wife: and there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon [Joash’s army], and trod down the thistle. [And he adds,] Thou sayest [to thyself], Lo, thou hast smitten the Edomites; and thine heart lifteth thee up to boast: abide now at home; why shouldest thou meddle to thine hurt, that thou shouldest fall, even thou, and Judah with thee? [This is good, sound advice.] But Amaziah would not hear; for it came of God, that he might deliver them into the hand of their enemies, because they sought after the gods of Edom....And Judah was put to the worse before Israel, and they fled every man to his tent. And Joash the king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah...and brought him to Jerusalem, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem from the gate of Ephraim to the corner gate, four hundred cubits (18-23).

This is the first time the walls of Jerusalem had ever been injured. It was on the north—the only side from which the city is easily accessible. Josephus stated that Joash gained entrance into the city by threatening to kill their captive king if the inhabitants refused to open the gates. The victorious Joash, king of Israel, took all the gold and silver and the holy vessels, and all the treasures that were found in the temple and

the king’s house; he took hostages also, and returned to Samaria.

Amaziah lived more than fifteen years after his humiliating defeat and capture by the king of Israel. He died by violence, like his father and grandfather before him. “Now after the time that Amaziah did turn away from following the LORD they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem; and he fled to Lachish: but they sent to Lachish after him, and slew him there. And they brought him upon horses, and buried him with his fathers in the city of Judah” or of David (27-28). His “turning away from following the LORD” was probably his final and complete apostasy from Jehovah God of Israel; not when he first bowed down to the gods of Seir, which was the beginning of his downward course.

Lachish was the first of the cities of Judah to adopt the idolatries of the kingdom of Israel—“she is the beginning of the sin to the daughter of Zion: for the transgressions of Israel were found in thee” (Mic. 1:13)—and it was natural for the idolatrous Amaziah to seek an asylum there. They brought his body back to Jerusalem on horses, as they would a beast (contrast Acts 7:16). His name means “strength of Jah,” but we read, “he strengthened himself” (2 Chron. 25:11). His character of self-sufficiency belied his name—a thing not uncommon in our day, especially among a people called “Christians.”

He was assassinated at the age of fifty-four. His mother’s name, “Jehovah-pleased,” would indicate that she was a woman of piety. It may be that it was due to her influence that he acted righteously during the earlier portion of his reign. The record of his reign has the same sad monotony of so many of the kings of Judah at this period—“his acts first and last”-the first, full of promise; and the last, declension or apostasy. “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Joash (or Jehoash)

Jehovah gifted

2 Kings 13:10-25; 14:8-16

Contemporary Prophets: Jonah (?)

A man shall not be established by wickedness: but the root of the righteous shall not be moved. Prov. 12:3

“In the thirty and seventh year of Joash king of Judah began Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned sixteen years” (2 Kings 13:10). It is evident from a comparison of the figures of this verse with those given in verse 1 of the same chapter, and 14:1, that Joash (Jehoash, abbreviated) reigned jointly with his father during the last two years of the latter’s life. This was not an uncommon custom in ancient times and readily explains an otherwise inexplicable chronological difficulty. It is quite likely that the seeming discrepancies of chronology in Scripture (those most difficult to solve) could be as simply and as satisfactorily explained. There may, of course, be a few which owe their origin to errors of transcription.

“And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord; he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin: but he walked therein.” Josephus called him a “good man” (Antiquities 9.8.6). This misjudgment of the character of Joash is probably based on the incident of his visit to the dying prophet Elisha (2 Kings 13:14-19). A little exhibition of religious, or even semi-religious, sentiment goes a long way with some persons in accounting people “good.” Or Josephus may have been referring to the latter period of Joash’s reign. It has been supposed by some that Joash reformed or repented toward the end of his life (perhaps founded partly on his mild treatment of Amaziah, when he had it in his power to take that combative meddler’s life-see AMAZIAH in Kings of Judah). But the words, “He departed not from the sins of Jeroboam,” forbid all thought of any real or lasting repentance at any period of his life. God is more anxious to record, than any of His people are to read, any good in any of these monarchs’ lives. He has noted none in Joash’s; and where He is silent, who will dare to speak?

The episode of Joash’s visit to the dying prophet is simple to understand. Joash could not but realize that the prophet’s departure from them would be a serious loss to the nation. In calling him “the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof,” he meant that the prophet’s presence in their midst was to them what chariots and horsemen were to other nations-their main defense. And by placing his dying hands on those of the king, Elisha meant him to understand the truth of what God said more than three hundred years later, through the prophet Zechariah, “Not by might [or forces, or army], nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:6). “Without me, ye can do nothing,” this would be in New Testament phraseology. The shooting of the arrow eastward, toward the territory conquered by Syria, signified Joash’s victory over Ben-hadad’s forces at Aphek (“on the road from Syria to Israel in the level plain east of Jordan; a common field of battles with Syria”—Fausset) (see 1 Kings 20:26). Only Joash’s lack of faith, manifested in his halfhearted smiting the ground with arrows just three times, prevented his destroying the Syrians utterly. And it was unto him according to his faith. “And Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz took again out of the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael the cities which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz his father by war. Three times did Joash beat him, and recovered the cities of Israel” (2 Kings 13:25, italics added).

Like Asa, he had the opportunity given him to end the power of Syria (2 Chron. 16:7), which from its beginning had been such a plague to both Judah and Israel. But, like Asa, he let it pass, and the work was left to the Assyrian, who destroyed both it (Syria) and them (Israel and Judah).

And the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, and his might wherewith he fought against Amaziah king of Judah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And Joash slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel; and Jeroboam his son reigned in his stead (2 Kings 14:15-16).

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Jehoahaz

Jehovah-seized

2 Kings 13:1-9

Contemporary Prophets: Elisha, and Jonah

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn. Prov. 29:2

In describing the reign of Jehoahaz, the Bible gives no variation from the same sorrowful formula usually used in describing the moral conduct of these Israelitish kings: “He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.” His ways may not have appeared sinful in the sight of his fellows; but God, who “seeth not as man seeth,” pronounced it “evil,” and sent on him and his subjects the chastisement their wicked idolatry deserved.

“And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He delivered them into the hand of Hazael king of Syria, and into the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael, all their days.” Hazael’s conquest of the kingdom had begun in the days of Jehu, Jehoahaz’ father: “In those days the Lord began to cut Israel short: and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel; From Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer, which is by the river Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan” (2 Kings 10:32-33). Jehu, though so “swift to shed blood” in the beginning of his reign, was more slow to take the sword in defense of the land and people of God toward the end. Men of this class are seldom really good soldiers. They may be exceedingly active in obtaining the position they love and covet, while very careless about the true interests of the people of God. There is no hint that Jehu made the slightest attempt to resist these inroads of the king of Syria in his dominion. He probably remained timorously passive at Samaria while the encroachments on God’s territory were being made. The Black Obelisk records that he (“Jahua”) sent gold and silver to Shalmaneser I at this time, probably to invoke the Assyrian’s aid against Hazael. Certainly valor was not characteristic of Jehu. Impetuosity is not courage, nor must we mistake enthusiasm for the earnestness of conviction. To boast when putting on the armor is an easy matter; the wise will wait until the time to take it off (1 Kings 20:11). Even then the truly wise will glory only in the Lord.

And Jehoahaz besought the Lord, and the Lord hearkened unto him: for he saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them. (And the Lord gave Israel a saviour, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians: and the children of Israel dwelt in their tents, as beforetime. Nevertheless they departed not from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin, but walked therein: and there remained the grove [Asherah, N.TR] also in Samaria) (2 Kings 13:4-6).

In this parenthetic paragraph we see how Elisha’s prophecy of Hazael’s pitiless oppression of the children of Israel was fulfilled (2 Kings 8:11-13). Well might the man of God, who so dearly loved Israel, weep as before him stood the destined perpetrator of these cruelties against his people. Through these afflictions, God was seeking to turn them back to repentance from their idolatries. This bitter chastisement appears to have had a salutary effect on Jehoahaz, for he “besought Jehovah.” When the goodness of God fails to bring men to repentance, His severity is required, and used (see Psa. 78:34; Hos. 5:15). “Accordingly God accepted of his repentance instead of virtue,” Josephus wrote, “and, being desirous rather to admonish those that might repent, and not to determine that they should be utterly destroyed, he granted him deliverance from war and dangers. So the country having obtained peace, returned to its former condition, and flourished as before” (Antiquities 9.8.5).

2 Kings 13:4-6 seems to imply a temporary deliverance under the reign of Jehoahaz. This restoration to prosperity began in its fullness under Joash son of Jehoahaz (2 Kings 13:25), and culminated during the reign of his grandson Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25). Prayer is frequently answered after the petitioner has passed away. So let none say, like the wicked of old, in reference to God, “What profit should we have, if we pray unto him?” (Job 21:15) What profit? Ah, true prayer is always heard at the throne: “Whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1 John 5:15).

“Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz” (2 Kings 13:22). There was no respite until Joash’s day. This must have been a test to Jehoahaz’ faith, if his repentance was really the result of godly sorrow for his and the nation’s sins. But when has untried faith ever flourished? Stagger not, then, nor stumble, beloved fellow believer, at “the trial of your faith.” God heard Jehoahaz, though he died with Hazael busy at his work of devastation in his realm. “Neither did he leave of the people to Jehoahaz but fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen; for the king of Syria had destroyed them, and had made them like the dust by threshing” (see Amos 1:3).

“Now the rest of the acts of Jehoahaz, and all that he did, and his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And Jehoahaz slept with his fathers; and they buried him in Samaria: and Joash his son reigned in his stead.”

The Kings of Judah and Israel, Jehoash

(or Joash)

Jehovah-gifted

2 Kings 11-12; 2 Chron. 22:10-24:27

Contemporary Prophets: Zechariah, son of Jehoiada

It is he that giveth salvation unto kings: who delivereth David his servant from the hurtful sword. Psalm. 144:10

“And when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal. [Chronicles adds, ‘of the house of Judah.’] But Jehosheba, the daughter of king Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king’s sons which were slain; and they hid him, even him and his nurse, in the bedchamber from Athaliah, so that he was not slain” (2 Kings 11:1-2).

2 Chron. 24:7 describes Athaliah as “That wicked woman.” She was just such a daughter as her infamous mother, Jezebel, was likely to produce. Her father was himself a murderer, and the family character was fully marked in her. She heartlessly slaughtered her own

grandchildren in her lust for power. She herself would be ruler of the kingdom, even at the cost of the lives of helpless and innocent children. No character in history, sacred or secular, stands out blacker or more hideous than this daughter-in-law of the godly Jehoshaphat.

Joash was only an infant at the time, and his mother (Zibiah of Beersheba) was in all likelihood dead—probably murdered by her fiendish mother-in-law. Jehosheba ("Jehovah's oath", that is, devoted to Him), the child's aunt and wife of the high priest Jehoiada ("Jehovah known"), hid Joash and his nurse, first in one of the palace bedchambers, and later in the temple (where she lived) among her own children and perhaps as one of them. "And he was with them hid in the house of God six years: and Athaliah reigned over the land" (2 Chron. 22:12). Through this, God displayed his mercy to the house of David, even as it had been declared at the time of the reign of Athcrliah's husband Jehoram: "Howbeit the LORD would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that he had made with David, and as he promised to give a light to him and to his sons forever" (2 Chron. 21:7).

Athaliah, no doubt, thought herself secure on the throne of David. Six years she possessed the coveted power, and could say, "I sit a queen." She made the most of her opportunity to corrupt the kingdom with idolatry, and had a temple built to Baal. But in the seventh year her richly-merited retribution suddenly came upon her.

And the seventh year Jehoiada sent and fetched the rulers over hundreds, with the captains and the guard, and brought them to him into the house of the LORD, and made a covenant with them, and took an oath of them in the house of the LORD, and showed them the king's son (2 Kings 11:4). And they went about in Judah, and gathered the Levites out of all the cities of Judah, and the chief of the fathers of Israel, and they came to Jerusalem. And all the congregation made a covenant with the king in the house of God. And he [Jehoiada] said unto them, Behold, the king's son shall reign, as the LORD hath said of the sons of David (2 Chron. 23:2-3).

Arrangements were then entered into for the most unique coronation that was ever known. Everything was ordered with great care and secrecy so that suspicion would not be aroused. Trusted men, chiefly Levites, were stationed at important points about the king's house and temple. The Sabbath day, and the time for the changing of the courses of the priests and Levites, may have been chosen so that the unusually large number of people about the temple would not excite suspicion in the minds of Athaliah and her Baalite minions. The Levites carefully guarded the royal child, "every man with his weapons in his hand," with strict orders to slay any one that would attempt to approach him. "And to the captains over hundreds did the priest give king David's spears and shields, that were in the temple of the LORD," and a strong guard was placed within the temple enclosure. "Then they brought out the king's son, and put upon him the crown, and gave him the testimony [a copy of the law, Deut. 17:18], and made him king. Jehoiada and his sons anointed him, and said, God save the king!" It is a thrilling tale, and nowhere given so well as in our time-honored King James

"Now when Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she came to the people into the house of the LORD: and she looked, and, behold, the king stood at [or, on] his pillar [Gesenius 'stage' or 'scaffold'] at the entering in, and the princes and the trumpets by the king: and all the people of the land rejoiced, and sounded with trumpets, also the singers with instruments of music, and such as taught to sing praise. Then Athaliah rent her clothes, and said, Treason, Treason" (2 Chron. 23:12-13).

But Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains of the hundreds, the officers of the host, and said unto them, Have her forth without the ranges: and him that followeth her kill with the sword....And Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD and the king and the people, that they should be the LORD'S people; between the king also and the people. And all the people of the land went into the house of Baal, and brake it down; his altars and his images brake they in pieces thoroughly, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars.... and they brought down the king from the house of the LORD, and came by the way of the gate of the guard to the king's house. And he sat on the throne of the kings. And all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was in quiet: and they slew Athaliah with the sword beside the king's house (2 Kings 11:15-20).

Jehoiada and his wife had engaged in this dangerous business in faith, as is evident by the words of Jehoiada, "Behold the king's son shall reign, as the LORD hath said of the sons of David." "The Lord hath said" is quite enough for faith to act on whatever be the dangers, the difficulties, and the toils. And in that path of obedience all the wheels of providence are made to turn to bring about the successful end. God gives the needful wisdom in it too, and so every step and arrangement of faithful Jehoiada succeeds perfectly, all proving that whatever be the cunning and craft of the devil in Athaliah, it must succumb to the wisdom of God and of faith. The cause was of God; Joash was the only rightful heir to the throne of David, which by the promise of God was not to be without an heir till that Heir should come who would be "the sure mercies of David" and would need no successor.

Joash was seven years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Zibiah ["doe" or "gazelle") of Beersheba. And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest. And Jehoiada took for him two wives; and he begat sons and daughters (2 Chron. 24:1-3).

His uncle appears to have exercised a wholesome influence over him. The noting of his taking two wives for him is doubtless to manifest his godly concern for the succession of the line of David.

"And it came to pass after this, that Joash was minded to repair the house of the LORD. And he gathered together the priests and the Levites, and said to them, Go out into the cities of Judah, and gather of all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that ye hasten the matter. Howbeit the Levites hastened it not" (4-5). Nothing was done at the time. The spiritual condition of the people made it difficult to accomplish anything. "The people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places," and would therefore feel little responsibility toward the temple at Jerusalem. The lines in Pope's pantheistic poem, "The Universal Prayer" would, no doubt, express pretty accurately the thoughts of the Israelites regarding the worship of God: "To Thee whose temple is all space, / Whose altar, earth, sea, skies!"

The money that was contributed was, it would seem, misappropriated towards the maintenance of the priests and Levites (see 2 Kings 12:7-8).This neglect continued until the twenty-third year of Joash.

And the king called for Jehoiada the chief, and said unto him, Why hast thou not required of the Levites to bring in out of Judah and out of Jerusalem the collection, according to the commandment of Moses the servant of the LORD, and of the congregation of Israel, for the tabernacle of witness? [Evidently he had not neglected to read the "testimony" delivered to him at his coronation.] For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of the LORD did they bestow upon Baalim

(2 Chron. 24:6-7).

True to what he had learned in the Word of God, Joash did not hesitate to admonish even the high priest if he was negligent in obeying it, for that Word is above all. And though he owed to his uncle a lasting debt of gratitude for the preservation of his infant life, he could, when occasion required, request that as God's high priest Jehoiada perform his duty in reference to the necessary repairs of that house over which he had been set by God. Would God that Joash had continued in such a mind to the end of his reign.

And at the king's commandment they made a chest, and set it without at the gate of the house of the LORD. And they made a proclamation through Judah and Jerusalem, to bring in to the LORD the collection that Moses the servant of God laid upon Israel in the wilderness [see Ex. 30:11-16].And all the princes and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end (8-10).

The people's conscience was stirred, and they gave as the Lord loves to see His people give—cheerfully. No exacting accounts were kept; there was no suspicion of dishonesty, or misappropriation; the most beautiful confidence prevailed, evidencing the work of God (11-13).When God's work is being done, the heart is engaged; selfish ends are absent; there is one common object; all this produces confidence: "Moreover they reckoned not with the men, into whose hand they delivered the money to be bestowed on the workmen: for they dealt faithfully" (2 Kings 12:15).

More than sufficient was bestowed by the willing-hearted people. "And when they had finished it, they brought the rest of the money before the king and Jehoiada, whereof were made vessels for the house of the LORD, even vessels to minister, and to offer withal, and spoons, and vessels of gold and silver" (2 Chron. 24:14). Nor were the priests left unprovided for. "The trespass money and sin money was not brought into the house of [Jehovah]: it was the priest's" (2 Kings 12:16).

And they offered burnt offerings in the house of the LORD continually all the days of Jehoiada. But Jehoiada waxed old, and was full of days when he died; an hundred and thirty years old was he when he died. And they buried him in the city of David among the kings [as well they might], because he had done good in Israel, both toward God, and toward his house (2 Chron. 24:14-16).

He had remembered the claims of the holy One of Israel, and attended to them with vigor and fidelity. Nor could it be other than the energy of faith in a man nearly a hundred years old setting himself to overthrow such an enemy of God as Athaliah.

His extreme old age may account for his evident laxity in performing the king's command in regard to the repairing of the temple. He was born before the death of Solomon, and had seen much during his long life that peculiarly qualified him to become the protector and early guide of Jehoash. By him the kingdom was reestablished, and the cause of Jehovah revived during his last days on earth. He was a true king, in heart and mind, and it was appropriate that the aged patriarch's mitered head should be laid to rest among those who had worn the crown.

How long he had filled the office of high priest is not known. He succeeded Amariah, who was high priest under Jehoshaphat. What a contrast between him and those other two high priests, Annas and Caiaphas, of whom we read in the New Testament. He labored to maintain the succession; they labored to destroy the final Heir—"great David's greater son." And when the time of rewards comes, what will be the unspeakable differences!

But now a cloud begins to appear that dims the brightness of the reign of Joash, and culminates in treachery and murder.

Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them. And they left the house of the LORD God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass. Yet He sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the LORD; and they testified against them: but they would not give ear (2 Chronicles 24:17-19).

The revival during Joash's early reign had already lost its hold. It could not have been of much depth when they could so quickly turn aside to idols after Jehoiada's departure. But the spirit of the good high priest was not dead; his worthy son Zechariah withstood and condemned their backslidings.

And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you. And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king, in the court of the house of the LORD (2 Chronicles 24:20-21).

"At the commandment of the king"! Alas for Joash's unfaithfulness to God, and base ingratitude to the man who had been to him so great a benefactor! Zechariah was his cousin, and his foster brother too! "Thus Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son. And when he died, he said, The LORD look upon it, and require it" (22). This is, in all probability, the Zacharias referred to by our Lord: "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew, between the temple and the altar" (Matt. 23:35). He was the last historical Old Testament martyr, as Abel had been the first. The prophet Urijah was slain almost two hundred and fifty years after Zechariah, but it is not recorded in the historical canon of Scripture; it is only mentioned incidentally in Jer. 26:23. "Son of Barachias" presents no real difficulty. It may have been a second name for Jehoiada (and would be a very appropriate one too as Barachias means "blessed"); or, Barachias may have been one of Zechariah's earlier ancestors, as "son of" frequently means in Scripture. Luke 11:51 does not have "son of Barachias." But one of the first of the above explanations is preferable. Anyway, he met his death at the hand of the very man for whom his mother and his father risked their lives. Other sons of Jehoiada were also slain by Joash (2 Chron. 24:25). "The LORD look upon it, and require it," the dying martyr said. Stephen, also stoned for his testimony, cried, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Law, under which "every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward," was the governing principle of the dispensation under which the martyr Zechariah died, whereas grace reigned in Stephen's day (as still in ours); therefore the difference in the dying martyrs' prayers. Both, though so unalike, were in perfect keeping with the dispensations under which they witnessed.

"The LORD require it." And He did, and swiftly—for He does not disregard the dying prayers of men like Zechariah.

And it came to pass at the end of the year, that the host of Syria came up against him: and they came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people and sent all the spoil of them unto the king of Damascus. For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men, and the LORD delivered a very great host into their hand, because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. So they executed judgment against Joash. And when they were departed from him (for they left him in great diseases), his own servants conspired against him for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest, and slew him on his bed, and he died: and they buried him in the city of David, but they buried him not in the sepulchers of the kings (2 Chron. 24:23-25).

2 Kings 12:17-18 records a previous invasion of Syrians under Hazael, when Joash bought him off with gold and other treasures taken from the temple and the king's palace. It was then that they discovered the real weakness of the army of Joash (in spite of its being "a very great host"); hence only "a small company of men" was sent out on the second expedition against him.

"There is no king saved by the multitude of an host," (Psa. 33:16) wrote that king whose throne Joash so unworthily filled. His time to receive the due reward of his deeds was come, and there was no power on earth that could have saved him. The murdered Zechariah's name (meaning "Jah hath remembered") must have had a terrible significance to him as he lay in "great diseases" on his bed in the house of Millo, the citadel of Zion. And if he escaped death at the hands of the Syrians by taking refuge in the stronghold at the descent of Silla (2 Kings 12:20), it was only to be treacherously assassinated by his servants. Both of them were sons of Gentile women (2 Chron. 24:26), fruit of mixed marriages, condemned by the law. So disobedience brings its own bitter reward, and what God's people sow they always, in some way or other, reap. Joash abundantly deserved his inglorious and terrible end. It can always be said, when the judgments of God are seen to come on such as he: "Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy" (Rev. 16:5-6).

clickbible.org