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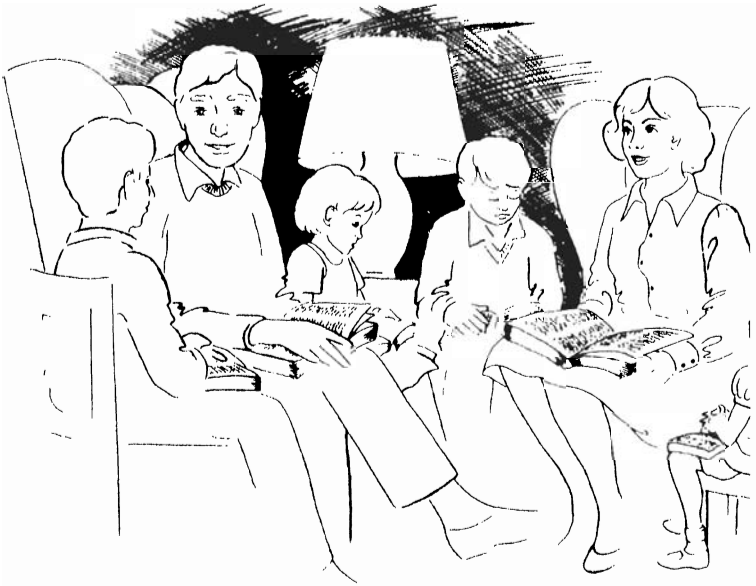
July 1995

# The Story of the Bible



A detailed exposition of the Bible  
discussed within the family circle  
by H. P. Mansfield

Edited by Graeham E. Mansfield



The children of the Phillips family gather with their parents for a daily reading of the Bible — an important part of their lives. Then they discuss together the remarkable events recorded in the greatest Book in all the world.





## *From the Days of Joash to the Exile in Babylon*

**T**HIS fourth volume of our *Story of the Bible* continues the dramatic story of the nation of Israel under the kings of Judah, from the days of the unfortunate Joash to the eventual downfall of the kingdom at the hands of the Babylonians. It is a sad period of Israel's history, for it saw the desolation of the throne of David and the removal of God's people from the city of Jerusalem.

The sinfulness of the nation to whom Almighty God had given such great privileges and who had protected them from their enemies, became so great that He could no longer bear with them. Wickedness must be forsaken if we are to please the Father, and this the people of Judah refused to do, even though many prophets were sent to them with God's appeal to repent of their evil.

Nevertheless, a faithful remnant remained: a small group of men and women who were prepared to honor the God of David, and to uphold the principles for which that great man stood. And there were

some godly kings, who endeavored to stem the tide of apostasy, and to turn the people back to God.

Finally, in exile — both in Babylon and Persia — circumstances were governed by the divine hand, that prepared a nation to return to the Promised Land, about which we will learn in our next volume.

This section of our story is one of great warning and of important exhortation. It will help us to understand what God desires of His people, and as we read of the examples of good and evil we will be helped in our personal spiritual development.

God's glorious kingdom on earth will soon be re-established under the Lord Jesus Christ, the king "whose right it is" (Ezek. 21:27). Then the worthy men and women of past ages will find the answers to the perplexing and difficult times in which they lived.

We will learn of these people of faith as *The Story of the Bible* unfolds this fascinating part of history; we will see the Ways of Providence stretch out even to the court of Persia, to develop the divine purpose in the lives of Esther and Mordecai.

*We gratefully acknowledge the work of Bro. Mark Edwards in providing many of the pen sketch illustrations used in this volume, and the helpful assistance of Bro. John Ullman, Sis. Rene Adams and others in the proofing and checking of the copy.*

*— G. E. Mansfield, Editor.*

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**H**AVING considered the story of lost opportunities which the record of the House of Jehu in the northern kingdom of Israel reveals, we must retrace our steps, and record what was happening in the southern kingdom of Judah during that time.

In relating the events when Jehu poured out judgment upon the wicked House of Ahab, we described the overthrow of pernicious Queen Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, who had married into the House of David. On the death of her son by Jehu, she murdered all the seed royal, or so she thought, in order that she herself might reign.

But one little baby boy, only a few months old, had been saved. He was carefully nurtured by Jehoiada the priest, who protected him from the evil that was occurring in the kingdom as Queen Athaliah ruled the people. But when he was seven years old Jehoiada presented the young boy to the nation as king, and the wicked Athaliah was deposed and slain.

The boy-king's name was Joash. During the lifetime of his mentor, Jehoiada, he reigned well. He had the faithful priest as his counsellor, and under his guidance, he restored the worship of Yahweh in its purity, and, repairing the temple which had fallen into ruin, he opened it for divine worship.

Certain aspects of these events are typical of the work of the Lord Jesus, as Mr. Phillips told his family when they discussed these incidents. We listen in again as he takes up the discussion with his family.

## Chapter One

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### THE RISE AND DECLINE OF JOASH IN THE DAYS OF JEHOIADA

**T**HIS is the second time that we have come across the reign of Joash,” remarked Mr. Phillips, after the family had read together 2Chronicles. “That is so,” said Peter. “We looked at it a few weeks back when we were reading from 2Kings 11 and 12. You told us then that the life of Joash was typical of the work of the Lord Jesus, and you promised to outline this to us further.”

“I have since done so,” answered his father. “I have typed it out on a sheet of paper and prepared a copy for each of you.\* If you study this carefully with the supporting references I have given, you will see how closely the experiences of Joash are linked with the divine purpose in Christ Jesus.”

“Can we be sure that these things are typical?” insisted Peter. “That is shown by Paul’s comment in 1Corinthians 10:11,” answered Graeham. “There Paul makes reference to Jewish history, and states that these matters are recorded as types, having important lessons for us.”

“That is correct,” commented Mr. Phillips. “And in order to grasp the significance of the events associated with the life of Joash, it is necessary to recall what took place. Queen Athaliah became widowed when Jehu slew her husband. In turn she murdered all the seed royal. One baby was saved from her evil action. He was hidden from sight in the House of God, and was carefully nurtured by a faithful priest, Jehoida. In due time the child Joash was revealed again to Israel and accepted as king. He ruled jointly with Jehoiada the priest. He repaired the temple, opened it for service, and restored the true worship in its purity. In all that, he foreshadowed the future work of Christ, who was carefully protected in his youth, and will ultimately come to rulership over all Israel.”

Mr. Phillips then handed to each of the family a copy of the paper he had prepared. “You will have to look up the references I have set out and carefully consider each one,” he told them.

“We did not complete the full history of Joash when we were discussing it before,” said Peter, as his father distributed the sheets.

“No, we only dealt with his elevation to power,” said Mr. Phillips. “This evening we have read what happened afterwards. With the overthrow of Athaliah and the elevation of the boy-king, Jehoiada set about establishing the pure worship of Yahweh. He set the priests in

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\* We have reproduced these notes on page 14.

their appointed offices; he arranged for porters to guard the gates; he commanded that 'none unclean' in any thing should enter into the temple (2Chron. 23:19)".

"That is an interesting point," commented Graeham. "It reminds me of one of the statements found in Revelation 21:27, that the 'unclean' will not be permitted into the New Jerusalem."

"A very good point, Graeham," remarked his father. "The statement in Revelation is based upon the law that will be enforced in relation to the temple to be set up in Jerusalem in the Age to come. The unclean will not be permitted into that temple either (see Ezekiel 44:9). So here is another detail where the events associated with Joash typify those connected with Christ."

"Jehoiada must have been the real ruler," suggested Ann, "because Joash could not reign if he was only seven years of age!"

"That is true, and in him we have an excellent lesson of the value of a good example."

"How is that?"

"Because he influenced the young king for good. He attended to his education in a way that fitted him to rule. We read in 2Chronicles 24:2 that 'Joash did that which was right in the sight of Yahweh all the days of Jehoiada the priest'."

"Do you think that the priest was behind all the work of reform that Joash did?" asked Ann.

"Yes! That is implied in verse 4, where we read that Joash 'was minded' to repair the temple. The words suggest that his mind was directed towards this. Though, doubtless, the impetus came from the king, it would have been induced by the education in spiritual things that he received from the priest. The temple had fallen into complete ruin and neglect. The sons of Athaliah had deliberately set about destroying it (2Chron. 24:7). Every attempt had been made to overthrow the pure worship. The tithes and dues that the people were required to pay to maintain the priests and the temple according to the Law of Moses had been neglected. But now Joash set about restoring it all. Priests and Levites were sent throughout the land warning the people to pay their dues. In Jerusalem itself special efforts were made to collect the normal dues required from the people, and a fund was established for anyone to contribute further by freewill offerings to restore the temple.

"But there was still delay. For a long time the priests had been denied their dues and had become destitute, and they now took advantage of the reformation to take out first what was owing to them.\*

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\* This seems to be the meaning of 2Kings 12:5-8. The priests were held responsible for gathering the money from certain districts (termed as their "acquaintance"). The money received represented portion of their stipend, or pay, and the priests probably felt justified in keeping what was really theirs.



“This became known to the people, and they became discouraged. They felt that their freewill offerings were not being properly used. They saw little work being done (2Kings 12:4-6). Joash reproved the priests. He called Jehoiada before him, and requested through him that the priests sacrifice the money due to them in order that there should be no delay through lack of money in repairing the temple.

“Jehoiada took the matter in hand himself. He arranged for a large chest to be set up at the altar with provision where worshippers could place any freewill offerings they cared to make (2Kings 12:9). Later, for convenience, this was placed outside the gate (2Chron. 24:8), so that all could contribute. Every day the High Priest, accompanied by a scribe and Levites, publicly counted the money, in order that the people might see that the greatest care was being taken of their contributions.

“The confidence of the people being thus restored, they contributed without reserve. Workmen of integrity were employed. They were moved with the spirit of the noble labor they had been invited to share. As the priests had voluntarily sacrificed their stipend, and the people had willingly given of their substance, so the workmen gave their hours of time and labour to establish the project. There was no reckoning of money, for it was recognised that all were sacrificing to a common end. Thus there was created a united resolve to accomplish the work of restoring the temple for service. The people worked willingly because their hearts were in it, and they wanted to show their love for God in loyal service. It was a happy time for the nation. Great enthusiasm was developed for the true worship. Ample money flowed in for the work. Labourers of all kinds were employed. They were urged to the greatest speed in their important duties. And, at last, the temple was restored, and the full worship established.

“Purity of worship was maintained all the days of Jehoiada. He lived a long and useful life, dying at the age of 130 years. He must have been born during the rule of Solomon, and lived through the six following reigns. As far as we know, no other person had lived so long since the days of Joshua (Josh. 24:29).”

“It was a sad day for Judah when Jehoiada the priest died,” said Mr. Phillips, as he continued the story the following evening. “For many years he had been a tremendous influence for good behind the throne of David. The people remembered his loving loyalty to young

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But on appeal from the king they apparently waived their rights and consented to receive no more money (v. 8). The payment of dues and tithes had fallen into disuse during Athaliah's reign, and when the people saw the priests taking certain money for their own use whilst they themselves were expected to contribute more than their dues, they became discouraged. Confidence was restored by the prompt action of the king, and the ready agreement of the priests through Jehoiada.

## JOASH AS A TYPE OF CHRIST

The widowed Athaliah, daughter of Jezebel, acted as the woman of Rev. 2:20-23 and 18:7. She "sat as a queen (not as a widow), proclaiming that she would see no sorrow" (2Kings 11:1-3). She destroyed the seed royal (v. 1), and in this was imitated by the religious "woman" (church) of Revelation 18 which has persecuted the true followers of Christ, the seed royal of the future age (cp. Rev. 18:24; 5:9-10).

Joash was saved from among the dead (2Kings 11:2), and thus typified the Lord Jesus who was saved out of death. His name means "*Strength of Yahweh*," a strength that Christ exhibits today as Joash did in his life. Having been typically taken from the dead, the young child was hidden in the temple of Yahweh until the seventh year (v. 4), thus, **representing** the destiny of the Lord who ascended into the heavenly **temple** of Yahweh, to be hidden from the sight of man until the time decreed.

During the absence of Joash, Athaliah drew the people from the true worship (2Chr. 21:11; 24:7), and during the Lord's absence, the children of the antitypical Jezebel have done the same (cp. Rev. 2:20-23; 17:4-6).

Joash emerged from his hiding place to be proclaimed king; so also will the Lord Jesus. He ruled with the assistance of Jehoiada the priest, so that the throne of David was jointly occupied by a king and a priest; and Christ will reign as king-priest (Zech. 6:13). During the reign of Joash, the priesthood was revived; it will be so under the Lord Jesus (Ps. 110). At this time Athaliah was slain and the false worship overthrown; in like manner the harlot-system of Revelation 18 will be overthrown at Christ's return. Joash repaired the temple and established the true worship throughout the land; Christ will do likewise. The nation rejoiced and Jerusalem found peace in the establishment of this joint rule; the same will be true of Christ's reign.

Under Jehoiada, the priesthood was raised to an importance it never afterwards lost. Through his ministrations, the lineage of David was saved, and the pure worship restored. He was regarded as the second founder of the priestly order (Jer. 29:26). His name means "*Yahweh hath known*," so that in this story he stands as a fit type for the priestly aspect of the Lord, whilst Joash represented his kingly position.

Thus the events associated with the elevation of Joash and his rule during the lifetime of Jehoiada, typify the work of God in Christ Jesus.

Joash and the self-sacrificing work he had selflessly done for the nation. He was like a father and king to them, and they treated him as such. We read tonight that 'they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God, and toward his house' (2Chron. 24:16). This is a wonderful testimony for any man. Jehoiada was a man of integrity. He did good toward God, and in doing so he helped his family. He brought them up in the fear of Yahweh, and gave them a heritage of spiritual truth that was beyond all price.

"Most people were very saddened by the passing of such a great and notable hero. But there were some who were glad; who saw in his death the opportunity they sought to undermine his work. They had not dared to oppose him in his lifetime, but now that he was dead, they became as bold as lions!

"They carefully watched the king, and saw that he was a weak and vain man. They believed that if they flattered him, he would grant them their desires. They wanted to undermine the influence of the priesthood that had increased during the ministry of Jehoiada, for they were jealous of its growing power which limited their own authority.

"One day, therefore, the king was approached by a deputation of the princes of his realm. They bowed low before him, and made flattering references to his wisdom and power. This pleased the king, and he asked what he might do for them.

"They wanted the right to worship according to their conscience. They wanted him to grant them religious toleration. This seemed reasonable to the king, and he granted them their request.

"Soon pagan idols were again seen throughout Judah and Jerusalem. Incense to foreign gods arose from before them. And because the flesh always delights to try something new, people who had eagerly embraced the true worship in the days of Jehoiada, now turned to evil forms of religion that led them away from Yahweh and gratified the flesh.

"How often this has happened down the ages! It teaches us that we must exercise care lest we too are turned aside to a more liberal and easy way of life. The history of mankind shows that men suffer most when they do this; that there is no lasting pleasure in turning from God. True peace of mind comes only from worshipping Him in "sincerity and in truth" (John 4:24), with a wholesome and fervent heart.

"Thus the king soon found that things were going wrong throughout his kingdom. He possibly blamed it on to natural causes, but the real reason was the wickedness of the king himself and the princes of his realm."

"Wait a moment, please," interrupted Joan as her father paused. "Where do we read all that?"

“You find it in 2Chron. 24:17-18 which we read this evening,” answered Mr. Phillips. “We read that ‘the princes made obeisance to the king; the king hearkened to them; they left Yahweh to serve idols.’ That is all we read, but there is tremendous significance in those statements, and we are able to build up a picture of what actually happened”.

“All this must have divided Israel,” suggested Graeham, “for we read that Yahweh sent prophets to warn the people and the king (v. 19).”

“Yes, and in that we have an example of the loving mercy of God. He realised that the course of action pursued by the nation was a foolish one, and would bring great trouble and suffering. He did not desire that His people should suffer, and as he is a loving heavenly Father, He sent and warned them of the folly of their ways. He plainly told them that if they continued as they had commenced, they would suffer badly. People imagine that suffering is an evidence of God’s indifference to their needs, but frequently it is an indication of His concern for their welfare (cp. Heb. 12:6). Pain is often beneficial, for it warns us of the presence of disease of which otherwise we would be in ignorance, and it forces us to seek a cure. Without that warning we would probably go on unheeding of the trouble, and that could prove fatal. If our teeth ache, we go to a dentist to get them treated, but if they do not ache we are unaware of the poison that might come from them if they are decayed, and which can undermine our health. For similar reasons God permitted His people to suffer, knowing that it was for their good.”

“It is a case of ‘being cruel to be kind’,” remarked Peter.

“Exactly!” answered his father.

**Murder of Zechariah:** “With the death of Jehoiada, the glory of One of History’s Greatest Crimes

Joash’s reign faded, and he was led to commit one of the greatest crimes of which man could ever be found guilty,” continued Mr. Phillips. “Jehoiada’s son, Zechariah, had followed in his father’s footsteps. He was a good man, and became saddened and worried with the state of idolatry that was being set up after the death of his father. He pleaded with the people and the king to stop this folly. But his words of reproof were in vain.

“He decided to make a great public appeal to the people, and to personally testify against the prevailing wickedness. Moved by the Spirit of God, filled with indignation against the folly of Judah’s rulers, he called together a gathering of the people. Standing high above them so that he could be seen by all (2Chronicles 24:20, RV), he addressed them: ‘Why transgress the commandments of Yahweh?’ he pleaded. ‘You cannot hope to prosper! You have forsaken Yahweh,

and in consequence He has forsaken you!’

“Publicly he pointed out that the troubles the nation was suffering came through the wickedness that stemmed from the rulers themselves. His words made the king and the princes furious. They were filled with a bitter hatred against Zechariah. They forgot the benefits they had received through the wisdom and guidance of his father. So angry were they with him that they decided he must die.

“But they realised they had to exercise care”, Mr. Philips pointed out. “Zechariah was well respected by the people who still remembered his father with affection, and the king did not want a revolution on his hands. At the same time, they feared that if they did not stop the outspoken criticism of Zechariah, they would have the people rising against them. They not only hated him, they also feared him, for they remembered the determination and wisdom of his father, and knew that Zechariah also possessed the ability and power to lead the people against them.

“A conspiracy was formed. Careful preparations were made. Then one day, as Zechariah was officiating as priest between the temple and the altar, the conspirators rushed upon him. They cared little about the sanctity of the place, or that he was the priest doing the work of God. Mad with hate, they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of Yahweh, until he died. This awful crime was committed with the full knowledge of king Joash who remembered not the kindness of his uncle Jehoiada (Zechariah’s father), nor that the king owed his very life to that man who had earlier risked the wrath of Athaliah to save him.

“As the stones thudded against the bruised and battered body of the poor priest as he lay on the ground, he turned his mind to Yahweh, and uttered one last prayer: ‘Yahweh look upon this, and require it!’ he prayed. And Yahweh, who looked with anger upon this act of gross wickedness of the ungrateful king and people, answered the prayer.

“The troubles of Judah mounted. Toward the end of the year, a small company of Syrians invaded the land. It was met by a large army of Israelites, led by the very princes who had conspired against Zechariah. They were confident of an easy victory against such a small company of Syrians. But what a shock awaited them! The army of Judah was put to rout, and the very princes who had flattered the king were destroyed in the battle (2Chron. 24:23-24). The Syrians swept through the land killing, destroying and robbing, until they came right to the walls of Jerusalem. Despite the smallness of their company, great success had attended their army, and the king was filled with fear at their presence outside the walls of his capital. No defence seemed capable of holding them in check. The only thing left was to buy them off. The very wealth that the king had been at such pains to collect to beautify the temple in the days of Jehoiada was

now stripped for this purpose (2Kings 12:18). With this rich booty in hand, the small company of Syrians returned to their land.

“But the troubles of Judah still continued. Men cannot oppose God with impunity. They cannot commit such acts of base ingratitude as are recorded in this chapter and not suffer in return! The king found that the people were beginning to detest him. They knew of the murder of Zechariah; they had seen his powerful army defeated by a much smaller force; they had suffered keenly through the Syrian invasion, and they blamed all this on the incompetence of the king. Their hatred against him grew daily, and they had no pity for him in his troubles.

“The king was now in need of all the pity he could receive, for he was smitten with a terrible, lingering illness. It could have been a stroke brought on through worry. In any case, he became bedridden and unable to attend to his affairs. Conditions in the kingdom went from bad to worse. The nation was in debt, the people found themselves oppressed, the general resentment against the king grew daily.

“It ended in tragedy. The conditions became unbearable, and a conspiracy was formed by some of his own servants to put an end to it all. Two foreigners were employed to murder the king. They forced their way into the palace, and into the bedroom where the sick king lay, and there they ruthlessly murdered him.

“He died without pity. Men had suffered too much from his folly to do anything but rejoice in his death. He was buried in the city of David, but so disastrous had been the latter years of his reign that they refused to bury him in the sepulchres of the kings.

“Thus Jehoiada the priest was honored as a king, whilst Joash the king was treated as a commoner. The record of these two men provides some important lessons. The Lord Jesus used these to point out to the leaders of Judah in his day the folly of their actions in opposing his wisdom and works, for they were guilty of imitating the action of these evil princes of Judah!”

“Where do we read that?” asked Graham.

“In Matthew 23:35,” replied his father. “The Lord Jesus declared: ‘Upon you will 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’.”

“That speaks of ‘Zacharias the son of Barachias,’ not Zechariah the son of Jehoiada,” protested Peter.

“I believe that it relates to the same person,” answered his father. “It was not uncommon for people to have two names in those days, in which case Barachias would be Jehoiada’s second name. On the other hand, Barachias could be a variation of Jehoiada.”

“You told us that Jehoiada signifies *Yahweh has known*. What does Barachias mean?”

"It means *Blessed of Yahweh*, and is therefore similar to Jehoia-da".

"Why should the Lord quote this reference above any other?" asked Peter.

"Because it is appropriate to the circumstances. In the days of Joash, the leaders were ungrateful for the benefits they had received from the father of Zechariah, and murdered his son. The same was true of the leaders in the days of the Lord Jesus. They were ungrateful for the mercies received from the Father of the Lord, and murdered His son because he dared point out to them the folly of their ways. The punishment meted out to the murderers of Zechariah and Jesus was similar."

"In what way?"

"The murder of Zechariah was followed by a national disaster brought about by the invasion of Judah by foreign troops, and a similar punishment was poured out upon Judah in the days of the Lord Jesus."

"The verse you quoted also mentions that the punishment poured out upon Cain for the murder of Abel was typical of that which would fall upon the generation which rejected Jesus," said Peter. "In what way did that come to pass?"

"The answer to that is found in the fourth chapter of Genesis," replied his father. "God avenged Abel by making Cain a 'fugitive and a vagabond' (i.e., a wanderer) in the earth. That also was the punishment meted out to Jewry because of their rejection of the Lord Jesus. Cain was banished to the *Land of Nod* (which signifies 'exile'), and Jewry went into exile amongst the Gentiles, cast off from God. But God also protected Cain by warning that He would place a curse upon any who dared to molest him (Gen. 4:12, 15), and the same is true of Jewry. God will curse those who curse the Jews, even though they rejected the Messiah. He does this because of His promise to faithful Abraham (Ezek. 36:22)".

"I cannot understand how a king like Joash could be so ungrateful to a good man like Zechariah, and so wicked towards God," remarked Ann with a sigh.

"It serves to show how difficult it is for those in the high esteem of their fellows, or those who have authority over others, to receive genuine criticism or exhortation," replied her father. "Joash just simply could not take it. He forgot the exhortation of the Bible, 'Faithful are the wounds of a friend.' He looked upon Zechariah, who was really his greatest friend, as though he was a bitter enemy. His folly brought ruin to himself and the nation over which he ruled."

## Chapter Two

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### AMAZIAH'S IMPERFECT REIGN IN JUDAH

**T**HE death of Joash left the throne of David to his son, a young man of twenty-five years of age. His name was Amaziah, which means: *Yahweh is strong*. The reign of his father had revealed that Yahweh is indeed strong, and is not to be mocked (Gal. 6:7).

Amaziah probably already had some experience in ruling the nation for he acted as deputy on his father's behalf for some two years during his sickness \* (2Kings 14:1). Amaziah realised that strong, determined measures were required to restore the greatness of Judah. He also realised that the policy of his father had been a foolish one. He cleverly determined that he would follow a different course of action. He encouraged the worship of Yahweh, though he did not put down the worship of Baal completely. The record in 2Chron. 25:2 says that "he did right in the sight of Yahweh, but not with a perfect heart." The word "perfect," in this place, is from a Hebrew word *shalem* which signifies "to be at one" so as to give peace.

Amaziah was not really "at one" with God. He did not give himself completely to His worship. He only encouraged it as a matter of national policy, because he thought he would receive some immediate benefit by so doing, and not because he loved God with all his heart. Therefore he did not find the true peace for which he sought.

His life reveals an important lesson we need to learn. Jesus Christ told his disciples that in him they could find a peace of mind such as was impossible in the world. He declared: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you" (John 14:27).

Peace of mind comes from giving ourselves completely to doing the will of God. We find true happiness by so doing, and are delivered from the troubles and doubts that come from doing otherwise — particularly when we know His will. Though the world may ridicule us,

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\* Amaziah commenced his reign in the second year of Joash, king of Israel (2Kings 14:1) which was the thirty-ninth year of Joash, the father of Amaziah of Judah (see "thirty-seven years" in 2Kings 13:10, plus two years in ch. 14:1) but who actually reign for forty years (2Chr. 24:1). Thus there is a discrepancy of about a year or two in the chronology, which would account for the period of dual monarchy mentioned by Mr. Phillips. *David Bible Dictionary* has the comment: "Amaziah, a king of Judah who, about 804BC at the age of twenty-five years, undertook the conduct of the government in behalf of his father, Joash, who had become incapacitated by reason of sore disease. On the murder of his father in 802BC he succeeded to the throne". — Editor.



there is One who looks with pleasure upon our actions and who has said: "They will be Mine, saith Yahweh of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels" (Malachi 3:17). We will find a happiness and contentment of mind doing the will of God that will surprise and please us. We may even discover the truth concerning that of which the wise man speaks, when he declared: "When a man's ways please Yahweh, He maketh even His enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. 16:7).

But let us try to serve two masters and we will certainly not have peace. If we try to serve both the world and Christ, our minds will be full of doubts; we will find ourselves divided in our allegiance; we will please neither Christ nor the world; we will find that we are a nuisance to ourselves and to others; and we will gain a reputation for being unreliable.

That was the attitude of Amaziah, son of Joash, who had witnessed the folly of his father but had not properly learned the lesson of his life.

### **The Early Fervor of Amaziah**

But at first things seemed to go well. There had been opposition to his rule, for his father was hated. But Amaziah quickly seized the initiative and held power with strong hands. Once the kingdom was established in his power (2Chron. 25:3), he brought the murderers of his father to the court of justice and had them executed.

Even here he exercised extreme care, for he realised that there still existed great resentment against his father throughout the land, and this could erupt against himself. He extended mercy to the children of his father's murderers, because the Law of Moses commanded it. This pleased the priests who were able to contrast his scruples for the Law with the indifference of his father. It helped consolidate Amaziah's position in Judah.

**International Success:** Established as king, Amaziah determined to extend his influence over the neighbouring countries, and avenge the disgrace of his father's defeat at the hands of a small army.

**Amaziah Extends His Power** He gathered together a large army out of Judah, and to make absolutely sure of victory, he hired 100,000 soldiers from Israel for a large sum of money.

Thus prepared, Amaziah made ready to invade Edom. But he was opposed by a prophet warning him of the folly of his action. "O king, let not the army of Israel go with you," he declared, "for Yahweh is not with Israel whom you have hired. If you use these hired soldiers, you will fail, no matter how hard you strive for success. Remember

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\* That is the sense of 2Chron. 25:7-8.

that God has power to help or to cast down!" \*

Amaziah was ready to act upon the advice of the prophet, but he did not want to lose the large sum of money he had paid his hired soldiers from Israel. "What shall we do for the hundred talents of silver which I have given to the army of Israel?" he asked.

"Yahweh is able to give thee much more than this," was the wise answer. How true those words are! In the long run, we will never lose by doing the will of God.

Amaziah then separated the soldiers of Israel from the rest of his army, and told them to return home. They departed from him in great anger, feeling that they were discredited in the eyes of the men of Judah.

Making careful preparations with the remainder of his troops, Amaziah marched south against the Edomites. Instead of remaining in the easily defended city of Petra which was hewn out of rock and only accessible through a long narrow ravine which could be easily defended, the Edomites were drawn out to the Valley of Salt, just south of the Dead Sea. Here they were defeated. Ten thousand fell in battle, and ten thousand more were taken captive by Amaziah. He cruelly led them back to the rock city of Petra, and before the eyes of their relatives cast them over into the steep, rocky ravine below where



\* In 2Chron. 25:12, the Hebrew word is rendered "the Rock"; in 2Kings 14:7 it is translated "Selah," which signifies *The Rock*. The reference is to the city of Petra which means "the Rock", a remarkable city which was carved out of the pink limestone abounding in the area. The city was impregnable from attack, as the entrance was restricted to a very small, long corridor formed out of massive rock structures surrounding the whole area.

they crashed to their death.\*

**Amaziah's Idolatry** This success went to Amaziah's head. He became lifted up with pride and forgot what was due to Yahweh. He imagined that he had gained the victory by his own power. This led to his undoing. He saw idols in the defeated city of Petra, and was attracted by the form of worship paid to them. He forgot that the gods had proved powerless to help the Edomites. Foolishly he took the idols home, and began to worship them.

Again the prophet sought him out. "Why have you sought after the gods of the people, which could not deliver their own people out of your hand?" he sternly asked the king.

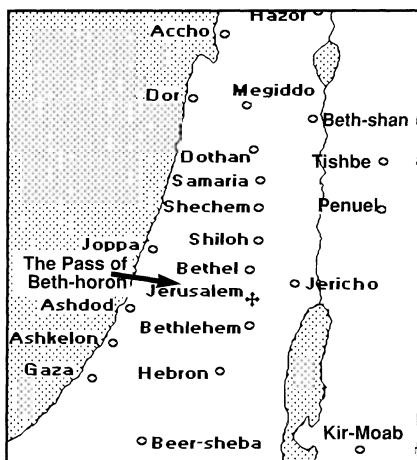
But the king was too lifted up in pride now to listen to words of criticism. "Who made you the king's counsellor?" he sarcastically asked. "Stop speaking like that or you will be smitten."

The prophet took the king's sarcasm up in his own lips: "I know that Yahweh has counselled to destroy you, because you have done this, and have not hearkened unto my counsel," he replied. He thus showed that he was in the counsels of a greater king than Amaziah — even Yahweh.

**International Failure** The punishment threatened by the prophet had already fallen upon the king. The soldiers he had employed from Israel, and which were ignominiously dismissed previously, had returned home in great anger. From Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, they organised raids that extended deep into Judah, as far as the important pass of Beth-horon (2Chron. 25:13).

When Amaziah had come home from the war, therefore, he found Judah seething with resentment at the action of these soldiers from the north. He realised that they had the support of Joash the king of Israel, and he called his advisers together. They decided on a course of action, but in doing so they left Yahweh out of their considerations, and thereby laid the foundation for failure.

They demanded that the king of Israel should agree to a conference in order that the damage his soldiers had done should be avenged. "Come, let us see one another in the face," was the abrupt



message sent to king Joash of Israel by Amaziah.

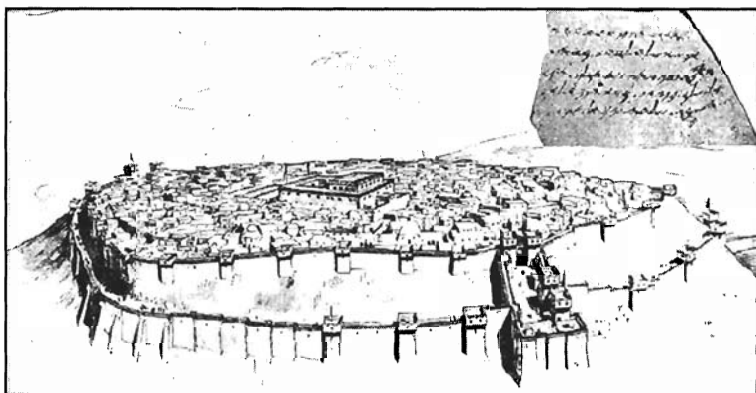
He received a most insolent reply. The king of Israel likened the king of Judah to a thistle in Lebanon, and himself to a cedar. He declared that the thistle asked the cedar for its daughter in marriage, thus treating itself as equal. But a wild beast (Joash's army) in Lebanon trod it down and destroyed the thistle.

"You say that you have defeated the Edomites," continued the king of Israel to the king of Judah. "Now your heart is lifted up to boast; abide at home; why should you meddle to your hurt that you should fall, you and Judah with you!"

This insolent answer angered Amaziah beyond all reason. Furious with rage he was led into battle, and thus brought upon himself the judgment that God had threatened. He suffered a terrible and disgraceful defeat and was taken captive in the war. He was led in disgrace by the king of Israel to the very walls of Jerusalem that his own people might see him humbled. Then, in the sight of Amaziah, the Israelites broke down a large portion of the walls of Jerusalem to show the people of Judah that they had their capital in their power.

Only by robbing the treasures of the temple and palace, and by giving the king of Israel hostages guaranteeing his good behaviour in the future were the Israelites bought off, and returned home.

All this happened to Amaziah because he had rejected the way of God! He reigned for a further fifteen years, but they were years filled with trouble. He had antagonised the priests when he had turned to idolatry, and they now organised a conspiracy against him. This conspiracy gained in popularity when Amaziah was so easily defeated at the hands of the Israelites. Amaziah found resentment against his rule



*Amaziah fled to the south-western fortress of Lachish. But the king could not escape the challenge of his opponents, and it was in this city that he was slain.*

growing daily throughout the land.

Finally it grew so strong that his life became constantly endangered. Jerusalem, the capital, swarmed with his enemies. An attempt was made on his life, and he fled the city to the refuge of the strong fortress of Lachish. Even here he received no peace. His pursuers followed him; sympathisers within Lachish conspired against him, and finally he was slain.

His body was conveyed back to Jerusalem on the horses of the conspirators, and buried in Jerusalem (2Chron. 25:28).

Thus ended a reign that commenced with promise but ended in disaster. Amaziah was a man who sought Yahweh because he believed it politic to do so. When he became lifted up in pride, however, he turned to his own way. He followed idolatry which led to a train of disasters that brought the nation low before its enemies, and brought the king himself under the impact of tragedy.

### The Chronology of Chronicles and Matthew

"I have just checked the names of the kings in the gospel record," said Peter. "In Mat. 1:17, it is recorded that there were 14 generations from Abraham to David, 14 from David

to the carrying away into Babylon, and 14 from these to the birth of Christ. But if you check up the list of kings, you will find that Matthew 1:8 excludes four rulers: Ahaziah, Athaliah, Joash and Amaziah. They have evidently been overlooked, merely to make it agree with the statement of three 14s in Matthew 1:17."

"What Peter is saying," said Mr. Phillips, "is that the genealogy of Matthew is artificially arranged to serve the purpose of stating that there were 14 generations between David and Zedekiah. He is asking: Does that indicate human authorship, and imply that the Bible is not reliable?"

"That is the idea," agreed Peter.

"Surely you don't think the Bible is wrong, Peter!" said Joan sharply.

"Of course not, but I want an answer," he replied.

"The answer will reveal that far from being an artificial arrangement that reflects discredit upon the record, the exclusion of the four rulers from the line of Christ was done for a very important reason,"

860	850	840	830	820	810
AHAZIAH →					
B	JORAM	JEHU		JEHOA	
ELIJAH	AHAZIAH →	←	ATHALIAH	ELISHA	
HAPHAT	JEHORAM		JOASH		
MICHAIAH					

explained Mr. Phillips. "Matthew is tracing the line of Christ from David, and these four rulers were excluded for the very good reason that they were not truly of the house of David."

"How can you say that?"

"They are accounted in the record as being of Ahab's house (see 2Chron. 22:2-3). This was brought about through the folly of Jehoshaphat in joining affinity with the house of Ahab by permitting his son Jehoram to marry Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel (2Chron. 18:1). As divine judgment had been pronounced upon the house of Ahab, this brought the posterity of Jehoram within its scope (1Kings 21:21; 2Kings 10:10)."

"I can see how that would be true of Jehoram and Athaliah," said Peter, "but why should it include Joash and Amaziah?"

"Look carefully at their reigns, and you will see that they followed the course of folly typical of the house of Ahab," answered his father. "This is true even of Joash. Though he commenced well under the guidance of Jehoiada, he later proved to be both ungrateful and inhuman in murdering Zechariah, the son of his friend. The judgment of Yahweh was extended to him as it was to all these four rulers, all of whom died violent deaths. Thus the warning of God was fulfilled".

"To what warning are you referring?"

"In Deuteronomy 5:9-10 and Exodus 34:7, God warned that His judgment would be manifest against those who hate Him until the third and fourth generation. His anger and judgment against the house of Ahab had been pronounced and extended even to the throne of David, where the royal seed had been polluted through affinity with the house of Ahab. Four generations were thus cut off to purify the seed again in accordance with Deut. 5:10. The exclusion of these wicked rulers by Matthew, therefore, was not an oversight, but a careful discrimination between the pure line of David and the line polluted by Ahab."

"But some of the other kings on David's throne proved disobedient without being excluded," protested Peter.

"That is true," agreed his father. "But that is not the point at issue. Here, the kings were not only disobedient, but tainted with a house that was cursed, and therefore not truly of the pure seed of David. For that reason they were excluded, and rightly so."

## Chapter Three

### UZZIAH'S GLORIOUS EXPLOITS AND SAD DECLINE

**UZZIAH'S** reign has been described as the most prosperous since the time of Solomon excepting that of Jehoshaphat. His military successes amply compensated for his father's defeat at Beth-shemesh (2Kings 14:13), and his careful preparations of defence made Judah powerful, securing the respect of all the neighbouring nations. The Bible declares: "his name spread far abroad, even to the entering in of Egypt" (2Chron. 26:8, 15). The record of his life is contained in 2Kings 15 and 2Chron. 26.

**Elevation of Uzziah** The murder of king Amaziah in Lachish left the throne vacant in Jerusalem. His failures had angered the nation, and the dissatisfaction that was generally felt continued after his death, leading to a state of political confusion.

This continued for eleven years, by which time Azariah his son had reached the age of 16 years. He manifested a manliness and uprightness which pleased the people. By popular acclaim they made him king. They were confident that he would rule the nation wisely, and in many regards their expectations proved correct. Though his name was really Azariah which means *Yahweh is my strength*, he is better known as Uzziah, which signifies *Yahweh hath given help* (cp. 2Chron. 26:1mg.). We shall see that whereas Yahweh gave him help, he did not always rely upon Yahweh for his strength.

But at first all went well. He ruled with authority and wisdom. He sought to serve God in truth, and the nation prospered. His reign brought a long period of fifty-two years of political stability to Judah during which time it grew in strength. The firm rule of Uzziah was a great contrast to the instability and increasing weakness found in the northern kingdom of Israel.

The king had wise advisers to help him. "He sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought Yahweh, God made him to prosper" (2Chron.

790	780	770	760	750	740
ZECHARIAH → → SHALLUM ← ← PEK					
HOASH		JEROBOAM 11			MENAHEM
JONAH AMOS HOSEA					
AMAZIAH			UZZIAH		JOTHAM

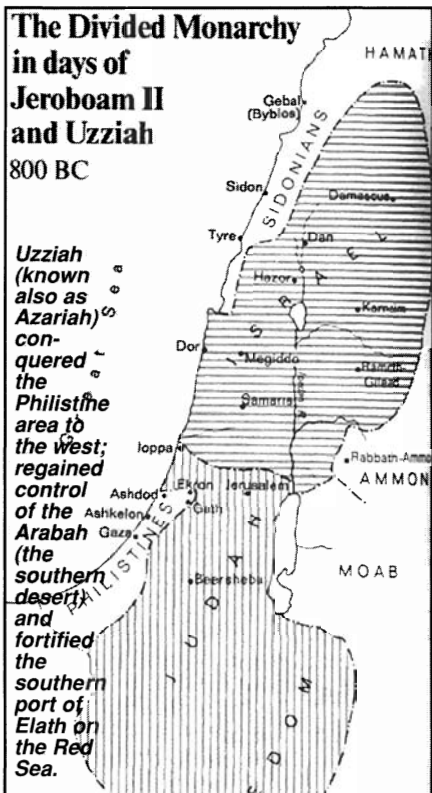
26:5). The prophets Amos (ch. 1:1), Hosea (ch. 1:1) and Isaiah (ch. 1:1) also lived during his lifetime. From all of these men he could obtain help if he desired it. He therefore had excellent advisers to assist him.

**International Success** Uzziah made every attempt to build up Judah's strength. His father had invaded Edom, and gained a notable victory over this southern enemy of Judah. Uzziah decided to strengthen his hold in Edom. He sent an expedition down to Elath, an important trading centre of Edom situated at the top of the Gulf of Akaba, and fortified it.

He thus became master of the south. Elath was an important terminus for the caravans that used to come from Arabia and Egypt to the countries of Israel, Syria and further north. It was the centre of the copper and turquoise industry of the ancient world, and therefore a place of great importance and wealth. By acquiring this place, Uzziah became a close neighbour to Egypt, which strengthened him militarily in the eyes of other nations who feared that Egypt would march to his assistance in time of need.

Having strengthened himself in the south, Uzziah next turned to the west. Along the coast of the Mediterranean dwelt the Philistines. They were constantly giving Judah trouble. Uzziah invaded their country in force, and attacked successively Gath, Jabneh, and Ashdod, three of their strongest fortresses. None of them were able to successfully resist him. He took places one after another, broke down the walls (2Chron. 26:6), and occupied the country.

Whilst thus employed in extending his power in the southeast and west of his country, Uzziah naturally came into hostile collision with the wild Arab tribes which used the districts





close to Judah to freely wander through and plunder. They particularly frequented the desert between the south of Judah and Egypt. It was necessary for Uzziah to bring these fierce marauders into subjection in order that his own southern border might have peace, as well as to protect the newly fortified city of Elath. Uzziah commenced warfare against these tribes, and, with God helping him (2Chron. 26:7), brought them under control.

The surrounding nations viewed the energy and warlike skill of the youthful king with fear. Such nations as the Ammonites rendered voluntary tribute to him (2Chron. 26:8), and as his strength grew, his reputation extended throughout all lands down as far as Egypt itself.

### **His Wise Domestic Policy**

Uzziah's successes abroad were accompanied by a wise policy at home. He had been carefully educated in divine matters by Zechariah,\* and early saw the need of using his position as ruler to bring the people in worship before Yahweh. He did right in the sight of God (2Chron. 25:2), even though he did not completely draw the people from false forms of worship (2Kings 15:4). Whilst the influence of Zechariah was upon him, he sought Yahweh, and prospered.

Whereas the northern kingdom was falling more and more under the influence of apostasy, Judah was relatively strong in spiritual matters. The prophet Hosea declared: "Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit; but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints" (ch. 11:12).

Uzziah also saw the need for strengthening the defences of Judah. Whilst God will help those who put their trust in Him, He also expects them to use every means at hand, which He has provided, to help themselves. We need ever to remember that. God will not help the slothful man or the careless person. If we are wasteful with the things He provides, we will suffer want, no matter how much we might claim to be faithful.

Uzziah, therefore, tried to make Judah as strong as possible. He could see that there was a great contest of strength about to take place among the nations. Under king Tiglath-pileser, Assyria in the north was gaining strength, and looked with covetous eyes towards the countries of Syria, Israel and Judah. Uzziah was by far the strongest of the ruling monarchs, and apparently the other nations now looked to him for a lead. Though the Bible does not speak of this, Tiglath-pileser mentions in one of the records of his many campaigns that he

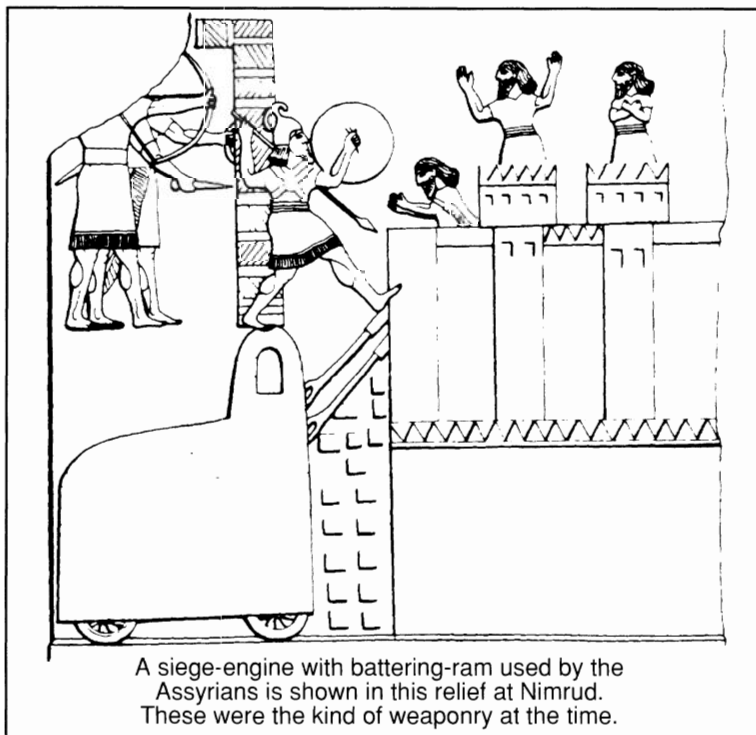
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\* Note 2Chron. 26:5. The Revised Version renders "had understanding" as "gave instruction." Of this prophet little is known. He appears to have acted as the king's counsellor, and so would have educated Uzziah in the ways of Yahweh, laying the foundation for his spiritual outlook and material prosperity.

was opposed by a strong coalition, including Hamath and Syria, under "Azriyahu of Yaudi" who was most likely Azariah of Judah.

But to oppose a monarch of such strength was to invite his anger, and Uzziah made careful preparations in case they should be needed. He strengthened the defences of Jerusalem by building towers at the "corner gate," the "valley gate," and the "turning of the wall." He protected the pasture region towards the southeast and the south, by building towers (2Chron. 26:10) in which the people could take refuge in case of a sudden raid. He improved the defences of many places, and the productivity of the land by cutting cisterns for the storing of rainwater (2Chron. 26:10, mg.). He organised, equipped and disciplined the military force of the country on a new plan. It was similar to the organisation that David had set up when he had established the "Six Hundred Men of Valor" to act as the nucleus of his army. Uzziah had a nucleus of 2,600 men, which officered a standing army of 307,500 men. These were equipped with the most modern armor and the finest weapons of war.

He also invented, or collected, a large number of military engines. Some resembled a Roman ballista which hurled huge stones against the enemy, and which are said to have cast stones up to 136



A siege-engine with battering-ram used by the Assyrians is shown in this relief at Nimrud. These were the kind of weaponry at the time.

kgs (300 lb) in weight for nearly a half kilometre. Others corresponded to the Roman Catapults, which shot forth darts and javelins. These were distributed along the line of the walls of Jerusalem and placed in commanding positions upon the towers, ready for use in case a siege of the city was attempted.

Never before had Judah been so completely armed as in the days of Uzziah; never before had there been such a display of strength and military might.

In addition to this, God helped him, for he was “marvellously helped till he was strong” (2Chron. 26:15). We are not told how God helped him, but from other references in the Bible, it seems to have been by earthquake. Both Zechariah (ch. 14:5) and Amos (ch. 1:1) speak of this. Amos predicted that Yahweh would “roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem” to the dismay of northern kingdoms. In some way God thus defended Judah in time of need, which assisted in making Uzziah even stronger.

**Uzziah’s Weakness:  
An Extensive Love of  
The Earth!**

Uzziah’s time was not all spent in preparation for war, however. He “loved husbandry.” Large royal herds of cattle roamed the grazing lands of Judah; vineyards graced the slopes of the hilly territory; large companies of husbandmen and vine dressers were employed by the king. When the record states that “he loved husbandry,” it refers to something more significant than that he merely delighted in farming.

The word “husbandry” comes from a Hebrew word meaning “ground.” Despite his strength, his knowledge of God’s Word, and his seeking of Yahweh, Uzziah was a man who turned to the ground. His attitude was earthy as far as the true service of God was concerned. Whilst the Bible records that he “did that which was right in the sight of Yahweh, according to all that his father Amaziah did” (2Chron. 26:4), we remember that of Amaziah it states: “he did that which was right in the sight of Yahweh, but *not with a perfect heart*” (2Chron. 25:2). Amaziah had served God because it was politic to do so, because he thought that by so doing, he would prosper materially and not because he “loved Yahweh with all his heart.”

Uzziah was similar. “So long as he sought Yahweh, God made him to prosper” (2Chron. 26:5). These words imply that the situation arose when Uzziah no longer “sought Yahweh.” He became so powerful in his own estimation that he thought he could do without God.

**How Pride Caused  
Uzziah to Fall**

How often it is that men fail to stand up to the temptation of prosperity. In times of adversity and defeat men are often humbled to seek divine help; they are forced to turn to God. But when material

possessions increase, they do not see so clearly the need of God; they begin to trust in “uncertain riches” (1Tim. 6:17); they “fall into temptation and a snare” (v. 9).

It was so with Uzziah. His continuous and extraordinary prosperity caused him to become puffed up with pride: “His heart was lifted up to his destruction, and he transgressed against Yahweh his God” (2Chron. 26:16). He was the supreme monarch in a powerful nation. The surrounding nations looked upon him with respect, their princes and rulers with envy.

But despite his power and glory, the king was still subordinate to the high priest; he was not permitted into the Holy Place of the temple where even the common priests could go. Whenever the king desired to worship God it had to be channelled through one of the priests.

This form of worship was designed by Yahweh to keep men humble before Him. Though king of the holy nation selected and protected by God, Uzziah was made to realise his low estate before God by worshipping through one of the descendants of Aaron.

It irritated Uzziah that he should be thus humbled before the people. He resolved that he would act as one of the priests, and burn the incense himself upon the altar in the Holy Place. He determined to do this, even though the law of God strictly commanded that it should not be done except by the appointed priests (Exod. 30:9-10; Lev. 10:1-3).

Wantonly and without excuse, he invaded the priestly office. Intent on self-exaltation, he entered the temple, and advanced towards the Holy of Holies to offer incense upon the golden altar which stood directly before the veil that separated the Most Holy Place. His foolish action begotten in pride challenged the very foundation of Mosaic worship and the authority of the priesthood — of Yahweh Himself!

The king’s attempt to force his way into the temple was seen by the high priest. Courageously this man gathered about him eighty ordinary priests, and hastened to the temple to oppose the haughty and powerful monarch. The high priest’s name was also Azariah, the original name of the king.

Inside the temple the stern priest opposed the proud monarch. “It appertaineth not unto you, Uzziah, to burn incense unto Yahweh, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense,” declared the priest. “*Go out of the Sanctuary!* You have trespassed; neither shall it be for your honor from Yahweh!”

The king could hardly believe his ears. It was presumptuous in his eyes for this priest to talk to him in such a way. Was not he king? Had not he brought might and glory to Israel? Were not the enemies of Israel humbled before him? Did he not command one of the most powerful armies in the world?

Furious with anger, Azariah the king glared at Azariah the priest.

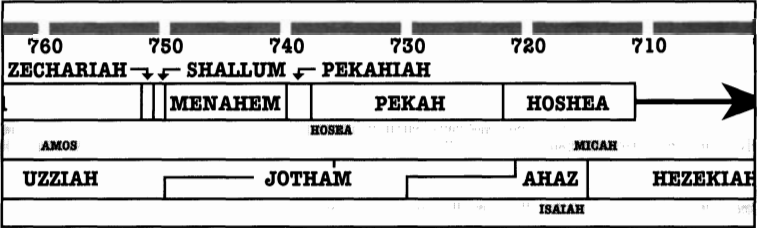
But the king was no longer known by that name. Whilst the priest was known as Azariah, or “*Yahweh is my strength*,” the king’s name had been changed to Uzziah, or “*Yahweh hath given help*.” He had received help from Yahweh, but the king no longer looked to Yahweh for strength.

He glared at the priest. On the forehead of the priest, shining in the light of the flickering lampstands, was the band of gold engraved with the solemn caption: “**HOLINESS TO YAHWEH!**” It was a warning that the things of God must be held in reverence. But it meant nothing to Uzziah. He continued to march forward determined to offer incense.

But then he realised something was wrong. He saw the looks of anger and indignation on the faces of the priests suddenly turn to horror and dismay. God had intervened. The king had been struck with the terrible scourge of leprosy, an attack so pronounced as to be immediately visible to all. “The leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests” (2Chron. 26:19). The king felt and knew what had happened, and dared no longer to resist. He acknowledged the power and judgment of God and yielded. The priests were strengthened in their opposition to him by what they saw. They had been horrified at the foolish action of the king, and were not prepared to spare him any indignity in thrusting him out of the temple. It was important that they should do so in order that the rest of Israel should be warned that God would not tolerate such impiety even by the king.

Uzziah hastened from the temple, pursued by the priests. As a leper he was considered unclean, and as such he was unable to perform his kingly duties any more, let alone enter the temple for worship. The one-time powerful monarch had to abide in a “House of Separation” (the “several house” of 2Chron. 26:21) for the remainder of his days, cut off from his people.

In consequence, the regency was conferred on his son Jotham, who lived in the royal palace and exercised the kingly duties, whilst his unhappy father endured a living death. How often Uzziah must have regretted his stupid and wicked action. His sad state was a lesson to all Israel that they must closely observe the commands of God lest they also suffer. Thus pride came before a fall; the mighty monarch,



ruler of the powerful nation was humbled before all the people because of sin. What could have been a glorious reign ended in misery and disgrace.

We are not told whether he repented and found forgiveness of his sin before he died, but it is possible that he did so, for the record in both books of Kings and Chronicles speaks of him as a good, rather than a wicked king. If that be so, then God was kind to Uzziah, for the humiliation that he must have felt will stand him in good stead in the future age when he stands before the Lord Jesus Christ in judgment. The leprosy had struck him in the head, because his sin was one of pride brought about by the thinking of the flesh. The mind conceives the idea of sin before it is put into effect. How important it is that we try to control our thoughts. Paul teaches that we must try "to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2Cor. 10:5). If we do so, we can leave the actions to take care of themselves; if we do not *think* evil thoughts we will not *do* evil actions (Mark 7:21).

That was really the lesson of the golden plate that was upon the forehead of Azariah the priest as he opposed Uzziah (Azariah) the king. The inscription, "*Holiness to Yahweh*", was a lesson to all people that they must try and bring their thinking into conformity with God's ways and ideas, and so live in accordance with His precepts.

Uzziah reigned for fifty-two years, and as he was sixteen when he came to the throne, he lived until he was 68 years old. He was buried in the royal burial place but, because he was a leper, he was given a separate sepulchre of his own (2Chron. 26:23).



*The tombstone of king Uzziah; the Aramaic inscription reads: "Hither were brought the bones of Uzziah, king of Jordan. Do not open." They had been brought from the Tomb of the Kings where Uzziah was first buried.*

# *The Ministry of the Prophets*



## Chapter One

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### THE MINISTRY OF ISAIAH: PROPHET AND STATESMAN

**T**HE age of Uzziah was rich in prophetic revelations. The voices of Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah and others were raised in protest against the abuses that were becoming ever more evident, or in directing the people of Israel to the glorious vision of the divine promise. It was the voice of God in the midst of the nation “testifying against the people, that He might bring them again unto His law” (Neh. 9:29), pleading with them, as their heavenly Father, through the “ministry of the prophets” that they might be saved.

Greatest of these prophets was Isaiah. He was a statesman as well as a prophet. According to Jewish tradition, he was the cousin of Uzziah the king, though there is no mention of this in the Bible. He was also an historian, for he wrote biographies of the lives of Uzziah and Hezekiah (2Chron. 26:22; 32:32). As both statesman and prophet he played a greater part in guiding the nation than any other of the prophets. In fact, Isaiah stands in the Bible as the greatest of the prophets whose writings are there recorded.

Isaiah warned that the spiritual condition of Judah was not good, no matter what its political state might be. “The people did yet corruptly” (2Chron. 27:2) and the high-place worship still continued (2Kings 15:35). Isaiah depicted the true character of Judah: “the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint” (Isa. 1:5). The rulers and people were apathetic to God’s requirements (v. 10), and there was but a remnant of faithful ones throughout the nation (v. 9). A “form of godliness without power,” prevailed. Sacrifices were offered; incense was burnt; new moons and sabbaths were carefully observed; the appointed feasts were kept; assemblies were called; solemn meetings were held; hands were spread forth; prayers were uttered (Isa. 1:11-15). But it was a mere show of religion, and, as such, was worthless, even abominable, in the sight of God. The “princes were evil,” the judges gave false judgments, the once “faithful city” had “become an harlot” unfaithful to God (vv. 21-23). The men were given completely to pleasure (ch. 5:11-12); the women vied with each other in the love of display (ch. 3:18-23); the whole nation was given over to materialism, to the pursuit of extreme luxury and worldliness, and even idolatry (Isa. 2:6, 8). For a time the judgment of Yahweh slumbered, but Isaiah warned that unless the nation gave itself to a change of heart, the voice of God would thunder out against Judah in destructive force.

These words of Isaiah were proclaimed towards the end of Uzzi-



ah's reign. In fact, the picture of the leprous king, set aside in his "house of separation," waiting for death to claim him, provided a symbolic picture of the nation itself.

This was brought home to Isaiah by a remarkable vision that he received in the very year king Uzziah died. He saw a revelation of the glory of Yahweh (see Isaiah 6). He heard seraphim\* proclaim the holiness of Yahweh, and saw the temple become so filled with a cloud of glory as to drive the priests therefrom.

As he considered this glory in the light of the leprous condition of the nation, Isaiah was filled with fear. He knew that such evils as he saw on every side were defiling, and that as a member of such a nation, he could be involved with it in a terrible judgment of destruction. "Woe is me," lamented the prophet, "I am undone! I am a man of unclean lips, and dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of Hosts."

Isaiah meant that as a member of such a disobedient people, he was unworthy to deliver a message in the name of Yahweh. But in the vision that he saw, one of the seraphim touched his lips with the fire off the altar, and by contact with this symbol of sacrifice, he was told: "Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged!"

He heard a voice saying: "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?"

It was a call for a volunteer to dedicate himself to proclaiming the divine will and purpose unto the nation. Isaiah willingly accepted the commission. He answered: "Here am I; send me!"

He was told to proclaim Yahweh's message to the people even though they would not hearken unto him. He was warned that there was no hope for the nation, that it would go from bad to worse, that it would be ultimately driven into dispersion.

But the picture was not entirely without hope. He was also told that there was a remnant within the nation, a few who would hearken as true witnesses for God. They are described as "a tenth," or a tithe — Yahweh's portion. Because of them, the nation would not be entirely destroyed; because of them, Isaiah's work would not entirely be without purpose and reward.

So Isaiah commenced his ministry to the people, a ministry that was to bring him into conflict with both rulers and people, a ministry that was to foreshadow the work of the Lord Jesus himself. For the Lord Jesus also volunteered to do his Father's will, even unto death.

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\* The word "seraphim" comes from the root "*saraph*" signifying to "burn" or "consume." In this verse the *seraphim* represent the angels about to administer the burning or consuming judgments of Yahweh. In type they depict the saints of the future age who will "execute the judgments written" (Ps. 149:9) relating to the age to come.

He, too, declared: "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). And he, too, proclaimed the very same message as did the prophet Isaiah (cp. Mat. 13:13-15). His also was a generation that faced impending judgment because of the degenerate spiritual attitude of the people (Mat. 23:34-38), even though, like Isaiah, his ministry would conclude before the city fell to enemy forces.

Little did Isaiah realise the many strange and remarkable adventures that were to befall him when he undertook to do the will of God, saying: "Here am I; send me!" He was called upon not only to rebuke Judah but also to proclaim the purpose of Yahweh with other nations. Sometimes he was instructed to also act out the message he also spake by word of mouth, and that made him a laughing stock to the people, as we shall see.

**Jotham's Reign  
Brings Growing  
Trouble for Judah  
(2Kings 15:32-38;  
2Chronicles 27).**

Jotham had become regent when his father, Uzziah, was stricken with leprosy. The king ruled well, reigning for sixteen years.\* He followed in the right ways of his father, whilst avoiding the sin of pride of which Uzziah had been guilty (2Chron. 27:2). He "prepared his ways before Yahweh his God," and because he did that he prospered (v. 6).

But it was not a happy period; the people did not follow his good example. They "did corruptly" (2Chron. 27:2). Thus the nation was brought more and more under the discipline of trouble.

Jotham could foresee this trouble. Far in the north, the Assyrian power was emerging from a period of disaster, and was commencing to exert its influence on neighbouring nations. A soldier by name of Pul (2Kings 15:19) grasped power in Assyria, and became known as Tiglath-pileser (see v. 29). He had extended his influence in the countries north of Judah, and thus constituted a threat to the kingdom. Already the kings of Syria and Israel had submitted, and were paying heavy tribute to the Assyrian. Rezin, king of Syria, tried to organise a combination of nations to oppose Tiglath-pileser. He approached the king of Judah with the request that he join the confederacy (2Kgs. 15:37). But Judah refused to do so, incurring the anger and opposition of Syria and Israel. During the reign of Ahaz this antagonism flared into open warfare.

Jotham wisely anticipated this coming trouble, and set out to

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\* In 2Kings 15:30 the 20th year of Jotham is referred to, so there is an apparent contradiction. The most likely explanation, however, is that the Spirit, in computing the time, passed over the reign of Ahaz on the basis that it was so evil as not to be worthy of consideration in the Davidic line of kings (cp. 2Chron. 28:22-23). Notice that 2Kings 15:30 does not say that Jotham reigned for 20 years (see marginal note), but refers to the 20th year from the reign of Jotham.

## **A SUMMARY OF ISAIAH'S PROPHECY**

### **Historical Background**

Isaiah's ministry commenced in the reign of Uzziah (ch. 1:1), probably during the closing years of that period (ch. 6:1). He was thus a contemporary of Hosea, Amos and Micah (Hos. 1:1; Amos 1:1; Micah 1:1). His work continued until the reign of Manasseh, for he wrote a comprehensive history of Hezekiah (2Chron. 32:32) as well as of Uzziah (2Chron. 26:22). He thus prophesied during the period of Jotham (16 years), Ahaz (16 years), Hezekiah (29 years), plus the closing years of Uzziah's reign, and the opening period of Manasseh. This represents a period of at least 63 years and was an epoch of gradual spiritual decline in Judah despite the reformation effected by Hezekiah. The true spiritual condition of the nation was reflected in the rapidity with which the nation turned from reform and reverted to idolatry and wickedness of every kind in the days of Manasseh.

### **His Ministry**

The book that bears his name presents both the "goodness and severity of God" (Rom. 11:22) in various expressions of prophetic utterance. The prophecy contains the following sections:

1. A series of addresses directed to the Israelites of both kingdoms; warning, denouncing, accusing them (chs. 1-12).

2. A number of prophetic discourses, in which the destiny of foreign nations is foretold, including the destiny of Babylon, Philistia, Moab, Syria, Assyria, Ethiopia, Egypt, Arabia, and Tyre (chs. 13-23).

3. Judgments against the Israelites and their foes, with ample promises of the final preservation and future prosperity of the Jews (chs. 24-36).

4. A historical section dealing with the circumstances of Sennacherib's invasion and Judah's miraculous deliverance (chs. 36-39).

5. Prophecies consoling the Jews concerning the coming of Messiah as the servant of Yahweh, describing the events which are introductory to it, including liberation from Babylon (chs. 40-49).

6. A description of the coming and work of Messiah — his person, his doctrines, his death, the widespread influence of the gospel and the final triumph of his kingdom (chs. 49-66).

Through Isaiah's prophetic gaze we can look across the dark and stormy present to the glory yet to be revealed, "when the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, when the ears of them that hear shall hearken, when the vile person shall no more be called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful, when Ephraim shall not envy

Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim... when the light of Zion shall have arisen, and Gentiles shall be attracted to its glory... when thine eyes shall behold the king in his beauty, and see the land that is very far off.”

### **One Complete Message?**

Modern critics of the Bible suggest two authors for the book of Isaiah; chapters 40 onwards are attributed to another writer of later date. The fallacy of this is shown by the fact that both sections of the book are attributed by John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus to Isaiah. For Isa. 29 see Mat. 15:7-9; for Isa. 42 see Mat. 12:17-18; for Isa. 40:3 see Mat. 3:3 and 12:17-18; for Isa. 53 see Jn. 12:38; for Isa. 61 see Mat. 3:3 and Lk. 4:17-19; etc. There are more quotations from Isaiah in the New Testament than any other of the Old Testament prophecies.

improve the defences of the country. He fortified the walls of the Temple area, and built fortresses \* “in the mountains of Judah, and in the forests” (2Chron. 27:3-4). Castles and towers were built in the open country that the approach of the enemy might be observed and reported.

So Judah had the appearance of strength but the hearts of the people were not with their God. Because of that, Isaiah warned that Judah would experience trouble in spite of all the preparations for war: “The palaces shall be forsaken; the multitude of the city shall be left; the forts and towers shall be for dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks” (Isa. 32:14).

This did not occur in Jotham’s time, however. He conducted several wars with success (2Chron. 27:7). He invaded the land of the Ammonites and prevailed against them so completely that they agreed to pay heavy tribute. But they only paid it for three years. Towards the end of Jotham’s reign, Judah suffered from the increasing aggression of Syria (2Kings 15:37). Ammon took the opportunity of throwing off the yoke of Judah and claiming its independence. It refused to pay the tribute any longer.

Jotham died at the early age of 41 years. His reign was only a short one, and with his death the people no longer had the example for good that he had set them. Ahaz, his son, reigned in his place. He was to prove the worst king to sit upon the throne of David.

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\* The word in Hebrew rendered “cities” in 2Chron. 27:4 signifies a fortified place, even a mere encampment.

## Chapter Two

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### AHAZ: JUDAH'S MOST EVIL KING

**T**HE Phillips family had just completed the reading of 2Chronicles 28, and were ready to briefly discuss together the most important details of the chapter.

"Ahaz evidently did not take much notice of the example of Jotham his father," commented Graeham at the conclusion of the reading.

"No, he proved to be the worst king to sit upon the throne of David," answered Mr. Phillips. "He came to the throne under difficult circumstances. The nation was far advanced in evil ways (2Chron. 27:2). The kingdom was threatened by Syria and Israel to its north. Ahaz had not the piety of heart, the courage, or strength of character, to make a stand against the prevailing corruptions of the people, or to rely upon Yahweh in trouble. The best course, as far as he could see, was to secure the support of the people by giving way to what they wanted, and seeking help from some powerful heathen monarch. He thus allowed every form of evil and degrading worship to be established in the land, and he turned to the Assyrians for help against Syria and Israel in the north."

"What does his name mean?" asked Peter, who was taking notes.

"Ahaz signifies *The Possessor*; it is a short form of the word Yehoahaz which means *Yahweh upholds*. Yehoahaz was the king's real name, and is used on the stone inscriptions made by the kings of Assyria, some of which have been found. But in Hebrew records he is not worthy of his full name, and there he is only referred to as Ahaz. He was a possessor rather than the one Yahweh upheld."

"According to verses 2 to 4, he certainly introduced a lot of idolatry," remarked Ann.

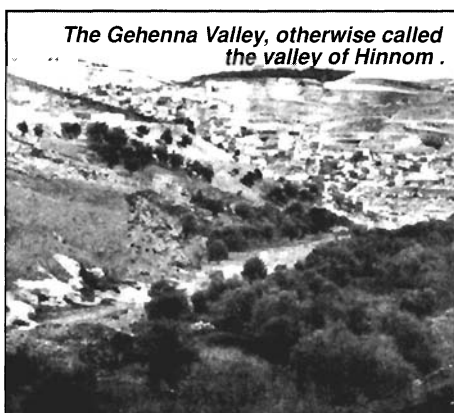
"Yes, he filled the land with it. On all sides were seen shrines to pagan gods, together with their images. It seemed to be a hobby with the king to collect together idols for as many different forms of worship as possible."

"What makes you say that?" asked Joan.

"Because of what we read in 2Kings 16:10 where is recorded a joint account of his life. It appears that when he visited Syria, he saw there yet another pagan altar, such as he had not seen previously. This intrigued him. He made a pattern of it and took it back to Judah where he set up a similar altar and worshipped before it!"

"What does it mean when it says, 'he burnt his children in the fire' (2Chron. 28:3)?" asked Ann.

"It means that he set up what was the vilest of all the ancient pagan forms of worship," answered her father. "Down in the valley of Hinnom, just outside Jerusalem, Ahaz set up the evil idol of Molech. This was the god worshipped by the Ammonites. It was a great metal god, with arms outstretched. Fires heated these arms until



they were red hot, and children were placed upon them to be consumed as a sacrifice. Drums were played as this terrible worship was conducted to drown the screams of the dying children. It was the most vile and awful form of worship imaginable, and was totally condemned by Yahweh (Jer. 7:31; Lev. 19:4)."

"What an inhuman sort of a father!" remarked Joan indignantly.

"Ahaz was a weak and cowardly king, and brought great trouble to the nation," said Mr. Phillips. "The worship of pagan gods daily increased. Their shrines were found in the valleys, on the hills, and under every flourishing tree. These trees gained a sacred character, for as the breeze rustled the leaves, it seemed to the superstitious worshippers as though they were actually speaking (cp. Isa. 1:29)."

### **Judah Invaded by Syria and Israel**

"Men cannot act wickedly as Ahaz did and not be punished," said Mr. Phillips as he continued the story. "Ahaz found that there was no help from these pagan gods. Having deserted Yahweh, he had cut himself off from help in that direction. His troubles mounted. The Syrians invaded the land, and Ahaz suffered defeat. Rezin, the king of Syria, took a great number of captives and removed them to Damascus. The invasion by Syria was followed by one on the part of Israel. Pekah, the king of Israel, invaded the land at the head of a large army, and Judah suffered a crushing defeat. Not only were a large number taken captive, but 120,000 (a third of the army; cp. 2Chr. 26:13; 28:6) were slain. They were slain, not because the warriors of Judah were inferior to those of Israel, but because, as we read in v. 6 tonight, 'they had forsaken Yahweh.' Those words in your Bible are worth underlining, in order that the real cause of Judah's failure may always be impressed on you when you read this chapter. And if you place in the margin of your Bible another reference by way of contrast — Joshua 1:7-8 — you will have at hand a verse that teaches how victories may be won!

“The defeat was personally disastrous for Ahaz. Not only was he disgraced before the people, but also his son, the governor of his house, and his chief adviser were slain in the battle.

“And now we come to a part of the story that takes us to a different section of the Bible,” continued Mr. Phillips. “As I have told you before, we must always bring together the various accounts of incidents recorded in Scripture. As far as the life of Ahaz is concerned, that means we must consider the record in Chronicles, the record in Kings, and the records dealing with the king in the writings of Isaiah the prophet.”

### **SPIRITUAL WICKEDNESS DURING THE REIGN OF AHAZ**

Every form of apostate worship was permitted (2Chron. 28:4); soothsayers and wizards were encouraged and consulted (Isa. 2:6, 8). Altars were erected on the rooftops of houses (Jer. 19:13), probably in imitation of the king who caused to be erected on the roof of the temple small altars apparently for the worship of the heavenly bodies of the Zodiac (2Kings 23:5, 12) and who seemed to combine an interest in astrology with astronomy (Isa. 38:8). At the entrance to the court of the temple were kept chariots dedicated to the sun, with their sacred white horses as in Assyria (2Kings 23:11), and idolatrous priests were employed to serve this false worship (v. 5). The temple worship gradually fell into contempt. Its wealth was spoiled to grace the idolatrous systems established (ch. 16:17-18), and its ordinances became neglected (2Chron. 28:24; 29:3, 7, 16-17). The vile worship of Molech was set up, not only on Olivet but in the valley of Hinnom (2Kings 16:3). There the brazen god of Ammon was erected, and the dreadful human sacrifice encouraged, the king himself offering upon the abominable altar (2Chron. 28:3).

But the culminating folly of his disastrous religious policy was the erection of the Altar of Damascus in the precincts of the temple, and the royal encouragement to the people to worship the gods of the very nations which smote him (2Chron. 28:23). This foolish religious policy of Ahaz sealed the doom of Judah. Even the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah were unable to redeem the nation completely from the degrading services thus established, so that after the death of these two kings, the nation rapidly reverted to its former folly and was ultimately driven from the land. Not until the future age, when the glorious temple to be erected by the Lord Jesus is established, and the nation is finally purified under his rule and discipline, will this folly be completely purged. It will be recalled by Yahweh in that day, to be finally hidden forever under the covering provided by the Lord Jesus himself. See the statements of Ezekiel 43:7-10.

## Isaiah and Ahaz

“Isaiah was watching with dismay the growing paganism and increasing wickedness of the times. He knew why Syria and Israel had invaded Judah. They wanted Ahaz to join with them in a union against the king of Assyria. Ahaz refused to do so however. His refusal was not based upon trust in Yahweh, but because he was already intriguing with Assyria. Now he turned to Assyria more completely than ever. Though the invasion by Syria and Israel had been partially successful as far as they were concerned, and Judah had suffered a terrible defeat, Jerusalem itself had not been taken. The city had withstood the shock of assault. Syria and Israel now feared that Judah might join with Assyria against them. They decided upon a joint invasion of the land, with the object of overthrowing Ahaz, and placing on the throne of David a nominee of their own, who is known by the title of ‘the son of Tabeal,’ which signifies “*Good for Nothing*,” and who they were sure would do as they desired.”

“Where do we learn all that?” asked Peter.

“In Isaiah 7:6,” replied his father.

“I thought we were discussing 2Chronicles 28!” murmured Peter.

“We are,” replied Mr. Phillips, “but as I told you, to get the full background of this chapter, we must consider Isaiah chapters 7 and 8 as well, for they deal with the same incidents. There we learn (Isa. 7:1) that though Judah was soundly defeated by Syria and Israel, Jerusalem itself had escaped their hands. Now Ahaz learned that both nations had joined forces to invade the land.

“Fear filled the heart of the king; it was a fear that swept through the whole of Judah as news of the impending invasion became known. Throughout the nation there were many families who were mourning the loss of men killed in battle, or taken into captivity during the recent invasions. They feared the effect of any further warfare.

“The faithless Ahaz realised he must gain help somewhere! He had turned his back on Yahweh, and had no faith in Him to seek repentance.

“One course lay open to him. He sent messengers to Assyria with a rich present, pleading help against his two northern enemies. And the mighty and brutal Tiglath-pileser agreed to assist him.

“But Ahaz feared that Syria might attack before Assyria could come to the aid of Judah. He decided to strengthen the fortifications of Jerusalem. Accompanied by his counsellors, he went to a point just outside the walls of the city where some of the waters flowed. If the city were besieged these waters could help the enemies of Judah. Ahaz was probably planning to stop these waters, so that they would not help the enemy.

“As he stood with his counsellors discussing the matter, he was approached by Isaiah the prophet, who was accompanied by his son



Shear-jashub. They had been sent out by Yahweh to meet the king. Their names are significant. Isaiah means *Yahweh will save*; Shear-jashub means, *The remnant will return*. Jointly their names signify: *Yahweh will save and the remnant will return*."

"What would those names mean to the king?" asked Graeham, as his father paused.

"They were an assurance that Israel can never be completely destroyed, for a remnant will remain to be saved. Later, in a prophecy delivered at the same time, Isaiah made a play on the name Shear-jashub saying: 'The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God' (Isa. 10:21)."

"I still can't see what the prophet meant," said Joan.

"He was showing that Israel can never be completely destroyed. It matters not how fierce the persecutions heaped upon this people by Gentile nations, there will always remain Jewish people, and ultimately they will be regathered to their God. We are living at that epoch. Today, the Jews are returning to their land again after nearly 2,000 years of trouble. This is the beginning of the fulfilment of these words of Isaiah, and shows that we are living at the time of Christ's return."

"Why does God do all that for the Jewish people if they were so disobedient?" asked Joan.

"We have an answer to that in Ezekiel 36:22," replied Mr. Phillips. "There God declares to the Jewish people: 'I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for Mine holy Name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went'."

"What does that mean?"

"God made a promise to Abraham that He would make of Israel a 'great nation' (Gen. 12:2). Because of that promise, He has preserved the Jewish people, has caused some of them to be restored to their land, and will yet make of them a great nation."

"How will He do that?"

"He tells us that in Ezekiel 37:21-22. There are three stages. First he restores the people to the land (v. 21); then He restores their nation (v. 22); finally He will restore their king, for we read, 'one king shall be king to them all.' That king will be the Lord Jesus."

"And you say that was what Isaiah was teaching Ahaz when he appeared with his son Shear-jashub just outside Jerusalem?" asked Graeham.

"That was the real meaning of his action as Isaiah himself shows by these comments he made, which I have quoted. There was, however, a primary fulfilment which stands as a type of God's ultimate intentions."

"What makes you say that?"

"Because there was actually a remnant that did return in the days of Ahaz, although God's words mainly apply to the time of Christ's return".

"Here we go again", said Peter in a resigned voice. "Instead of Dad coming straight out with his explanation, we must go around in circles in some mysterious manner."

"I want you to learn to *think* upon these things, Peter!" replied his father. "That is more difficult than merely accepting them. By thinking upon them you will learn how to solve any problem that may come up in the Scriptures at any time."

"You forget, Dad, that a person must have something to think with, before you can teach them to think," said Ann, with a chuckle, grinning at her brother.

"Can we get back to what we were talking about?" interrupted Graeham. "You were saying that there was a remnant of Jews who returned in the days of Ahaz and this was typical of the purpose of Yahweh to ultimately save the nation."

"Yes," replied his father. "Bear in mind the circumstances when Isaiah and Shear-jashub his son, met Ahaz and his counsellors as they were arranging for the defence of the city. Already Judah had been invaded by Syria and Israel, and had suffered a crushing defeat, though Jerusalem had not been overthrown. Large numbers of Jews had been taken into captivity. But the meaning of the names Isaiah and Shear-jashub taught that *Salvation is of Yahweh* and the *Remnant shall return*. Shortly afterwards the remnant did return."

"How do you mean?"

"We have already read about it in the chapter of Chronicles we are considering. When this is linked with this section of Isaiah, the significance of the action of the prophet is apparent. The children of Israel had taken captive out of Judah some 200,000 women and children, and had driven them back to Samaria with them. What a load of misery was in that company of people! Many of them had fathers, or husbands, or sons, or brothers, slain in the recent war. They had been uprooted from their homes and carted into a foreign land by unsympathetic people. They were without hope. And why? Verse 6 of 2Chron. 28 declares: 'Because they had forsaken Yahweh!' True happiness, true peace of mind, comes from following the things of God."

**The Prophet Oded  
Rebukes Israel  
For The Oppression  
Of Their Brethren**

"But in their case, the mercy of Yahweh was to be revealed, and the significance of the joint names of Isaiah and Shear-jashub shown. There was a prophet of Yahweh in Samaria whose name was Oded. He went out to meet the victorious army of Israelites as they came bearing with them the captives from Judah. He commanded them to stop, and warned them that they were acting in a foolish manner; that if they continued in the course they were pursuing they would reap the punishment of Yahweh. He declared: 'Consider! Because Yahweh was

wroth with Judah. He has delivered them into your hand, and you have slain them in a terrible rage. But now you purpose to bring into bondage these captives. Remember that you have sinned against Yahweh yourselves, and you might reap greater punishment by following this course. Set these captives free!’

“The soldiers were not at all ready to follow the advice of Oded. They wanted to ignore the rebuke of the prophet and take the captives for slaves. But there were leaders in Samaria who recognised the wisdom of his advice. They knew that God would be displeased at such a conduct against those who were virtually their brethren; that their action was really inciting the anger of Yahweh against them (see, for example, Ezekiel 25:12-13).

“They stood up against those who had come back from the war, and publicly denounced them. ‘You shall not bring the captives into this city!’ they declared. ‘We have offended sufficiently against Yahweh already, and do you want to add to our sins and wickedness! You know that we have already experienced wrath against Israel.’

“The people knew that these words were true. Already the nation had been invaded by the Assyrians (2Kings 15:29), and this was recognised as judgment against their sins. People had gathered together to see the returning army, and they heard the words of Oded and these leaders of Samaria. A murmur went through the crowd, that the captives should be sent home. The army found that the people were beginning to become hostile towards it. The despondent, pathetic appearance of the captives themselves, doubtless excited the sympathy of many in Israel who recognised that they were really their kinsfolk. Instead of ill-treating them they decided to help them. The work was given into the hands of the leaders who had already voiced their protest against the army. As a result, the captives were treated sympathetically; they were given back their clothes, they were fed and cared for, and conducted back with kindness to Jericho, so that they might return to their families. Thus the ‘remnant returned’ in the days of Ahaz, a great sign that the remnant will return in the last days to restore the greatness of Israel in the times when Messiah shall reign.”

“Before you go on, Dad,” said Peter slowly, as he tried to take in the mass of detail his father had put before them, “there are one or two questions I would like to ask.”

“Very well! Go on!”

“First of all, who was Oded?”

“We know nothing more than is recorded in 2Chronicles 28:9. His name means *Helping*, and he was certainly of help at this time.”

“Names in the Bible always seem to have some significance,” continued Peter. “Is there any special significance in the names of the leaders of Israel who protested against the army on its return from the war? They are all recorded in verse 12.”

"I believe there is a significance in these names, especially as we read in verse 15, that they were men who were especially 'expressed by name.' Their names with their meanings are as follows: Azariah: *Yah is Keeper*; Johanan: *Yah is Gracious*; Berechiah: *Yah is Blessing*; Meshillemoth: *Recompenses*; Jehizkiah: *Yah is Strong*; Shallum: *Recompenses*; Amasa: *Burden Bearer*; Hadlai: *Weak*. These names set in order, form the following sentence: *Yah is a Preserver, He is gracious, He blesses and recompenses, for He is strong to repay. He is a burden-bearer to the weak*. These very names, therefore, seem to tell the story of God's purpose."

### **Ahaz Rejects the Sign of Christ**

"I would like to ask a question or two about Isaiah 7," said Graeham. "I think I can understand your statement concerning the prophet and his son, and the meaning of that sign to Israel, but what is the rest of the chapter about?"

"A very dramatic picture is presented to us there," said Mr. Phillips. "As the king with his counsellors came to this place just outside Jerusalem and were met by the prophet, they heard words that should have encouraged them. Ahaz was told to 'take heed and be quiet' (Isa. 7:4), meaning that he should comfort himself in the significance of the sign of the prophet and his son, for it showed that Yahweh was with Judah if the king and people would but turn to Him. The prophet told the king not to fear the confederacy that had been formed between Syria and Israel and which was even then preparing to invade the land, for it would not prosper. The intention of the invading kings was to overthrow the throne of David, and to place a commoner on the throne, but God's promise to David made that impossible. The line of David must be preserved until the Messiah, whom Isaiah called *Immanuel*, would appear. Therefore, declared the prophet: 'Fear not the fierce anger of Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel; they are but the two tails of smoking firebrands soon to be put out. It is against the purpose of Yahweh for them to place on the throne in Jerusalem a king other than a son of David, and therefore their schemes are not to be feared. Within 65 years Ephraim shall be broken, that it be not a people!'"\*

"These would be words of comfort to a man of faith, but Ahaz was not a man of faith. He had no confidence in the purpose of Yahweh, no faith that the conspiracy of Israel and Syria against the house of David would not succeed. Isaiah's appeal to him was to trust God, but Ahaz had already sent an appeal for help to the king of Assyria.

"Isaiah pressed the king further: 'Ask for yourself a sign of Yahweh your God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above!' (Isa. 7:11).

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\* Mr. Phillips' words are a paraphrase of those contained in Isaiah 7:4-9, expressing their meaning.

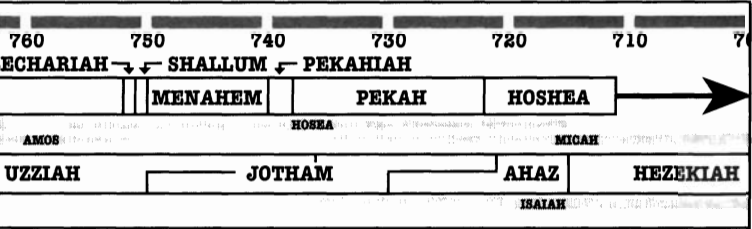
“This was a gracious and powerful statement. The prophet gave the king choice of any miracle he liked to ask. To a man of faith this would have been a wonderful offer. But the confidence of Ahaz was pinned upon the help he hoped to receive from Assyria.

“The invitation of the prophet was embarrassing to the king. He was surrounded by many of his counsellors, some of whom doubtless still retained faith in Yahweh. For the king to openly reject the invitation of the prophet would have placed him in a bad position with his counsellors; to accept the invitation and demand a sign would undoubtedly be followed, as the king realised, by the demand that he place his trust in Yahweh and not in the king of Assyria. This he was not prepared to do. Instead, the king tried to avoid any such commitment. He refused to accept the invitation on the authority of the Law of Moses. He declared: ‘I will not ask, neither will I tempt Yahweh!’

“Isaiah realised he could get nowhere with the faithless king. ‘Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also?’ he asked angrily. ‘Therefore Yahweh himself shall give you a sign: Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings. And the very king whom you have chosen to help you, will be used by Yahweh to punish you’ (Isa. 7:14-17, paraphrased).

“Thus the prophet warned the king that the Assyrian whom Ahaz had hired (cp. Isa. 7:20) would be used by God to punish him. Syria and Israel would, indeed, be overthrown by Assyria, but Judah also would be invaded.

“The prophet declared that, because the northern kingdom of Israel opposed the covenant of David by trying to place on the throne of Jerusalem a king other than a son of David, that nation would be utterly destroyed within 65 years. Because the sign of Immanuel had been rejected by Ahaz, the mighty Assyrian power would be allowed to sweep down through Syria and Israel to Judah itself, so that the wicked nation would be severely punished. This latter part of the prophecy would, indeed, be fulfilled within a very short time, before a certain baby which was yet to be born would learn to say, ‘My father’ (Isa. 8:4).”



**The Remarkable  
Sign Of  
Maher-shalal-  
hash-baz**

"I am afraid that I find this a little hard to follow," complained Ann, as her father paused in his description of the sign given to king Ahaz. "Does not Immanuel refer to Jesus Christ?"

"That is true; his name is Immanuel, and Matthew 1:23 shows how the prophecy was fulfilled in him."

"What does it mean by 'butter and honey shall he eat'?"

"Butter is a form of milk, and milk and honey are often used in the Bible to symbolise God's teaching. See Psalm 119:103; 55:21; Proverbs 24:13-14 and Isaiah 55:1-2."

"I see!" said Ann, eagerly. "Through the knowledge and instruction that Jesus obtained from God, he would find strength to overcome evil ways."

"That is correct," answered her father. "He was born of a virgin, for God was his Father, and by that means Jesus inherited qualities that he was able to make strong by the instruction of the Word of God guided by the Spirit which he had without measure. Isaiah speaks of this in ch. 11:2-3. He declares that 'the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Yahweh,' caused the Lord to be 'of quick understanding,' with the result that 'he loved righteousness and hated iniquity,' as we read in Hebrews 1:9."

"So far so good," said Peter, "but in verse 16 the explanation breaks down. There Isaiah declares that the land would be forsaken of both its kings before the child 'knows to refuse the evil and choose the good'."

"That is quite correct," argued Graeham. "The punishment came on Syria, Israel and Judah long before the birth of the Lord Jesus".

"But the reference implies that the child shall be born, though not able to choose between good and evil before the threatened judgments came," insisted Peter. "That is not appropriate seeing that the Lord was not born until 700 years after these kings were punished!"

"I don't agree with you," replied his father. "You are only implying this; the verse is quite correct. There was another son promised who was born before the threatened judgment came. The king rejected the sign of Immanuel, so there was given unto him another sign, the sign of Maher-shalal-hash-baz. This was the son of the prophet, referred to in Isaiah 8. His name means: *He shall hasten to the spoil, he shall make speed to the prey* (Isa. 8:1, margin). The sign of Immanuel would have brought peace to the nation, but the people having rejected it, the Assyrian would be sent hastening to the spoil of Judah, speeding to the prey. As you can see from verse 18 these sons of Isaiah were signs to Israel."

"Who was Maher-shalal-hash-baz?" asked Joan.

“He was another son born to Isaiah,” explained her father. “When Isaiah knew that he was to have another son, he took witnesses to record the time he was to be born, and then told them that ‘before the child shall have knowledge to cry, *My father*, judgments would have fallen on Syria, on Israel, and would sweep down on Judah’. It would all be fulfilled within a few months after the birth of the little boy.”

“That proves my point,” exclaimed Peter, triumphantly. “These are similar words to those spoken of Immanuel, therefore the birth of Immanuel should have been before the judgments on Israel and Judah!”

“There is a very important reason why that is not so,” answered Mr. Phillips.

“What is the reason?”

“Because Judah was specifically told that Maher-shalal-hash-baz would be born at that time, but they were not told that Immanuel was then to be born. Therefore it is true that judgments fell on Judah before Immanuel knew to choose between the good and the evil (that is, before his birth 700 years afterwards), and it is also true that they fell shortly after the birth of Maher-shalal-hash-baz.”

“Why do you say this was clearly shown to Judah?”

“Because the king was told that the son promised to the prophet was to be then born, and he was instructed to take ‘faithful witnesses’, to record the time that the birth was to take place. By those means the people knew that the judgments were impending. No such instructions were given regarding Immanuel, therefore there is no date given as to when he would be born. That was revealed later. All that the faithful in Judah would know was that in due time a virgin would bear a son named Immanuel, but before that time judgment would come on the nation — it would come on the nation early in the lifetime of Maher-shalal-hash-baz, the son of Isaiah. Thus when the little boy was born, the prophet and the people knew that the judgments were impending. Only a few months would elapse before he would learn to speak a few words, and before that time Assyria would have invaded the land of Syria, Israel and Judah (Isa. 8:4).

“But though judgments were threatened on the nation, a glorious future was also promised through Immanuel, who would surely come eventually.

“Meanwhile, the king and his counsellors must have returned to the city very disturbed by the words they had heard from Isaiah the prophet,” Mr. Phillips concluded on this occasion.

## Chapter Three

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### DAYS OF TERRIBLE WICKEDNESS IN JUDAH

**U**NDER the evil reign of the wicked king Ahaz, Judah's troubles mounted daily. Not only had the Syrians invaded the land, and driven the Jews from Elath, the important caravan terminus on the Gulf of Aqaba (2Kings 16:6), but other nations had taken the opportunity to invade the land and seize territory for themselves. The Edomites and Philistines attacked Judah and took many important towns and forts (2Chron. 28:17-18).

Judah had been brought to a very low ebb. The Bible declares: "Yahweh brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he made Judah naked" (2Chron. 28:19).

Judah was "made naked" by the wickedness of Ahaz; that is, the whole nation was brought into a state of sin, for "nakedness" is used typically of sin (cp. Gen. 3:11; Rev. 16:15). The nation suffered because of its folly. It did not seem to have any effective defence against the enemies that were rising up against it on every side.

Ahaz could have taken the advice of Isaiah and turned to Yahweh for help; and there is no doubt that he would have found deliverance (see Isa. 7:11). But he lacked the necessary faith to do so.

To him there was but one solution: trust in the arm of flesh. He deserted Yahweh and turned to the king of Assyria for help. He did this, doubtless, because his enemies (nations like Syria, Edom, Philistia) had joined alliance with Egypt in opposition to Assyria. Ahaz stood aside from this alliance, and joined the Assyrians. He was warned by the prophet Isaiah that his policy was not wise; that the very nation to which he had turned for help would bring trouble upon him and upon the land (Isa. 7:18-20; 8:6-7). He was told that it would be better if he stood aside from entanglement with either Assyria or Egypt, and place his complete confidence in Yahweh.

#### **Ahaz Seeks Assistance of Assyria**

Ahaz spurned the advice. He put no confidence in Yahweh or His prophet. Instead he sent a servile letter to Tiglath-pileser, the king of Assyria, pleading for him to help him, humbling himself before him in a most degrading manner: "I am your servant and your son," he wrote. "Come up, save me out of the hand of the king of Syria and out of the hand of the king of Israel which rise up against me."

This letter was insulting to Yahweh, the God of Israel, for it implied that He could not save. He represented Himself as a Father to

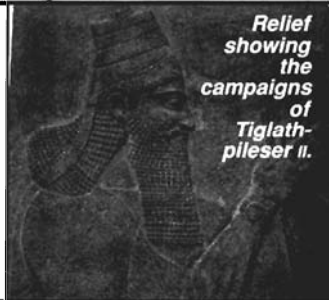
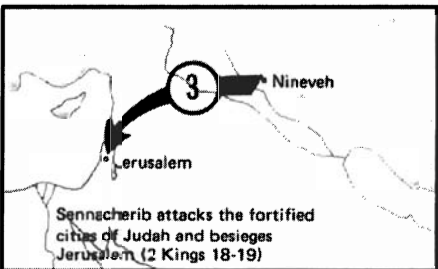
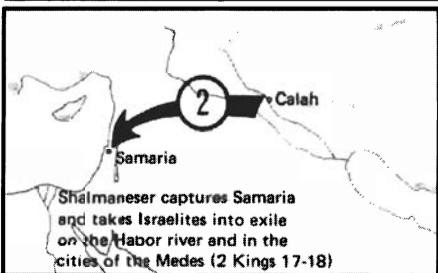
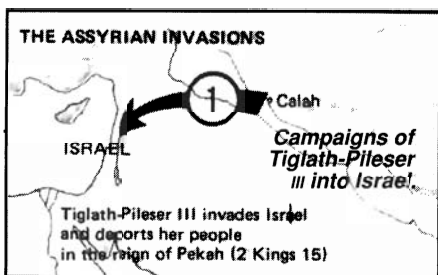


Israel (Mal.1:6), yet here was the king claiming to be a son of Assyria! Ahaz had written in this manner because he was filled with great fear at the prospect of Judah being again invaded by Syria and Israel (Isaiah 7).

With the letter, he sent a rich present of silver and gold which he robbed from out of the temple and the palace in Jerusalem to pay as hire to the pagan prince of Assyria (2Kings 16:8).

Tiglath-pileser was pleased to have Ahaz as an ally. He invaded the land, marching south past the borders of Israel to Gaza where he defeated the Philistines. He also overthrew the city of Damascus, capital of Syria; slew its king, Rezin; took many of the people captive; and put the whole country under the direct control of the Assyrian government.\*

This defeated the plans that Syria and Israel had made to invade Judah. Ahaz rejoiced at the success of the Assyrian and doubtless felt that his schemes had been wise and for the best.



\* These things are recorded on the stone monuments and records of the kings of Assyria, which have been unearthed by archaeologists. They confirm the Bible account. In them Tiglath-pileser speaks of how the nations, including "Rezin of Damascus and Menahem of Samaria", paid him tribute. They also record the excursion he made at the call of Ahaz, the king of Judah. He declares that he restored the widespread territory of Damascus to the border of Assyria. "My (official) I set over them as district governor." He speaks of how the king of Gaza put his confidence in Egypt, but how Assyria defeated the Philistines and imposed tribute on them.

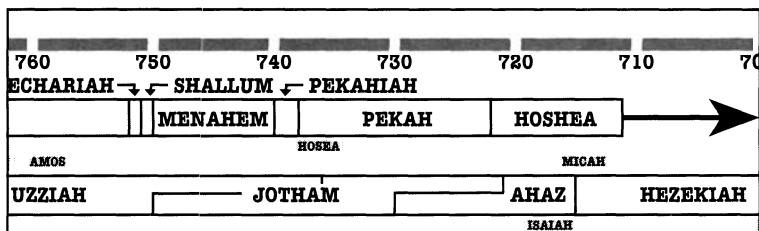
Tiglath-pileser next turned his attention to Samaria. The king reigning there at the time was a man called Pekah. He had earlier invaded Judah and gained a great victory. Thus God had used him to punish wicked king Ahaz, but now the time had come when he, too, was to be punished in turn. His reign over Israel had not been successful. Many problems had beset the nation during his reign, and these helped to make the people dissatisfied with him. A conspiracy against him was formed by a man named Hoshea. It received the full support of the king of Assyria, as recorded on the stone by Tiglath-Pileser. Pekah was murdered, and Hoshea reigned in his stead.

These are the dreadful things that happen when people depart from God.

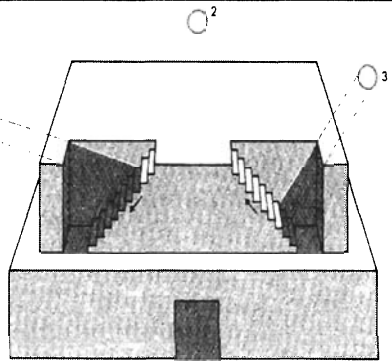
But all this trouble in the north was good news to Ahaz. His enemies in the north and to the west had been overthrown, and it appeared as though his policy in seeking assistance from Assyria had been the correct thing to do. He felt grateful to Tiglath-pileser, and travelled north to the city of Damascus that he might meet him personally, and pay his respects to him. There he received a shock. He was told that more tribute was required; that he was expected to pay such sums as would keep Judah in a constant state of poverty.

### **Ahaz Imitates Foreign Religion**

One thing pleased him, however. Whilst he was in Damascus, Ahaz saw a new altar dedicated to a pagan god. It captured his imagination. He made a hobby of collecting idols and altars, and had filled Jerusalem with foreign forms of worship. But here was one that he did not have, and he could not rest satisfied until he had added it to his collection. He commanded the high priest Urijah, to come up to Damascus and draw a copy of it that he might build a similar altar in Jerusalem. Urijah was the priest who had been called upon by Isaiah the prophet to witness to a prophecy which spoke of the sudden destruction that Yahweh would bring upon the guilty nation of Judah (Isa. 8:2). But he feared the wrath of the king more than he did that of God, however, and to his everlasting disgrace, did as he was commanded. How stupid was Ahaz! This god of Damascus had been unable to help the Syrians in their resistance to Tiglath-pileser, and



The sundial was used to indicate the time of day by the shadow of a gnomon thrown on a graduated surface. According to archaeological data there were such buildings in the time of Ahaz, constructed with two walls, one on the eastern and the other on the western side, and two staircases (within the walls) which ascend opposite each wall, in such a way that the last step is common to both. The sun shines on different sections through the day, to show the time.



yet Ahaz was willing to worship it instead of Yahweh who could have assisted him. Nevertheless Isaiah had invited him to seek a sign of Yahweh as a vindication of His power (Isa. 7:11).

All that Judah received out of the goodwill visit of its king to Damascus was heavier taxation, and a new false religion set up in Jerusalem. Like a small boy with a new toy, the king was anxious to use the altar. He commanded that the morning and evening sacrifices should be offered upon it, and he even led the people in this wicked action.

The king now knew no bounds to his wickedness. The threat of invasion from Syria and Israel having been removed, he imagined that he was immune from trouble, and had no need of Yahweh's help. Every form of false worship was encouraged until the land was filled with idols and pagan systems. "This is that king Ahaz," declares the Bible as though emphasising his wicked character (2Chron. 28:22). Cities throughout Judah were set aside as headquarters of false systems of worship, and on every high place incense ascended unto the gods of heathen nations. The people were drawn away from the true worship, and the anger of Yahweh smouldered against the foolish nation (2Chron. 28:25).

Ahaz also showed a great curiosity towards astrology. It was probably associated with the pagan worship of the sun, moon and stars. He set up in Jerusalem a sun-dial which later became an important medium by which Yahweh manifested His power to Hezekiah, the son of this wicked king (Isa. 38:8). He made the shadow on the sun-dial go backward, an indication to all who cared to think about the matter that Yahweh was superior to the sun which some worshipped as a god.

Meanwhile, Assyria continued to demand its tribute, and Ahaz found it more and more difficult to provide it. All wealth was stripped

from the temple and palace and paid over to the Assyrian. The people were heavily taxed to provide what was demanded. Great distress was felt throughout the land. The Bible declares: "The king of Assyria came unto Ahaz, and distressed him, but strengthened him not" (2Chron. 28:20).

Indeed, the nation became so poor that the king had to cut down all the brass found on the furniture of the temple, even that used in the sacred vessels and the huge covered way along which previous kings had ceremoniously walked to the temple on sabbath days. But still the greed of the Assyrian king was not satisfied.

The reign of Ahaz, therefore, witnessed the temple closed for worship, heathen altars everywhere erected, and determined efforts made by a foolish king to stamp out the true worship of Yahweh in favor of false and wicked systems. It was not a happy time for Judah.

**The Son of Ahaz:** Towards the end of his reign Ahaz caused his  
**Faithful Hezekiah** son to join him in ruling the nation. He was a young man of just over twenty years of age, whose name was Hezekiah. He was to prove a wise and faithful king. He disagreed completely with the policy of his father, but so long as the latter was living, he could do little about it. He waited the time when the sole authority would be his, and he could put into operation the reforms he had already begun to plan.\*

Hezekiah played a most important role in the history of Judah. He not only commenced a great national reform, but through him Yahweh vindicated His power against the boastful Assyrian. Hezekiah's life is given in great detail in the Bible, and as it presents a remarkable type of the purpose of God in our time, we will find it most valuable to consider it closely.

But meanwhile, let us see what was happening in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Ahaz and the early years of Hezekiah.

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\* As Hezekiah was 25 years of age when he came to the sole rule over Judah (2Kings 18:2), and Ahaz was 20 years old when he commenced to reign and reigned for 16 years, it means that Hezekiah was born when Ahaz was about 12 years of age (2Kings 16:2). This is not an unusual age for fatherhood in the east. That he was co-ruler with his father is shown by computation. He commenced to reign in the 3rd year of Hoshea (2Kings 18:1). But Hoshea commenced to reign in the 12th year of Ahaz (2Kings 17:1). Thus the 3rd year of Hoshea was the 14th year of Ahaz; so that Ahaz was still reigning at this time. Hezekiah was reigning as co-ruler for the last three years of Ahaz's life, then, at the age of 25, he commenced his sole reign, and immediately initiated the reform for which he had been preparing during the last years of his father's life.

# *Last Years of the Kingdom of Samaria*



**W**E have previously shown how the House of Jehu came to an end in the murder of Zachariah by Shallum. Shallum did not live long to enjoy his triumph. Within the compass of a month he had perished at the hands of his executors. Menahem then ascended the throne, and ruled with power for about ten years. He brought a measure of stability to Israel, but it was not long-lived. Only three kings succeeded him: Pekahiah (2 years), Pekah (20 years), and Hoshea (9 years). A period of anarchy and increasing trouble developed that swept the nation into oblivion early in the reign of Hezekiah of Judah. We therefore now turn back the pages of history to trace the story of the sad decline of the northern kingdom of Israel until it was taken into captivity, there to remain until the Lord Jesus returns to restore it to its former glory (Ezekiel 37:21-23; Amos 9:11; Micah 4:8).

## Chapter One

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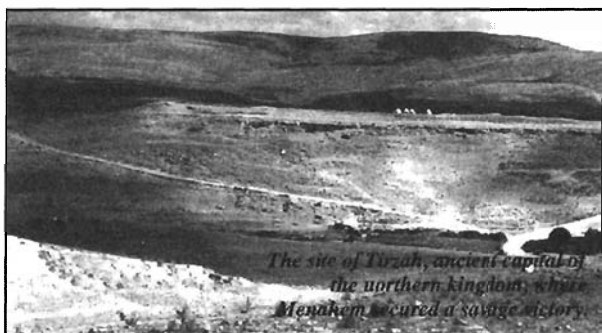
### MENAHEM'S REIGN: TROUBLES MOUNT IN ISRAEL

**M**ENAHEM was a man of ruthless energy who was determined to bring some stability to Israel. He had swiftly moved against Shallum, and, having slain him, reigned in his stead (2Kings 15:16-22). It was a period of confusion and anarchy, and Menahem found that the exercise of authority multiplies enemies. The city of Tiphseh became the headquarters of a faction who conspired against him. But Menahem was equal to the situation. He moved rapidly against the city and crushed the revolt. He also attacked the district round Tirzah, the ancient capital of the northern kingdom (cp. 2Kgs. 15:16 with 1Kgs. 15:21, 33), possibly because a rival to the throne was aiming to set up his power there. Both at Tiphseh and at Tirzah the inhabitants resisted the attack of Menahem, whereupon he laid siege to the cities, and took them by assault, treating them with a severity which was extremely barbarous, slaying both men and women with cruel ruthlessness.

But Menahem soon found himself face to face with a Power with which he was unable to cope. Assyria, which had been a mighty power in the days of Ahab and Jehu, and which had threatened seriously the independence of the western kingdoms, had soon afterwards begun to decline.

For many years its pressure on the nations situated on the coast of the Mediterranean had been greatly reduced, and, except on rare occasions, was hardly felt. This had been the case during the period of Jeroboam II who advanced Israel to great power, and the mission of Jonah to Nineveh which then was humbled by reverses. Down to the time of Menahem, Assyria had continued as a comparatively weak nation.

But now, suddenly, the nations of Judea, Samaria and Syria found themselves threatened by a revived and powerful Assyria determined to recapture its former influence. In the purpose of Yahweh,



Assyria was to execute His punishment upon those nations which opposed His will or were disobedient to His commands.

The Bible describes this in the following words: “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” (2Kings 15:19).

It was Pul who revived the power of Assyria. He had been once an efficient commander in the Assyrian army, but in the face of the weakness of the reigning monarch, he sought and gained the support of his fellow officers, and raised the standard of revolt. He was successful, and, ascending the throne, he assumed the name of Tiglath-pileser (see 2Kings 15:29). He welded the Assyrian army into an efficient, ruthless fighting force. His ambition knew no bounds. He sought world domination and was prepared to brutally crush underfoot any who stood in his path. This brought him into conflict with Egypt. But between these two great powers there were the smaller nations of Judah, Samaria and Syria. They were buffer states caught between the crushing millstones of the gigantic struggle for world power that soon broke out between Assyria and Egypt.

But it was the purpose of Yahweh that really prevailed. It is He who guides the destiny of nations, and bends the schemes of men to His purpose. The Assyrian was but His tool to accomplish His purpose, being described by Isaiah as “the rod of Yahweh’s anger, the staff of His indignation” by which He would punish the “hypocritical nation” of Israel (Isa. 10:5).

Thus 1Chron. 5:26 declares: “The God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul, king of Assyria... and he carried them (the Israelites) away, even the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, and brought them unto Halah, and Habor, and Hara, and to the river Gozan.”

Foolishly, Israel had turned from its God and was defenceless in the face of the conflicting national policies which turned the countries between the Euphrates and the Nile into a cauldron of trouble and violence.



But for a moment, Menahem was able to stem the tide of trouble. He realised that he could not successfully resist the onslaught of the Assyrian army, and therefore sought to make his peace and purchase his freedom with liberal tribute. He gave into the hands of Tiglath-pileser one thou-



sand talents of silver, that he might retain the kingdom in his power (2Kings 15:19).

According to one authority, this is equivalent to about six million gold sovereigns, an enormous sum.

Having agreed to pay this sum, Menahem had to raise it. He took a census of his subjects and, separating the wealthy from the others, he demanded of them that they should each contribute a certain amount towards it. People recalled the ruthless way Menahem had crushed the earlier revolt against his power in Tipsah and Tirzah, and paid up without trouble.

With this rich spoil, the proud Assyrian who had marched through the land to Philistia and defeated an Egyptian army there, turned back to his own country, counting Israel as among his tributaries, and well satisfied with his exploits.

### **Pekahiah's Reign: Growing Dissatisfaction**

Tiglath-pileser had led the previous expedition into Syria and Israel in person. But now the well-armed and highly-disciplined troops of Assyria, inured to warfare, for the first time trod the soil of the Holy Land, and threatened the northern portion of it with violence. Isaiah's prophecy had received its first fulfilment:

"Yahweh will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth: and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly: none shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken; whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent, their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind: their roaring shall be like a lion, they shall roar like young lions; yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry it away safe, and none shall deliver it" (Isa. 5:26-29).

These words describe the ruthless efficiency and fighting capabilities of the Assyrian forces. It had been this efficiency that caused Menahem to send an embassy to the king and agree to terms which reduced him to a subject under Assyrian feudatory.

"When Ephraim saw his sickness, then he went to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb\* yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound" (Hos. 5:13).

Menahem had agreed to an annual tribute that completely improv-

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\* The word "Jareb" signifies an *Avenger* or *Helper*, and is so rendered in some versions. It is said that the word is not a proper noun, and it has been rendered "the king who takes up all quarrels". It thus describes a powerful monarch who adjudicated over weaker nations. This was the Assyrian who was courted by Israel.

erished the nation. It resulted in widespread dissatisfaction which, though the people did not give it expression during the reign of the feared Menahem, broke out into open revolt after his death when his son Pekahiah ascended the throne.

Among the wild hills of Gilead, a captain of the Israeli army, Pekah by name, conspired against Pekahiah. At the head of a body-guard of fifty Gileadites, Pekah forced his way into the palace of the king. He was opposed by two attendants, Argob and Arieih, who were faithful to Pekahiah, and who sealed their attachment with their blood. They were slain, Pekahiah was murdered in his palace, and Pekah ascended the throne.

### **Pekah Seeks to Strengthen Israel**

Pekah was a man of vigour and energy, perhaps more suited than any other man of his time to re-establish the power of Israel. He waged successful war against Judah\* and manifested great skill in diplomacy. His energy and ability delayed for a time the inevitable ruin of the decaying kingdom. If he had been a truly wise man, and had sought the help of Yahweh, he might have helped Israel to surmount its growing problems. But he relied upon the flesh alone; and because of that he failed.

His reign warns us not to put emphasis upon fleshly ability, but to remember that "except Yahweh build the house, they labor in vain that build it; except Yahweh keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain" (Ps. 127:1). Fleshly ability is no adequate compensation for trust and faith in Yahweh, and never achieves a satisfactory and lasting result.

Though Pekah ruled with skill and power, and perhaps imagined that he would restore the greatness of the northern kingdom (particularly after he had such a resounding victory against Judah), he was nonetheless but a "tail of a smoking firebrand" (Isa. 7:4), as God reminded Ahaz through Isaiah the prophet. He was not a firebrand, but merely the end of one; not blazing, but merely the half-burnt, decaying remains of what had once been a formidable power.

Again Tiglath-pileser invaded the land, and Israel again heard the tramp of Assyrian feet. Pekah was not as ready as Menahem to buy off the invader and this brought him troubles. The Assyrian fell upon the cities of Gilead devastating them, taking the people captive, and dragging them off to Assyria. It was a grim foreshadowing of the suffering that would fall upon the whole nation due to the folly of the people and their kings. A foreign population was settled in the con-

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\* We have outlined the successful invasion of Judah by Pekah in our story of the life of Ahaz. Pekah had a resounding victory and took back to Israel a large body of captives. However, he was opposed by the prophet Oded and returned these captives back to the land of Judah.

quered land of Gilead, and, having added Israel to the territory of Assyria as a vassal nation, Tiglath-pileser retired.

For the moment, the people breathed freely again as the Assyrians withdrew, but Pekah could see how perilous was his position. He realised that unless a powerful confederation of nations could be formed in the area, Assyria would little by little absorb the entire country, enslave or deport its people, put down its kings, and establish its own hated sway from Nineveh to Egypt.

He set himself the task to organise such a league of nations. It was a wise and prudent policy according to the ordinary ideas which govern human thought. Such a league had checked Assyria before and could again. But Pekah did not have the foundation for success. If he had given himself over to the reformation of the nation, turned the people from their idolatries, restored them to divine favour, and sought divine protection, he could have succeeded. But instead, he again relied upon the flesh, and ignored the true recipe for success (cp. Joshua 1:7-9).

He entered into close alliance with Rezin, king of Damascus, who was even more exposed to the attacks of Assyria than himself, and then turned for further strength to Ahaz, king of Judah. But here he received unexpected resistance. Ahaz refused to join the alliance. In fact, he turned completely to the Assyrian as we have seen from our story of his life, and sought Assyrian aid.

Diplomacy having failed to move the king of Judah, the kings of Syria and Israel decided to impose their will upon him by war. Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel successively invaded Judah. Their object was to take Jerusalem, slay Ahaz the king, and put a nominee of their own upon the throne of David; a man by name of Ben-Tabeal, who would readily join their union.

But Yahweh had promised David that the lineage to his throne would continue, and He would not permit it to be overthrown by these kings. They won a notable victory against Judah, but they were unable to take Jerusalem, and therein failed in their main objective.

They believed that they had failed in their objective because they had attacked separately, and they made plans for a combined effort against Jerusalem. When news of their plans reached Ahaz and Judah, it caused a state of alarm throughout the land, as we saw when we considered the life of Ahaz.

Ahaz realised that his state was desperate, and he had to turn somewhere for aid. He rejected the help that Yahweh offered him, and foolishly turned to the Assyrian king for assistance. An embassy was sent to Nineveh with a rich present of silver and gold, and the offer to become a tributary to Assyria if only Tiglath-pileser would "save Judah out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, who had risen up against him."

Tiglath-pileser welcomed the opportunity. He wanted to teach Israel a lesson and strengthen his power in Palestine. He took the field in person marching against Damascus and Samaria. The world was plunged into war. The Philistines trembled as they heard of the advance of the Assyrians and appealed to Egypt for assistance. Tiglath-pileser heard of this, and decided to attack the Philistines and Egyptians before punishing the Syrians. He marched down to Philistia where he defeated an Egyptian army, and then he turned back to Syria and Damascus. He ravaged the countryside, broke down the walls of Damascus and slew its king, Rezin. The Assyrian king himself recorded the occasion upon a stone memorial which he set up in Nineveh. Here is his account:

*"Rezin's warriors I captured, and with the sword I destroyed his power;*

*Of his charioteers and his horsemen the arms I broke;*

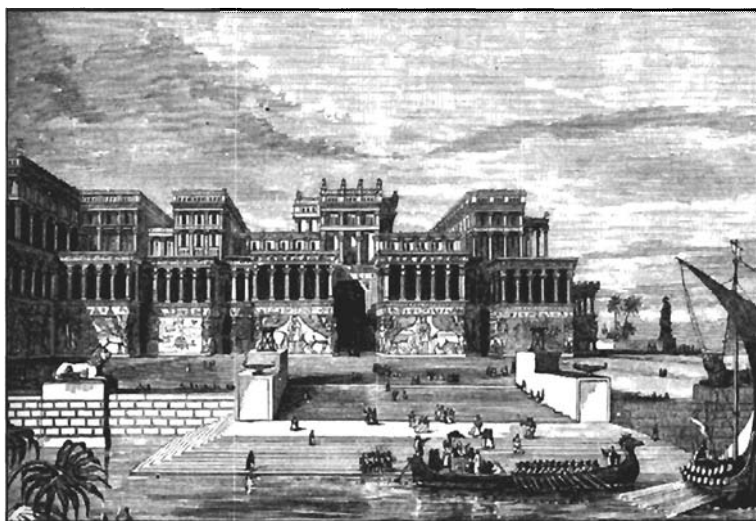
*Their warriors bearing bows, armed with spear and shield,*

*With my hand I captured them, and those who fought in their line of battle;*

*He, to save his life, fled away alone;*

*Like a deer he ran, and entered into the great gate of his city.*

*His generals, whom I had taken alive, on crosses I hung;*



*The Royal Palace at Nineveh, as envisioned by an unknown nineteenth century artist.*

*His country I subdued.  
 Damascus, his city, I besieged; and, like a caged bird, I  
 enclosed him;  
 The trees of his forest, which were without number, I cut down, I  
 left not one.  
 Hadara, the palace of the father of Rezin of Syria I burnt;  
 The city of Samalla I besieged, I captured; 800 of its people I  
 took;  
 Their oxen and their sheep I carried away captive.  
 Seven hundred and fifty women of the city of Kuruzza,  
 ... hundreds of the city Armai; 550 of the city Mituna  
 I bore off as prisoners; I took 591 cities;  
 Over sixteen districts of Syria, like a flood, I swept."*

The Bible also records this invasion. The captives from Damascus were carried away and settled in Kir (2Kings 16:9). The Assyrians believed that by transporting the native populations of a conquered country to other parts they prevented any rising against their authority.

Having reduced Damascus, Tiglath-pileser proceeded against Samaria. Pekah found himself in a perilous position. He was isolated from any other support, and could offer only a feeble resistance. His international policy had proved completely disastrous. But now troubles also arose within his own realm, and as the Assyrians rapidly overran, plundered and took some of the people into captivity (1Chron. 5:26),\* mutterings of revolt were heard against Pekah. The more the people suffered, the greater became their resentment against him. At last a pretender rose against him from out of the very city of Samaria itself. His name was Hoshea the son of Elah. He gained the support of the Assyrians, who no longer trusted Pekah, and conspired against him. The conspiracy was successful. Pekah was slain, and Hoshea became king, though he was but a puppet of Assyria.

So the twenty years' reign of Pekah came to an end. He had played a desperate game and had lost, because he placed confidence in his own strength and ability rather than in that of God. With his death, Israel lost the only man who could have helped it; only a few years remained before the nation came to an end in the captivity under Shalmaneser.

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\* Tiglath-pileser recorded on stone his own version of these events. In part it reads as follows: "Bet-Omri (Israel) all of whose cities I had added to my territories on my former campaigns, and had left out only the city of Samaria... The whole of Naphtali I took for Assyria. I put my officials over them as governors... They overthrew Pekah their king, and I made Hoshea to be king over them" (From Assyrian inscriptions — compare this with 2Kings 15:29).

## Chapter Two

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### THE TEN TRIBES TAKEN INTO CAPTIVITY

**I**N this chapter we recount the story of the last tragic acts that led to the overthrow of the northern kingdom. It underlines the constant exhortation of the Bible, that sinning brings suffering, and that true happiness is only found in doing the will of God. Associated with the terrible punishment that Yahweh was forced to bring upon His people is the record of His own sorrow at the need — the divine lament that in spite of all that He had done for Israel they had refused to properly respond. So the people would ultimately be taken into captivity.

#### **Death Of A Kingdom**

With Hoshea's reign, we commence the closing scene of the northern kingdom of Israel. He is not solely responsible for his country's ruin, for the causes that led to this had long been at work, and nothing short of outstanding ability and faith, combined with the blessing of God, could have warded off the evil days for any considerable time. The king tried, in half-hearted fashion, to effect some reform. "He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him" (2Kings 17:2). But no matter how hard he tried, he had neither the power to thoroughly implement his policy, nor the confidence of the people to lead them in ways of righteousness. He was a mere usurper, a sort of subject-monarch, half dependent and half independent. He relied upon Assyria for his authority, and yet he must have known that such a policy must end in disaster.

He did not have the full support of the people. Eight years of anarchy passed by before he was accepted as king. Pekah had been slain in the 4th year of Ahaz, but Hoshea came to power in the 12th year (2Kings 15:30; 17:1, see mg: "an interregnum"; i.e., an interval without rulership). These eight years were troublous ones for Israel. The ruthless, brutal Assyrians had devastated the whole countryside, breaking down the walls of cities, rooting up many of the people, taking whole districts into captivity. It had brought terrible suffering upon the land, so that the people must have looked with resentment upon a ruler who was but a nominee of their tormentors.

In view of the fact that Israel came to an end as a nation during his reign, the king's name is ironical. "Hoshea, son of Elah" signifies "*the strength (Elah) of salvation (Hoshea).*" But there was little of strength or of salvation in this last king of Israel.

Nothing he did seemed to prosper. Shortly after his elevation to

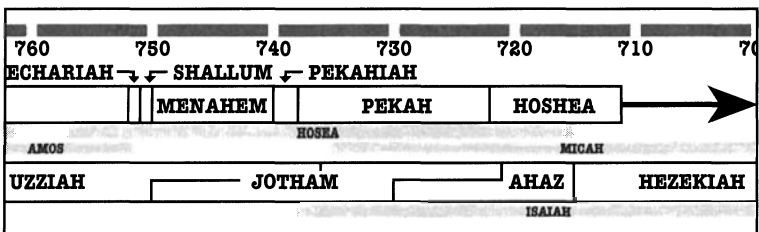
power, Tiglath-pileser died and Shalmaneser took his place. The Assyrian empire was shaken to its core. Revolts broke out, and several nations attempted to regain their independence, particularly Phoenicia. Hoshea imagined that he could do likewise. He looked around for allies to help him, and found one in Egypt. This nation had also passed through a phase of disorganisation and weakness, but had now become united under one head. A famous Ethiopian, by name of Sabaco, sat upon the throne of the Pharaohs, and ruled over the entire Nile Valley. Sabaco was ready to challenge the supremacy of the Assyrians and willingly accepted Hoshea as his ally.

The policy was a foolish one for Israel, as the prophet Hosea warned the nation. "Ephraim is like a silly dove without heart," he declared, "They call to Egypt, they go to Assyria" (Hos. 7:11). "They do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt" (Hos. 12:1). His words described the vacillation and indecision that was evident in the policies of Israel. They looked to one source, then another, in an attempt to obtain some help for their problems, but their endeavors were all in vain.

Hoshea should not have become embroiled with the Gentiles, but should have kept separate, seeking the help of Yahweh. As it was, the nation became drawn into the great international upheaval that shortly afterwards broke out between Egypt and Assyria.

Hoshea imagined, however, that Egypt would be the strength of his salvation. He had to do something to stem the growing criticism within the nation. The people were restless under Assyrian control; the yearly tribute was an intolerable burden keeping them poor, making them toil for the benefit of the Assyrians who contributed nothing to the welfare of the nation. Hoshea realised that he could not maintain his position as king unless he did something to alleviate the position. He was thus caught in a trap from whence there was no way of escape. The support of Egypt was the only answer as far as he could see. He perhaps reasoned that the Assyrians had sufficient on their hands without becoming embroiled in a war that could involve such a powerful enemy. He therefore refused to pay them the yearly tribute they demanded (2Kgs. 17:4).

Shalmaneser was engaged at this time in a war with Phoenicia (Josephus: *Ant.* 9:14.2), in a determined attempt to bring into



subjection the Tyrians who had also defied his power. He could not afford to overlook the challenge from such a weak nation as Israel. If it succeeded it could easily tempt other subject-monarchs to follow the same course, and destroy the whole empire.

He descended in force upon the unhappy country, and, weakly, Hoshea gave way. He agreed to pay the tribute to Shalmaneser whilst at the same time appealing to his powerful Egyptian ally for assistance.

Thus Israel had returned to Egypt out of which Yahweh had taken them in the days of Moses!

It is significant that the Bible makes reference to the call of Israel *out of Egypt* at this very time when the same nation had deserted its God, and was calling upon Egypt for help. "For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against Yahweh their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods, and walked in the statutes of the nations whom Yahweh cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made" (2Kings 17:7-8).

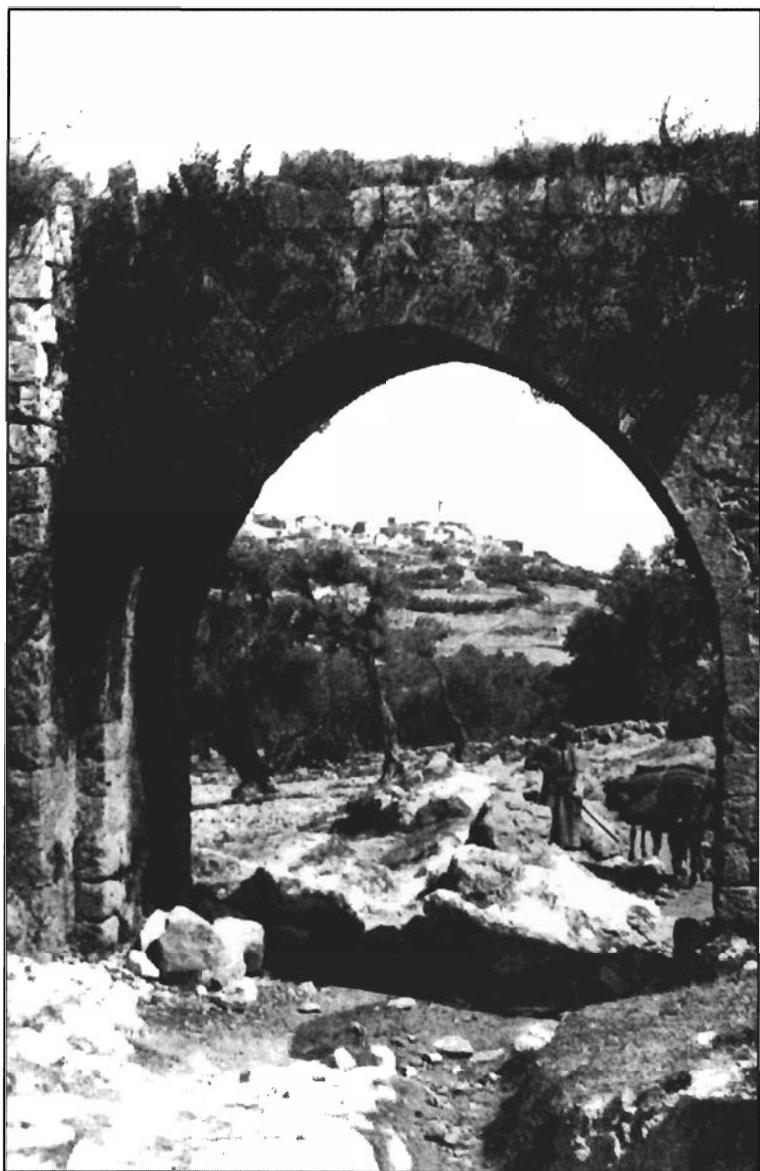
### **The Terrible Destruction of the Nation**

Rapidly the Assyrians swept down south against Israel, whilst Hoshea waited in vain for his Egyptian ally. Fiercely Shalmaneser set about punishing the king of Israel. He was determined to make Israel an object lesson to all nations. He entered the land in force, and ruthlessly set about systematically destroying it. Israel was given over to violence. Cities were destroyed, families broken up, all resistance ruthlessly crushed, whole districts deported into distant lands, and every effort made to completely devastate the nation.

In the "deep glen of Beth-Arbel" a terrible scene took place. Many had fled there to take refuge in the caves and precipitous cliffs. They were caught up in the maelstrom of war and destroyed without mercy. Mothers and their children were ruthlessly dashed from the top of the rocks to the valley below (Hos. 10:14); other fortresses were taken and spoiled. Vainly did the Israelites try to stem the Assyrian avalanche, waiting in vain for the promised Egyptian help that never came. A stand was made in the valley of Esdraelon to hold off Shalmaneser from the city of Samaria. The best forces that Israel could muster joined in battle with the well-armed, disciplined and triumphant army of Assyria. The Israelites were swept aside with ease, the flower of the army was destroyed, and in the valley of Jezreel the "bow of Israel was broken" (Hos. 1:5).

But in the heights above this slaughter, Samaria still remained proudly defiant. It was a well-fortified city, and able to withstand a





**Samaria set on a hill, Crown of the Pride of Ephraim.**

Through this archway, belonging to a Roman aqueduct which crossed the valley, is seen the edge of the modern village built on part of the site of Samaria, capital of the kingdom of Israel. Originally erected by Omri in about bc880, it was conquered by Sargon of Assyria, son of Shalmaneser, bringing the northern kingdom of Israel to an ignominious end.

long siege. Shalmaneser now set about conquering it. He ascended the slopes to the city. He was met with continued defiance. The defenders knew that they could not hope for any mercy from their ruthless enemy, and this desperate knowledge gave them a courage which caused a prolonged, if hopeless, defence. For three bitter years the city defied the Assyrian forces, enduring agony and misery rather than give in, still vainly waiting for the help of Egypt that never came. They had trusted in a “bruised reed”, as the prophet had declared. They had turned from Yahweh who could have helped, to Egypt which never has benefited Israel, and they suffered terribly in consequence.

In the midst of this siege, Shalmaneser died. His son, Sargon, continued the campaign.\* He was even more ruthless, more determined than his father. The long, terrible siege continued until the inhabitants were haggard with privation, distress and starvation.

Gradually this took its toll of the defenders. Their powers of resistance were at an end. At last the walls of Samaria were breached, and the Assyrians swarmed into the city. The war was over, and the ruthless, brutal conquerors gave themselves over to an orgy of destruction and murder in which they spared neither age nor sex (Hos. 13:16).

With the fall of Samaria, the kingdom was at an end. Sargon deported the people into foreign parts. Hoshea was dragged in disgrace to Nineveh, and there imprisoned awaiting the pleasure of the king. Foreigners were rooted up from other parts and brought to dwell in the land of Israel.

The Assyrians had taught the surrounding nations that it did not pay to resist their will.

### **Yahweh’s Lament at the Destruction of His People**

The Bible story of the destruction of this northern kingdom is followed by a long lament (2Kings 17:7-23) in which is outlined the long, sad, sorrowful story of Israel’s sin. The great God of Israel did not look on unmoved at the folly of His people. He had sent prophets to them, warning them of the evil of their ways, beseeching them to turn to Him, reminding them that He could not continue to help and defend them if they persisted in turning from Him.

But they refused to hear or heed. They “did secretly” evil things against Yahweh, “from the tower of the watchman to the fenced city,” or, as the phrase means, the whole country, from the remote watch-tower in rural districts to the fortified cities. The people engaged in

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\* Notice that 2Kings 17:4-6 does not claim that Shalmaneser took Hoshea to Nineveh, but “the king of Assyria.” The Assyrian records show that whilst Shalmaneser commenced the campaign (see v. 3) it was concluded by his son Sargon.

every form of false worship (vv. 9-10); they “hardened the neck” against Him, and refused to heed.

Thus they brought upon themselves the result of their folly; they were themselves to blame for what happened.

### **The Strange Experience of Foreigners who were Settled in Israel**

Though Sargon the Assyrian had commenced the deportation of Israelites, he did not complete it; Israelites still remained in the land (cp. 2Kings 17:6 with 2Chron. 30:10-11). Further systematic deportations were made by Esar-haddon and Asnapper (Ezra 4:2, 10; 2Kgs. 17:24). In other words, from now on the Assyrians made regular and systematic deportations of Israelites into foreign places. And from other parts were brought foreigners to dwell in the land of Israel.

Thus a mixed multitude was found in the north, for there still remained some of the original Israelites (2Chron. 34:9).

The foreigners found many difficulties. Wild beasts roamed the devastated and deserted countryside; lions preyed upon the people and slew some of them. The settlers appealed to the king of Assyria. They claimed that these troubles came upon them because they were not worshipping the God of the land aright. In their ignorance they asked the Assyrian monarch to send them one of the priests of Israel to teach them the right methods of worship.

The king of Assyria readily agreed to this proposal. He sent them one of the priests of the northern tribes. Unfortunately, such a priest would have been one set up over the schismatic worship of the north established by Jeroboam, and not a true priest of the house of Aaron. He gave them a false form of the original worship, and with this the foreigners blended their own beliefs and superstitions.

Out of this confusion a new form of worship evolved. “They feared Yahweh, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations” (2Kings 17:31-33).

### **The Religion of the Samaritans**

They set up the headquarters of this strange religion in Samaria. It was a mixture of true and false, of the worship of Yahweh and that of pagan gods. Many of the books of the Old Testament were rejected, but they did honour the first five books of the Bible, known to the Jews as “The Law” (Heb. *towrah*, the “teaching, precepts and statutes”).

Because they set up the headquarters of their religion in Samaria, they became known as Samaritans. True Israelites would have nothing to do with them, realising that their teachings were false. The Lord Jesus included the Samaritans with the Gentiles, classing them

## **HOSHEA'S REIGN DESCRIBED ON ASSYRIAN MONUMENTS**

He conspired against Pekah and ascended the throne of Israel (2Kings 15:30) with the connivance of Assyria, as recorded by Tiglath-pileser: "They overthrew Pekah their king, and I made Hoshea to be king over them." Thus he had to pay homage and tribute to the Assyrian power. Having successfully conspired against Pekah, he also tried to double-cross Assyria, ignoring the warnings of the prophets (2Kgs. 17:4; Hos.10:14). But he only brought destruction upon himself and the nation. He was attacked by Shalmaneser v who died unexpectedly during the siege. Sargon (Isa. 20:1), his successor, continued the attack. "In the first year of my reign", boasted Sargon in his annals, "I besieged and conquered Samaria." He claims to have led away into captivity 27,290 people.

Sargon settled foreigners in Israel. He records: "People of the lands, prisoners my hand had captured, I settled there. My officials I placed over them as governors. I imposed tribute and tax upon them as Assyrians." The inscriptions imply that Hoshea was incited to revolt by the action of Iau-bi'di of Hamath. Hanunu of Gaza, who had thrown off the Assyrian yoke on the death of Tiglath-pileser also joined the coalition with the support of Egypt. The Assyrians first defeated Hamath, then Samaria, and overthrew a joint army at Gaza which was supported by the Egyptians. In a battle on the Egyptian border near Rapihu the confederacy was again defeated. Nevertheless, Sargon had to intervene again later against Ashdod and Gaza which, instigated by Egypt, sought to include Palestine, Judah, Edom and Moab in an anti-Assyrian league. The failure of this coalition led the Egyptians to bring a token gift. Egypt had proved but a broken reed, as Isaiah warned.

After defeating Samaria, Sargon recorded: "From among them I equipped 50 chariots for my royal army... the city of Samaria I restored and made more habitable than before. I brought into it the people of the countries conquered by my own hands. My official I set over them as district governor and imposed upon them tribute as on an Assyrian city... I made to mix with each other... Hanunu, king of Gaza, and Sib'e the commander-in-chief of Egypt advanced to Rapihu to make a direct attack and to battle with me. I defeated them..."

In one inscription he makes reference to how he gained the supremacy over Samaria in spite "of the gods (plural) in whom they trusted", a reference to the many gods worshipped in Israel at that time — see 2Kings 17:10.

together as one (Matt. 10:5; Acts 1:8). They were to prove a thorn in the side of the Jewish people in the days that were to come.

Meanwhile, the northern kingdom was scattered into the kingdoms of the earth, there to remain until they will be restored under the guidance of the Lord Jesus Christ, although some from the northern tribes returned under Ezra (Ezra 2:70; 6:17; 8:35). The prophet Hosea declared: "The children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim\*: afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek Yahweh their God, and David their king; and shall fear Yahweh and His goodness in the latter days" (Hos. 3:4-5).

In these words the prophet showed that the kingdom was to be completely broken up for a long time to come. The people were to dwell "without a king, or a prince" until the time when they shall be brought back into the Land by the Lord Jesus, there to accept him as their king and prince. Ezekiel declared: "Thus saith Yahweh: Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land. And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and ONE KING SHALL BE KING TO THEM ALL; and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all. Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will save them out of all their dwelling places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them; so shall they be My people, and I will be their God. And David, My servant, shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments, and observe My statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob My servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt... and My servant David shall be their prince for ever" (Ezek. 37:21-25).

Thus, in the very epoch of Israel's disgrace and punishment, a merciful God proclaimed His purpose to bring them again to their land, and restore again the greatness of their nation.

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\* By "image" is meant "altar" and it is so rendered in the *Septuagint* version of the Bible. Notice in the margin that this word is rendered "pillar." In ancient times pillars were sometimes used as altars (Gen. 28:18; 35:14). Israel has been without a true altar for many years. The Ephod was part of the high-priest's garment in which was placed the Urim and the Thummim by which he proclaimed the judgment of God. Today, Israel is without a high priest because the people reject the Lord Jesus. "Teraphim" is translated "Urim and Thummim" in the *Septuagint* version. As a word it signifies "manifestations" and the Urim and Thummim revealed the manifestation of God in the midst of Israel. But for many years Israel has been without any divine manifestation in its midst, for they continue to reject His Word.

“David their prince” is the Lord Jesus Christ. The word “David” means “*The Beloved*,” and therefore “David their prince” can be rendered, “*The Beloved their prince*.” When the Lord Jesus Christ was baptised over 1900 years ago, the voice from heaven announced: “Thou art *My Son, the Beloved*; in thee I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22, literal translation).

Ultimately, Israel will be brought back from dispersion to the Lord Jesus whom the people will accept as king. “He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob” (Rom. 11), and establish the nation in righteousness. The twelve tribes will be restored again and re-established in the land (Ezekiel 48). Thus will he “build up the tabernacle of David as it was in the *days of old*” (Amos 9:11). Until then the twelve tribes of Israel are known by the general term of “the Jews”.

Some people imagine that when the ten tribes in the north were taken into captivity, they wandered through the earth until they came to Britain. They teach that Britain and America constitute the “lost tribes of the house of Israel” and that the British throne is the “throne of David,” and the reigning monarch is of the “House of David.”

This is completely wrong. Not only does Hosea 3:4-5 demand that the “children of Israel” abide many days “without a king and without a prince” until they seek the Beloved their King in the “latter days,” but, in addition, the law of inheritance in Israel never permitted a woman to sit upon the throne as the descendant of David — as has occurred in the reigning families of England, throughout the centuries.

Though these ideas are wrong, the time will come when Israel will be established again in the land as twelve tribes, with the twelve disciples acting as judges over them (Mat. 19:28), and the Lord Jesus as king (Luke 1:31-32). Until that time they will remain politically disorganised and in dispersion.





**A**LTHOUGH destruction faced the apostate northern kingdom which had its capital in Samaria, there was hope of better things in the southern kingdom of Judah. There, upon the throne of David, was seen the greatest king to reign over the divided monarchy: Hezekiah, a faithful man of God. David, of course, was greater than Hezekiah, for he had ruled over the united twelve tribes. But of Hezekiah we read: "After him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him" (2Kings 18:5). It is obvious, as we study the life of this great man of faith, that he is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are many important lessons to be learned in the events associated with his life, and we will find it of greatest benefit to carefully examine all that is recorded of him. Let us again listen in to the conversation between Mr. Phillips and his family.



## Chapter One

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### HEZEKIAH'S REFORMATION

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“IN the life of Hezekiah,” remarked Mr. Phillips to his family as they discussed together the daily reading of the Bible which had brought them to 2Kings 18, “we have some of the most remarkable incidents in the Bible.”

“I know that Hezekiah was a righteous man,” remarked Graeham, “but what makes you suggest that he was one of the most remarkable men of the Bible?”

“When all the evidence is brought together, it is obvious that he was not only outstandingly faithful, but of great importance to the purpose of God,” replied his father. “He not only restored the temple services, purified the priesthood, and caused the people to return to the true worship, but in addition, he set in order many of the proverbs (Prov. 25:1), and arranged various psalms for the temple service (2Chr. 29:30; Isa. 38:20). In addition to all that, he was subjected to some extraordinary experiences that mark him as a type of the Lord Jesus. It was in his reign that the mighty Assyrian monarch Sennacherib met with a decisive defeat by divine intervention.”

“The defeat of Sennacherib would be typical of the overthrow of the Russian Gogue at the coming of Christ, I suppose,” commented Peter.

“Undoubtedly,” replied his father. “In addition to that, Hezekiah suffered a terrible illness which prefigured the sufferings of the Lord, and was redeemed from death by a miraculous cure.”

“Do we read much of him apart from what is given in the Book of Kings?” asked Ann.

“Yes, his life is recorded also in the Book of Chronicles, and portion of it in the prophecy of Isaiah. In fact, incidents in the life of Hezekiah seem to typify that which Isaiah predicted concerning the Lord Jesus. The people saw certain things happen to Hezekiah, and heard Isaiah speak of the coming Messiah: his sufferings, his death, his ultimate glory. And what they saw happen to Hezekiah, foreshadowed what Isaiah told them will happen to their Messiah and coming King, though in a far more glorious manner. Hezekiah’s life was therefore a parable of things yet to happen.”

“His life sounds very interesting,” remarked Joan.

“It is interesting. He lived in most dramatic times that challenged the faith of both king and people. They were times that called forth words of encouragement and rebuke from Isaiah the prophet, and events upon which he built his prophetic pictures of the future.”

"It all sounds fascinating," said Graeham, "but I think we had better bring a little order into the telling of it."

"I think so, too," commented Peter, "otherwise Dad will go off on a tangent again, and we will end up in the Book of Revelation in some mysterious way."

"Very well," replied Mr. Phillips, "Let us commence at the beginning."

### **The Priesthood Purified**

"The reign of the wicked King Ahaz had come to an end, and his son Hezekiah at last took over sole control. During the last three years of the reign of Ahaz, Hezekiah had ruled as joint monarch. He had seen with distress the wickedness of the people, and the evil example set them by his own father. He determined that when he came to power he would change all this drastically.

"And now the time had come.

"All preparations had long been made by Hezekiah beforehand, and no sooner was his father dead than he took steps to open the temple again for worship..."

"Before you go any further," interrupted Peter who was taking notes, "I would like to ask a question. What is the meaning of Hezekiah's name?"

"It means *Yahweh is Strength*."

"His life certainly illustrated that Yahweh is Strength, as God worked to save His people" said Ann.

"His mother's name is equally significant," remarked Mr. Phillips. "She was Abijah the daughter of Zechariah. Abijah means *Yahweh is Father*, and Zechariah means *Yahweh has remembered*."

"That is interesting!" exclaimed Graeham who was also taking notes. "When the three names: Zechariah, Abijah, and Hezekiah are put together it makes the sentence: 'Yahweh hath remembered, for He is a Father, and will provide Strength'."

"It may have been from his mother that he obtained the inspiration to devote his life to the service of Yahweh," said Mr. Phillips. "He certainly did not get any encouragement in that direction from Ahaz. It shows the power for good which a woman can wield. That is true of young girls as well as mothers. Whether young or old, they can influence their husbands, sons, brothers, or boy-friends for good. We are reminded of that frequently throughout the Bible. When Paul wrote to Timothy he reminded him of the great help that his younger friend had received from both his grandmother and his mother (2Tim. 1:5)..."

"Now, Dad!" remarked Peter. "Remember we are dealing with the life of Hezekiah, not that of Paul!"

"Very well," said Mr. Phillips. "Let us get back to Hezekiah's life.

The people soon realised that they were witnessing more than the opening of a new reign: his accession to power was the beginning of a new era. In the first month of his reign, he opened the doors of the temple and set about repairing the building for worship (2Chron. 29:3).

“What a change this was to the attitude of his father. Ahaz had argued: ‘Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me.’ But the Bible adds: ‘They were the ruin of him and of all Israel’ (2Chron. 28:23).

“The nation had been brought very low. So much so, that the people had tired of Ahaz (2Chron. 28:19). Therefore they were the more ready to follow the example of Hezekiah.

“Hezekiah had some great men to help him. Chief of them all was that grand man of faith, Isaiah the prophet. He was ever on hand to help, ever there with words of encouragement to inspire the king.

“There were enemies to oppose the king, of course. There always are when a man stands up to do a good work. At first, Hezekiah did not find much ready co-operation from the priests. The high priest had supported his father Ahaz in his wicked idolatrous practices (2Kings 16:15), and therefore had cause to fear the youthful and enthusiastic Hezekiah. As a result, when the king called for a public assembly of the priestly class, the common Levites responded readily, but the priests themselves, perhaps influenced by the high priest, were more reluctant (cp. 2Chron. 29:5 with v. 34).

“A great public consecration of the priests and Levites was arranged. They were told to sanctify themselves by sacrifice to re-dedicate themselves to the work of God. The temple was found in a deplorable condition. Not only had it been robbed of its wealth, and so spoiled that parts were in ruins, but idols had been set up in the Holy Place and elsewhere by Ahaz (2Kings 16:14-16). Hezekiah commanded the priests and Levites to remove ‘this filthiness,’ as he called it, and destroy it (2Chron. 29:5).

“He then addressed the priests and Levites. He reminded them of the wickedness of the previous generation of Jews. The doors of the temple had been closed; the golden lamps had been allowed to go out; the incense had not been offered; the burnt offerings had not ascended to Yahweh.

“He boldly declared, ‘Wherefore the wrath of Yahweh was upon Judah and Jerusalem, and He has delivered them to trouble, to astonishment, and to hissing as you see with your eyes. For, lo, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this. Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with Yahweh the God of Israel, that His fierce wrath may turn away from us. My sons, be not now negligent; for Yahweh has chosen you to stand before Him, to serve Him, that you should minis-

ter unto Him, and burn incense' (2Chron. 29:8-11).

"With this exhortation ringing in their ears, the priests and Levites rededicated themselves anew to their work. They offered sacrifices, and then presented themselves before the king to continue on the task.

"First the temple had to be cleansed. The idols and debris were carted out and destroyed in the brook Kidron. Then for eight days the temple was sanctified. Special offerings and services were conducted to cleanse it. They found that Ahaz had laid wicked hands on even some of the sacred vessels of the temple, and these had to be restored.

"But at last all was ready. They returned to the king with the news: 'We have cleansed all the house of Yahweh, and the altar of burnt offering, with the vessels thereof, and the shewbread table, with all the vessels thereof. Moreover all the vessels which king Ahaz in his reign did cast away in his transgression, have we prepared and sanctified, and, behold, they are before the altar of Yahweh' (2Chron. 29:18-19).

**HEZEKIAH'S LIFE IS DIVIDED INTO:**

- A RELIGIOUS CRISIS
- A PERSONAL CRISIS
- AN INTERNATIONAL CRISIS

**All of which are typical of the work of God in Christ.**

**The People Purified** "Having purified the Holy Place, Hezekiah next turned his attention to the holy people. A day was appointed for them to gather together and rededicate themselves to God. A sense of excitement had begun to sweep through the people as they observed all the preparations. The king, too, was excited. The night before the gathering he could hardly sleep, so thrilled was he with the success that had attended his reformation up to that moment. He arose early in the morning (2Chron. 29:20) to make the necessary preparations for the day. This was to inaugurate once again the restored worship of Yahweh. It was to see the people officially turn from the disastrous religious policy of Ahaz and embrace that which Hezekiah knew could only result in good for them all.

"The king, princes and all the congregation (2Chron. 29:28) went up, probably in a long procession, to the temple, where the priests and Levites were already gathered in order to perform their respective parts in the offering. Hezekiah brought an offering for the kingdom and the temple (v. 21) which was offered by the priests. The Levites stood in their appointed places with cymbals, psalteries and harps, and the priests with trumpets (vv. 25-27) chanted psalms.

"A sacrifice of seven bullocks, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven he-goats was prepared as a special offering, and, when the king arrived full of zeal and enthusiasm at the head of the congregation,



this was offered in the appointed manner and burnt upon the altar.”

“Before you go on, Daddy,” interrupted Ann, “may I ask a question?”

“Certainly, what is it?”

“I suppose seven of each of the animals were selected because of completeness.”

“That is so. The offering was a national one, offered for all (2Chron. 29:24). Thus seven of each animal were selected because of the sense of completeness. Seven is also the number signifying an oath. The same word in Hebrew means either *seven* or *oath*. And Hezekiah had called upon the people to enter into a

covenant with Yahweh (v. 10).”

“Is there any special significance in the animals used?”

“Indeed, yes. Also in the manner in which they were offered.”

“What is the significance?”

“Firstly, notice that this was a burnt offering. The animals were brought before the priest and slain. As the people looked on they would understand the meaning of all this. They would realise that they were sinners, for the death of the animals would make them conscious of their own past failures; but in the shed blood they would also see the token of atonement that brings forgiveness. For the blood was brought into contact with the altar, sprinkled upon it, representing a life given to Yahweh in total service. The first lesson learned therefore was that they had sinned. The second was that Yahweh alone could forgive, and shed blood was necessary to that end. It was an acknowledgement that they were guilty and worthy of death. But more than that is necessary. Having learned that lesson, the people had to recognise that they must build something better into their lives. The sacrifices were washed both inside and out, speaking of an inner as well as an outer cleansing: both purity of thoughts and actions of life must be consistent with that cleansing. Then it was placed upon the altar which was always kept burning by a fire that originally Yahweh had supplied. This divine fire slowly consumed the sacrifices and the smoke ascended towards heaven (Lev. 1:5-11). As the worshippers solemnly observed the flesh of the animals being consumed, and the smoke arising, they learned the lesson that they, too, should be consumed with a zeal for the things of Yahweh; that the Truth should burn in them as the fire consumed the sacrifice upon the altar.

“Significantly only special parts of the animal were burned upon

the altar, namely the head, the fat and the flesh. These represent intellect, strength and being; all of which we should offer as a 'living sacrifice to God' upon our altar, the Lord Jesus (Rom. 12:1-2; Heb. 13:10)."

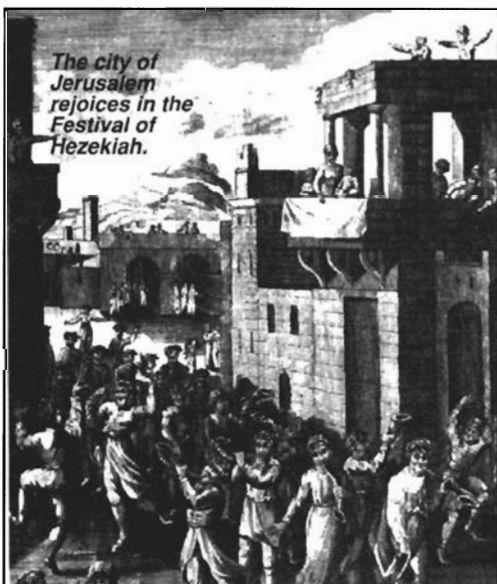
"That recalls the declaration of Christ regarding the first commandment: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, thy soul, thy mind, and thy strength.' There we have intellect, strength, and being," said Graeham thoughtfully.

"That is true," replied his father. "In fact, the acknowledgment of the need of such service is fundamental of all acceptable worship."

"What do the animals represent?" asked Ann.

"The bullock speaks of strength, which we can use in the service of Yahweh; the ram signifies desire, which we can also bend to His will; the lamb implies innocence and trust, which we can offer him; whilst the he-goat is the symbol of fleshly waywardness, which we must sacrifice to obey His commandments. In the great national dedication, all these features were brought home to the people. Notice in 2Chron. 29:23, that when the he-goat for the sin-offering was brought forward, the king and his rulers placed their hands upon its head. By doing this they identified the nation with the animal. It was a confession that the people had sinned, but now requested the forgiveness of Yahweh in the means appointed by Him.

"Whilst the smoke was ascending, the priests and Levites played their instruments and sang appropriate psalms, the sad and solemn notes of which would bring to the people a full realisation of their privileged position. It was like the times of Solomon again, when Israel was great in the earth, and Jerusalem rang with the praises of worshippers. How joyful must have been the heart of Hezekiah as he saw the preparations of years thus vindicated. The people, too appreciated the solemnity of the occasion. With the temple again opened for service, with the people gathered once more to worship in



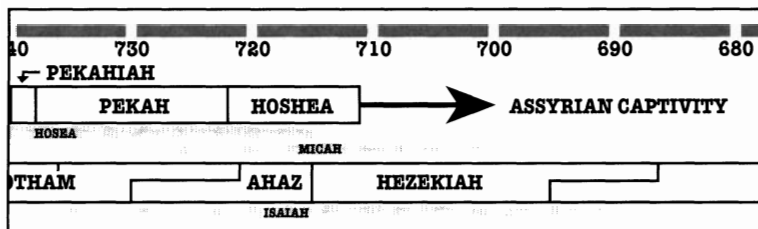
truth, with the sacrifices smoking upon the altar and the glorious songs of Zion filling the air — a spirit of deep reverential feeling came on the congregation. All were deeply conscious of the wonderful occasion.

“But at last the burning finished, the songs died down, and a solemn silence came over the gathering. With one accord the people bowed their heads in worship, and uplifted their hearts in prayer.

“The silence continued for a time, and then was again broken by music. This time it was more cheerful. The priests and Levites sang psalms that spoke of the glory of Yahweh, that moved the people with gladness. Their hearts overflowed with love towards their God. Again all heads were bowed in the large concourse of people, and hearts were uplifted in prayer.

“And now the king addressed the people. Many had brought individual offerings to personally sacrifice unto Yahweh. They were invited to bring them forward, together with anything that they desired to give unto Him. Hundreds of animals were brought forward for that purpose. There were so many offerings, and so few priests to minister to the work, that the Levites, who had showed themselves more ready than the priests, were called upon to help them.

“So this great day of rededication came to an end with the people happy under their great king, and united to their God. It ended with the king rejoicing more than anyone else, happy in the commencement of this national service unto Yahweh. The ‘thing was done suddenly’ (2Chron. 29:36); it had entailed much work. But it had been successful because Yahweh was with it. The king had gone to great pains to do everything correctly. He had searched into the writings of David and others, to correctly arrange the orders of the priests and Levites, to properly select the necessary psalms. The blessing of Yahweh had been with all his labors, made the ceremony outstandingly successful, and had brought the people as a united company before him. It augured well for the reign that was about to commence.



## Chapter Two

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### JUDAH'S GREATEST KING ESTABLISHED IN POWER

**T**HE great religious revival brought about by Hezekiah took place in the first year of his reign,” said Mr. Phillips, as he outlined to his family the reign of Hezekiah. “At that time, the northern kingdom under Hoshea was still in existence, though the shadow of Assyrian oppression had fallen heavily across it, and a few years later it was taken into captivity.”

“Where do we find that in the Bible?” asked Peter who was taking notes, to later mark into the margin of his Bible.\*

“In 2Kings 18:1 we read that Hezekiah commenced to reign in the third year of Hoshea, whilst in chapter 17:6 we learn that the northern kingdom fell in the ninth year of his reign. Therefore, five years had yet to pass before the Assyrians invaded the north to take the Israelites into captivity.”

“Do you think that Hezekiah would have made any preparations to set up the true worship before he came to the throne?” asked Peter.

“Yes,” replied his father. “Hezekiah had jointly reigned with his father during the last years of his life, and had been able to make secret preparations for what he would do when he came to the throne. Now secrecy was set aside, and he publicly made known his policy. The doors of the temple, which Ahaz had shut up (2Chron. 28:24) swung open again, and, full of enthusiasm, the king set about cleansing it that it might be fit for divine worship. The work was accomplished in 16 days, and was celebrated by the people with great joy. Many were glad to see the re-establishment of the true worship.

#### **The Passover Feast Re-instituted**

“Hezekiah now determined to bring Judah completely under the influence of God’s law. According to the Law of Moses, the Passover should have been kept in the first month. For many years this feast had been neglected, but Hezekiah now decided to revive it. It was too late to keep it at the appointed time, however, so after taking counsel with the priests and elders of his realm, the king decided to keep it in the second month (2Chron. 30:2).”

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\* Mr. Phillips always encouraged his children to make notes in their Bibles. He recommends special “wide margin Bibles” with larger margins upon which additional comments can be entered. These Bibles are printed on special paper that can be written upon with good quality marking inks. For further details and assistance with the skill and pleasure of Bible marking, readers are invited to write to the *Logos Office* (see page 2).



“Would not that be breaking the law?” asked Peter.

“No, because the Law provided for a second Passover in the second month for such as could not keep it at the appointed time (Num. 9:10-11). Hezekiah took advantage of that provision, and arranged to keep it on a scale never before attempted since the kingdom was divided. He decided to invite all Israelites of both kingdoms to celebrate the Passover.”

“How could he do that if Hoshea was still reigning in the north?” asked Peter, who likes to place as many difficulties as possible before his father.

“Under normal conditions a monarch would resent any interference in his kingdom on the part of a neighbouring ruler,” agreed Mr. Phillips, “but actually, at this time, conditions in the northern kingdom were favorable for such an attempt, and Hezekiah was able to send his messengers throughout Israel without these being molested. Hoshea exercised but a weak hold upon the country (2Kings 17:1-5). All the bonds which normally hold a healthy state together were relaxed. The people were contemptuous of their king, and were inclined to think and act for themselves. They knew he was but a nominal sovereign, and was in subjection to the Assyrian Power; therefore they did not greatly respect him. Moreover, the prophets Hosea and Amos had openly rebuked the leaders of the northern kingdom, and warned the people of trouble to come. This could have made some of them more receptive of Hezekiah’s appeal.

“Accordingly, messengers were sent throughout all the land from Beersheba to Dan, advising the people that the passover would be held, and inviting them to assemble at Jerusalem to keep it. The king wrote a personal letter which was publicly read out in the various cities. It warned the people that the present state of apostasy and wickedness must result in divine punishment; it spoke of the widespread difficulties that even then were facing the two nations; it reminded them of the stubborn refusal of their fathers to heed God’s message and the punishment that fell on them in consequence; it called upon them to submit to Yahweh’s requirements in the assurance that His compassion waited for them. Finally, it concluded with a reminder that He is ‘gracious and merciful and will not turn His face from His people if they return unto Him’ (2Chron. 30:9).”

“All the people should have responded to that appeal!” remarked Ann.

“One would have thought so,” continued her father. “But, no! As the messengers went from town to town in the northern kingdom they were met with scornful laughter and mocking taunts. There were but few who were prepared to thoughtfully consider the king’s words, and had the moral courage to act upon them. This is not easy to do in such circumstances. It requires a person to humble himself before God and

man. Every age has seen a few who are prepared to do that, and Hezekiah's times were no exception. Some in the northern kingdom accepted his invitation, so that a stream of worshippers made their way from the north to Jerusalem.

"The messengers had a different reception in Judah. The fine example of the king had made a great impression upon the people. They flocked to the capital to keep the passover. In Jerusalem itself excitement was at fever point. A spirit of keen revival swept the city. The citizens wanted to make it fit for the coming Passover. Though many altars had already been destroyed, a further search was made for any that might remain, and they were smashed to pieces in the brook Kidron outside the city. The greatest enthusiasm took hold of the people. Those priests and Levites who had previously held back from dedicating themselves to the service of Yahweh, were caught up in the general feeling, and hastened to sanctify themselves and report for duty. A great company was thus gathered together from all parts of the land.

"But many were ignorant of God's requirements, and were not really in a fit state of spiritual preparedness to celebrate the passover. After all, they had been so long separated from the true worship — particularly those from the northern kingdom. This was obvious to Hezekiah, and he realised that something must be done about it. He prayed to Yahweh that He might overlook anything that was not in strict conformity with the Law, and that He might receive the worship of the people in the spirit in which it was offered. The mediation of the king was successful, and his prayer on behalf of the people was accepted (2Chron. 30:18-19)."

"That prayer is very interesting," commented Graham interrupting his father. "I have been following your comments with the Bible, and I notice that Hezekiah prayed that Yahweh should pardon 'everyone who prepareth his heart to seek God though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary.' You told us before that Hezekiah is a type of Christ. In that light, this incident is significant, for we have Hezekiah instituting a passover by which the people were acceptable to God, though not according to the purification of the temple, that is, as actually set down in the Law of Moses. The Master did exactly the same thing when he instituted his Passover."

"A good point, Graham," commented his father.

"What does verse 20 mean?" asked Ann. "It says that 'Yahweh healed the people.' Were they sick?"

"They were not physically sick, but they were spiritually sick and therefore were in need of healing. Besides, in presenting themselves before Yahweh without being cleansed according to the Law they were in danger of punishment by plague (Num. 8:19). But on this special occasion God overlooked what they had omitted to do, and did

not plague them. In that sense, by its prevention they were 'healed of the plague' and were not affected by it as they would have been otherwise."

"It must have been a very wonderful time for Israel," said Joan.

"Never had there been a passover like that one since the days of Solomon. The people rejoiced in the joy of communion with God and with each other. But Hezekiah realised that religious fervour and feeling need the knowledge of the Word upon which to feed. He understood, very clearly, that in the absence of this knowledge, all the enthusiasm of the people would soon evaporate; that unless they had something more than excitement to sustain them they would soon drift back into their old ways. He provided for this need by arranging for Levites to be sent among the people to teach them the 'good knowledge of Yahweh' (2Chron. 30:22). They taught them the spiritual meaning of the passover; what was implied in the sacrifice of the lamb; the service that Yahweh required of each worshipper. This teaching had caused a profound effect upon the people. They learned the need of prayer and of 'making confession to Yahweh' (v. 22).

"Seven days were thus spent profitably together. At the end of the feast, the people did not want to disperse. They felt the need of further instruction, they wanted to experience more of the pure joy of divine service and communion. A further seven days were set aside for this purpose. Special services were conducted. The king donated 1,000 bullocks and 7,000 sheep for sacrificial offerings. Deeply moved by the general enthusiasm and the example of their king, the princes of the realm offered a further 1,000 bullocks, and 10,000 sheep. Then followed a period of solemn rededication. Publicly, in the sight of the whole congregation, the priests entered into a solemn covenant to serve Yahweh. The congregation did the same. All the people gathered together from all parts of the land to rejoice before Yahweh. The whole city gave itself over to joy and gladness in the realisation that God was with them. **Never**, since the days of Solomon had Jerusalem witnessed such enthusiasm for God.

"The rejoicing was not limited to the city of the Great King (Mat. 5:35). It extended beyond there to heaven itself, illustrating the saying of the Lord Jesus that there is 'joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth' (Luke 15:7). If that is the case when 'one sinner repents,' what must have been the joy in heaven at the work of Hezekiah, when the whole nation gathered itself together with one mind to give itself completely to God! We read: 'The priests and the Levites arose, and blessed the people; and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to His holy dwelling place, even unto heaven.' There was joy both in heaven and on earth.

"And what were the words of blessing that caused such joy? They are familiar to many today who have passed through the waters of

baptism, and have been received into the present-day ecclesia with the words of Anthem 19 in the 1932 Christadelphian Hymn Book. This anthem is taken from the beautiful passage of Numbers 6:23-27: 'On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them: Yahweh bless thee, and keep thee: Yahweh make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: Yahweh lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put My name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.' This was done on the great day when Hezekiah brought the people back to Yahweh, and the priests blessed the congregation."

"And all this was a type of Christ's coming work, I suppose?" queried Peter.

"Yes. It takes us right into the future, when there will be a glorious gathering of the righteous, when they shall eat the 'second passover' with the Lord Jesus (Matt. 26:26-29). Then king, princes, priests and congregation will be united together as 'one' (John 17:21)."

"I can understand whom you mean by the king," remarked Graeham, "but who will represent the princes, priests and congregation of the kingdom Christ will set up?"

"They represent all the redeemed. Though they will all possess eternal life in common, they will not all have the same position or status in Christ's kingdom. Some will exercise authority and will teach the people, constituting the royal priesthood of the Age to come. Others will occupy more humble positions as the general congregation. All will find positions adequate to their standing in Christ's sight at that time."

### **False Religion Overthrown**

"The Great Passover was over. But the people were not as yet satisfied. They had been uplifted in the fulness of enthusiasm, and had to manifest it in some direction. Encouraged by the king, they gave themselves over to a tumultuous activity of a remarkable character. The idols and altars in Jerusalem had been destroyed, but many remained in other cities. The people decided these must go.

"Throughout Judah there was a general revulsion against all forms of false religion and worship which now felt the weight of popular antagonism. The people gathered at the passover now returned home smashing the idols, destroying the altars, cutting down the images in all the towns through which they passed. They did this not only in Judah but in some of the cities of the northern kingdom as well!

"Among the things destroyed was the brazen serpent that Moses had made in the wilderness. The people had come to worship it as an idol. Hezekiah was determined that nothing should hinder the pure worship of Yahweh. He therefore destroyed it, calling it '*Nehushtan*' (2Kings 18:4)."



An ancient drawing shows Hezekiah destroying idols, as he set about cleansing the land of idolatry.

"Whatever does that mean?" asked Joan.

"It means, 'a piece of brass.' The king wanted to show the people that Yahweh alone should be worshipped. The Hebrew word for serpent is *nachash* and the Hebrew word for brass is *nechush*, so the king emphasised his point by a play on words."

"Do you think there is any significance in such a play on words?" asked Graeham.

"Certainly. In this case it showed the people how careful they must be. As it was so easy, by a slip of the tongue, to turn '*nachash*' into '*nechush*,' so small acts of thoughtlessness can turn true worshippers into idolators, as in the case of the worship of the brazen serpent. It was excellent as a memorial; but it became a symbol of apostasy when worshipped by the people, as any object or ritual can, if it is not properly understood and applied. The Jews treated the formalism of the Law of Moses in that way, as Christ showed at his first advent when he set it aside as Hezekiah did the brazen serpent. We have a similar example today in the sign of the cross so often displayed throughout many cities. This is excellent as a memorial; but it becomes a symbol of apostasy to a world that worships it."

"Back to the story, Dad!" warned Peter.

"Very well. Hezekiah had accomplished much; but much remained to be done. He carefully studied the order of temple worship established by Samuel and David, and re-instituted it again. The Levites and priests were appointed to their courses and forms of service. The king gave a public example (see 2Chron. 31:3) of sacrifice by arranging to personally supply animals for the daily service. He re-instituted the principle of tithing so that the priests and Levites should not want.

“And the people responded. There poured into Jerusalem the firstfruits of wine, oil, honey, corn; the tithes of the field; the freewill offerings of the people. Yahweh had responded to the enthusiasm of the people by blessing their labors so that they had abundance. It was obvious by the third month (v. 7) when the Feast of Harvest was celebrated, that Judah was to be blessed that year with bumper crops. The firstfruits were brought in and stored in stacks. By the time the seventh month arrived, and the fulness of the harvest was gathered in, it was seen how great was the abundance.

“This was the month when the solemn Day of Atonement was celebrated, and the sins of the people were ceremonially blotted out in the covering provided by the Atonement sacrifice. It was followed (see Lev. 23) by the Feast of Tabernacles, when the people camped out together for a week, rejoicing before Yahweh because of His goodness.

“And they had ample cause to rejoice on this occasion.

“Azariah, the chief priest, showed Hezekiah the huge heaps of produce that had come in through the firstfruits, the tithes and the freewill gifts of the people. ‘Yahweh has indeed blessed His people,’ he declared. Storehouses were provided for the surplus after the priests and Levites had received their dues.

“Hezekiah arranged for the priests and Levites to be registered in order that they might receive a regular distribution of foodstuffs. Levites in authority were placed in charge of the distribution and the tithes were dispensed according to the size of the families of those registered. Thus the priests and Levites were relieved of any necessity to be concerned with mundane matters, and could devote their time exclusively to teaching the people, and to assisting the king in his policy of national worship. We, today, benefit from this wise provision, for one of the many things they did at that time, was to set in order some of the writings of Solomon (Prov. 25:1) and David. Hezekiah used some of the psalms of David to express his own feelings and experiences, as we shall see. In fact, the evidence indicates that Hezekiah set in order many of the Songs of Zion for use in the temple service at this time (see Isa. 38:20).

“Meanwhile he prospered in all his ways. Notice what is recorded of him in 2Chron. 31:20-21: ‘Hezekiah wrought that which was good and right and truth before Yahweh his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and he prospered.’

“But as Yahweh tests all His workmen to perfect their characters,” said Mr. Phillips, as he concluded this portion of his talk, “a great trial of faith was soon to be experienced by the king.”

## Chapter Three

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### THE KING FACED WITH A POLITICAL CRISIS

**W**HILST Hezekiah was busy in the peaceful pursuit of restoring the pure worship of Yahweh, the world about him resounded with the thunder of approaching war. The brutal Assyrian army was on the march, determined to extend its power over the then-known world.

#### **The Assyrian on the March**

The Assyrians were a cruel and ruthless nation. They knew only one argument — brute force. Their name has echoed down the ages as synonymous with torture and cruelty. Assyrian monuments, excavated by archaeologists, depict their kings and generals gloating over their spoils, mocking at their tortured captives, trampling underfoot their fallen and humiliated foes with haughty indifference. It was an age of terror and evil.

Author J. Urquhart has written: “No considerations of pity were permitted to stand in the way of Assyrian policy. It could not afford to garrison its conquests, and it practised a plan which largely dispensed with the necessity for leaving garrisons behind the Assyrian armies. There was unsparing slaughter to begin with. The kings seem to gloat in their inscriptions over the spectacle presented by the field of battle. They describe how it was covered with the corpses of the vanquished. This carnage was followed up by fiendish inflictions upon individual cities. The leading men, as at Lachish when Sennacherib had conquered that city, were led forth, seized by the executioners, and subjected to various punishments, all of them filled to the brim with horror. Some of the victims were held down while one of the band of torturers, who are portrayed upon the monuments gloating over their fearful work, inserts his hand into the victim’s mouth, grips his tongue and wrenches it out by the roots. In another spot pegs are driven into the ground. To these, another victim’s wrists are fixed with cords. His ankles are similarly made fast, and the man is stretched out, unable to move a muscle. The executioner then applies himself to his task; and, beginning at the accustomed spot, the sharp knife makes its incision, the skin is raised inch by inch till the man is flayed alive. These skins are then stretched out upon the city walls, or otherwise disposed of so as to terrify the people and leave behind long-enduring impressions of Assyrian vengeance. For others, long sharp poles are prepared. The sufferer, taken like all the rest from the leading men of the city, is laid down; the sharpened end of the pole is driven in through the lower

part of the chest; the pole is then raised, bearing the writhing victim aloft; it is planted in the hole dug for it, and the man is left to die.”

The archaeologist, Professor Sayce, wrote: “The barbarities which followed the capture of a town would be almost incredible, were they not a subject of boast in the inscriptions which record them. Ashurnasirpal’s cruelties were especially revolting. Pyramids of human heads marked the path of the conqueror; boys and girls were burnt alive or reserved for a worse fate; men were impaled, flayed alive, blinded, or deprived of their hands and feet, of their ears and noses, while women and children were carried into slavery, the captured city plundered and reduced to ashes, and the trees in its neighbourhood cut down.”

One could imagine the abject fear that would be engendered in the hearts of all as news of the approach of such an army was rumoured.

That is why so much is mentioned of Assyria in the records of the Bible; why it is so continuously the subject of prophecy — because it types the ruthlessness and cruelty of the latter-day Assyrian, known in the Bible as Gogue. Ultimately, however, the mighty power of Gogue will be destroyed, as was the Assyrian in the past.

The prophet Nahum foretold the doom of this wicked nation, in language that expresses uninhibited relief and joy in the complete overthrow of a vile and hated enemy. The nation contributed nothing to the progress of humanity. The doom of Assyria was a cause of rejoicing to all mankind.

But in Hezekiah’s time, over a century was to elapse before that came to pass. In the meantime, Assyria rode the crest of the wave of success. Under the mighty warrior-king Shalmaneser IV, its power was extended on all sides. Syria, then Israel, were invaded. In Judah, news came of cities destroyed, of brutalities inflicted upon the Israelites, of families torn from the land and deported to foreign parts.

In the midst of this campaign, Shalmaneser died, and his son Sargon came to the throne. He, too, delighted in war. This was the 4th year of Hezekiah’s reign (2Kings 18:9). Samaria was besieged, and for three years resisted the weight of Assyrian arms. At last it fell, and the Assyrians swept south against Philistia. The Egyptians sent help to the Philistines, but it was in vain. Philistia fell and was ravaged by the Assyrians.

Hezekiah now had the Assyrians threatening him on the north and west. Fear swept through the nation of Judah. Busy with the restoration of Divine worship, the king was not ready for war. In the face of the Assyrian threat, and the fears of his own people, Hezekiah capitulated and agreed to pay tribute.

King Sargon, of Assyria, boasts of this in his Annals that have been discovered. He calls himself the “subjugator of the land of Judah which is far off... the uprooter of Hamath, whose ruler was captured



by his own hands.”

For a time Hezekiah paid this tribute.

### **The Challenge of Isaiah**

From Jerusalem the statesman-prophet Isaiah looked out upon a troubled world. In a series of prophetic utterances he spoke of the fate of the various nations; of the “tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together” (Isa. 13:4). Babylon would fall. Moab would be humbled. Syria would be overthrown. Confusion would sweep Egypt.

Only those who have put confidence in Yahweh, and sought the kingdom He will set up on earth under Messiah, would find the strength to rise above the threatening storm.

The prophet exhorted the people of Judah that the triumph of Assyria was but for a time: “It shall come to pass, that when Yahweh hath performed His whole work upon Mt. Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria and the glory of his high looks” (Isa. 10:12).

“Be not afraid of the Assyrian”, he told the people (ch. 10:24), “for yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction” (v. 25).

He predicted the sudden advance of the Assyrian, and his equally sudden destruction. His warning was expressed in rapid staccato statements that spell out dramatically the fear and panic that swept Israel and Judah as the tramp of Assyrian feet was heard in the distance:

*Assyria is on the march from Rimmon,  
he has reached Ai,  
he has passed through Migron,  
he has stored his baggage at Michmash,  
he is through the pass,  
he camps at Geba.  
Ramah is in a panic,  
Saul's Gibeah is in flight;  
Shriek, O folk of Gallim!  
Listen, Laishah!  
Answer them, Anathoth!  
Madmenah runs away,  
The natives of Gibbim scurry for safety.  
Today he is halting at Nob,  
shaking his fist at the hill of Zion,  
at the hill of Jerusalem.  
But lo! the Lord, Yahweh of hosts,  
lops Assyria's boughs with his axe.  
The towering trees are felled,  
the lofty is laid low!* (Isa. 10:27-34; Moffatt)

But the people had little faith in Isaiah's words. They could not see how any nation could conquer Assyria unless it be Egypt. Certainly it was beyond the power of little Judah to do so. When the Assyrian swept down south to Ashdod and Philistia (see Isa. 20:1), the fear of the people was at its height. There was a general demand that Hezekiah should seek the assistance of Egypt.

### **HEZEKIAH'S POLITICAL AND PERSONAL CRISES**

The political crisis which now disturbed the reign of Hezekiah demands our closest attention. There is, perhaps, no more dramatic incident in Scripture than the record of the triumphant descent of the mighty Assyrian, his boastful assurances that he would reduce Jerusalem to pulp, and his ignominious defeat.

This tremendous crisis and deliverance foreshadows the impending crisis of this age predicted in Ezekiel 38, when the Russian Power will re-enact the same self-confident advance upon the Holy Land, only to experience the same measure of defeat.

Thus we are living in times similar to those of Hezekiah's day.

In addition, the events of Hezekiah's times form the background of the prophecies of Isaiah and anticipate the future. The people of his day had actually witnessed such a crisis as will yet usher in the Kingdom of God in the future. They could hardly doubt that what God had accomplished in their day He will repeat in the future.

These incidents must have made a tremendous impression upon the faithful in Judah.

So important are these incidents in history in the purpose of Yahweh that He has recorded the political and personal crises that disturbed Hezekiah's life, no less than three times in His book (2Kings 18; 2Chron. 32; Isaiah 36). In Isaiah chapters 36-39, the prophet turns historian because the things he describes in these chapters form the typical foundation for the events he predicts, many of which have yet to be fulfilled. In the embattled city of Jerusalem, a drama was enacted seven hundred years before Christ that foreshadowed the sufferings and the glory of Messiah. The king was first brought low in sickness; was then made great in victory by the defeat of Sennacherib; was exalted over the surrounding nations; and finally completed the spiritual revival in Judah which he had commenced at the beginning of his reign. Christ, too, was brought low in the sickness of mortality over 1900 years ago; will be made great in victory in the Age to come; will establish his power; will complete the spiritual revival he commenced at his first advent.

The grand prophecy of Isaiah cannot be properly understood without some conception of Hezekiah's life and times upon which it is based.

Isaiah knew that such a policy was disastrous. Egypt had never helped Israel, and would not do so then. He knew that Egypt was destined to be overthrown by the Assyrians, and that if Judah turned to Egypt it would be overwhelmed in the destruction that would be poured out upon the kingdom of the Nile.

His message was dramatically presented to the people. He appeared before them as a captive, divested of his normal clothing, without shoes on his feet. As the people wondered at the strange appearance of the prophet, he gave them the message from Yahweh: "Yahweh hath said, 'Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia; so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians and Ethiopians prisoners'." (Isa. 20:3-4).\*

There was no help to be gained from Egypt; the only source of help was from Yahweh. But in the face of the Assyrian threat the people of Judah had forgotten their vows, forgotten what they had promised to do at the time of the religious revival and the Great Passover, and had completely lost their faith.

The prophet went among the people trying to bring them back to their former conduct. "What is the matter with you!" he demanded of them (Isa. 22:1). The very people who had so eagerly swarmed the city of Jerusalem, destroying the idols in the first flush of enthusiasm for Hezekiah's religious revival, were now full of dread. The test that Yahweh brought upon them found the weak places in their armour. Jerusalem, which had earlier resounded with vows of what the people would do for God, of how strong they were in faith, now became a city in which God's protection was forgotten. An excitement begotten of dread dominated the people. It became a "city of stirs, a tumultuous city, a city given over to pleasure," a city whose leaders were so weak that they considered themselves as good as dead before they went to battle (Isa. 22:2).

People reacted differently to the terrible crisis facing them.

There was a class that thought death was inevitable: that put no confidence in God or man. They reasoned that defence, either spiritual or physical, was in vain. Completely lacking faith, they set aside Isaiah's message of hope, and gave themselves over to riot and revelry. They believed that death was near, therefore they would enjoy life whilst they could. "Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die," was their fatalistic philosophy.

"You shall certainly die," was Isaiah's rebuke to such a class.

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\* Isaiah probably only walked among the people for three days in the manner described. The words can be rendered: "As my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot, a three years' sign and wonder..." He was not necessarily completely naked, but divested of his customary clothing in similar manner as Saul is described in 1Sam. 19:24.

Others did seek to defend the city. They busied themselves in strengthening the walls of the city; they observed with pleasure the plans of Hezekiah to cut an aqueduct from the spring of Gihon to the pool of Siloam and to wall in this reservoir so the water would not be available to the invader. These preparations were good as far as they went, but they did not go far enough. Men were putting their confidence only in the flesh, and overlooking the true Source of Defence available to them.

Isaiah reminded them of this.

He told them that they had been diligent in making preparation for defence in regard to these waters of Jerusalem, “but ye have not looked unto the Maker thereof, neither had respect unto Him that fashioned it long ago” (Isa. 22:11). “Seek Him and your defences will be sure,” he exhorted (Psalm 127).

Another class was quite confident that the enemy would not succeed. Their confidence was not in God but in themselves. They were haughty and self-righteous, and thought that Yahweh must surely preserve them. Such an one was Shebna, the treasurer, who was over the palace. Confident in his own righteousness, he had actually built a sepulchre on high where it would be seen by all. He was sure he would be preserved from any attack by the Assyrians, and that his descendants would remain in the land as well. They would see in the wonderful sepulchre he had made for himself, a memorial of his glory for all time. He found pleasure in that which the Law showed to be defiling, associated with death and cursing.

But Isaiah revealed that the self-righteous would be rebuked. Yahweh is not mocked, and such as Shebna would be punished. He was to be “whirled round and round” violently like a stone in a sling, and cast into a far distant land (Isa. 22:18).

A final class whom he describes as “rebellious children” were politicians. They served Yahweh when it was politic to do so, but now they sought an alliance with Egypt. They saw the power of Pharaoh as their only hope, and desired to turn back to that land from whence the nation had been delivered under Moses. This, as Isaiah knew (Isa. 30), was a disastrous policy of complete apostasy and doom for those trusting in it.

He warned them that Egypt was a land of darkness, a “broken reed,” that those who trusted in it would find it to be to their shame and confusion.

But the city was not completely given over to wicked men. There were some who followed Hezekiah and had faith in Yahweh. Among these was Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, whose combined names mean “*El shall establish, for Yahweh is a Protection.*” He was one who delighted to serve Yahweh even in this time of crisis, for he is styled “His servant” (Isa. 22:20).

Isaiah told him that he would be preserved and promoted. He would be given a position of authority and honor in the realm of David and given the charge of the palace in place of Shebna who would be deposed.

Hezekiah must have known this message of Isaiah and acted upon it, for later, when the Assyrian army was destroyed, Eliakim is mentioned as being “over the household,” and Shebna is merely the scribe (Isa. 37:2).\*

Meanwhile, as the feared and hated Assyrian moved south, uprooting nations, creating a reign of terror throughout the countries; as fear and dread stalked Jerusalem and men arose with faithless and conflicting policies and demands; whilst the trials and testing of the times separated the righteous from the wicked, and caused all to appear in their true light — the prophet Isaiah performed his ministry for the benefit of the nation, strengthening those who were prepared to be helped, striving to bring forth fruit to the glory of Yahweh’s Name, and warning and condemning the foolish and the wicked.

### **Hezekiah’s Challenge**

Although Hezekiah had not capitulated to the demand of those who said he should seek Egyptian aid, he nevertheless gave way to the Assyrian and agreed to pay tribute. King Sargon returned to Assyria, and Hezekiah paid tribute at Nineveh. The people of Jerusalem breathed a sigh of relief. The city returned to normal. But Hezekiah was not satisfied with what he had done. The word of Yahweh exhorted him to “fear not the Assyrian” (Isa. 10:24), but here he was humbly submitting to him!

Hezekiah decided to revolt (2Kings 18:7).

To the west, in the land of the Philistines, Sargon had placed rulers who were prepared to do his will. Among them was the king of Ekron. Hezekiah attacked the Philistines with success, capturing this king, and taking him to Jerusalem. He overran the whole country, occupying even Gaza, the last of the powerful forts towards Egypt.

This strengthened Judah and Jerusalem considerably. It meant that the Assyrian would have to retake these forts before he could press his claim against the Jewish capital. To do otherwise would have allowed the Egyptians to move north against the Assyrian army under cover of these protective forts. And Egypt was the deadly

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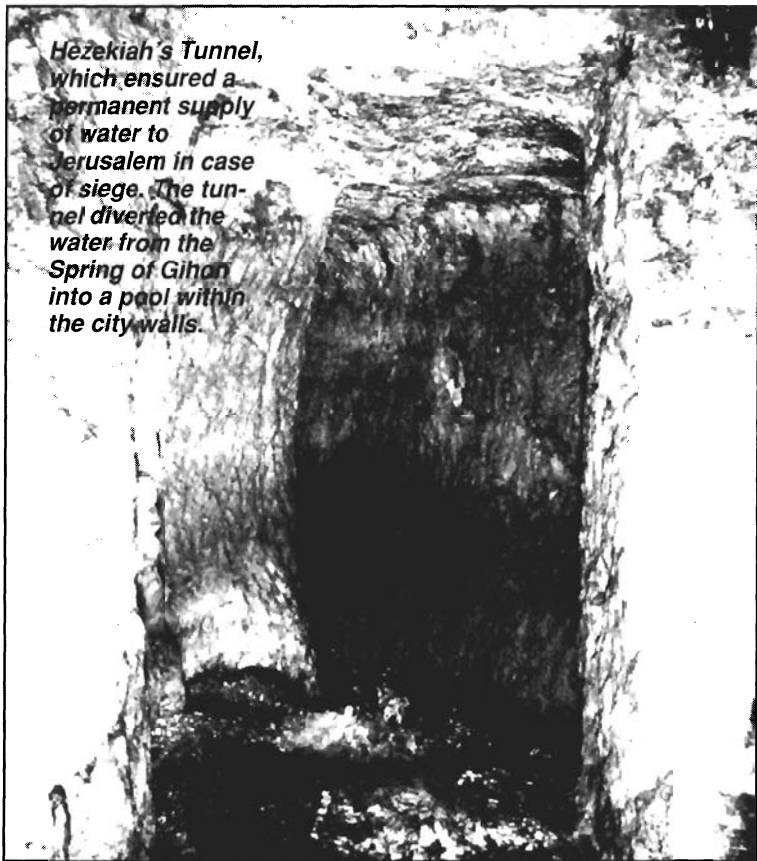
\* Shebna and Eliakim are typical of the purpose of God in Christ (see Isa. 22:15-25). The name of the former means “*To lead captive*.” He is representative of Israel trusting in the flesh. He was deposed in favor of Eliakim who represents Israel trusting in faith, the chief of whom is the Lord Jesus. The former was scattered into a “far country,” the latter (both Jew and Gentile) will become ruler in Zion. As Eliakim was placed over Shebna, so spiritual Israel (with Christ as head) will gain the supremacy in the kingdom the Lord Jesus will establish.

## HEZEKIAH'S AQUEDUCT HIS PREPARATIONS FOR THE DEFENCE OF THE CITY

Hezekiah's aqueduct is one of the archaeological wonders of the city of Jerusalem. It was laboriously dug out of rock, and follows an "S" shape for 570 metres (1,700 ft), linking the spring of Gihon with the Pool of Siloam (2Chron. 32:3-4) which was then surrounded by a wall to close it off from outside contact (Isa. 22:9-11; the word "ditch" signifies "reservoir"). Why this aqueduct followed the "S" shape is not known, for if it travelled in a straight line, some 240 metres (700 ft) of difficult digging would have been avoided. The record says that "many people were gathered together" for the purpose of digging (2Chron. 32:4). Perhaps in the panic and confusion mistakes were made and thus the curious shape of the aqueduct came into being. The construction of the aqueduct was apparently mooted when the Assyrians marched south and fear dominated Jerusalem (Isa. 22:9-11), but only constructed or completed when it was obvious that Sennacherib was going to attack Jerusalem (2Chron. 32:1). The aqueduct stopped the water of Jerusalem from flowing into the Kidron valley, and therefore being available to any invading enemy.

The story of the digging is told on an inscription in stone found on the spot of the aqueduct in 1880 and today exhibited in the Istanbul Museum. It makes interesting reading: "The boring through is completed. And this is the story of the boring: while yet they plied the pick, each towards his fellow, and while yet there were three cubits to be bored through, there was heard the voice of one calling to the other that there was a hole in the rock on the right hand and on the left hand. And on the day of the boring through, the workers in the tunnel struck each to meet his fellow, pick upon pick. Then the water poured from the source to the pool 1,200 cubits, and a hundred cubits was the height of the rock above the heads of the workers in the tunnel".





*Hezekiah's Tunnel,  
which ensured a  
permanent supply  
of water to  
Jerusalem in case  
of siege. The tun-  
nel diverted the  
water from the  
Spring of Gihon  
into a pool within  
the city walls.*

enemy of Assyria.

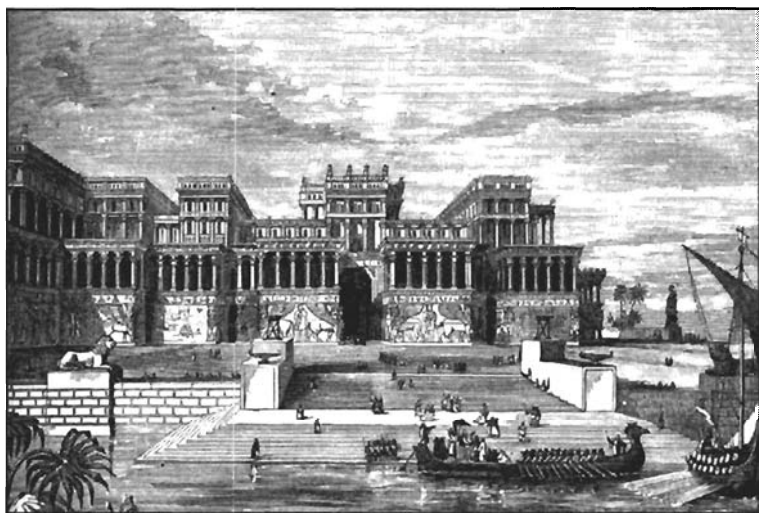
Hezekiah's action sparked off revolts in other countries, probably encouraged by Egypt. Nations rashly cast off their allegiance to Assyria, placing confidence in Egypt, that "broken reed," as Isaiah described it. In one of the Assyrian inscriptions, Sargon makes mention of this: "The people of Philistia, Judah, Edom and Moab... were speaking treason," he declared.

Hezekiah's challenge angered the Assyrian monarch but did not deter him. Sennacherib, the son of Sargon and crown prince of the realm, marched against the nations of the south and west.

He was a most efficient general: ruthless, determined, brutal.

The whole country was in revolt from Sidon down to Egypt, but one by one they were attacked and crushed.

They had no hope against the efficient Assyrian war-machine.



*The majestic palace of Sennacherib, in the city of Nineveh.*



*A stone relief from Nineveh showing Sennacherib, king of Assyria, receiving spoils from the cities he captured.*



## Chapter Four

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### SENNACHERIB ATTACKS JUDAH

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**HEZEKIAH** determined to throw off the yoke of Assyria that had rested so heavily on Judah. In this action he was supported by Isaiah the prophet, though many in Jerusalem were bitterly opposed to his policy. The Assyrians were a cruel and brutal nation, and as they invaded the countries north of Judah leaving a trail of destruction and suffering behind them, the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem became even more fearful of the consequences of the king's action.

Sennacherib swept south, leaving behind him a trail of vengeance and violence. The record of his campaign is recorded on an inscription which remains to this day, preserved in the British Museum. Portion of it reads as follows: "In my third Campaign I marched against Hatti. The awful splendour of my lordship overwhelmed Luli, king of Sidon, and he fled afar, over the sea and died [an infamous death]. The fearsome nature of the weapon of the god Ashur, my Lord, overwhelmed Great Sidon, Little Sidon, Bit-Zitti, Zariptu, Mahalliba, Ashu, Akzib and Akku. His strong walled cities, places where there were food and drinking facilities for his garrisons [were overthrown] and they bowed in submission at my feet... I sat on the throne to be king and imposed tribute, due to my lordship [to be rendered] annually without ceasing."

Only pausing sufficiently to punish and demand, Sennacherib marched south wreaking his vengeance on the cities that did not bow in submission quickly enough. One by one they fell. Down as far as Philistia he continued. The Assyrian inscriptions speak of the guilt of the Philistines in submitting to Hezekiah: "The officials, nobles and people of Ekron, had thrown Padi, their king, into iron fetters as one loyal to the treaty and obligations of Assyria, and had given him up to Hezekiah the Jew, as an enemy."

The Philistines appealed to Egypt for help — but in vain. Full vengeance was exacted of them by Sennacherib. Then, at last, he turned the full weight of his wrath on to Judah. Forty-six cities were besieged and fell. Two hundred thousand people were brought into subjection. Destruction, devastation and ruin became the order of the day.

Sennacherib was bent on crushing Judah as his father had crushed Israel.

In Jerusalem dismay reigned. Reports arrived of city after city falling, of terrible atrocities being committed on the conquered, of the

full measure of pain and misery experienced by the nation.

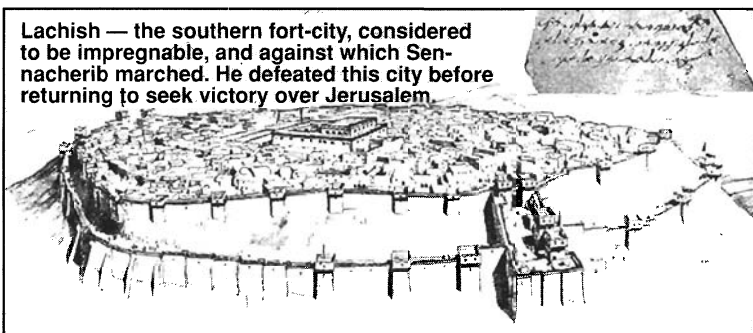
News came that Lachish was besieged. This was a strong fort about 35 miles from Jerusalem, which Sennacherib now set about to systematically destroy.

Jerusalem became panic-stricken. Fierce demands were made that Hezekiah should give way. The people could stand no more.

Hezekiah capitulated. He forwarded a message to Sennacherib at Lachish. "I have offended," he said. "Return from me; that which you put on me I will bear."

Sennacherib accepted the offer. He demanded that Hezekiah give up Padi the Philistine ruler, that he pay 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold, together with other tribute. Hezekiah submitted. To pay the tribute he had to strip the gold and silver from off the temple. How sadly Isaiah must have observed this desecration.

Proudly, Sennacherib boasted of his triumph. On the Taylor Prism, preserved in the British Museum, he records the details of this campaign: "I caused Padi, their king, to come out of Jerusalem [*probably part of the tribute imposed on Hezekiah — Editor*], and sat him on the throne as lord over them, fixing upon him tribute to my lordship. But as for Hezekiah the Jew, who did not bow in submission to my yoke, forty-six of his strong walled towns and innumerable small villages in their neighbourhood I besieged and conquered by stamping down earth-ramps and then by bringing up battering rams, by the assault of foot-soldiers, by breaches, tunnelling and sapper operations. I made to come out of them 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, innumerable horses, mules, donkeys, camels, large and small cattle, and counted them as the spoils of war. He himself I shut up like a caged bird within Jerusalem, his royal city. I put watch-posts strictly around it and turned back to his disaster any who went out of its city gates... As for Hezekiah, the awful splendour of my lordship overwhelmed him, and the irregular and regular troops which he had brought in to strengthen Jerusalem, his royal city... Together with 30 talents of gold, 300 talents of silver... he paid tribute [*see 2Kings*



18:15 — *Editor*]...and made slavish obeisance.”

There is a significant feature about this boast. Sennacherib claims to have shut up Hezekiah like a caged bird within Jerusalem, but he does not claim to have taken the city. That is an important omission for an Assyrian king to make. It means that though he besieged the city, it did not fall to him. To that extent the attack failed. And the reason why it failed was that the mighty Assyrian came face to face with a Power he could not match.

It was the challenge of Yahweh that destroyed him.

Meanwhile, Hezekiah realised that his policy of appeasement was a failure. He had paid the tribute, he had spoiled the temple to do so. But Sennacherib made no attempt to raise the siege of Lachish, and it was obvious that Jerusalem would be attacked once Lachish had fallen.

### **The Assyrian Conquers the South**

Lachish fell, and Sennacherib made it his headquarters. The defenders were treated with great cruelty. Sennacherib caused a wall relief to be made of his triumph and placed in his palace at Nineveh. It is still in existence today. It depicts the cruel king sitting on his high-backed portable throne with armrests and footstool which was placed in his camp outside the city. Surrounding him are his officers, whilst representatives from the stricken city pay homage, and the captives, including women and children, are led past. Above the bas-relief is the following caption: “Sennacherib, King of all, King of Assyria, sitting on his nimerdu-throne while the spoil from the city of Lachish passed before him.”

Thus Sennacherib sat in pomp and enjoyed his triumph; but his rejoicing was short-lived. He was soon to learn that his claim of being “king of all” was untrue. He was to be opposed by the King of heaven, before whose power the mighty Assyrian army was to be brushed aside like “thistledown before the whirlwind” (Isa. 17:12-14).

### **Hezekiah Prepares to Defend Jerusalem**

When Hezekiah realised that his policy of appeasement had failed, and that Sennacherib was determined to take Jerusalem (2Chron. 32:1), he called together a gathering of his counsellors, and they planned preparations for the war.

He strengthened the walls of Jerusalem, completed the aqueduct (see p.98), raised its towers, prepared munitions, did everything in his power to resist the Assyrian.

But his main confidence was in Yahweh.

It is not inconsistent with faith to do what we can for ourselves. In fact, God expects us to do so. The Lord Jesus was prudent in the face of trouble, even though he knew that the Jews could not destroy him

until his hour had come (John 7:1-8). Similarly Yahweh desires us to use the means He provides for us in time of need.

However, faith permits us to trust in God despite what we might do for ourselves. In fact, what we do for ourselves provides the foundation upon which God can work for our deliverance and benefit.

The farmer who does not sow his seed will not reap a bountiful crop, no matter how much he prays. The man who does not work will lack the essentials of life, no matter how great his faith.

So Hezekiah prepared for the defence of the city.

But he did not neglect the essential thing. He not only strengthened the walls, but the people as well.

With the captains of his army, he called them together in the broadspace of the city,\* and there he gave them a heart-to-heart talk. He warned, counselled, exhorted and comforted them.

“Be strong and courageous,” he declared, “be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for THERE BE MORE WITH US THAN WITH HIM! With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is Yahweh our God to help us, and to fight our battles.”

The courageous, faithful attitude of the king helped the people immensely. They forgot their fear, and put confidence in Yahweh. They believed the king and “leaned on his words” (see margin).

### **Rabshakeh’s**

### **Blasphemous Demand (Isa. 36; 2Kings 18; 2Chron. 32)**

It was not long before the people of Jerusalem had their first sight of the feared and hated enemy. Sennacherib sent a large portion of his army to the city, under the charge of Tartan, the Commander-in-Chief; Rab-saris, the chief of his officers; and Rabshakeh, the chief of the captains, a sort of political chief.

The army marched to the valley of the Kidron just outside the walls of the city. Here, at one time, the waters of the Gihon used to flow, but Hezekiah’s newly-built aqueduct had stopped all that, so that there was no water for the enemy. The Assyrians could see in the walled-up reservoir and the strengthened walls of the city, Hezekiah’s determination to maintain his independence.

Jerusalem was not to be taken easily.

The Assyrian chieftains called for the king that they might discuss the situation. Under the terms of a truce, three of Hezekiah’s officers

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\* In this action, Hezekiah restored the formula for fighting laid down by Yahweh in His law. Israel was taught to go into battle with an exhortation to “fear not” in their minds, and a prayer on their lips. See the provision laid down in Deut. 20:1-4. The principle of this can be incorporated into the actions of everyday life. It is not always physical warfare in which we are engaged or a visible enemy that we fight.

emerged from Jerusalem to parley with the Assyrians. They were Eliakim, who had been newly appointed over the king's palace (cp. 2Kings 18:18 with Isa. 22:15-19); Shebna, who had been deposed to the position of scribe; and Joah, the recorder or official historian.

Angrily and haughtily Rabshakeh addressed them:

"What foolish confidence\* is this in which you trust?" he asked. "If you claim you have counsel and strength for war, on whom do you trust? Do you trust in the support of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt? Do you think he can help you? Why, he is but a bruised reed, upon which if a man lean it will only pierce his hand, like the reeds of Egypt, but will not support his weight. But perhaps you trust in Yahweh, the God of Israel! Has not Hezekiah removed His high places and altars and told the people they must worship before this altar in Jerusalem? Now I wager\*\* that if we gave you 2,000 horses you could not find riders for them. How then do you think you will cope with the least of the captains of the Assyrian army who each have more cavalry under him than that? But if you think that Yahweh will save you, why, Yahweh has told us to go up and destroy Jerusalem! It is because He is with us that we are so successful!"

This was a clever speech, very damaging to the cause of Judah. It was designed to set the people against their king by representing him as a despotic autocrat, who had taken away the places of worship they had set up, and had forced them to go up to Jerusalem which was now in trouble. It was a speech well calculated to cause dissension and dissatisfaction throughout Jerusalem.

The Jewish embassy well knew this. They realised that in the divided state of the people of Jerusalem, Rabshakeh's arguments would appeal to many. Some defeatists were still saying that the king should give way; many were cowards at heart and would be made more so by the bold and boastful attitude of the Assyrians. Some had heard the prophecy of Isaiah in which he had declared that the Assyrian was the rod of Yahweh's anger (Isa. 10:5-6) and would find confirmation of this in the last statement of Rabshakeh.

It was dangerous to the defence of Jerusalem for the people to hear such words as those. And they were spoken in the hearing of many inhabitants of Jerusalem, for the walls of the city were crowded with people looking down in curiosity at the negotiations going on below.

Hezekiah's officers pleaded with the Assyrians that they speak in

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\* Hebrew: "*Ma habbittachon hazzeh.*" *Bittachon* is a diminutive intended to express the utmost contempt for Yahweh. Thus, to trust in Him was in the mouth of Rabshakeh nothing but "foolish confidence."

\*\* In A.V. "pledge." But the Hebrew "*aurob*" signifies to traffic, barter, pledge; hence to wager or gamble.



*The insulting and blasphemous demands of the captains of Sennacherib's army taunt the Jews on the wall of Jerusalem.*

the Syrian language which they understood very well, as was the normal custom in time of war, but Rabshakeh contemptuously rejected their request. "Do you think that my master has sent me to your master to speak these words?" he haughtily asked Eliakim. "He wants the common people of Jerusalem to hear what I have got to say, and then if they are forced to great extremities through the siege that will surely take place, they can only blame themselves."

So saying, he turned to the people that crowded the walls of Jerusalem, and with a loud voice he shouted at them: "Do not let Hezekiah deceive you; he is not able to deliver you. Do not let him lead you astray by suggesting that Yahweh can deliver you. It is not possible that this city will escape the king of Assyria. Seek my favor by a present, and come out to me. You will then have security, and we will look after you. You will be taken to a land just like your own where you will have ample to eat. But beware lest Hezekiah persuade you by saying that Yahweh will deliver you. Have any of the gods of the nations delivered their countries out of the hands of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arphad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have the gods delivered Samaria out of my hand? What gods have delivered any nation out of the hands of Assyria, so why trust that Yahweh should deliver Jerusalem out of our hands?"

A deep silence followed this confident, boastful shout. The Jewish representatives did not answer the Assyrian, but returned to report to Hezekiah the result of their conference. They came into his presence

with their clothes rent, and with all the marks of sorrow, to tell him the grim news.

Nor did the people answer the Assyrian, for the king had instructed them not to do so.

But though silence followed the shout of Rabshakeh, the conference had demonstrated one important factor that was of benefit to Hezekiah. The impudent, blasphemous, insulting speech of Rabshakeh had taken the quarrel from out of the hands of Hezekiah and placed it into the hands of Yahweh. It was no longer a battle between kings, but one in which the gods of Assyria were set against the living and powerful God of Israel\*.

There could be only one result from such a battle as that!

### **Yahweh's**

### **Comforting Reply**

When Hezekiah heard the report of Eliakim, he rent his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the temple to beseech the aid of Yahweh. He also sought the help and guidance of Isaiah. A deputation comprising Eliakim, Shebna and the chief priests, clothed in sackcloth the garb of mourning, approached the prophet with the message of the king. "This is a day of trouble, punishment and provocation," they declared. "For the children are come to the birth, and there is no strength to bring forth.\*\* It may be that Yahweh thy God will hear all the words of Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master has sent to reproach the living God; and will reprove the words which Yahweh thy God hath heard: therefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that are left!"

Back to Hezekiah there came a wonderful message of comfort: "Thus saith Yahweh. Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. Behold, I will send a blast\*\*\* upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land."

The prophecy began to be fulfilled almost immediately.

When Rabshakeh returned to Lachish, he found Sennacherib had

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\* This was similar to the contest between David and Goliath. What commenced as a challenge of forces, developed into a war of religion. The Dagon god of the Philistines was elevated before the Israelites (1Sam. 17:43), whereas David entered the fray to defend the honor of Yahweh (v. 45). Hezekiah might well have received encouragement from this outstanding example of the past.

\*\* Judah is represented as experiencing all the pain of childbirth without having the strength to deliver and bring to an end (2Kings 19:3).

\*\*\* The word in Hebrew is *ruach*, rendered elsewhere as "spirit". Yahweh would cause a spirit of fear to come on Sennacherib.

completed his conquest of the fortress, and was attacking Libnah, another city about ten miles north.

He also learned that a report was current that Tirhakah of Ethiopia, who had gained power in Egypt, was marching north to attack the Assyrian army. In the face of this new threat, the conquest of Jerusalem had to be delayed. Sennacherib massed his forces to meet the attack from the south.

But he was still determined to destroy Hezekiah. He sent a threatening letter to the king: "Let not your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. You have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by destroying them utterly, and shall you be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed? Where is the king of Hamath, of Arpad, of Sepharvaim, of Hena and Ivah?"

The letter mocked at Yahweh, and Hezekiah determined to place the issue in the hands of God.

He went up to the temple, and spread out the letter, offering up a prayer for help. Full of fervor, he besought that Yahweh, whose presence in Israel was indicated by the light that shone in the darkness of the Most Holy Place, between the Cherubim and above the Mercy Seat, should manifest His power and aid His people.\*

*"O Yahweh God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubim, Thou art the God, even Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. Thou hast made heaven and earth.*

*"Yahweh, bow down Thine ear, and hear: open, Yahweh, Thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God.*

*"Of a truth, Yahweh, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands. And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them.*

*"Now therefore, O Yahweh our God, I beseech Thee, save Thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that Thou art Yahweh Elohim, even Thou only" (2Kgs 19:15-19).*

He is also the *Creator*, for He made "heaven and earth." Sennacherib was therefore but a creature of His creation.

He is *All-seeing*, and therefore knew all that Sennacherib said and did.

He is *All-powerful* and therefore able to cope with the Assyrian in

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\* It is good to carefully consider such prayers as this, in order that we may see how men of God approached the Father in times of crisis. Deep reverence was expressed. There was no waste of idle words. There was no sense of familiarity in their approach to Deity. Hezekiah obviously had very carefully prepared his mind to seek his God before he presumed to open his lips in prayer.



spite of the strength of the latter manifested by his successful conquests.

The king pleaded the help of that One Who alone could save.

Hezekiah had not long to await an answer to his prayer. Isaiah was sent to him with a message saying that God was pleased with him, and gave him an answer of peace that enabled him to defy the proud and mighty Assyrian. So beautiful is this answer, so significant are the words, that we set it out here in full.

**Yahweh's Letter  
to Sennacherib  
(2Kgs 19:21-28)**

As Sennacherib had sent a letter to Hezekiah, which he in turn placed before Yahweh in the temple, so, in return, Yahweh sent a letter to Sennacherib through His servant Isaiah:

*The virgin<sup>1</sup> the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee.*

*Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed?*

*Against whom has thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high?*

*Even against the Holy One of Israel.*

**HEZEKIAH'S LIFE AS A TYPE**

The life and times of Hezekiah are important. The Jews look upon them as typical of Messiah's times, and the prophecy of Isaiah shows that this is so. We will appreciate this better if we carefully ponder the circumstances of his life, and see in them the outline of events to come. The main incidents of his life, and their bearing on those of the Lord Jesus are as follows:

1. The sweeping reforms introduced into divine worship at the inception of Hezekiah's rule — answering to the work of the Lord Jesus at his first advent (Col. 2:13-15).

2. The invasion of Sennacherib and the threatening challenge of his officers — answering to the opposition received by the Lord over 1900 years ago (see Acts 4:26-27).

3. The terrible infliction of leprosy — answering to the teaching of Paul: "Christ was made sin for us, who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21).

4. His remarkable recovery — answering to the resurrection and glorification of the Son (Heb. 9:12; Rom. 1:4).

5. The destruction of Sennacherib — answering to the coming overthrow of Gog (Ezek. 38:17-23).

6. The completion of his work of restoring divine worship and the peaceful and prosperous condition of his reign — answering to the setting up of the millennium under Christ (Psa. 72; Isa. 2:2-4).

*By thy messengers thou hast reproached Yahweh, and hast said:  
 "With the multitude of my chariots I am come up to the height  
 of the mountains, to the sides of Lebanon<sup>2</sup> and will cut down the  
 tall cedar trees thereof and the choice fir trees thereof: and I  
 will enter into the lodgings of his borders<sup>3</sup> and into the forest of  
 his fruitful field. I have digged and drunk strange waters<sup>4</sup> and  
 with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of  
 besieged<sup>5</sup> places".*

*Hast thou [Sennacherib] not heard long ago how I have done it.  
 Of ancient times that I have formed it?*

*Now have I brought it to pass,*

*That thou shouldest be to lay waste fenced cities into ruinous  
 heaps<sup>6</sup>.*

*Therefore their inhabitants were of small power,*

*They were dismayed and confounded;*

*They were as the grass of the field,*

*As the green herb, as the grass on the house tops<sup>7</sup>,*

*As corn blasted before it be grown up.*

*But I know thy abode,*

*And thy going out, and thy coming in,*

*And thy rage against Me<sup>8</sup>.*

*Because thy rage against Me and thy tumult [Heb. arrogance] is  
 come up in Mine ears,*

*Therefore I will put My hook in thy nose<sup>9</sup>.*

*My bridle into thy lips,*

*And I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.*

Isaiah also brought a message of peace for Hezekiah, "This shall be a sign unto you," he declared. "You shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, and in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards,

1. It was for these who had not polluted themselves with idols and false worship that Yahweh would move against the Assyrian.

2. Lebanon signifies "white". Its glory was emblematic of Israel, "the tall cedars" speaking of the principal men of the nation.

3. The extreme limits of his borders.

4. Occupied lands and made himself at home in them.

5. His soldiers were so numerous that the king claimed they drank up all available drinking water, bringing the inhabitants under severe privation.

6. Yahweh thus shows that the Assyrian had been His tool to execute His purpose. All that the oppressor accomplished had been in fulfilment of the divine purpose so that he was actually only the servant of the God of Israel.

7. Such grass with little root soon withered in the heat of the sun. The nations Sennacherib conquered had but small power.

8. The controversy was a matter of the gods of Assyria versus Yahweh of Israel.

9. Notice the similarity of language in relation to God's dealings with Gogue of Ezekiel 38, of whom Sennacherib was a type.

and eat the fruits thereof.”

The prophet showed that God would protect and defend His people. “The remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall yet again take root downward, and bear fruit upward,” he declared.

He told the king that the remnant of Judah that had sheltered in Jerusalem would spread forth abroad, for “the zeal of Yahweh shall do this”. Yahweh would conquer the Assyrian, so that he would “not come into the city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with a shield, nor cast a bank against it.”

This message was very comforting to the people of Jerusalem, though they soon found that their troubles were far from being all over.

**Hezekiah Falls Sick** An uneasy lull settled over the city of Jerusalem, as the people awaited the next move of Sennacherib. They were surrounded by evidences of the destruction wrought by the Assyrians throughout the land. Despite the message of assurance received from Isaiah, they knew that they would be subjected to further attacks, and that faith was required of them.

As though all this trouble was not sufficient, a rumour was now whispered around the city that cast the people into the deepest gloom.

Their leader, king Hezekiah was sick!

It was not an ordinary illness, but the dreaded scourge of leprosy that afflicted him\*.

Normally he would have been put outside the city, but that was not possible with the enemy encamped about it.

The king, himself, was desperately unhappy. Leprosy was not only a dread disease, but because of the teaching of the Law of Moses in regard to it, a terrible stigma was attached to the plague of leprosy. It was treated like sin, and the person contracting the disease was accounted unclean. So long as he had the disease, he was not permitted to go into the temple to worship Yahweh (Lev. 13:46).

Leprosy is a living death that slowly claims the whole body.

The leprous person was not without hope, however. Sometimes people were cured of it, and by offering a suitable sacrifice, were

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\* Two features we should note. As Hezekiah reigned 29 years, and an extension of 15 years was granted him after his sickness, it is obvious that his malady occurred the same year in which Sennacherib attacked the city (see 2Kings 18:13). Further, Yahweh’s statement: “I will add unto thy days fifteen years. And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city” (Isa. 38:5-6), shows that Sennacherib had not been overthrown when Hezekiah was smitten with his illness. It must have occurred between the visit of Rabshakeh and the final attack by Sennacherib. The sickness appears to have been leprosy, for the same word is used to describe it as is used for leprosy under the law (cp. Isa. 38:21 with Lev. 13:19-21).

brought into the congregation again, and permitted to worship God.

Perhaps that might be the experience of the king. Hezekiah hoped so anyway!

But no! One day, Isaiah the prophet presented himself to the king. He had a terrible message from Yahweh. Sad-faced and sorrowful, he pronounced it: "Thus saith Yahweh, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live!"

This was a terrible message for Hezekiah. Not only would his work for Yahweh be curtailed, but, worse than that, he had no son to continue the line of David, and provide the continuity of the seed that would result in the promised Son of David.\*

This was tragic indeed.

No man could help him in his distress.

On his bed of sickness, he turned his face even from Isaiah, and looking to the wall, he poured out his heart in prayer to his God: "I beseech thee, O Yahweh," he prayed, "Remember now how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thy sight!"

He wept bitterly before his God.

## 15 Years

### Granted to Hezekiah

Having delivered his message, Isaiah had sorrowfully turned from the house of mourning. But he had not gone far, when he received a further message from Yahweh. God had seen the tears of Hezekiah and heard his prayer. He was prepared to grant the request of the king for the sake of David, the man after His own heart (2Kings 20:5). So the prophet was turned back to the king with a fivefold message of grace. Hezekiah was told that Yahweh would:

1. Heal him;
2. Allow him to go up to the House of God on the third day;
3. Add unto his days 15 years;
4. Deliver him and the city out of the hands of Sennacherib;
5. Defend Jerusalem for His sake and that of David.

Isaiah prescribed the cure. The servants of the king were to make a poultice of figs, and place it on the boil, and the king would recover.

But whilst Hezekiah did not doubt what the prophet told him, he desired a sign to show that the normal provisions of the Law of Moses were to be waived to permit him to go up to the House of God on the third day (see 2Kings 20:8; Lev. 14:1-10). Since the whole city was expecting the impending attack by Sennacherib, it was important that Hezekiah's presence should be found as quickly as possible at the head of his people in their approach to Yahweh.

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\* Hezekiah's only son, Manasseh was 12 years old at the death of his father 15 years later (2 Kings 21:1). Thus he was born 3 years after the king was healed of his illness.

At his own request a sign was given him.

He had asked that the shadow of the sun, by which time was recorded in those days, should go back ten degrees, instead of forward as would be normal. And sure enough, as God promised, this happened. Though the sun continued to move across the sky in the normal manner, the shadow on the dial went back instead of forward.

It was the sign that Hezekiah would not only recover, but would be permitted to worship in the temple with the congregation after three days.

How joyful the king was now! The extension of life granted him would not only permit him to continue the work he was doing in restoring the true worship, but would also give him time to rear a family, and so keep alive the posterity of David through himself.

He expressed his pleasure in a psalm of praise, recorded in Isaiah 38:9-20, and described as *"The Writing of Hezekiah, king of Judah, when he had been sick and was recovered of his sickness"*.

The psalm records his experiences and feelings, as well as his vows for the future. It also shows that his sickness and recovery foreshadowed the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

**Destruction of Sennacherib's Army** Meanwhile, Sennacherib had defeated the Egyptian forces that marched against him, and was now ready to deal with Hezekiah. Confidently the Assyrian army marched to Jerusalem and encamped around the city. The anger of the soldiers was enraged at the obstinate resistance of its inhabitants. They were determined to ruthlessly destroy the city and its people.

But Yahweh had told Hezekiah: "He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a

## HEZEKIAH — A SUMMARY

General estimate of his character: 2Chron. 31:20-21; 2Kings 18:5. He re-opened the House of Yahweh after it had been closed (2Chron. 29: 3) and cleansed it after it had been desecrated. Restored its services according to the instructions of David (2Kings 18:3). Organised the songs of the temple (Isa. 38:20). Conducted a widespread revival in all Israel (2Chron. 30:26). Engaged in literary work for the benefit of the people (Prov. 25:1). His grief at the prospect of death was because he would be cut off from this work (2Kings 20:8). The drama of his life is expressed in "his songs" (Isa. 38:20), the *"Shir ra-ma'aloth"* or Song of the Degrees: Psalms 120-134. These seem to have been selected by Hezekiah to express the events of his life from the shame caused by the blasphemous tongue of Rabshakeh (Psa. 120).

bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into the city”.

Sennacherib knew nothing of this. Outside the city, little realising the drama that would unfold in the next few hours, the soldiers made preparations for the night. Soon the people of Jerusalem were looking from the walls of the city towards a forest of tents in the distance.

But next morning there was something strange about the camp of the Assyrians.

There was not the usual appearance of activity about it.

Scouts were sent out to report on the matter.

Cautiously they crept up to the camp, but soon they were seen hurrying back again.

They had an amazing story to tell: the besieging army was an army of dead men!

Yahweh had struck against His enemy. No less than 185,000 soldiers lay dead, including the leaders of the Assyrian host (2Chron. 32:21). The angel of Yahweh had taken up the challenge that the impious king had flung down when he blasphemously stated that he would treat the God of Israel as he had the gods of the other conquered nations, and, by a means that is not disclosed, the divine warrior had wreaked His vengeance.

The flower of Sennacherib's army had been destroyed. Sennacherib himself returned home, and several years later was murdered by his own sons as he was worshipping in the Temple of Nisroch, his god. Another son, Esarhaddon, came to the throne, and proved to be one of the greatest rulers of Assyria.

But for some time, Judah had peace. The destruction outside Jerusalem had so decimated the Assyrian forces that they did not return to complete the work of conquest.

### **Sennacherib's Glory and Death**

History provides some confirmation of this terrible evidence of divine intervention. The Greek historian, Herodotus, speaks of the incident. Rawlinson, another historian, declares: “Whatever the agency employed in this remarkable destruction — whether it was caused by a *simoom*, or a *pestilence*, or by a direct visitation of the Almighty, as different writers have explained it, the event is certain. Its truth is written in the undeniable facts of later history, which show us a sudden cessation of Assyrian attack in this quarter, the kingdom of Judea saved from absorption, and the countries on the banks of the Nile left absolutely unobstructed by Assyria for the third part of a century”.

Rawlinson further writes: “Sennacherib was the eldest son of Sargon, and succeeded his father in the summer of BC 705. Born in the purple, and bred up as crown prince, his primary characteristic was an overweening pride and arrogance which shows itself in all his inscrip-

# THE DESTRUCTION OF SENNACHERIB



*The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,  
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;  
And the sheen of their spears  
was like stars on the sea  
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.*

*Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green  
That host with their banners at sunset were seen;  
Like the leaves of the forest  
when autumn hath blown  
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown!*

*For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,  
And breathed on the face of the foe as he passed;  
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,  
And their hearts but once heaved,  
and for ever grew still!*

*And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,  
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;  
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,  
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.*

*And there lay the rider, distorted and pale,  
With the dew on his brow and the rust on his mail;  
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,  
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.*

*And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,  
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;  
And the might of the Gentile unsmote by the sword,  
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!*

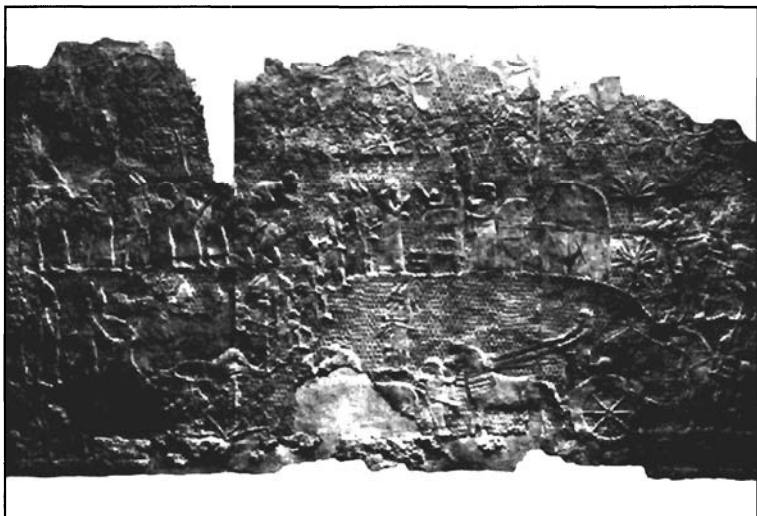
— Byron.

tions. He calls himself 'the great king, the powerful king, the king of the Assyrians, of the nations, of the four regions, the diligent ruler, the favourite of the great gods, the observer of sworn faith, the guardian of law, the establisher of monuments, the noble hero, the strong warrior, the first of kings, the punisher of unbelievers, the destroyer of wicked men'.

"He was mighty both in war and in peace. His warlike glories are attested by Herodotus, by other historians, and by his own annals. His peaceful triumphs are witnessed to by the great palace which he erected at Nineveh, and the magnificent series of sculptured slabs with which he adorned it, by his canals and aqueducts, his gate-towers and embankments, his Bavian sculpture and his stele at the Nahr-el-keleb. He was a worthy successor of his father Sargon, and of the second Tiglath-pileser, active in his military enterprises, indefatigable, persevering, full of resource. No more energetic soldier ever found himself at the head of a huge army eager for battle; no more vigorous administrator ever commanded the resources of a vast empire".

He was the Gogue of the ancient world!

The Babylonish inscriptions record the death of Sennacherib thus: "On the 20th of the month Tebet, his son killed Sennacherib, king of Assyria, during a rebellion. For 23 years Sennacherib had exercised kingship over Assyria. The rebellion continued from the 20th Tebet to the 2nd month of Adar. On the 18th month of Adar, Esarhaddon, his son, sat on the throne in Assyria".



*A relief from the palace of Nineveh shows Sennacherib, "King of the universe, king of Assyria... while the booty of Lachish passed before him."*



## Chapter Five

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### HEZEKIAH'S PRIDE IS HUMBLLED

**H**EZEKIAH'S character had yet to go through a further element of purging before his reign took on the full Messianic character which it finally portrayed. In this the king typifies the multitudinous Christ, the followers of the Lord, who will be raised from the dead to be brought before the Judgment Seat of Christ. There they will learn their failures and successes; all pride and arrogancy and self-seeking will be destroyed out of their hearts, and they will recognise the love of God in that they are granted a place in His kingdom despite their weaknesses.

This was revealed in type to Hezekiah.

#### **Ambassadors from Babylon**

About this time, there reigned in Babylon a monarch who had revolted from the Assyrians and seized power for himself. He is mentioned in the Bible as Merodach-Baladan (2Kings 20:12; Isa. 39:1), but his Babylonish name was Marduk-Apaliddina. Merodach was the god of war, and Baladan signifies "*Bel (another god of Babylon) is his lord*". He fancied himself as a warrior under the protection of the gods, and showed great hostility towards Nineveh and the Assyrians. In order to consolidate his power, he sought allies to help him in his anti-Assyrian campaign.

He only reigned for a couple of years. He was then overthrown by Sennacherib on his return from Jerusalem, who placed his son Esarhaddon on the throne.

But those two years of power for Merodach-Baladan proved sad ones for Hezekiah!

In far away Babylon, news came through of the successful resistance of Hezekiah, of his remarkable recovery from leprosy, and of the sign God gave him (2Chron. 32:31). Merodach-Baladan listened to the report with pleasure. He saw in this an opportunity to gain an important ally against the Assyrians. He sent ambassadors to Hezekiah with a present, to congratulate him on his recovery and victory.

And Hezekiah was duped by these fawning visitors. It seemed such a pleasant contrast to receive a visit from those who praised him instead of others who indulged in criticising or threatening him, that the king was drawn out of his former way of life. Trouble had forced him to seek God, but the flattering words of the Babylonish ambassadors caused him to forget God. Lifted up in pride, he showed the ambassadors the wealth and armaments he had stored up in

Jerusalem\*. He momentarily forgot that this was all from God, and displayed it to the ambassadors as though he were responsible for it all.

He who had suffered the taunts of others because of his weakness, found it an exciting experience to be praised as powerful.

It went to his head. It unfortunately resulted in him developing great pride.

The king who had proved so faithful under difficulty, weakened in times of ease. Earlier trouble had driven him to his knees in prayer and had forced him to seek his God. But prosperity caused him to forget!

How true that is of most people. Hezekiah's experience shows that the characters of the Bible were very human, everyday people. The Bible teaches how often tragedy is bound up in the simple statement: "They forgot" (Judges 3:7; 1Sam. 12:9; Psa. 78:11; 106:13,21; Hos. 2:13). This illustrates the significance of the words: "God chastens those whom He loves" (Heb. 12:6). He does so in order that the best loyalties may be developed in them for their ultimate good.

In this instance, Yahweh had left Hezekiah to test him, that the inner recesses of the king's heart might be revealed.

Some people, reading this account of Hezekiah's life, feel that it is a pity he was given an extension of fifteen years of life, for until that time, he had not been guilty of such folly. But the element of pride had always been in Hezekiah's heart, and this incident only brought into the open what had always existed but had not been given opportunity to develop. It was in the mercy of God that Hezekiah should be thus tested, for it is better to drive pride out of a man by such things as the king now experienced than that it should have remained in his heart to be the subject of condemnation at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

### **Isaiah Rebukes the King**

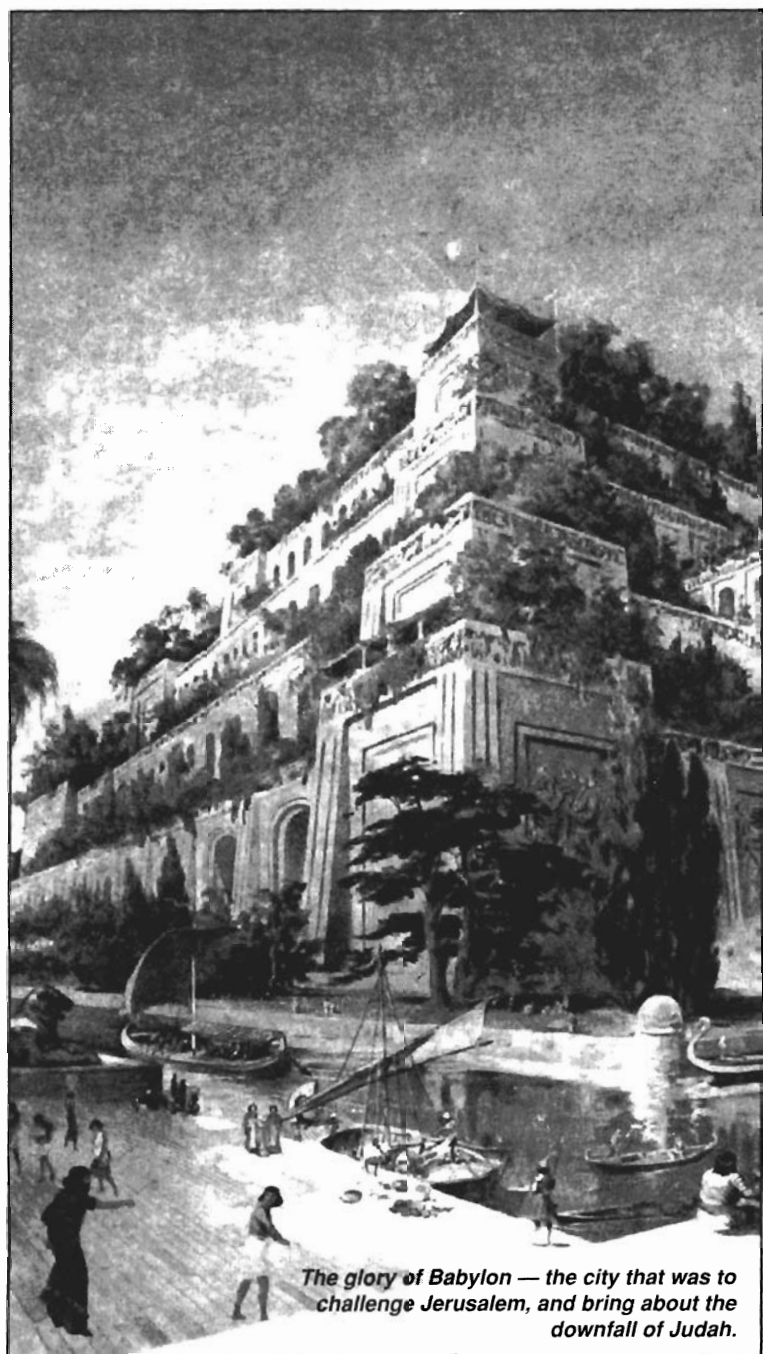
The proud and haughty Babylonian ambassadors left Jerusalem feeling that they could rely upon a powerful ally in Hezekiah.

But they had no sooner gone, than Isaiah the prophet demanded an audience with the king.

Hezekiah had to figuratively stand before the Judgment Seat, to make confession of his sin, to receive forgiveness, to experience the

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\* Critics of the Bible have challengingly asked, from whence did Hezekiah get all this wealth seeing he had stripped the temple and palace to pay tribute to Sennacherib (2Kgs. 18:16)? The answer is simple: from the spoil of the army destroyed outside the walls of Jerusalem. The army would have had in its possession the accumulated spoil of many nations over whom victories had been gained, and this would have been seized by Hezekiah at the amazing defeat of the enemy, brought into Jerusalem, and shown by the king to his visitors as a token of the extent of the victory and evidence of his power.



*The glory of Babylon — the city that was to challenge Jerusalem, and bring about the downfall of Judah.*

divine mercy in that he would not be cut off from the kingdom.

Sternly the prophet faced Hezekiah. "Who are these men, and from what country do they come?" he abruptly asked.

"They are come from a far country, even from Babylon," replied Hezekiah.

"What have they seen in your house?" enquired the prophet.

"I have shown them everything in mine house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them", was the frank confession of the king who now realised the wrong he had done.

"Hear the word of Yahweh," continued the stern-faced prophet. "Behold, the days come that all that is in your house shall be carried into Babylon, so that nothing shall be left. And of thy sons which you shall beget, shall they take away to the palace of the king of Babylon".

The words of Isaiah brought home to Hezekiah the folly of his action, but they also revealed the mercy of Yahweh in that He would not directly punish the repentant king.

Hezekiah recognised that the reproof he had received was good for him. He realised that God had not punished him to the extent that he deserved, and that he would be left unmolested to continue the work of consolidating and extending the true worship throughout Judah during his lifetime. He thanked God that "peace and truth" would thus continue to prevail even though the ultimate divine judgment was sure.

Moreover, he humbled himself before Yahweh together with the inhabitants of Jerusalem (2Chron. 32:26), so that through his wise conduct good came out of his sin. He used it to help lead the people to God.

### **Final Glory and Death of Hezekiah**

The withered stem of Jesse had flourished once again as a typical fulfilment of Isaiah 11\*. Yahweh guided the work of the king, so that he had great success on every side. Jerusalem became the centre of worship, and worldwide pilgrimages as in the days of Solomon, and the king himself received the admiration of the surrounding nations because of the wisdom and prosperity of his rule (2Chron. 32:22-23).

To the people of those days, it was a picture of the millennium in miniature.

Hezekiah completed the work he had set his hands to do. The Psalms were put in order (cp. Isa. 38:20), and arranged for use in the

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\* Notice how this prophecy of Messiah's kingdom follows on that which portrays the destruction of Sennacherib (Isa. 10:24-34). Isaiah could see the great dramatic events of his day as typical of the greater drama that shall inaugurate the reign of Christ on earth. Notice how even the wife of Hezekiah comes into the prophetic picture (cp. 2Kings 21:1 with Isa. 62:4).

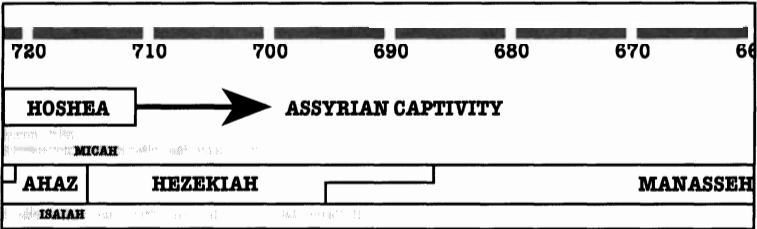
public service of the temple. He copied out many of the Proverbs (Prov. 25:1) so that the people might have better access to these sayings of Solomon, and be guided by the wisdom thereof in their daily lives. Wealth poured into Jerusalem (2Chron. 32:27). The nation was respected far and wide. After the terrible and mysterious destruction of the Assyrian army none dared invade the land.

The king made sure that he did not repeat his former neglect. Hezekiah married Hephzibah and to her was born a little boy whom he called Manasseh. His name means “forgetting”, and doubtless Hezekiah so named him because God had caused him to forget all his troubles. But we shall see that Manasseh in turn “forgot” what was due to God.

Gradually the years passed away. At last, the fifteen years of grace came to an end, and Hezekiah knew that the time for him to die had come. He was not dismayed this time, for his work was completed. The nation was happy and prosperous, the temple thronged with worshippers, the worship of Yahweh was everywhere upheld, he had a son to continue his reign, on all sides there were evidences of his wise administration.

But the death of Hezekiah was a matter of great grief to the people. They had learned to love their king. A solemn ceremony of mourning was conducted, and the people of Jerusalem especially “did him honor at his death” (2Chron. 32:33). He was buried in the “ascent of the sepulchres” (see Revised Version), a place of great honor among the kings of Judah and Israel.

Manasseh ascended the throne at the tender age of 12 years. He was not experienced to decide foreign policy at that age, but was guided for a time by advisors who, unfortunately, forsook Hezekiah’s policy.



## HEZEKIAH AS A TYPE OF CHRIST

In Kings, Chronicles and Isaiah (chs. 36-39), the Bible records the life of Hezekiah no less than three times, thus indicating the great importance of the events narrated. In Isaiah this is particularly obvious, for the prophet suddenly breaks off his prophesying and turns historian. Why should he do this? Because the events he outlines in Chapters 36-39 form the historical basis or type of the prophecies that follow. They dramatise the final great controversy by which Yahweh will vindicate His power in the earth at Christ's coming, and usher in the kingdom that He will establish.

This is shown particularly in the psalm composed by Hezekiah after his sickness, which reveals many remarkable similarities to the great prophecy of Christ as the suffering servant of Yahweh recorded in Isaiah 53.

### HEZEKIAH'S PSALM (ISA. 38:9-20)

#### **Superscription — v. 9**

*The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness.*

This sickness was leprosy, indicated by the use of the word "boil" in v. 21. It is the word used in conjunction with leprosy in Lev. 13:19-21. Leprosy is used as a symbol for sin. Of Christ it is said, "we did esteem him stricken, smitten... afflicted" (Isa. 53:4). They treated him as unclean, as a leper. But Hezekiah's sickness was cured when a poultice of figs was placed on the boil (v. 21). Israel is likened to figs (Jer. 24) and both the sickness and cure of Hezekiah (and of Christ) were for the benefit of Israel.

#### **Life Cut Short — vv. 10-11**

*I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave; I am deprived of the residue of my years. I said, I shall not see Yahweh, even Yahweh, in the land of the living: I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world.*

"Cutting off" is rendered "noontide" in the R.V. The Hebrew signifies "quiet." The idea is that in the midst of life, at the time when his usefulness is at a peak, Hezekiah was consigned to the grave. Link this thought with "the travail" of Isa. 53:11 as applicable to Christ; and compare with Isa. 53: 9; Acts 2:31. For "deprived of the residue of my days" see Isa. 53:12 — "poured out his soul unto death." Compare the phrase "land of the living" with Isa. 53:8.

What is said of Hezekiah can be applied to Christ.

The phrase "of the world" is a translation of the Hebrew word *chedel* which signifies "rejection" or "silence." It is from the same

root as the word rendered “rejected” in Isa. 53:3. This sentence of death was as rejection to Hezekiah. Without a posterity he was without hope.

#### **Posterity Denied — vv. 12-14**

*Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent: I have cut off like a weaver my life: he will cut me off with pining sickness: from day even to night wilt Thou make an end of me. I reckoned till morning, that as a lion, so will He break all my bones; from day even to night wilt Thou make an end of me. Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove; mine eyes fail with looking upward: O Yahweh, I am oppressed; undertake for me.*

The Hebrew word *dor* rendered “age” in v. 12 is translated “posterity” in Num. 9:10, and “generation” in Isa. 53:8. It should be rendered “posterity” in both Isa. 38:12 and ch. 53:8. Thus the expression belongs both to Hezekiah and to Christ. In the subsequent expressions, Hezekiah lamented that Yahweh would cut off his life suddenly and completely as a weaver takes his web from the loom by cutting the warp. He looked to the morning for relief, but it did not come. His sickness threatened to destroy him as a lion crushes the bones of its prey. It seemed as though death would come from “day unto night”; thus, within the compass of a day. So he mourned like a dove. But, suddenly, relief came in the reassuring message of Isaiah.

#### **Assurance of Renewed Life — vv. 15-17**

*What shall I say? He hath both spoken unto me, and Himself hath done it; I shall go softly all my years: in the bitterness of my soul. O Yahweh, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit; so wilt Thou recover me, and make me to live. Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back.*

The statement of v. 15 is made in view of his request stated in v. 10: “I said...” Hezekiah finds it difficult to adequately express his appreciation of the mercy provided him in the extension of life granted to him. It is “by these things” (v. 16), by such experiences that man’s dependence on Yahweh is revealed, and which thereby humbles the flesh, and leads men to life.

#### **Posterity Granted — vv. 18-19**

*For the grave cannot praise Thee, death can not celebrate Thee: They that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth.*

***The living, the living, he shall praise Thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known Thy truth.***

When this Psalm was first uttered, Hezekiah did not have any children to whom he could make known Yahweh's truth, but with the extension of life granted him, there came also a posterity.

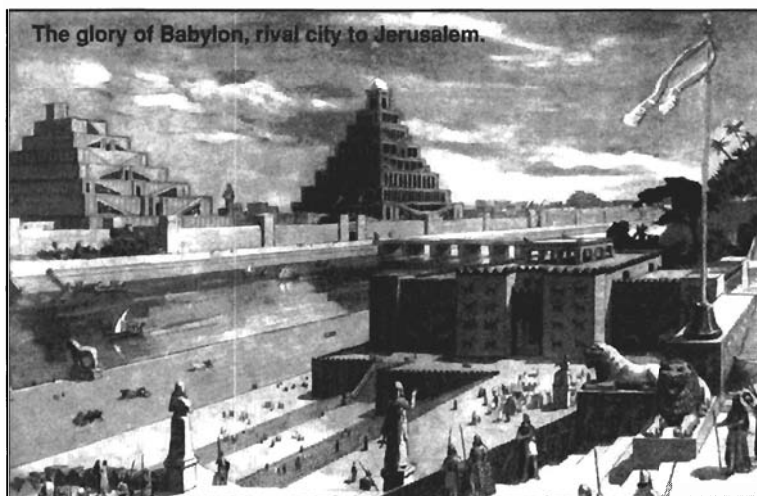
#### **A Life Prospect of Praise — v. 20**

***Yahweh was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of Yahweh.***

Delivered from sickness, and figuratively raised from the grave, Hezekiah expresses his determination to come constantly into the presence of Yahweh with songs of praise. How appropriate this is of the Master, who rose from the grave to appear in the presence of his Father in the heavens.

**Compare the following aspects of Hezekiah's illness with Christ in his mortal condition:**

Leprosy set him as a man apart (cp. Isa. 53:3). He was sick unto death (cp. Isa. 38:1, 9 with ch. 53:12). He was brought to the grave [hell] (cp. Isa. 38:10, 18 with ch. 53:9). He was cut off (cp. Isa. 38:10 with ch. 53:8). From the land of the living (cp. Isa. 38:11 with ch. 53: 8). No posterity (cp. Isa. 38:12-14 with ch. 53:8). Brought from death (cp. Isa 38:16 with Acts 2:31). Oppressed, bitterness (cp. Isa. 38:14-15 with ch. 53:7, 11). No peace (cp. Isa. 38:17 with ch. 53:5). All sins put away (cp. Isa. 38:17 with ch. 53:12). A posterity granted (cp. Isa. 38:19 with ch. 53:10).





## Chapter Six

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### MANASSEH: THE KING WHO FORGOT

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**T**HE story of the Bible now takes us to 2Kings 21 and 2Chron. 33. Isaiah had warned Hezekiah that though “peace and truth” would continue throughout his reign, ultimately Judah would be taken into captivity by the very nation (Babylon) to whose ambassadors the king had revealed his wealth and munitions (Isa. 39:5-8). God thus indicated that the righteousness of Hezekiah’s reign would give place to one of great wickedness, for otherwise Yahweh would not have punished His people.

This came to pass in the reign of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah. He has the distinction of reigning longer than any other monarch upon the throne of David (a period of 55 years), and the terrible record of being Judah’s most wicked king. In the Bible narrative he is compared with Ahab (2Kings 21:13), for he was to Judah what Ahab was to Israel. He pursued a vigorous policy of idolatry, doing all within his power to root up the form of worship established by his father. Yet there must have been something of worth in his character, for after he had been dragged in chains to Babylon by the Assyrians he repented, pleaded the forgiveness of God, and was restored to the throne. In the last years of his life, he made determined efforts to undo the wickedness of his former years. Time, however, was against him. He was not able to completely repair the evil of his early years; it remained, to become the cause of Judah’s ultimate rejection and captivity (Jer. 15:4).

Why did Manasseh receive such consideration at the hands of the God whom he had so completely repudiated. We have suggested that there must have been some worth in his character that God was able to detect, and later allow to develop; but in addition to that, he probably received special consideration because of the love that Yahweh had for his father, Hezekiah. In that he is like Israel after the flesh, who are “beloved for the fathers’ sake” (Rom. 11:28). In the repentance and restoration of Manasseh, therefore, we not only witness an outstanding example of Yahweh’s unfailing mercy, but a token of His intention with the nation of Israel. Whereas the reign of Hezekiah represents the coming glory of Christ’s kingdom, that of Manasseh tells the story of the wickedness of Israel after the flesh, and the ultimate conversion and restoration of the nation.

Manasseh’s name means “forgetting.” He probably was so named because the birth of the little boy kept alive the line of David through Hezekiah, and was one of the gifts that Yahweh gave him during the

fifteen years extension of life granted him, by which he was caused to “forget” his troubles. But it was also appropriate to this wicked king who “forgot” the goodness of Yahweh to his father and the nation. How like Israel after the flesh was this king in his forgetfulness! How often do we “forget” and so sin against God!

The story of his life reminds us how deep and abounding is the love of God. Even though we might sometimes forget, He is ever ready to receive us, if we are truly repentant and turn to Him, confessing our sins and beseeching His forgiveness.

Let us listen in to the conversation between Mr. Phillips and his family as they discuss the life of this king from 2Kings 21, which they have just read.

**Manasseh Rejects His Father’s Influence** “I did not like that chapter a bit!” exclaimed Joan after the family had completed reading 2Kings 21. “It was so exciting reading about Hezekiah restoring the true worship, and how Yahweh rescued Jerusalem by destroying the Assyrian army, that it is disappointing to read how wickedly his son behaved! I cannot understand the people turning from God so quickly.”

“You forget that fifteen years had passed since that time,” remarked her father. “The memory of the people was becoming dim. Consider! How much do you remember of what happened fifteen years ago!”

“But I was only a baby then!” protested Joan indignantly.

“Of course! but Manasseh had not even been born when Sennacherib’s army was destroyed outside the walls of Jerusalem,” replied Mr. Phillips.

“But though Manasseh may not have remembered, surely others would!” urged Joan.

“Human nature is very fickle and forgetful,” commented Mr. Phillips. “Fifteen years is a long time in a human life; memory becomes dim, and with the pressures of life we forget the goodness of God. Especially is this so when other problems arise to crowd it from our minds.”

“What particular problems did Judah have, to cause the people to forget?” asked Ann.

“We are not told in the Bible,” said Mr. Phillips, “but from the history of the times we learn that Assyria was again exerting her influence. On the assassination of Sennacherib, Esarhaddon came to the throne (2Kings 19:37). He invaded Judah and forced terms on the nation which the king accepted. On a stone inscription found by archaeologists in the ruins of Nineveh, it is recorded that Manasseh paid tribute to Esarhaddon the son of Sennacherib. Perhaps that fact provides us with a key to his life. As he was only twelve years of age

when he came to the throne, it is obvious that he would be too young to decide affairs relating to the foreign policy of the nation. That would be in the hands of advisors who, in the face of Assyrian threats, had not the faith to continue the policy of Hezekiah. They reverted to the attitude of appeasement that Ahaz had followed, and as this was bound up in the national worship of the enemy, so the people were found following 'after the abominations of the heathen whom Yahweh cast out before the children of Israel'. The bold, defiant attitude of Hezekiah was set aside; Judah lost its independence and became a vassal State under Assyria. Manasseh thus grew to maturity in an atmosphere of divided loyalty to the things of God. The worship of foreign gods was first permitted and then encouraged, until the king became openly hostile to the worship of Yahweh."

"Was it the worship of Assyrian gods only that he encouraged?" asked Ann.

"No, the king became the eager devotee of the gods of all nations, until at last their degrading rites were seen on every side. It became an obsession with him. He plunged into all the mysteries of sorcery and magic (2Kings 21:6); he caused the terrible furnace of Tophet\* to be rebuilt on an enlarged scale (Jer. 7:31; 19:5-6) and sacrificed his own child thereon (2Kings 21:6); he restored and enthusiastically followed the worship of the heavenly bodies, begun by Ahaz (Jer. 8:2). The people imitated the evil example of the king. Soon, in gardens, and on the flat roofs of houses, were set up brick altars from which arose clouds of incense (Isa. 65:3; Jer. 19:13; Zeph. 1:5); in the streets of the cities were built small furnaces for which children gathered wood, and in which their parents baked cakes as an offering to the goddess Astarte (Jer. 7:17-18); the high places were restored (2Kings 21:3); the practice of human sacrifice became tolerated (Jer. 32:35); the firstborn of the family which Yahweh claimed as His own were offered on the altars of Molech (Ezek. 23:37).

"Even the temple was not exempt from the blasphemous pollutions of the deluded king. Two altars were set up in its courts and dedicated to the heavenly bodies (2Kings 21:5; 23:12); an image to the vile goddess Astarte was erected in the sacred precincts themselves (2Kings 21:7; 23:13-14), whilst close by were the houses of those who lent themselves to the shocking rites of this abominable worship (2Kings 23:6-7). The Altar of Yahweh and the Ark were alike desecrated (2Chron. 33:16; 35:3), whilst the sacred vessels were given over to the use of Baal (2Kings 23:4). In fact, with fanatical fury

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\* The word means "drums," the valley of Tophet being the Valley of the Drums, so called because the noise of drums drowned out the shrieks of children offered as a burnt offering to the image of Molech. This is said to be a metal image with arms outstretched upon which the children were offered. The inside was hollow and comprised a furnace which was heated up until the image was red hot. The valley is better known as the Valley of Hinnom, or Gehenna. It is situated just outside Jerusalem on the east.

Manasseh dedicated himself to completely destroying the worship of Yahweh throughout the land. In a few years, most of what Hezekiah had restored, was again broken down.”

### **Isaiah Protests and is Murdered**

“Surely there were some left from Hezekiah’s time to oppose the wicked king,” said Ann as her father paused in his comments.

“Yes, we have read this evening from 2Kings 21:10-15 of the courageous message of certain of the prophets who publicly protested against this wickedness, and warned of the terrible judgments that would fall on the nation in consequence. None would escape the divine punishment, they declared. Whereas in the days of Hezekiah, Jerusalem had been defended by God, He would give it over to destruction in the future judgment.”

“Do you think that Isaiah would have influenced these prophets to oppose the king in that way?” asked Graham, who was thoughtfully considering the chapter from the Book of Kings which the family had read.

“Yes, I am sure he did,” replied his father. “The indications are that Isaiah was still living at the beginning of Manasseh’s reign. Even before then, he could detect trends in the nation which he deplored, and against which he raised his voice. This is apparent if we read the Book of Isaiah carefully. In the early flush of Hezekiah’s reform, he proclaimed words of encouragement, but as time went on his language became increasingly severe. He began to accuse the people of hypocrisy (Isa. 48:1-2), warned them not to make the mistake of believing that Yahweh did not know their hearts, reminded them that Jerusalem had been saved for Yahweh’s own sake, not because of the righteousness of the nation (vv. 9-11). He saw about him signs of approaching apostasy (Isa. 56:9-11). He knew that trouble faced the nation even as Yahweh had warned Hezekiah, and therefore grimly told the people that the death of the righteous was not a thing to lament under the circumstances, for they were ‘being taken away from the evil to come’ (Isa. 57:1-2). With prophetic foresight, he spoke of the conditions Manasseh would establish in the land: idolatry would be encouraged, child-sacrifice was to become common, Yahweh would be ignored and foreign aid sought, the wicked example of the king would be followed by the people, the nation would become vassal to a power ‘afar off,’ and the people ‘would debase themselves unto hell’ (Isa. 57:3-9).

“Harsh, stern words fell from his lips as he tried to warn the people of the future. He was encouraged in this by Yahweh: ‘Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet and shew My people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins,’ he was told (Isa. 58:1).

“He carried this message to the nation: ‘Behold’, he declared, ‘Yahweh’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear’ (Isa. 59:1-2) .

“He attracted to the divine cause a company of faithful Israelites who were like-minded. To them he gave a message of hope. ‘If thou delight thyself in Yahweh’, he told them, ‘He will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth (as rulers), and will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father’ (Isa. 58:14).

“He gave them a glorious vision of the future. He spoke of a time when all nations will seek the God of Israel instead of Israel seeking the gods of the nations (Isa. 56:4-8); of a time when all the tribes will be restored to the land, and during the reign of Messiah (Christ) the bright, penetrating light of truth shall beam forth from Zion to lighten all mankind (Isa. 60); of the year of divine vengeance when flesh shall be humbled before the mighty manifestation of divine power, and Jerusalem and its people will become a rejoicing and a praise throughout the earth (Isa. 65:17-18). He told that company of faithful ones that they would yet see this fulfilled if they continued to worship Yahweh in sincerity and humility (Isa. 66:1-2); that the time will come when, in Jerusalem, there will be seen the complete vindication of the true worship (Isa. 66:22-24).

“Isaiah’s final message to the nation was given when Manasseh was seated upon the throne, and the epoch of idolatry had commenced. He saw the whole nation as completely given over to wickedness: ‘From the sole of the foot even unto the head thereof is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores...’ (Ch. 1:6). He saw Judah in vassalage to Assyria: ‘Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers...’ (v. 7). He saw a nation completely changed from the days of Hezekiah: ‘How is the faithful city become an harlot! It was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers...’ (v. 21). He saw that there was no hope for the nation apart from the purging judgments of Yahweh, that it would be destroyed until the time of its redemption came (vv. 25-27). He could see that apart from the mercy of Yahweh leaving a small remnant to faithfully testify to His truth, Zion would have been completely destroyed as were Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 9). The ‘small remnant,’ in the days of Manasseh, were those faithful prophets who lifted up their voices against the king, as we read in the chapter this evening.”

“Before you go any further, Dad,” interrupted Peter, who had shown progressive signs of impatience as his father continued, “I would like to ask a question.”

“Very well! What is it?”

“You have been quoting from Isaiah Chapter 1, haven’t you?”

“That is true.”

“Well, how can you say that this was Isaiah’s final message, if it is his first chapter?”

“Because the first chapter was undoubtedly written last, and comprises a foreword, or an epitome, to the whole ministry of the prophet.”

“How can you say this is ‘undoubtedly’ the case?” asked Peter, who delights to get what he calls “proof” for any such statement.

“We are told that in the first verse,” answered his father. “This verse tells us that Isaiah prophesied until the end of Hezekiah’s reign. With the rest of the first chapter it therefore comprises his last message, and must have been delivered in the early portion of Manasseh’s reign. How else could he have said that he would prophesy throughout the reign of Hezekiah?”

“Satisfied, Peter?” asked Ann, who is always pleased when her father scores off her brothers.

“Jewish tradition says that Isaiah was murdered because of his outspoken words against the king,” continued Mr. Phillips, overlooking the little exchange of compliments among the children. “They say that the king, ignoring the grand service the prophet had rendered the nation, had him put to death in the most terrible manner — by being sawn asunder. So died this great prophet, patriot, and hero.

“Is there any proof of that in the Bible?” asked Peter, who had ignored Ann’s comment, and was busily writing notes.

“There is no direct confirmation in the Bible,” answered Mr. Phillips, “although in Hebrews 11:37, Paul makes reference to some being ‘sawn asunder,’ and he could well have had Isaiah the prophet in mind. But as that wonderful chapter on faith so clearly shows, such men did not die in vain. They had before them the glorious hope of a resurrection to life eternal. Isaiah gave expression to this, for he declared: ‘My dead body shall arise’ (Isa. 26:19). Therefore, though Manasseh might slay him, he knew that God would raise him from the dead to enter upon his inheritance.

### **Manasseh Unleashes A Reign of Terror**

“Manasseh listened to the words of rebuke uttered by Isaiah and the other prophets with extreme displeasure. As king he believed himself above such criticism, forgetting that he was but regent for a greater Monarch in the heavens. Having no argument whereby he could silence his accusers, he decided to do it by means of violence and death. He proceeded to fill Jerusalem with innocent blood, murdering those who believed they should obey God rather than man. Isaiah was but one of many who became martyrs to the faith. Manasseh

sought out any who raised but the slightest criticism against his rule and policy, and gave them over to death. It was a massacre of righteous men which was long remembered (cp. 2Kings 24:3-4).

“With anger Yahweh looked down from heaven upon this unwarranted persecution of His saints. But what displeased Him most was not just the action of Manasseh, but the attitude of the people in stupidly following the wicked king, and in looking on with calm indifference to the persecution of His prophets.

“This was one of the causes why Judah was taken into captivity (2Kings 24:3), though Manasseh himself was ultimately forgiven, after he had been severely punished.

“The life of Manasseh teaches us two things: Firstly, that nobody can touch Yahweh’s true saints with impunity; and, secondly, His love is great, and He will not reject any who turn to Him with true repentance, pleading His forgiveness.”

“You are going too fast for me, Dad,” complained Peter again. “Where do we read that Manasseh was forgiven? It is not in the chapter we read this evening!”

“No, a further account of his life is given in 2Chronicles 33. There we read of the captivity, repentance and restoration of Manasseh, details not given in the account in Kings.

**Taken Into Captivity** “In Nineveh, the great capital of Assyria, Esarhaddon died, and Ashurbanipal reigned in his stead. It was an opportunity that some of the nations in subjection to the brutal Assyrian power were seeking. Encouraged by Egypt, a number of Syrian nations confederated to throw off the yoke of Assyria. Among them could have been Judah. The ruthless and efficient Assyrian army went immediately into attack. They swarmed down through the northern countries, punishing the rebels, spreading a trail of ruin and devastation as they moved south. Over the border of Judah they marched. Manasseh found himself without defence. He had turned from Yahweh, he had rebelled against Assyria; he found himself deserted by God and man. A battle took place\*; Judah was defeated and Manasseh taken captive.

“What now of the gods of other nations whom the king had preferred before Yahweh? Could they help him in his distress?

“Manasseh found that they could not. He was treated with the greatest indignity. Ashurbanipal decided to make an example of him. Cruelly, in accordance with brutal Assyrian custom, hooks were crudely driven through the lips of the king, and he was ignominiously dragged back over six hundred miles to Babylon, where he was flung

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\* Mr. Phillips is here reconstructing the history of the times from the records of historians such as Josephus, and from archaeological research. Both confirm the Bible narrative and provide additional information.

into a cell to await the Assyrian king's pleasure."

"I notice that 2Chron. 33:11 says that the 'king of Assyria took Manasseh among the thorns'," said Graeham, who had turned to this passage when his father made mention of it. "What does that mean?"

"According to the *Companion Bible*, the word 'thorns' should be rendered 'hooks,' and relates to what I have just told you about the Assyrian king dragging Manasseh to Babylon as a captive with hooks driven through his lips."

"Why should he take him to Babylon when Nineveh was the capital of Assyria?" asked Peter.

"Possibly to teach the Babylonians a lesson. They, too, had recently revolted against the Assyrians and had been punished. Perhaps Manasseh had been taken there to teach them the lesson that it does not pay to rebel against Assyria. He would provide a particularly powerful argument to that end, for the Babylonians had been ready to congratulate Hezekiah on his successful resistance in the days of Sennacherib, Ashurbanipal's grandfather, and to see the son of Hezekiah in bonds would vindicate the reputation of the Assyrians.

**Manasseh in Babylon** "In Babylon, Manasseh enacted the part which Judah as a nation was doomed to play a few years later, when, it, too, was taken into captivity. In his cell, he had ample time to review the events of his life, and to see in his degraded state, the failure of all his hopes. Perhaps he recalled something of the early training he must have received as a young boy in his father's home. Perhaps he considered more deeply the words of the prophets he had spurned in more prosperous times.

"Whatever the cause, Manasseh came to recognise the vileness and the stupidity of his actions. Moreover, he had sufficient knowledge of Yahweh and His truth to know what he must do. And, furthermore, he now manifested sufficient humility and courage to put it into execution. Humility had been forced upon him during the long, degrading march to Babylon, when he had been led, mile after mile, day after day, week after week, with the humiliating, painful hooks dragging at his lips, in the midst of his jeering, unsympathetic captors.

"In this time of urgent need he turned to Yahweh in prayer. He poured out his heart, pleading with God to forgive, if possible, all that he had done amiss, to overlook even the murder of His prophets, to grant unto him the opportunity to make restitution.

"And Yahweh heard the prayer from the prison-cell, could see that the man was truly repentant, and granted him his request.

"The doors of the prison swung open, and Manasseh was released and restored by the king of Assyria to his former position of power in Jerusalem. Historians suggest why this was done. They say that the Assyrian king wanted to obtain an ally north of Egypt, and believed



that this act of mercy to a fallen foe would secure his friendship. That might be the natural explanation of what occurred, but behind these man-made schemes was the hand of God guiding them in accordance to His will and purpose.

### **Manasseh Tries**

### **to Make Restitution**

“Back in Jerusalem, Manasseh vigorously set about repairing the damage he had done.

Jerusalem saw a changed king, and heard commands issue forth from his lips reversing all that he had done before. The idols he had set up were now broken down; the pagan altars that had been reared up were now overthrown; the holy places that had been defiled were now cleansed; and the people who had been instructed in false worship were now “commanded” to worship Yahweh (2Chron. 33:16).

“But true worship cannot be established by law; it must be in the hearts of people, to be really effective. Manasseh’s work of reformation was therefore a failure. The false ideas implanted by pagan worship over many years could not be eradicated in a moment of time. The people still sought after the degrading evil worship Manasseh himself had established.

“And in that moment of frustrated reformation, he learned the full measure of his wickedness. For in destroying the prophets, he had slain those who could now have helped him; he had robbed Judah of the very teachers which might have made his reformation really effective, so that his life ended in a spirit of frustration and defeat.

“Politically he also realised that difficult times lay ahead. In Babylon, in Egypt, in other parts of the Assyrian empire, men were preparing for war, and it was obvious that soon the world would be plunged into conflict. Judah lay between the Empires of the north and the south, and would inevitably become involved. Manasseh gave attention to strengthening the defences of Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah, whilst he sought to fulfil the vow he made in the prison in Babylon.

“He never captured the full affection of the people. They had seen too much contradiction in their king to really like him. His reign had been one of ruthless force against all reason; the nation had suffered foreign invasion through his folly; the people had been forced first to worship foreign gods and then Yahweh. Thus, though he reigned longer than any other king, he was not given a king’s burial at his death. He was buried in a garden, called the Garden of Uzza, that he had acquired for himself. This may have been the place where Uzzah touched the Ark and was slain. If so, it is rather appropriate that he who had done such wrong in life should, in death, be buried in a place which commemorated the desecration of the Ark of God in the days of David.

## Chapter Seven

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### AMON: THE PAGAN

**T**HE death of Manasseh was followed by the short reign of Amon. He continued on the throne for only two years and contributed nothing but evil to the record of Judah's history. His short reign ended in confusion and bloodshed.

#### **A Product of Paganism**

Amon was a young man of twenty-two years of age when his father died, and he ascended the throne. Although he must have witnessed the great change that came over his father after he had returned from captivity in Babylon, Amon soon fell under the influence of a heathenizing party within Judah, which had been instrumental in causing previous kings to turn from the way of righteousness (2Chron. 24:17-22). It had doubtless been this party which had warped the mind of Manasseh in the early portion of his reign, and caused him to so strenuously advocate paganism.

This party would no doubt use all the arts of flattery, misrepresentation and cajolery to obtain control over Amon. The king would probably be told that the remarkable return of his father to the true wisdom in the latter years of his reign was due to dotage in his old age, and every form of flattery would be used on him to urge him to revert to the earlier heathenism.

Amon's name was indicative of the earlier paganism of his father. Amon was the name of an Egyptian god — the sun god. Probably Manasseh was trying to woo the nation of Egypt at the time his son was born, and therefore named him after one of the most prominent gods of that nation of darkness.

Paganism was popular at the time. The people had little taste for the reforming zeal of Manasseh, and eagerly embraced the vile, immoral worship advocated by his son as soon as he came to the throne. Amon plunged into this wickedness with steady resolve, and "trespassed more and more" against God (2Chron. 33:23). This led to conspiracy, murder and civil war.

Conditions in the kingdom worsened under Amon's rule. His ministers determined on ruthless means to save the nation. They decided to kill the king and place a nominee of their own upon the throne. A conspiracy was formed, and when the time was ripe, the king was murdered in his palace. This action sparked off trouble throughout Judah. Many in the land rose against the murderers of Amon, and they in turn were killed. Then, by popular acclaim, Josiah, the infant son of Amon, was established in power. Thus the evil reign of two years' duration ended in an orgy of bloodshed.



**T**HE reign of Josiah introduces us to a sad, yet dramatic, epoch of Israel's history. It is sad because it witnessed Yahweh's last appeal to His people — an appeal which they rejected. It is dramatic because it tells of how an orphaned child was wisely brought up in the midst of wickedness to effect a great reform in the land.

Historically, this period saw the beginning of the breakup of the great, but brutal, Assyrian Empire. Esarhaddon, the king of Assyria who lived during the early period of Manasseh, had several times invaded the land. He had transplanted captives from Babylon and established them in Palestine (Ezra 4:10). About BC 675, he invaded Egypt and though forced to retreat by a sandstorm, he returned the next year and began a conquest that was completed three years later (BC 671). Ashurbanipal, who succeeded him in BC 669, twice invaded Egypt. On the latter occasion Memphis was sacked and Thebes (No-Amon, mentioned as "No" in Nah. 3:8 and Jer. 46:25) captured. The conquest of Egypt represented the height of Assyrian power. After these successes it rapidly broke up. The Cimmerians from the north and the Scythians, attacked the empire. Whilst Ashurbanipal was repelling these attacks, Egypt rebelled under a local governor Psammeticus, who, between BC 658 and 651, drove the Assyrians out and gained Egypt's independence. In BC 652, Ashurbanipal's brother, a vassal king of Babylon rebelled, and was not defeated until four years later. The last years of his life were disturbed by family strife and sickness. He died in BC 626. His successor, Ashur-etil-ilani, had to fight for his throne and the following year, Nabopolassar was established as independent king of Babylon. The brutal Assyrian power had fallen.

## Chapter One

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### JOSIAH: THE FRUSTRATED REFORMER

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**T**HE story of Josiah's life must be considered from five perspectives: (1) The historical background of the times; (2) The stand taken by the prophets who ministered during the reign of the king; (3) The intensely interesting details supplied, relating to Josiah himself; (4) The lessons we should learn, to apply in our own lives; (5) How Yahweh viewed this period of history and the life of Josiah.

It was therefore an important as well as a dramatic period, and teaches the need for the people of God to enthusiastically follow the direction of a wise and true leader. Unfortunately, the nation in the days of Josiah was not prepared to do that.

Both Jeremiah (ch. 1:1) and Zephaniah (ch. 1:1) prophesied during the reign of Josiah. They revealed the true character of the nation which was not manifested by the reform effected by the king. The reform was enforced by law and the demands of the king, and did not spring from the hearts of the people. The prophets spoke of that, and warned the nation that their hypocritical worship could reap only one harvest: the stern punishment of Yahweh.

Nahum also prophesied about this time. He spoke of the impending overthrow of Assyria and Nineveh. He exulted in the troubles that were about to fall upon that brutal nation. In vision he saw the approach of the enemy, saw the walls of the city breached, heard the triumphant shout of the invaders, the chariots clashing in the streets, the soldiers rushing with torches to set fire to the buildings until what was once a beautiful and magnificent city became a ruined waste (Nah. 2:1-8; 3:1-3). And he saw in the fall of this brutal, Gentile city, a type of the ultimate destruction of Gentilism throughout the earth (Nah. 1:14-15).

During this troublous period, Josiah, the child-king, grew to maturity, and vainly strove to effect a true reformation. On the surface his work seemed well founded and enduring, but the canker was already underneath, and the prophets revealed the nation for what it really was. Perhaps the greatest exhortation of the entire Scriptures is contained in the history of this time, which we will try and unfold as we consider the events surrounding the story of Josiah the frustrated reformer.

#### **Josiah Fulfills Prophecy**

The story of Josiah really commences some 340 years before he was born. It takes us back to the days of Jeroboam, who had led ten tribes away from their allegiance to Rehoboam, the grandson of

David. Jeroboam not only set up a rival monarchy, but also a rival religion. He called all the people together to dedicate the altar he had set up for this purpose. At the height of the ceremony, however, a voice rang out from among the crowd. The interjector was a prophet from Judah, and he had been sent north with a message from Yahweh. He harshly shouted his message to Jeroboam as the king stood by the altar to burn incense.

“O altar, altar,” cried the prophet, “thus saith Yahweh; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men’s bones shall be burnt upon thee” (1Kings 13:2).

The years had rolled by since the dramatic intervention of the prophet on that day when the false altar had been dedicated; now a young child of that name, sat upon the throne of David as king. As he came to maturity, his attention was directed to this prophecy (2Kings 23:17-18), and he set about fulfilling it to the very letter.

### **Good Influence of His Mother**

It was fortunate for Josiah that his father died so young, since he thereby escaped the corrupting and degrading influences which would otherwise have been brought to bear upon him as he passed from childhood to manhood. He was but “eight years old when he began to reign” (2Kings 22:1), and had thus remained almost wholly under the charge of his mother, as was the custom among Jews. She is mentioned with some particularity, as if she was a person of some importance. Her name was Jedidah, which is the feminine form of David, and means *Beloved*. She was the daughter of Adalah, which means *Yahweh has adorned*. Thus her full name signifies *The Beloved whom Yahweh has adorned*. She came from the city of Boscath, a Judaeen town not far from Lachish, on the border of Philistia (Josh. 15:39). The name of this town signifies *Stony Ground*, but apparently in this “stony ground” she grew to love and revere her God.

We can, perhaps, ascribe to her careful training and pious zeal, the religious bent of Josiah’s character, for he manifested a love for God from a very early age. Her influence on his life may be the reason why she is so carefully referred to in the Bible account.

Eight years went by uneventfully. Josiah was carefully educated by his mother and ministers of the realm for the time when he must take over the kingdom independently of their oversight. This came about at the age of sixteen. He took over his royal duties completely, and began independently, at this young age, to seek to do the will of Yahweh.

In consequence of that he prospered. His reign illustrated the truth of the prophet Azariah’s words: “Yahweh is with you, while ye be

with Him; and if ye seek Him, He will be found of you; but if ye forsake Him, He will forsake you" (2Chron. 15:2).

For four years Josiah consolidated his position in the land. He carefully surveyed the spiritual condition of the kingdom, and as he saw the extreme wickedness, he considered a wholesale reform. Then, at the age of twenty, he felt himself secure enough on the throne to attempt that which must have been on his mind for some time.

### **Early Years of the Reformation**

Josiah ascended the throne of David in Jerusalem when he was only eight years old. For a further eight years he was carefully nurtured by his mother and the high priest, Hilkiah, and educated in divine precepts. At the age of sixteen years, he took over his duties completely, and independently sought to do the will of Yahweh. A further four years passed during which he consolidated his authority in the land. Then, at the age of twenty years, in the twelfth year of his reign, he was ready to commence a reform he must have contemplated for some time: to rid the nation of idolatry.

In this he exhibited a fiery zeal.

### **The First Purge (2Chronicles 34)**

A reformation was, indeed, timely. Paganism in all its forms had again reared its head in the days of Amos after the partial reform by Manasseh. In the streets were seen the Chemarim (Zeph. 1:4; the word implies blackfrocked priests) ministering to the altars of Baal. On all sides incense arose to foreign gods, and people bowed down to their images. The abominable and immoral rites of this evil worship were freely practised. Josiah determined to rid the land of it all. He decreed a complete abolition of all these things.

The initial work was begun in Judah and Jerusalem, and was then extended to the territory of the northern kingdom (2Chron. 34:3-6). The king personally supervised the activity. Pagan altars were thrown down, images broken up, pillars cut down, idol-priests slain, and the "holy places" of false worship desecrated by the bones of the dead.

At the command of the king, the people busied themselves in the work, with every appearance of keen enthusiasm; it must have seemed to many as though the nation was on the crest of a wave of genuine reform, as though the worship of Yahweh was about to be enthusiastically established in spirit as well as in complete truth.

But then, suddenly, unexpectedly, the stern, harsh voice of criticism was heard, openly denouncing the nation for hypocrisy. This disturbing message came from a young man who was destined to be projected before the public glare, as Yahweh's prophet of judgment, until the nation was taken into captivity by the Babylonians in the days of Zedekiah. His name was Jeremiah.

## Chapter Two

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### THE CALL OF JEREMIAH

**J**UST north of the Mount of Olives, was a city mainly inhabited by priests, called Anathoth. Among its inhabitants was a young priest by the name of Jeremiah. He was of the family of Hilki-ah. As the high priest in the days of Josiah was also called Hilki-ah (2Kgs. 22:4-14), it may have been that Jeremiah was son of the high priest.\*

Yahweh had a most important work for this young priest to perform. In the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign, a year after he had commenced his reform (cp. 2Chron. 34:3 with Jer. 1:2), the word of Yahweh came to the young priest with the following message: "Before you were born I knew you, and I set you apart and ordained you a prophet unto the nations" (Jer. 1:5).

The young priest was taken aback by this message. "Ah, Lord Yahweh," he replied, "Behold, I cannot speak well! And, besides, I am but a child, nobody will heed me!"

But Yahweh commanded him to go forth in courage, and not hesitate to speak all that he was commanded. Whatever he proclaimed concerning the nations would be fulfilled. God told him: "Gird up your loins, and arise, and speak unto the people all that I command you; be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them."

He was told that God would protect him in this work, so that no harm would come to him in spite of the messages he would deliver. He was told that he would be sent against the kings, the princes, the priests and the people (ch. 1:18). He was warned that they would bitterly oppose him and even reject his message, but, nevertheless, he must courageously continue to proclaim it.

"They shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee," Yahweh told him.

#### **Jeremiah's First Message**

Whilst the king and the people were busy smashing the pagan idols with every appearance of sincerity, Jeremiah commenced his first message. He saw in vision the rod of an almond tree, and as he pondered its meaning, he heard the voice of Yahweh: "Thou hast well

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\* This is disputed by some on the basis that Anathoth was a priestly city given to the family of Ithamar, whereas Jeremiah, son of Hilki-ah, was of the line of Eleazar (1Chr. 6:1-13), and Anathoth had been given to descendants of Eli, not Eleazar (1Kgs. 2:26-27). But if this objection was completely valid, surely Jeremiah would have indicated this in his introduction (Jer. 1:1) for his father Hilki-ah was very prominent in the reign of Josiah.



seen, for I will hasten My word to perform it”.

The Hebrew word for “almond” is *shaked* which signifies *The Watcher*. It was so called because of its early blossom, it being the first of the trees to waken from the sleep of winter. The word “hasten,” used in the declaration of God to the prophet, is a similar word (*shoked*) so that there was a play on the words that Yahweh used to the prophet.

The message meant that time was short; that what God intended to do would be done quickly.

The prophet then saw a great iron pot towards the north. A strong fire was causing that which was in it to boil and bubble, so that every moment, it threatened to pour over the sides. He was told the meaning of this remarkable vision. God will cause the kingdoms of the north to pour down over the borders of Judah and besiege Jerusalem.

This was a terrible message to the people of the land. It told them that they were living in evil days when the punishment of God would overcome them. It reminded them that the time was short, and that it was urgent for them to seek their God.

But were not the people already engaged in a reform?

Were they not destroying the idol worship from out of the land?

It is true that they were under Josiah whose policies required the obedience and worship of the people, but the prophet proceeded to show that their actions did not reflect the true attitude of their hearts; in fact, they were acting hypocritically. All that they were doing was not done out of love of Yahweh, but because the king commanded it, and used force to see that his law was obeyed.

Josiah must have heard Jeremiah’s words with sorrow and amazement. He could see how important was the work to which he had given his hands, and he determined to redouble his efforts to make his reform truly effective.

Through the guidance of Yahweh, Jeremiah was able to detect what the king could not perceive, namely that the nation “had not turned unto God with her whole heart, but feignedly” (Jer. 3:10). The reform did not reflect the true attitude of the people.\* Many were still looking to Egypt for help (Jer. 2:36). Some secretly preferred the pagan policies of Manasseh and Amon, whilst quite a number were indifferent as to what form of worship was followed.

In harsh, stern language the young prophet listed the sins of the people. At the top of the list was the sin of *HYPOCRISY*. In forthright language Jeremiah accused the people of insincerity towards God. He

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\* The first twelve chapters of Jeremiah are contemporary with the reign of Josiah. They can be divided up as follows: • Introduction, ch. 1:1-3. • Instruction: vv. 4-10. • 1st Prophecy: vv. 11-12. • 2nd Prophecy: vv. 13-19. • 3rd Prophecy: ch. 2:3-5. • 4th Prophecy: ch. 3:6-4:2. • 5th Prophecy: chs. 4:3-6:30. • 6th Prophecy: chs. 7:1-10:25. • 7th Prophecy: chs. 11-12:17.

told them that their very religious exercises were hateful to God because they were not done in love for Him, but only because the king's commandment demanded that they be observed.

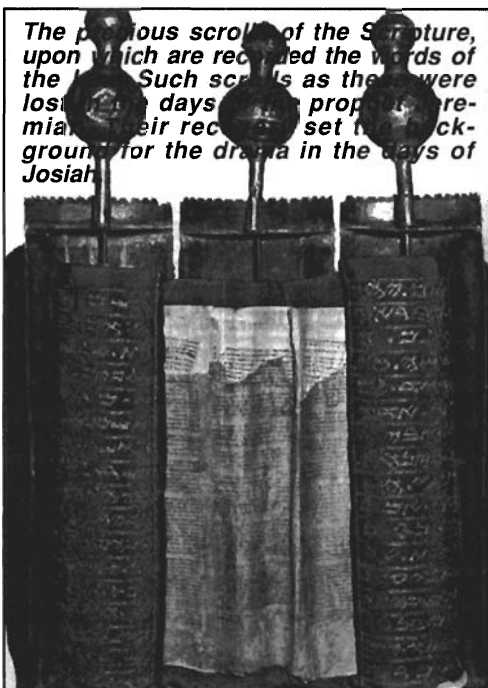
Judah was observing a religion of force and fear, but not one based on faith and love. The people served God because it pleased the king, and in the face of his fierce resolve to root out the slightest remnant of paganism, they did not dare to do otherwise!

### **The King Reads An Amazing Book**

Meanwhile, the king did all in his power to make the people religious. He demanded that they contribute money for the restoration of the temple, and sent Levites into all parts of his realm, and even beyond the border into the land of Samaria, for this purpose. Money was freely given, for the people feared to oppose one so full of fiery zeal as Josiah. It was placed into the hands of Hilkiah, the high priest, probably Jeremiah's father, who divided it up among those who were appointed to perform the necessary labor.

Foremen had been selected who were so interested in the work of restoring the temple that it was adjudged unnecessary to audit the accounts, "for the men dealt faithfully" (2Kings 22:7).

Thus Jerusalem became the scene of greatest activity. The temple, so long neglected, and even desecrated, was cleaned out ready for the



work of restoration. It was all conducted under the supervision of Hilkiah, who co-operated with Shaphan, the king's scribe, to that end.

On one occasion, when Shaphan approached Hilkiah with instructions from the king, he found the high priest with a long scroll in his hands.

Shaphan looked at the scroll. "I have found the Book of the Law in the House of Yahweh," declared the priest.

The Book of the Law comprised the five books of Moses, and was placed in the

side of the Ark in the Most Holy Place (Deut. 31:24-26). Every seven years, during the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel were gathered together, the priests had to read this book in the hearing of the people. In addition to that, whenever a king ascended the throne, the Law commanded that he write for himself a copy of this book, and read it daily that he might rule according to the will of God (Deut. 17:18) .

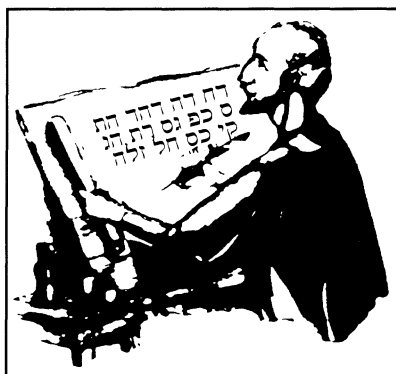
But in the reign of Josiah, for at least over half a century since the days of Manasseh, that had not been done. The temple had been closed up and mutilated; the Book of the Law remained forgotten under the accumulating dust; the people had never heard of it; Josiah had never written out his copy; he had never even read it!

### **Judah Threatened with Destruction**

Full of curiosity, Shaphan took the book from the high priest, and began to read it for himself (2Kings 22:8). He read of the laws that Yahweh had set before the people, the solemn warnings He had issued to them should they disobey the divine instruction; the curses that were thundered against them if they should commit certain sins. And Shaphan knew that those very sins were part of normal life in the Judah of his day. He realised the importance of the book that had been placed in his hands, and, with the permission of Hilkiah, he hurried back to Josiah that he might show it to him.

Much of it the godly king would already know, for it had been explained to him orally. He knew the record of creation, the call of Abraham, the beginnings of the nation, the wonderful deliverance from Egypt, many aspects of the law...

But then Shaphan commenced reading to the king the book of Deuteronomy; the last warning message of Moses given just before his death. It warned the people that if they worshipped idols, if they turned from Yahweh, great and severe punishments would fall upon them. The book recorded the covenant to which the nation had bound itself, the terrible curses which would fall upon it if it proved guilty of certain sins. "Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field... Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, the flocks of thy sheep. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out. Yahweh shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, rebuke...



pestilence... consumption... sword... invasion... war... drought... famine... *destruction!*..."

Horror-stricken the king listened to the voice of Shaphan as it continued on.

"Thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and *no man shall save thee...*"

Hour after hour the reading continued:

"Blessings if they do good... cursings if they do evil... plagues, sicknesses, the land desolate... Like Sodom and Gomorrah... the heat of great anger... What is the meaning? Because they have forsaken the covenant of Yahweh God of their fathers... the anger of Yahweh kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curses that are written in this book... before you life and death... Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day... it is not a vain thing for you, it is your life . . ."

To these responsibilities the nation had responded with the word: "**AMEN**" — "So be it!" It had pronounced its own judgment should it fall into the error of committing the sins enumerated.

And the horrified king knew that Judah was even then committing the very sins outlined. He had heard Jeremiah announce that the time of punishment was at hand. With deep concern, the king listened to the reading of the Law for the first time. As curse after curse was pronounced, his anxiety mounted.

At last he could stand it no more. With a cry of grief, he tore asunder his royal robe as a sign of mourning, symbolically indicating that he had no cover for his feelings.

He knew that the nation was already beginning to suffer some of the things threatened. For the first time he began to fully understand the significance of the signs of the times of his day. "The great wrath of Yahweh is kindled against us because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book!" he declared to Shaphan (2Kings 22:13).

He appointed a deputation of the leaders of the nation and, with Hilkiah and Shaphan, he instructed them to enquire of Yahweh whether the punishments pronounced would indeed be administered.

But to whom could they go?

There was the young priest Jeremiah, who had proclaimed several prophecies in the name of Yahweh, but he was not yet fully established as a prophet in the eyes of the nation, and, moreover, he did not dwell in Jerusalem but in Anathoth, some distance away.

Perhaps the reason why the high priest did not enquire of Yahweh was that as yet, the temple was not sufficiently restored for a proper approach to Yahweh.

There was a woman of high spiritual standing living in Jerusalem,

close to the temple. Her name was Huldah, and she was a prophetess. It was not normal for the nation to seek the aid of a woman in interceding with God, but the king must have realised in that time of need how few there were in Judah to whom he could really turn for help. The leaders of the nation had proved unworthy of their trust, so finally the deputation was sent to this woman for assistance.

This action of the deputation really endorsed the message of Jeremiah. So low had the nation sunk, in spite of all the activity and excitement of apparent reform, that Yahweh would converse through no other in Jerusalem than Huldah the prophetess!

Her name signifies "Fleeting," as though to underline the fact that time was short and the matter urgent.

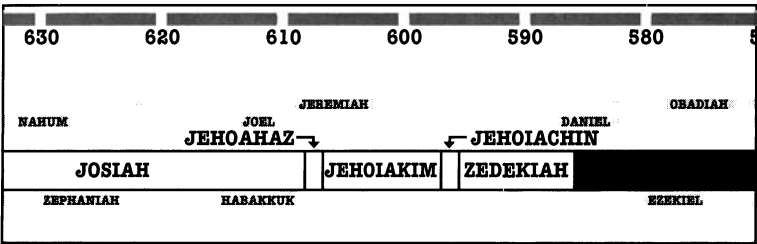
To her the deputation went and explained its mission. Through her came back the answer of Yahweh: "Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and all the inhabitants thereof, even all the curses written in the Book found by the king. Because they have forsaken Me and worshipped idols, My wrath shall be poured upon this place and shall not be quenched. But as for the king who sent you, because his heart is tender and he has humbled himself before Me, behold, he shall be gathered to his fathers in peace, neither shall his eyes see the evil I will bring upon this place!"

A very subdued deputation left the home of Huldah to convey this message to the king.

### A Ray of Hope

Grim as this message was, there remained a ray of hope. Indeed, God threatened to punish the nation, but the very fact that the king's humility and zeal had delayed the pouring out of this judgment, showed that any individuals who likewise sought Yahweh in truth would similarly find mercy.

If sufficient such individuals could be multiplied might not the nation be saved?



## Chapter Three

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### INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE REFORMATION OF THE NATION

**T**HE king carefully listened to the message brought to him by the deputation from Huldah the prophetess of Jerusalem. As he thought upon the solemn words declared, his enthusiasm for reform became even greater. Carefully he examined the newly discovered Book, and determined he would fully carry out the instructions it contained.

What had been the cause of failure? The Book declared: "Because they have forsaken the covenant of Yahweh" (Deut. 29:25). Therefore the king decided the first thing to be done must be to bring the people back to a consciousness of the covenant. He called for a general gathering of the representatives of the nation: princes, priests, Levites, commoners were assembled together in the court of the temple.

The king stood upon the great brazen platform that had been erected by Solomon\* so that all could see him. When all was ready, the great scroll was unfolded and, with all eyes centred upon him, the king solemnly read the words of the covenant.

Now the people heard for the first time the blessings and cursings that Moses had pronounced: blessings for obedience; cursings for disobedience (Deut. 27:1-28). They heard how they would be involved in a growing crescendo of trouble if they turned from the covenant. First they would be affected in the city, then in the country, then by drought and famine, then by plague and pestilence, then by war and invasion, then by defeat and violence, then by captivity and scattering. They heard how the nation had entered into covenant with Yahweh, had proclaimed "AMEN" ("So be it") to the blessings and cursings listed in the Book (Deut. 27). They knew that they were guilty of the things condemned.

The king called upon them to re-affirm the Covenant and to keep the Law. He warned them of the dire results which they could expect if they did not do so.

With due solemnity, the people agreed to do so (2Kings 23:1-3). They realised that if they did not, they would not only have God to deal with, but the king also. And, unfortunately, the people feared the king more than they did God.

That is just where the reform of Josiah failed. Haunted by the

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\* See 2Kings 23:3. The Hebrew *al haammud* can be rendered "upon the stairs," i.e., upon the brazen platform of Solomon (2Chr. 6:13). The R.V. renders: "upon the platform." A similar provision will be made for the King of the future Age in the temple then to be built (see Ezek. 46:2).

## SHAPHAN'S FAMILY: A RECORD OF USEFULNESS

**HIDDEN** throughout the Bible are the biographies of men and women who have served Yahweh well in their day and generation. One such in the times of Josiah, was Shaphan the Scribe. He and his family are noted for good in the Bible accounts. Eight of Shaphan's relations are mentioned: his grandfather, Meshullam; his father, Azaliah; four sons: Ahikam (2Kings 22:3, 12), Gemariah (Jer. 36:10), Elasaah (Jer. 29:3), Jaazaniah (Ezek. 8:11); two grandsons: Michaiah (Jer. 36:11, 13), Gedaliah (Jer. 40:5).

**Shaphan:** was in the confidence of Josiah. He was intermediary between the king and the high priest in the work of restoring the temple (2Kings 22:3). To him Hilkiah delivered the Book of the Law (v. 8) and, after reading it, he took it to the king, recognising the importance of its contents. He was trusted by the king, and sent to Huldah concerning the intentions of Yahweh. The king obviously relied upon him. He could have been an influence for good behind the throne during the infancy of Josiah.

**Ahikam:** was of prominence in the realm, and went with his father to Huldah. He continued to be of prominence through to the reign of Jehoiakim and, when Jeremiah was in danger, it was Ahikam's care that saved him (Jer. 26:24). Earlier Jehoiakim had sought to slay Jeremiah, but the elders of the nation prevented this crime (Jer. 26:17), and it could have been the influence of Ahikam that saved him on this occasion also. Ahikam's family was of prominence in the kingdom, for Gedaliah, his son, was made governor by Nebuchadnezzar (2Kings 25:22).

**Gemariah:** was a prince of the realm in the days of Jehoiakim (Jer. 36:12) and occupied a room attached to the temple (v. 10). His son Micaiah was likewise prominent, and seemingly in the confidence of Jeremiah (Jer. 36). With two others, Gemariah protested against Jehoiakim burning the scroll of Jeremiah (Jer. 36:25).

**Elasaah:** Jeremiah entrusted this member of Shaphan's family with a letter to the exiles in Babylon which was not calculated to increase the popularity of the bearer, for it called upon the captives to establish themselves in Babylon since they would remain there some time (Jer. 29:3).

**Micaiah:** Son of Gemariah. To him Baruch read the Scroll of Jeremiah and he reported its contents to the elders (Jer. 36:13).

**Gedaliah:** A son of Ahikam honored by Nebuchadnezzar and made governor of Jerusalem after the captivity (2Kings 25:22), he received Jeremiah out of prison and cared for him (Jer. 39:14). He set up his residence at Mizpeh, and, as had Jeremiah, he called

upon the people to serve the Chaldeans. He was a man of integrity and of a trusting nature, and was duped by Ishmael. He refused to believe that Ishmael was intriguing against him, rejected the offer of Johanan to assassinate his enemy, and was himself treacherously murdered by Ishmael (Jer. 40:15; 41:2).

**Jaazaniah:** Most families have a black sheep among their members, and this man was the black sheep of the family of Shaphan. He was a man of prominence who used his position for evil, for in the days of Zedekiah he was prominent in leading the people back to idolatry (Ezek 8:11).

*Underneath the drama of these times that brought the nation to its end there were individuals, like those of Shaphan's family, who courageously manifested faith and obedience despite the difficulties with which they were surrounded. Their names are written in the Book of Life, and they will receive their reward with Jeremiah and other worthies at the coming of the Lord Jesus.*

enormous spiritual and political pressures of the times, he tried to force the people to love God by law; but love cannot be created by law. Love of God develops as we count our blessings, as we appreciate what God has done for us, and when we learn of His love towards man in providing a way of escape from the very evils that man himself has brought about. Unlike the king, the people did not humble themselves to appreciate the love and goodness of God and therefore never developed a true and lasting love for Him.

There was one man, at least, who recognised this. Jeremiah made reference to this newly-discovered law: "Why do you say, We are wise, and the law of Yahweh is with us? Lo, certainly in vain made He it" (Jer. 8:8).

The prophet meant that it was made in vain for all the real use that Judah made of it. As for himself, he declared: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart; for I am called by thy name, O Yahweh God of hosts" (Jer. 15:16). Jeremiah stood for a class in the nation which was, unfortunately, in the minority.

### **The Second Purge (2Kings 23)**

The king now looked upon himself as the saviour of the nation. He was determined to rid the land of idolatry. With tremendous energy and fiery zeal, the king swept through the land, determined to ruthlessly destroy every semblance of opposition to the Law he had just read.

He did to the nation what every Jew does to his home just before



the celebration of the Passover. Before this feast, Jews diligently search their houses to make certain that there is no leaven in the home. During the Feast itself they eat only unleavened bread. Leaven (a form of yeast) was forbidden during the Passover, because it is used in the Bible as a symbol for corrupt doctrine (Mat. 16:11; Mark 8:15) and wickedness in the heart (1Cor. 5:6-8). It also reminded Jews of the haste with which their forefathers left Egypt with the dough in their troughs (Exod. 12:39), and taught the lesson that the wickedness of Egypt should likewise be left behind in service to God.

Only a little leaven is necessary to leaven a lot of dough, for it continues to grow and spread — similarly, where small sins are permitted to remain unchecked their influence will grow and corrupt, until an entire ecclesia or a nation becomes affected. So unleavened bread was eaten during the Passover to press home this vital lesson.

Josiah had determined that the nation would again keep the Passover as commanded, and such a Passover as had never before been celebrated. He would make sure that no leaven of wickedness would remain by himself going throughout the land to completely crush it. In this way he acted as a faithful Israelite, whose duty it was to ensure that all leaven was excluded (Exod. 12:15).

He started in Jerusalem. At the entrance to the temple there had been placed horses and chariots dedicated to the sun: these were now destroyed by command of the king (v. 11). In the temple there were vessels that had been used in worship to Baal. They were publicly taken out and burnt as the law required\* (v. 4).

In the deep valley of Tophet still stood the great metal image of Molech with outstretched arms. Before the reign of Josiah this image used to glow red with the fires inside it, and the beat of the drums filled the valley to drown the screams of children offered in sacrifice in this horrible worship. Every remnant of the idol was now smashed up, and the place of worship defiled by order of Josiah (v. 10).

In parts of Judah high places had been dedicated to an irregular form of the true worship, which should have been conducted at Jerusalem. These were now defiled, and the priests who had served in such worship were not permitted to attend at the altar in Jerusalem, though they partook of the benefit of the tithes (vv. 8-9).

On the Mount of Olives there still remained the places of worship that Solomon, over 400 years before, had permitted to be built for the pagan worship of his foreign wives, turning the Mount of Olives into the Mount of Corruption. These were now removed forever (v. 13).

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\* The careful student will notice that Josiah was guided by the Law so recently discovered. This is shown in the reform recorded in 2Kings 23. Compare verse 4 with Deut. 7:25. Verse 5 with Deut. 12:2. Verse 7 with Deut. 23:17-18. Verse 8 with Deut. 12:5. Verse 9 with Deut. 18:8. Verse 10 with Deut. 18:10. Verse 11 with Deut. 17:3, etc.

Throughout Judea, from Geba in the north to Beersheba in the deep south, the king sent his men to search out and destroy all forms of idolatry (v. 8).

Having cleansed Judah, he turned his attention to Samaria in the north. Pagan priests trembled as they heard of the intentions of the king. They might well do so. With determined ruthlessness, Josiah systematically stamped out their worship without mercy, for they were beyond it (v. 20). He slaughtered the idolatrous priests,\* burnt their bones upon their own altars, defiled their places of worship, smashed down their altars, idols, pillars, and statues, ground to powder the images that had been worshipped, and cast the dust on the graves of the people to show his contempt for these things. He avenged the reign of terror that Manasseh had instigated against the true prophets of God when he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, a persecution which these very priests had assisted (2Kings 21:16).

Thus the king fulfilled the prophecy that had been proclaimed over 340 years before, when Jeroboam established the false altar in Bethel. A prophet had been sent with the message that Yahweh would raise up a king, Josiah by name, who would burn the bones of idolatrous priests upon the very altar then set up (1Kings 13:1-3). Josiah now fulfilled it to the letter.

As he did so, he saw a lonely sepulchre by which was a monument.\*\* Full of curiosity, he enquired as to its purpose. He was told that it was the last resting place of the prophet of Judah who had predicted his advent by name, and said that he would perform the very things that Josiah had done at this time.

How impressive it must have been for the king to be told that he had been named by Yahweh over 360 years before, to do the very work he was so thoroughly performing. It must have shown the king the importance of his labors. He commanded that this sepulchre should not be touched, though all others belonging to the false prophets were desecrated.

At last the crusade of the king was over. A clean sweep had been made of all idolatry. Not even smoking ruins remained, for all had been completely obliterated.

Thus Josiah avenged the reign of terror that Manasseh had

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\* Notice the margin. The word "chemarim" is from *camar*, "to be black," thus "black-frocked priests" in contrast to the white-gowned Levites. The cleric, Adam Clarke, comments: "Why we should imitate in our sacerdotal dress those priests of Baal is strange to think and hard to tell." The answer is that the priests of the Apostasy today are the antitype of those priests of Baal whom Josiah destroyed.

\*\* The word "title" (2Kings 23:17) is rendered "erection" by Rotherham and probably denotes a monument, perhaps set up by the prophet of Samaria to commemorate the work of the prophet of Judah (see 1Kings 13:31).

unleashed against the true prophets of Yahweh (2Kings 21:16). The people saw in the king and his followers, a party equally fierce and ruthless in its determination to restore the worship of Yahweh. Whereas the idolatrous princes of the realm had probably favoured Manasseh and supported his policy of paganism, the priestly class had aided Josiah and assisted him in his reform.

But, unfortunately, they were more interested in the formalism of the temple worship than in the Truth itself, as Jeremiah later told them.

***The Mount of Olives, from the city of Jerusalem. In the days of Manasseh, this skyline was disgraced by the shrines and idols of paganism. It became known as the "hill of corruption," and represented the ungodly worship of the nations. Today it is no better. The churches of apostate Christendom and ignorant Islamism still hold pride of place. They are soon to be removed, as they were in the days of Josiah — but this time, under the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ, the cleansing will be permanent.***



## Chapter Four

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### JOSIAH CELEBRATES THE PASSOVER

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**I**T was now close to the beginning of the Jewish religious year. On the 14th day of the first month, the Passover was appointed to be held.

For many years, however, this had been neglected. With the Book of the Law in his hands, Josiah determined that it must be restored (2Chron 35). He decided it must be kept according to the strict requirements of the law (cp. 2Cor. 3:6). Carefully he studied the instructions in Exodus and Deuteronomy. He then turned to the writings of David and Solomon (vv. 4-6), where are set down the arrangements for the work of the priests and Levites at such a time, and he instructed them what they must do.

Public announcement was made that the Passover was to be re-instituted, and the people invited to attend. With the evidences of Josiah's fiery zeal still fresh in memory, the people dared not refuse. In due time a great number, representing at least 30,000 family groups, assembled in Jerusalem.

The king had provided the animals necessary, and his generosity was imitated by the priests and princes of the realm. The animals were herded together on the 10th day of Abib, as required by the Law and carefully inspected by the priests to ensure that they were without blemish. This was commanded by Law to teach a very important lesson. The Passover Lamb pointed forward to Jesus Christ, the "Lamb of God offered for the sin of the world" who was himself without blemish of character.

All was done according to the Law. On the 14th day of the month, on the very day of the year on which Jesus was to die, thus fulfilling the type, the lambs were slain. The priests and Levites took their places in the court of the temple. The normal daily sacrifices were offered. The heads of family groups, on this occasion 30,000 in number, assembled at the temple in relays. As each group was ushered into the temple court, they saw a sight that had not been seen for over fifty years. The priests and Levites were assembled in their appropriate places; the former ready to preside over the slaying of the lamb (which each head of family in Israel did on his own account) and to receive the blood to dash it on the altar; the latter receiving back the sacrificed animal for the Passover services to be undertaken in each home. Others of the Levites played instruments of music, or chanted the Passover psalms. After each service, the heads of the family groups returned home each with his animal, where it would be roasted

and eaten that evening as commanded.\*

Relay after relay of men presented themselves at the temple to slay the Passover Lamb on behalf of the family group over which they presided.

But, finally, the long procession came to an end, the last animal had been slain, the concluding Psalm had been sung, the first part of the great service was over.

In thousands of homes the lambs were roasted, the family groups assembled around the table, and the story of divine mercy and deliverance was told. Children heard for the first time the story of the Exodus, of the great deliverance that had been effected through Moses. The lamb was eaten with bitter herbs, with unleavened bread and the youngest son "of the commandment" present asked the question traditionally posed at such a time: "Wherein is this night different from all other nights?"

The head of the group commenced the instruction: "On all other nights, we may eat either leavened bread or unleavened, but on this night only unleavened; on all other nights we may eat other kind of herb, but on this night only bitter herbs..."

"What mean the testimonies, and statutes, and the judgments which Yahweh our God hath commanded you?"

"We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt, and Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; He shewed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh..."

So the explanation went on, in 30,000 homes that night. The Passover was being celebrated strictly according to the Law. It was the culminating point of Josiah's reform; the king could look back satisfied at that which he had attempted. He had done what he could for the nation. He had destroyed the external evidences of idolatry; had brought the people back to the Law; had laid the foundation of righteousness for the nation. It was not his fault that they did not fully respond to his lead.

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\* Josephus says that the Passover was kept in companies of no less than ten (Wars 6:9,3) and that it was not lawful to eat it singly. At the time appointed (from approximately 3 to 6 p.m.) representatives of each group brought their animal to the temple, the gates of which were closed when the allowed number were inside, and were not opened again until the next relay. The priests stood between the slaughter place and the altar to officiate over the slaying, and to assist one another. The people acted as priests and slew their own offering. The Levites stood at their places (cp. 1Chron. 25) singing Psalms 113-118 repeatedly. The seemingly endless slaughter of animals, the stream of blood poured out, the singing of significant psalms, would impress those assembled with the awful consequences of transgression, and that without the shedding of blood there was no remission of sin.

## Chapter Five

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### WHERE JOSIAH FAILED

**T**HE Phillips family had gathered together to read the story of Josiah, and were now discussing it together. "I have a difficulty to reconcile," declared Peter to his father. "In 2Kings 23:25 we read that there was 'no king before or after Josiah who turned to Yahweh so completely' as he did, and yet in 2Kings 18:5 these same words are said of Hezekiah. Which is right?"

"Both are right," answered Mr. Phillips, with a smile.

"That's impossible!" said Ann, who had turned up the two references, and though she prefers to argue with her brother, was forced to agree with him in this.

"But it is true!" declared Mr. Phillips.

"How can it possibly be true?" asked Peter.

"I have told you repeatedly that when you find what seems to be a contradiction in the Bible to very carefully look at the context," said Mr. Phillips. "Notice that 2Kings 23:25 says that Josiah was greater than any other king in a particular way, namely, that whatever he did, he did 'according to all the law of Moses.' He observed the Law more strictly than did Hezekiah, but in accordance with 2Kings 18:5, Hezekiah was the greater king."

"I suppose the same explanation applies to 2Chronicles 35:18, where we read that the Passover Josiah kept was greater than that kept at any previous time," remarked Graeham.

"Yes. When you read, 'there was no Passover like to that,' it does not mean that more people celebrated it in the time of Josiah, nor that it was kept with more enthusiasm, nor did more good, but rather that there was none kept so meticulously according to the ritual requirements of the Law as that conducted by Josiah. Notice the comments of vv. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16 of the chapter you have quoted. See how carefully the record states that everything that was done was according to the commandment. In fact, I feel that it was in this direction that his reform actually failed!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Josiah had discovered the Book of the Law and, with the greatest enthusiasm, tried to put into practice all he read therein. In that, he was helped by the priests and prophets of Judah. Their interest, however, was mainly political and rested in the formalism of the Law. Like the Jews of Christ's day, they looked at the letter of the law and discerned not its spirit. Jeremiah warned them of this. He told them not to trust in lying words, saying, 'The temple of Yahweh, the temple

of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh are these,' using the temple as a mere talisman (Jer. 7:4). They believed that so long as they attended the temple all was well, and God would not destroy the building He had caused to be erected. Thus they relied on externals in religion, on strict attendance to formalism without discerning the spiritual lessons behind these necessary things (Mat. 23:23). There was no spirit or love of Yahweh in their worship.

On the other hand, Hezekiah saw beyond the mere letter of the Law. In his day they 'did eat the Passover otherwise than it was written' (2Chron. 30:18), but through the intercession of the king they were forgiven any such infraction of the Law. Thus, in Hezekiah's day, the people recognized that they had broken the Law, and saw the need of seeking forgiveness; but in Josiah's day, the law was so meticulously set before them that the people felt themselves covered by it, and became self-righteous. They forgot that the Law could not save them, and, in fact, cursed them."

"Don't you think Josiah was a great king?"

"Most assuredly I do! We are told that he was a great king. His work actually foreshadows that of the Lord Jesus. As Josiah ruthlessly destroyed idolatry, slaughtered the black-frocked priests, restored the temple worship, provided the Passover lambs for the people, so also will the Lord Jesus at his coming. It was not his fault that the people refused to respond to the teaching of the law."

"That explains why Jeremiah so often denounced the people during the time of Josiah," suggested Graeham.

"That is so. One of the most important verses in the Old Testament is Jeremiah 1:2. It tells us that this great prophet began to prophesy in the thirteenth year of Josiah. This was when the great reform had just commenced. The first twelve chapters of Jeremiah record prophecies given in the days of Josiah, at a time when people were flocking into the temple, when they were celebrating the Law as it had never been kept for centuries, when idolatry had been destroyed, the pagan temples and idols broken up, the false prophets and priests slain. From an external viewpoint, the nation looked spiritually prosperous and united. But Yahweh reads the heart, and there the picture was not so good. He could see that the people did not want this reform: they preferred to go their own ways. He could see that they were hypocritical in attitude and that the sweeping reforms of the king were not really to their liking. Jeremiah expressed the viewpoint of God. He was forthright in his bitter condemnation. He told them that they were a nation of adulterers; that they had been completely unfaithful to their God, whom figuratively they married in the Covenant made at Sinai (Jer. 3:1-5). He warned them that the very book of the Law they had discovered cursed them, and that upon them would assuredly come the terrible punishments therein recorded. He threatened and pleaded with them

to turn wholeheartedly to Yahweh, to serve Him in such a way that the judgments pronounced therein might be averted."

"But why do you say that Jer. 1:2 is such an important verse?" interrupted Peter.

"Because it tells us that the indictments of Jeremiah were given when the greatest religious revival in the history of the nation was taking place. We are thereby shown very clearly that, though Yahweh requires observance of the laws and commandments that He gives, it is not in externals that Yahweh takes pleasure, but in the heart. We are taught that true religion cannot be forced by law, is useless to God when it relies upon man-made stimulus in the absence of the spirit of the Truth, or is induced by the commandments of men. By its very attitude Judah showed that it feared Josiah, not God, and this was abhorrent to Him. All that is implied in the simple, mechanical statement that Jeremiah prophesied in the thirteenth year of Josiah! "

### **Jeremiah at the Temple**

"I don't like the Book of Jeremiah very much," remarked Ann, after her father had completed his comments concerning the background of the times. "It is such doleful reading; chapter after chapter of complaints!"

"You don't like reading his message, and Jeremiah hated proclaiming it," answered Mr. Phillips. "But this is a book that really grows on one the more it is studied. Most people prefer Isaiah, because of the glorious language in which his prophecies are delivered. However, whereas Isaiah predicted the sufferings of Christ in such chapters as his 53rd, Jeremiah manifested them in the things he

#### **THE ORDER OF EVENTS UNDERTAKEN BY JOSIAH**

**The First Purge** — Undertaken in the twelfth year of his reign, when 20 years old, and he began to restore true worship in the land.

**The Law was Found** — This was six years later, when the temple was cleaned and repaired. The books were discovered in the Ark.

**The Law was Read** — First by Shaphan, the king's scribe; then reported to Josiah.

**The Covenant Undertaken** — Josiah insisted upon the nation responding in worship to Yahweh.

**The Passover Held** — So that all the people would recall the deliverance from Egypt, and repeat its significance in their circumstances.

**The Second Purge** — Pagan worshippers removed; their altars and idols destroyed.



endured and the message he proclaimed. It is always easier to think or speak of sufferings than to endure them! In this, Jeremiah was a wonderful and remarkable type of Christ!"

"Jeremiah had warned the people that Yahweh requires more than mere formalism in worship, that if they really wanted to serve Him in truth they must seek Him completely with all their hearts. It was true that they had given tithes to restore the temple, it was true that they were reverting to the form of worship laid down in the Law, it was true that they were offering the prescribed sacrifices, and attending the necessary feasts. But they did all this because the king demanded it and not because of their love of God. Therefore there was little true spirit in their religion.

"But the exhortations of Jeremiah made no impact upon the people. Therefore, at the command of Yahweh he began to use more dramatic methods.

"On one occasion, some time after the celebration of the Passover, when the people were flocking into the temple for worship, they saw the prophet standing in the court gate. He faced the people with his back to the temple, as though he were guarding it from their polluting presence. Then, when sufficient had gathered around him, he addressed them. 'Hear this, all you that enter these gates to worship Yahweh,' cried the youthful prophet and priest, 'Thus saith Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place!'

"The people could hardly believe their ears. What did he mean? Did they not flock to the temple, bringing their sacrifices? Were they not worshipping Yahweh? Had they not changed their ways?

"The prophet declared they had not. As they thronged around him in the temple, he showed that their actions were really dictated by the commands of men and did not reflect a love of God. He told them they put too much confidence in the temple as though God would never destroy it, and he warned them that Yahweh would destroy both the temple and the nation if the people did not change.

"He declared, 'You trust in lying words that cannot profit. You steal, murder, do all manner of evil, and then come and stand before Yahweh in this house and say, 'We are delivered to do all these things. *IS THIS HOUSE WHICH I HAVE CALLED BY MY NAME, BECOME A DEN OF ROBBERS IN YOUR EYES?* Behold, even I have seen it, saith Yahweh' (Jer. 7:8-11)."

"I am beginning to see what you mean when you say Jeremiah was a type of Christ," said Graeham, interrupting his father. "Those were the very words that the Lord used when he entered the temple, and overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of them that sold doves, and said: 'This house shall be called of all nations a House of Prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves'

(Mark 11:17). I can imagine how the people would look on Jeremiah with anger as they later did also on the Lord."

"The Lord was quoting both Isaiah and Jeremiah on that occasion," replied his father. "Isaiah predicted the time when the temple shall be called a House of Prayer for all nations (Isa. 56), but Jeremiah actually enacted the very incident itself. It was this action of Christ that caused the priests to conspire to destroy him, and in like manner, Jeremiah's exhortation in the temple caused the people to hate him. It was the beginning of a long discourse that occupies chapters 7 to 10 of his book, and in which he showed that the very Book of the Law they had discovered warned them of dire punishments to come."

### **Opposition to Jeremiah**

"There is even a more interesting incident recorded in his eleventh chapter," continued Mr. Phillips. "It has as its background the Covenant with which Josiah had bound the nation to serve Yahweh. You remember the incident, don't you?"

"Yes, it is recorded in 2Chronicles 34:31-33," replied Peter.

"Well, some time after that, the Voice of Yahweh came to the prophet, reminding him of the implications of that covenant. 'Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of the covenant which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt. Obey My voice and do My commands that I may give you a land in which to live,' Yahweh declared.

"And as Jeremiah heard these words, he confirmed them, saying: 'So be it' or, in Hebrew: 'Amen' (Jer. 11:5).

"This was the response that Israel was commanded to give when they heard the words of the Covenant. It meant that they were bound to them and would truly receive the blessings or the cursings there outlined according to whether they obeyed or disobeyed.

"Jeremiah was told to take this message to the people. Like the Lord Jesus, nearly 700 years later, he commenced a tour of the cities of Judea (vv. 6-8), warning the people that the very covenant they had entered into could destroy them unless they obeyed it in the letter and in the spirit.

"It was not a pleasant tour that he made. The people came to hate him for his straightforward talk. They did not want to hear of curses; they wanted only blessings. They were well satisfied with their ways, and manifested the greatest impatience at his criticism. The prophet told them that they were completely disloyal to Yahweh: 'According to the number of their cities have been your gods,' he declared (Jer. 11:13). And though the idols had been destroyed, the hearts of the people remained unchanged. So completely apostate had they become that Yahweh refused to hear any prayers on their behalf unless they changed their ways (v. 14).

“He reminded them that though Israel is likened to a ‘good olive tree,’ Yahweh would break off its branches and burn them (v. 16) — similar to language used by Paul in Romans 11:19. Jeremiah spoke of the growing hatred of the people for himself, and likened himself to ‘a favorite lamb led to the slaughter’ (according to Rotherham’s translation of verse 19) a term used of the Lord Jesus (Acts 8:32).

“His journey led him back to his own city of Anathoth, just as the journeyings of Christ took him back to his hometown of Nazareth. And there, Jeremiah, like Christ, proclaimed his message. And, like Christ, he found these people more angry with him than any others. ‘We do not want to hear you!’ they stormed at him. ‘Do not prophesy in the name of Yahweh, or we will kill you!’ (compare Jer. 11:21 with Luke 4:24).

“Even the members of his own family joined in the hue and cry against him. And when they found that anger and persecution did not move him, they tried flattery and fair words — but all in vain (Jer. 12:6). How like the Lord Jesus, concerning whom it was said, that ‘even his brethren believed him not’ (Jhn. 7:5).

“Sad and despondent, the prophet turned to Yahweh. ‘Why do the wicked prosper?’ he asked (Ch. 12:1). He desired to know the purpose of all his sufferings. He could see that though Yahweh was ‘near in the mouths of the people, He was far from their inward feelings’ (v. 2). He could see that even then the beginnings of punishments predicted in the Law were being felt. Severe drought was troubling the land (v. 4), and he wondered if it was to continue.

“He was told that worse things were in store for the nation. Jerusalem would be overthrown by the Gentiles, though ultimately the ‘times of the Gentiles’\* would come to an end, and Israel would be restored.

“In short, this message of Jeremiah, in his 12th chapter, is strikingly similar to the warning prophecy which Christ delivered on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24), in which he also predicted famine, civil war, invasion, destruction for Judah, and the downtreading of Jerusalem ‘until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled’.

“Thus Jeremiah anticipated the work of the Lord Jesus. As far as we know, this was his final prophecy in the lifetime of Josiah. Shortly after this, political events developed to a crisis in which the life of the godly king was brought to an end”.

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\* In Jer. 12:14 the Gentiles are styled “Mine evil neighbours” because Yahweh is represented in Scripture as dwelling in the midst of Israel.

## Chapter Six

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### ZEPHANIAH'S DRAMATIC WARNING

**W**HILST Jeremiah was busy touring the cities of Judah, scorned and derided of men because he set their sins plainly before them, the voice of another prophet was heard, warning the people of impending judgments.

It was the voice of the prophet Zephaniah. His name means *Yahweh Has Hidden*, and his words show that Yahweh, indeed, had turned His face from His people.

Zephaniah was related to king Josiah, being a descendant of Hezekiah, and as a young man, he prophesied in the closing years of Josiah's reign\*.

He endorsed the words of Jeremiah. Zephaniah's book only contains three short chapters, but they are full of meaning and power. Some had rejected the message of that prophet, claiming that "Yahweh will do neither good nor evil!" (Zeph. 1:12). "You people who are 'settled on your lees' and say such things, shall be carefully searched out and punished", was the prophet's sarcastic reproof to those who spoke in that way.

He warned the materialistically minded merchants of Jerusalem that their trust in wealth would avail them nothing in the day of crisis that was rapidly approaching. They would be cut off in spite of their riches (Zeph. 1:11).

Zephaniah saw the tragic folly of the people's indifference; he anticipated the sickening thud and rumble of approaching judgment and war. Loudly his warning cry rang through the streets, repeating the same message: "Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord Yahweh: for the day of Yahweh is at hand: for Yahweh hath prepared a sacrifice, He hath bid His guests" (Zeph. 1:7). Judah was to be carved up like a sacrifice; the Gentiles were invited as guests to a feast, to come and feed off the nation!

It was a dreadful, urgent message — if only the people would heed. In dramatic, compelling language he drew a picture of the impending disaster:

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\* "Hizkiah" (Zeph. 1:1) is the same in Hebrew as Hezekiah. The long genealogical line, so unlike the prophets, points to this being Hezekiah the king, with Zephaniah being in the line of David as was Josiah. The date of his prophecy is implied in the statement of ch. 1:8 in which all classes of society are condemned, including the "king's children" — the king alone being excluded. This suggests that Zephaniah must have commenced to prophesy fairly late in the reign of Josiah by which time the king's sons had grown to maturity, to earn this rebuke.

*The great day of Yahweh is near!  
Near! SPEEDING APACE!  
The voice of Yahweh is heard; the mighty man shall cry bitterly.  
A day of wrath, of woe, of anguish.  
A day of stress and distress, of darkness and gloom.  
A day of cloud and thunder-cloud.  
A day of trumpet blast and battle cry,  
Against fortified towns and high towers,  
Bringing distress upon men,  
Causing them to grope like the blind, desperately,  
Because against Yahweh they rebelled,  
Their blood shall be scattered like dust,  
Their flesh like dung.  
No silver, no gold will avail to protect,  
On the day of Yahweh's wrath.  
The fire of His fury will consume the whole land;  
For a full end, yea a fearful end,  
Will Yahweh make of all that dwell in the land" (Zeph. 1:14-18) .*

What an all-embracing day of trouble he predicted! Commencing with Judah, he systematically showed how the nations west, east, south and north would in turn be involved.\* Guilty Judah would become the very centre of the cauldron of trouble into which eleven nations would be plunged. It would be ringed with an iron band of judgment and woe that would bring it to utter destruction.

But his message was not unrelieved doom. Like all the other prophets, he also had a vision of future glory. His final words comprise a prediction of healing and of hope (Zeph. 3:9-20). He saw the people returning to the land, worshipping Yahweh in truth, manifesting shame at their former iniquities, seeking the divine favor. He saw Zion transformed, the enemy expelled, the Messiah king applauded as the victorious warrior, Israel regathered and glorified, receiving praise and fame in all lands where previously they had been put to shame.

What a wonderful message of hope it is! How he must have encouraged those faithful few who in the midst of the terrible wickedness of Jeremiah's day still sought to obey the Truth. It was a royal message for the royal prophet to deliver for the benefit of those who still delighted in "the sure mercies of David" (Isa. 55:3).

**Jeremiah's Temple Prophecy (Chs. 7-10)** "They had found a copy of the Book of the Law" (2Kings 22:8). This book became the text book of Josiah's reform, but Jeremiah showed how the curses of the book would come upon that generation.

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\* Notice the systematic treatment of nations in Zephaniah's prophecy. First: Judah as the centre of the divine purpose (ch. 1:2—2:3); then Philistia to the west (ch. 2:4-7); Moab and Ammon to the east (vv. 8-11); Ethiopia and Egypt to the south (v. 12), and finally Assyria to the north (vv. 13-15).

In doing so he stood as a type of Christ. Thus he stood as a bridge linking Moses and the Lord. Note the following references to the Law in his temple discourse, and how his words anticipate those of the Lord Jesus. Like the Lord, he condemned the people out of the Law.

MOSES	JEREMIAH	CHRIST	MOSES	JEREMIAH	CHRIST
	ch. 7:4	Mat. 24:2		ch. 8:8	Mat. 15:6
Deu. 24:14	ch. 7:6		Deu. 28:30	ch. 8:10	
Deu. 6:14-15	ch. 7:6		Lev. 14:44-45	ch. 8:12	
Deu. 4:40	ch. 7:7			ch. 8:13	Mat. 21:19
Deu. 6:14	ch. 7:9	Mat. 23:21-23	Deu. 29:18	ch. 8:14	
	ch. 7:11	Mat. 21:13		ch. 8:21	Mat. 8:17
Deu. 12:11	ch. 7:12	Lk. 21:24		ch. 9:1	Lk. 19:41
Deu. 9:14	ch. 7:16	Jn. 17:9		ch. 9:2	Mat. 16:4
Deu. 6:3	ch. 7:21-23	Heb. 10:8-9		ch. 9:4	Mat. 10:36
	ch. 7:26	Mat. 23:30-31	Deu. 28:23-24	ch. 9:10	
Deu. 17:9	ch. 7:28	Mat. 23:13	Deu. 31:29	ch. 9:13	
Deu. 17:3	ch. 7:32	Mat. 23:32	Deu. 28:64	ch. 9:16	
	ch. 7:34	Lk. 23:28		ch. 9:23	1Cor. 1:31
Deu. 4:19	ch. 8:2		Deu. 30:6	ch. 9:26	Rom. 2:25
Deu. 28:61	ch. 8:2		Exo. 15:11	ch. 10:6-7	Rev. 15:3
Deu. 28:66	ch. 8:3		Deu. 32:9	ch. 10:16	

**A World in Turmoil** Some time after the eighteenth year of king Josiah's reign when he had celebrated the Passover for the first time, an event of the greatest importance occurred. It comprised a warning to the self-satisfied kingdom of Judah; it also completely altered the balance of power among the nations, setting in motion the train of circumstances that finally led to the destruction of Jerusalem: Asia was invaded by the Scythians.

The Bible barely mentions this marauding, warlike nation, but it played quite an important part in the history of the times. The Scythians appeared suddenly from the mysterious north, from behind the long mountain barrier formed by the Himalayan, Caucasian and other ranges, which completely blocked off that which lay beyond, from the civilised world of the times.

The Scythians suddenly and unexpectedly appeared: fierce, uncivilised, uncouth, to fall upon the comfortable, sophisticated cities of the south. One division swept along the coastal plains of Palestine towards Egypt, penetrating Philistia to the southern border of Palestine. It was met and halted by Psammetichus of Egypt after sacking the temple of Astarte at Askalon. The Egyptian leader bribed these bloodthirsty, crude-looking invaders to retire.

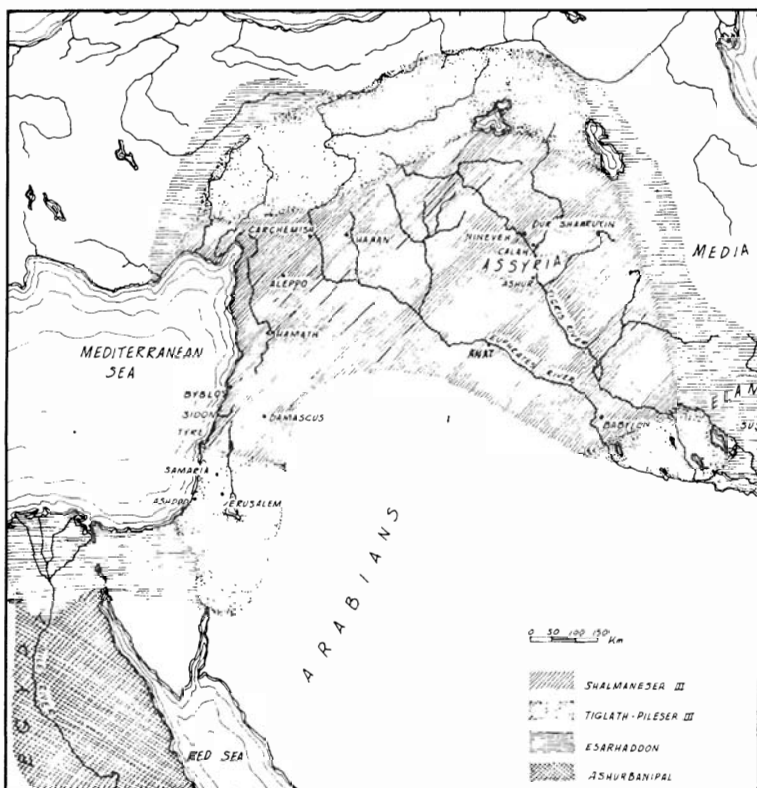
Bought off by Egypt, they returned north, ravaging the country; burning, plundering, bringing terror to the inhabitants. They left but one permanent trace of their passage as they retired along the plain of Esdraelon. From them the city of Bethshan, on its eastern extremity, received the name it afterwards bore, of Scythopolis. Within ten years they had retired behind their mountain barrier, having disappeared like an evil apparition. The terror that had so swiftly struck and

retired, was like a warning to Judah of what it could expect when its time came.

But for the moment the nation escaped. The Scythians passed it by. For some reason, Jerusalem, apparently, was not attacked. Historians wonder why this was so. The Bible supplies the answer. God had promised Josiah, through Huldah the prophetess, that he would have peace during his lifetime. The fierce, brutal Scythians— murdering, plundering, destroying, but by-passing Judah — represented a warning and an ominous token to many watchers in the land.

### Assyria Collapses

Although the Scythians attacked Assyria, and weakened the nation, they actually delayed the fall of the empire. Two other powers were awaiting the opportunity to attack, but feared to do so whilst the fierce, savage fighters from the north were ravaging the land.



The mighty Assyrian empire, which existed from the ninth century BC to the seventh, extended through the Holy Land, as its kings lay the whole area destitute. But its work was completed, and it was about to be taken away by the rising power of Babylon.

They were the developing powers of Media and Babylon. To the northeast of Assyria, in the Province of Media, a king by name of Cyaxares had come to power. He proved to be an efficient military leader, and made preparations to throw off the yoke of Assyria.

Meanwhile, in the southeast, Nabopolassar founded the Babylonian Empire, and also awaited an opportune moment to seize the spoils of the decaying empire of Assyria.

The retirement of the Scythians behind their mountain barrier provided the opportunity both were seeking. They bore down on the Assyrians on two fronts. Nineveh was caught in a joint-attack that crushed it as in a vice. One by one the protecting fortresses fell, until, in the year BC 614 the remaining stronghold had been taken.

Cyaxares had reached Nineveh first, and Nabopolassar met him in the ruins of the city. Both kings pledged each other to a mutual agreement. Amid the ruins of Nineveh they divided up the Assyrian Empire. Media annexed the north and northeast. Babylon lay claim to the south and southwest.

By this momentous decision, Syria, Palestine and Egypt came under the sphere of Babylonian rule.

### **Egypt Moves Against Babylon**

In Egypt a ruler had come to power called Pharaoh Neco II. He had heard of the fall of Nineveh, and the pact of mutual agreement entered into by Media and Babylon. But he had no intention of quietly being adopted into the family of nations that Babylon desired to establish. He believed that it was to his advantage to help the fallen Assyrians.

It was true that for many years Egypt and Assyria had been bitter enemies, that their armies had clashed time and again, that Palestine had been constantly disturbed by the arguments between the powers of the north and south. But Neco preferred to have a weakened Assyria sufficiently strong enough to withstand Babylon, rather than having a powerful Babylon emerge to threaten Egypt. He decided to march to the help of Assyria.

It was a momentous decision that he made, destined to prove disastrous to the little kingdom of Judah, and the family of Josiah in particular, as Mr. Phillips explained to his family when discussing 2Chronicles 35.





## Chapter Seven

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### THE SIGNIFICANT BATTLE OF MEGIDDO

“WE discussed the Passover celebrated by Josiah last evening,” said Mr. Phillips to his family, “and now I want to outline to you the final incidents in Josiah’s life. With his death came the sunset on Judah’s glory; for now the kingdom was hastening to its doom.

“Thirteen years had flown by since the great Passover had been kept with such enthusiasm, and...”

“How do we know that?” interrupted Peter.

“Oh, work it out for yourself!” exclaimed Ann impatiently. “2Chronicles 34 :1 says that he reigned 31 years, and in chapter 35:19 we are told that the Passover was celebrated in his 18th year. Eighteen from thirty-one leaves thirteen!”

“Alright, Ann! Keep your hair on!” answered Peter cheerfully.

“Nevertheless, it is good to work these things out for yourself,” remarked their father.

“When you tell me, it saves me the trouble,” said Peter with a grin at the indignant Ann.

“We know very little of the events of those thirteen years, apart from what we learn in the record of Jeremiah,” said Mr. Phillips, who, being a family man, has learned to ignore the little arguments that sometimes arose between his children.

“Apparently, Josiah enjoyed a measure of prosperity until about the closing year of his reign, when a severe drought was experienced, causing Jeremiah to ask, ‘How long shall the land mourn?’ (Jer. 12:4).

“It was also a year of international tension. From the north were heard reports of the fall of Assyria and the success of two new powers: Media and Babylon. And then, closer to home, was heard the tramp of Egyptian soldiers, as the army of Pharaoh Neco moved north to help the Assyrians.”

“I do not find that in the Bible,” interrupted Graeham. “2Kings 23:29 reads that he went up ‘to fight against Assyria.’ How can you say he went up to help the Assyrians?”

“That verse is better rendered ‘he went to’ as it is in the RSV,” answered Mr. Phillips. “Neco went to fight in support of the Assyrians against the rising powers of Babylon and Media. Archaeologists have found inscriptions confirming the Bible record in this. They are today preserved in the British Museum, and state that ‘the king of Assyria procured a large Egyptian army and marched against Haran to conquer it’! The Assyrian monarch hoped to make Haran his head-

quarters from whence he could reconquer his own territory from the Medes and Babylonians with the help of the Egyptians.

"But it was a forlorn hope. He obtained the Egyptian help but could do nothing with it. Haran was besieged for two months, but it did not fall, and when Neco saw how weak were the Assyrian forces, he retired to Carchemish on the Euphrates which he made his border, and defied Nabopolassar, the king of the Babylonians, to dislodge him.

"Thus, for a time, Syria, Palestine and the adjacent countries came under the control of the Egyptians.

"But, before this, a most tragic event occurred as we read in 2Chronicles 35. Josiah attempted to stop the mighty Egyptian army. Perhaps he was encouraged with the thought of Sennacherib's overthrow; doubtless he wanted to keep his country free from foreign domination, and realised that if Egypt were successful in the north, Judah would fall under its influence.

"Whatever were his real motives, he decided to oppose Egypt. Courageously he pitted his small army against the mighty forces from the south.

"He failed, however, to seek divine guidance in this crucial and fateful decision, and this led to his undoing. Neco treated the small Judean forces with contempt. 'What have you to do with me, O king of Judah?' he asked. 'I have not come out against you but against my own enemy. God has commanded me to make haste. Therefore stop interfering with God who is on my side, lest He destroy you!'

"Unconsciously, Neco was uttering the counsel of God in thus speaking. But Josiah did not heed the voice of wisdom. Disguising himself, he set his chariots in battle array and made ready to oppose the astonished and now angry Egyptians. The battle took place in the historic vicinity of Megiddo, not far from where Barak had much earlier discomfited Sisera, and where Gideon with his 300 men had defeated the Midianites.

"Megiddo signifies *The Place of Troups*, and soon the normal peaceful valley resounded with the clash of troops, the battle-cries of men in mortal combat, the groans of men wounded unto death. Josiah was in the forefront of the battle, commanding the chariots. The Egyptian bowmen directed a cloud of arrows at the advancing Israelites. One among their number shot his arrow blindly, at a venture, in the direction of the disguised king. Swiftly the shaft flew to its target, striking the king a mortal blow. Josiah slumped in his chariot. 'Take me away, I am badly wounded,' he gasped.

"Swiftly the servant wheeled the chariot out of the battle line. Tenderly he lifted his beloved king out of the small war-chariot into a larger one in order to carry him to Jerusalem. But the king was beyond any help. Josiah had fought his last battle, had introduced his

last reform. His record was closed in death until the resurrection.

“He died at peace with God. He died just in time to escape the trouble that was looming on the political horizon and which almost immediately began to affect Judah.

“Thus God had fulfilled His promise made through Huldah. The threatened punishment on Judah was delayed until the death of good king Josiah. Now that Josiah was dead, the divine judgments on a guilty nation were to be exacted.

“Meanwhile, the tiny army of Judah was swept out of the way. Without waiting to consolidate his victory (for his presence was urgently required in the north) Pharaoh Neco pressed on to the assistance of the fallen Assyrian Empire.”

### **The Mourning for Josiah**

“Slowly, mournfully, the body of the king was conveyed back to the city. Fearfully the people had awaited news of the battle. As the broken remnants of the army were seen the apprehension mounted. The mournful appearance of the returned soldiers, the subdued look of the leaders, the absence of the king in his chariot, and finally the news that the king had been slain revealed to them how disastrous was the defeat.

“The whole nation gave itself over to mourning. It was as though every family had lost a beloved son. The streets were deserted, families sheltered in their homes mourning the terrible loss the nation had suffered. Throughout the land a cry arose because a beloved king had been tragically taken from his people.

“But no one mourned so earnestly as Jeremiah. He knew, as no one else, how much the nation had lost. He realised that the death of the king removed that which restrained the outpouring of divine anger and judgment on the wicked nation.”

“Before you go any further,” remarked Peter as his father paused, “I am going to challenge you on what you have just said. You told me I must work out things for myself, but I have read the accounts in both 2Chronicles 35 and 2Kings 23, and they say nothing about the people gathering in families to mourn as though they had lost a son, as you have said. Are you just exercising your very graphic imagination?”

“By no means!” responded his father. “I have told you before, that when you study a section of the Bible, you need to take a concordance and look up every reference to it and link them together, to get the full picture. You will find the mourning of Josiah referred to in Zechariah 12:11. Link the references in Kings and Chronicles with that in Zechariah and you will find the description is exactly as I have said. Moreover, you will find that this mourning is said to be similar to a mourning that will overcome the Jews in the days when the Lord

**The Valley of Jezreel from the Hill of Megiddo — where king Josiah endeavored vainly to stop the progress of the powerful Egyptian army under Pharaoh Neco**



**Tel Megiddo from the north, with the Jezreel Valley in the background. Notice: [1] gate area; [2] water installation pit; [3] south stables; [4] silo; [5] shaft; [6] round high place; [7] temples; [8] north stables; [9] Israelite fortifications.**

Jesus shall appear in the earth. They will then mourn as they did in the days of Josiah. They mourned because their king was dead; but when Christ returns they will mourn because they will realise that they put to death their saviour-king over 1900 years ago!"

"I know that it says that Jeremiah lamented for Josiah (2Chron. 35:25), but is there any record of what he said?" asked Ann.

"No. This was possibly a funeral lamentation which has not been preserved. However, Jeremiah did make mention of the death of Josiah. In Lamentations 4:20 he declared:

***The breath of our nostrils,  
The Anointed of Yahweh,  
Was taken in their pits.  
Of whom we said,  
Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen.***

"Again, in Jeremiah 22:10 he wrote concerning Josiah: 'Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him'. He spoke thus because he knew that greater troubles were shortly to fall."

"Are Megiddo and Armageddon one and the same?" asked Graeham.

"No, the word *Armageddon* is a different word entirely. Some suggest that Armageddon signifies the Mountain of Megiddo, but it was in the *Valley* of Megiddo that Josiah lost his life, and the Bible does not mention any mountain of that name. *Armageddon* should be spelt with only one 'd' as in the Revised Version of the Bible at Rev. 16:16, and its meaning is only found in the Hebrew tongue. In *Eureka* vol.5, pp. 256-257, Dr. Thomas says it is compounded of three Hebrew words: *Armah*, which he links with *arema*, meaning 'a heap of sheaves'; *ge* or *gai*, meaning 'a valley,' and *don* or *dun*, signifying 'judgment'."

"What does all that mean?" asked Ann.

"Accepting these meanings, *Armageddon* signifies *A heap of sheaves in a valley for judgment.*"

"I still cannot see what you are driving at," said Ann with a frown on her face.

"Give Dad time and he'll get there finally," murmured Peter, critically!

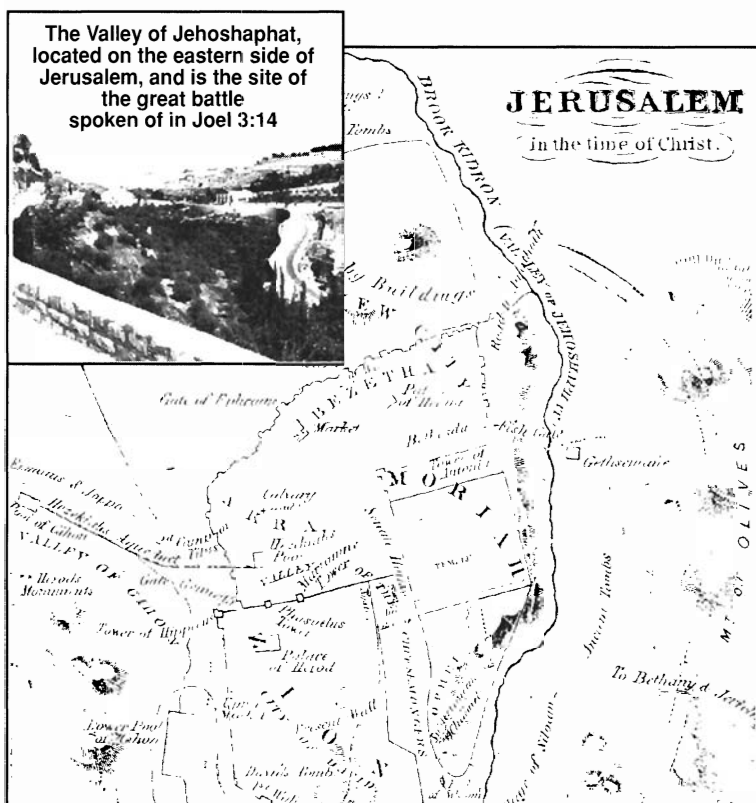
"*Armageddon* relates to the judgment of the nations, and the word signifies that God will gather all the nations as sheaves into a valley for judgment."

"Yes, but what I want to know is whether that valley is the valley of Megiddo!" said Ann impatiently.

"That cannot be," remarked Graeham, "because Zechariah 14:2 says that God will gather the nations to Jerusalem for battle, and it will be there, and not at Megiddo in the north, that He will pour out upon them His great judgments."

“Graeham is quite right” said his father. “Outside of Jerusalem there is a valley called the Valley of Jehoshaphat; that is, the *Valley of Yahweh’s Judgment*. This valley flowed down the eastern side of the city, and through the valley the brook Kidron flows (see *Eureka*, vol. 5, p. 256). This area will be the focal point of conflict among the nations when God gathers them together for battle. We learn that in Joel 3. Notice verse 2 says that ‘all nations’ will be drawn to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and that there Yahweh will judge them. In v. 12, he declares: ‘For there will I sit to judge all the nations round about’. He likens this place to the ‘valley of threshing’ (v. 14 mg.), and states that the nations will be gathered there like heaps of sheaves into the threshing floor.

“Micah predicts the same event, but in language even more in line with the word Armageddon. He declares that God will gather the nations ‘as the sheaves into the floor’ for judging (Micah 4 :12). The word *Armageddon*, therefore, has its roots in Old Testament prophecy, but is to be identified with Jerusalem more than the valley of Megiddo.”





**W**ITH the death of Josiah, the judgments of Yahweh fell fast and heavy on the guilty nation. The kings that followed gave no spiritual direction to the nation, and this resulted in a continuing deterioration. It was only a matter of time before Judah was to face challenges from its enemies, and the prophesied captivity by the Babylonians would be effected. The centre of interest in the story of the Bible now turns from the kings to the prophets of that period — faithful men such as Jeremiah and Habakkuk spoke out courageously, calling to the people to check the direction of their failing worship, and urging individuals to stand aside from the way of the society, and to commit themselves to the way of Truth. But these were now the last days of the kingdom.



## Chapter One

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### JEHOAHAZ: KING OF THE RETRIBUTION

**T**HREE sons were left to mourn the death of Josiah. They were Jehoiakim (Eliakim), a young man of 25 years of age (2Kings 23:36), Jehoahaz (Shallum) who was 23 years of age (2Kings 23:30-31; 1Chron. 3:15; Jer. 22:11), and a young boy of ten years of age named Mattaniah (2Kings 24:17-18), who is better known to us as Zedekiah.

The people elected Shallum king by popular vote. Why they did not make the eldest son king is not revealed, but it is probable that Eliakim was taken captive by Pharaoh Neco at the battle of Megiddo, leaving Shallum as the obvious choice. Perhaps Neco was in too much of a hurry to assist the Assyrians in the north, and delayed putting the affairs of Judah in order. Therefore, Jerusalem had a three months' respite, whilst the Egyptian army moved north to finally take up its position in Carchemish. This three months' respite was the full length of Shallum's reign. The people had such high hopes of him, however, that they changed his name to Jehoahaz. Shallum means *Retribution*, whereas Jehoahaz signifies *Yahweh upholds*.

This second name proved ironical, for Yahweh was not prepared to uphold him. As Zephaniah had earlier predicted, there were severe punishments reserved for Josiah's sons (Zeph. 1:8). Jehoahaz was destined to be the first of these sons to reap this result of their own folly. He was to be King of the Retribution, and thus live up to his proper name of Shallum. He commenced to reign at a time when the long-threatened, long-delayed punishment of Yahweh began to fall upon his disobedient, God-defying people.

The record states that "he did evil in the sight of Yahweh." He did not manifest the qualities of Josiah. He probably pleased the people by relaxing the extreme religious demands that his father had made. But he did not please God by so doing. He was, perhaps, the best of the three sons of Josiah. The people saw him as Ezekiel describes him: "a young lion" well trained to "catch the prey" (Ezek. 19:3). They hoped that he might restore the fallen fortunes of Judah (v. 5) .

But his three months' reign saw troubles increase. In the days of Josiah the beginnings of a severe drought had been felt, and this continued throughout this period. Day after day the sun beat down out of a cloudless sky, and the ground became hard and parched. Ploughing was useless. Cattle became famished for want of grass. Wild animals deserted their young; streams of water dried up; the springs failed. The whole country became stricken with drought. Jerusalem became a city of gloom. The gates of the city, where people commonly met

for business and conversation became places of mourning as knots of grave-faced people discussed the political and climatic crises facing them (Jer. 14:1-6).

Jeremiah sought to intercede for the people, but was told that they were not worthy of it. "Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be towards this people: cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth," Yahweh told him.\*

He was told that this was but the beginning of distress; that Jerusalem as the Mother City was to experience terrible privation and bereavement from among her sons (Jer. 15:6-9), that the famine the land suffered was but a token of the spiritual famine manifested by the people (Jer. 17:8; Amos 8:11-12). False prophets were saying that the drought would soon break (Jer. 14:13), but Yahweh's reply was that "sword and famine shall consume those very prophets" (v. 15).

At the end of three months, Pharaoh Neco demanded that Jehoahaz present himself before him at Riblah in the land of Hamath (2Kings 23:31-33). It was in this region that David enjoyed one of his greatest victories by which his sublime faith was vindicated (2Sam. 8). Now the descendant of David had to come to this very spot, and humbly crouched before the proud and haughty Egyptian.

Imperiously, Neco told Jehoahaz that he was not allowed to reign in Jerusalem. He was taken prisoner and sent in chains to Egypt. Neco then appointed Jehoahaz's elder brother Eliakim as king in Jerusalem, changing his name to Jehoiakim.

Many in Jerusalem lamented this disgrace that so quickly followed on the disaster of Josiah's death. They hoped that Neco might experience some reverse that would restore their banished king to them again. But Jeremiah told them that such hopes would never be realised. He called upon them to dry their tears for Josiah, and reconcile themselves to the fact that Jehoahaz (Shallum) had gone away for good. "Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him; but weep sore for him that goeth away; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country. For thus saith Yahweh, touching Shallum the son of Josiah king of Judah, which reigned instead of Josiah his father, which went forth out of this place; he shall not return thither any more; but he shall die in the place whither they have led him captive, and shall see this land no more" (Jer. 22:10-12).

In thus being taken away to die in the land of dispersion, Shallum, the King of the Retribution, enacted the retribution that Yahweh would exact of the nation over which he ruled. The time was not far distant when Judah would be no more.

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\* Why are Moses and Samuel specifically mentioned? Because they were known to the people of Jeremiah's day as the mighty intercessors of heroic times whose mediatorship had proved effectual (cp. Exod. 17:11; 32:11; Num. 14:13-19; 1Sam. 7:9; 12:16-18; Psalms 99:6; Isaiah 63:11).

## Chapter Two

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### AN OUTLINE OF THE PROPHECY OF JEREMIAH

**A** GREAT surprise is in store for anybody who systematically sets out to study the book of the prophet Jeremiah. At first glance, the book seems to be little more than a monotonous repetition of complaints, lamentations, indictments, gloomy forebodings, and harsh critical judgments on the prophet's contemporaries. So much is this so, that his name (which really signifies *Whom Yahweh Upholds*) has given birth, in the English language, to the word *jeremiad*, which signifies a lamentation; a tale of grief; a doleful story.

Even among Bible students there is a natural tendency to turn from that which at first sight seems such a gloomy book to one that is more exciting, such as the glorious predictions of Isaiah, the thrilling apocalyptic forecastings of Ezekiel, or the sweet meditations found in the Psalms. But we need to remind ourselves, that if it is monotonous to read chapter after chapter of indictments such as we find in Jeremiah, it must have been far more monotonous to constantly deliver such messages day after day, week after week, month after month, continually throughout so many years of his ministry.

But sandwiched in among these indictments there are exciting incidents recorded, and wonderful foreshadowings of the work of Christ. Thus the book grows on us the more closely it is studied. We see the prophet-priest as a wonderful type of the suffering Messiah, as an outstanding exponent of the newly discovered law, as a careful historian setting before us the details of one of the most significant epochs of Jewish history, as a prophet presenting a glorious message of hope in an age of evil and despair, as a courageous, faithful, patient and persistent witness to truth not only proclaiming the divine will but revealing it in his life.

#### **Jeremiah as a Character Study**

Jeremiah was a timid, retiring man (ch. 1:6), so deeply sympathetic and with such an intensity of feeling, that he lived, felt and suffered the message he delivered (cp ch. 9:1-4; 15:10, 18; 20:14-18). He entered into the feelings of both Yahweh and the people. His sympathy with the people was like that of the apostle Paul, who could wish that he, himself, were accursed that the nation of Israel might be saved. Jeremiah pleaded with God, almost suggesting that the threatened chastisement was too severe (ch. 4:10, 19, 20; 10:23-25; 14:7-13).

But there came a change, as he found that the people refused to respond to his message. He found them stubborn, he suffered their

derisive mockery, he heard them proclaiming lies in the name of Yahweh, he discovered their ruthless plots against his life, he endured their degrading persecution and cruel treachery.

All this made him realise that Yahweh's punishment was not only warranted, but necessary. If it did not come, the whole nation would be destroyed, both righteous and wicked. Therefore, Jeremiah was caused to cry out, appealing that Yahweh punish them — not in a spirit of revenge but because he could see that justice demanded it, and kindness required it (ch. 11:19-20; 18:18-23; 20:10-12; 42:20-22).

His personal humility and love for Yahweh and his fellowmen resulted in the manifestation of the greatest patient perseverance in the face of the most ungrateful repudiation of his message that it was the lot of a prophet to receive. He bravely persisted despite the humiliation heaped on him by an unheeding people. Here certainly was the kind of love that "suffers long, bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Jeremiah was completely faithful. Though his sensitive nature shrank from the task set him, he continued it to the bitter end, feeling the pain of his message, yet determined to do the bidding of Yahweh though none should take heed (ch. 1:19; 7:27).

**Jeremiah as a Type** Among the prophets, he was pre-eminently the "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." What Isaiah predicted concerning the Lord Jesus as the suffering servant of Yahweh, Jeremiah manifested. His life was a dramatic foreshadowing of Christ's life.

Time and again, incidents of Christ's life are represented in that of the prophet. The messages he delivered are similar to those of the Lord; the reaction of the people to his teaching corresponded to the reaction afforded the teaching of Christ; time and again, in incidents in his life there is found a remarkable similarity to incidents of the life of the Messiah.

Jeremiah commenced to minister about forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem — as did the Lord. He was foreknown to Yahweh before birth (ch. 1:5), as was the Lord (John 17:3). He was under divine protection (ch. 1:8), as was also Christ (John 16:32; 19:11). Of him, Yahweh said: "I have put My words in thy mouth," and of himself, Christ said: "The father gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (John 12:49; 7:16). He bore the reproach of men (ch. 15:18), as did the Lord (Psa. 69:20). He visited the temple and proclaimed it a den of thieves (ch. 7:11), as did Christ (Mark 11:17). He confirmed the covenant, travelled Judea preaching in the cities, described himself as a lamb to the slaughter, was hated by his countrymen, was despised by the people of his own

city, was rejected by his own brethren (cp. ch. 11:21; 12:6 with Luke 4:24; Jhn 7:5). He was condemned by the chief priests and scourged (ch. 19). He was put in a pit and left for dead (representing the grave), and drawn out of it again (typifying resurrection). He was carried into Egypt where he proclaimed the message of God (symbolizing the offering of the gospel to the nations through the work of the apostles).

Thus this sorrowing, suffering prophet dramatises the greatest of all prophets, who is described as “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”

### **Jeremiah as Historian**

He lived at a time when all things in Judah were rushing down to the final and terrible catastrophe of national destruction. Politically, excitement was at a peak, the worst passions swayed the various parties, and the most fatal and foolish counsels prevailed.

It was Jeremiah's lot to see his own people, whom he loved with the greatest affection, plunge over the precipice in complete and utter national ruin. His writings are interspersed with references to the times. He is like a reporter, telling the story of Judah's disgrace from the standpoint of God, so that we clearly see why the catastrophe had to come. He makes no less than twenty-three references to Jehoiakim, and makes further comment on Josiah, Shallum, Coniah, Zedekiah.

In spite of his afflictions, he lived through all these reigns, and though despised, he was the dominant figure of them all. He left an indelible mark upon the history of the times. In the record he is always laboring for the cause of righteousness, warning the king, pleading with the people, dramatically setting before them in symbolic action and parable the dangers that threatened them, so that to understand his book properly it is necessary to know the background of the crucial, tragic, important years that led to Jerusalem's fall.

He tried, by every possible means, to stem the tide of folly that was sweeping the nation to disaster — but in vain. With indomitable courage, he publicly voiced his protests: in the public places of the city, in the precincts of the temple, at the very gates of the royal palace, and defied death itself in order that he might set before the people “a more excellent way” — the way of divine love and righteousness.

### **Jeremiah as a Prophet**

The Book of the Law had been recently discovered in the days of Josiah. The prophetess Huldah had proclaimed the decree that the judgments threatened therein would be carried out. Jeremiah's prophecy is a wonderful interpretation of that very book. He makes many references to Deuteronomy. He expounds the Law, shows what it really means, reveals the outworking of its judgments, proclaims

the significance of the blessings and cursings it sets before the people. He revealed that “not one jot or tittle of the Law” would fail. He shows how drought, famine, invasion, war, captivity, destruction, scattering, and rebukes threatened in Deuteronomy 28 would be experienced by that very generation.

Christ, of course, did the same to his generation.

The book of Jeremiah has its counterpart of the Olivet Prophecy given by the Lord Jesus, its version of Matthew 23 and its indictment on leaders and people. And yet, with the threat of punishment, there is promise of restoration. In fact, the message of the book could well be summarised in the statement: “I will punish — I will restore”. The stubbornness and criminal folly of the nation would bring failure, but ultimately the love of God will triumph in the restored nation.

This prophet who indicted Judah so completely, is also the prophet who proclaims the promise of the New Covenant whereby both Israel and Judah will be saved (Jer. 31:31).

### **Jeremiah's Book**

The prophecy of Jeremiah is not set in strict chronological order. For example, chapters 35 and 36 describe events which are historically before chapter 21. Some chapters (chs. 21 to 39) are particular and dated; others are not. But even in these places, a certain systematic arrangement is evident. For example, chapter 21 (which is after chs. 22 to 27 in time of writing) speaks of the terrible disaster which would overcome the nation in the days of Zedekiah, whereas the succeeding chapters show the events that lead up to that time.

All the chapters from 1 to 39, are before the fall of Jerusalem.

Here is a brief outline:

INTRODUCTION — CH. 1.

PROPHECIES, GENERAL AND UNDATED — CHPS. 2 TO 20.

PROPHECIES, PARTICULAR AND DATED — CHPS. 21 TO 39.

PROPHECIES AFTER THE FALL OF JERUSALEM — CHPS. 40 TO 44.

PROPHECIES UPON THE GENTILE NATIONS — CHPS. 45 TO 51.

CONCLUSION — CH. 52.

The key to the book is found in chapter 30:15-18, “Because thy sins are become immense I have done these things unto thee... Yet all they that devour thee shall be devoured... For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith Yahweh.”

Many of the personal incidents experienced by the prophet, and which make up a great part of his book, will find their place in our *Story of the Bible*.

## Chapter Three

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### JEHOIAKIM: THE FRIVOLOUS EGOTIST

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**I**T is said that Nero played his fiddle whilst Rome burned. If that be the case, then in Jehoiakim we have the Nero of Judah. At a time when war-clouds were banking up on the political horizon, when Judah itself was faced with severe internal crises, including a long protracted drought and heavy taxation to meet tribute exacted by Egypt, this conceited young coxcomb, this frivolous, foolish king, oppressed the people even more greatly in order to maintain the pomp and extravagance of his court. At a time when Judah was faced with utter destruction, Jehoiakim occupied his time in glamorising the palace. At a time when God's prophets solemnly warned that the only sane, sound policy was a firm and bold return to the ways of Josiah (Jeremiah 22), he permitted many of the heathen practices of Manasseh to be restored.

He earned the most scathing rebukes of Jeremiah, but they meant nothing to this frivolous egotist. So lightly did he esteem the Word of Yahweh, that when Jeremiah's words were read to him, after having been written in a scroll, he contemptuously, and with light-hearted indifference, burnt the roll containing the sacred Word of God.

The records of 2Kings and 2Chronicles contain a brief history of Jehoiakim's reign, but it is in the pages of Jeremiah's prophecy that the full iniquity of the king is made apparent and more complete details of the times are revealed. The very incidents that revealed the stupidity of the king also brought the prophet to the fore, and revealed him in his most courageous moments.

#### **Vassal of Egypt**

The history of Judah now rapidly approached a great catastrophe, which has been twice re-enacted in the history of the Jewish people. It is the overthrow of the Jewish State and the destruction of Jerusalem.

The incident was a foretaste of that which was to later occur again. Forty years after Jeremiah's voice was heard the city was given over to the enemy. Similarly, forty years after Christ's voice was heard, Jerusalem again felt the heavy heel of the oppressor in circumstances that were very similar to the days of Jeremiah. The voice of warning and rebuke sounded forth, as courageous men sought to turn the nation from its folly, but with headstrong will, it plunged on into disaster.

As we read of the events of Jehoiakim's times, it is obvious that we are considering the agonies of an expiring nation. Jehoiakim was

established in power in Judah by decree of Pharaoh Neco, so that Jerusalem witnessed the disgrace of seeing a man reigning on the throne of David who was set there to do the will of his Egyptian overlord.

Faithfully he performed his duty. But faithfulness to Egypt meant disloyalty to Yahweh. And in manifesting this characteristic, Jehoiakim plunged Judah deeper into the mire of trouble.

Originally his name was Eliakim (*El Establishes*), but Neco changed it to Jehoiakim (*Yahweh Establishes*). Probably the Egyptian ruler made him swear fealty by Yahweh, and prefixed the divine Name to his own name to remind him always of his oath.

Neco also demanded heavy tribute which Jehoiakim raised by a poll-tax (2Kings 23:35). As Judah was experiencing severe drought at the time (Jer. 14:1) this heavy taxation imposed an even greater strain upon the resources of the people.

As though all this was not sufficient, the king further impoverished the country by heavy taxation on his own account. He wanted to live in luxury and pomp as he thought befitted his position. The palace was not grand enough for his liking, and he demanded that it be rebuilt (Jeremiah 22:13-15). He did not care how the money was obtained, so long as he got it. Thus the nation was plunged into deepest trouble.

## **Jeremiah in the Temple**

Early in the reign of Jehoiakim (Jer. 26:1), as the people were flocking to the temple from all parts of Judah, Jeremiah publicly took up his stand in the court to speak to the people. He openly proclaimed words of warning and rebuke: "Thus saith Yahweh: If you will not hearken to Me, to walk in My law, which I have set before you, then I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth" (vv. 4-6).

The people knew what this meant. The tabernacle was established at Shiloh in the days of Eli the priest and the youthful Samuel, but because of the wickedness of the sons of Eli, it had been given over to destruction.

The presence of the tabernacle had not saved Shiloh then, and now Jeremiah threatened that the same curse would fall upon the temple that they revered so much.

The priests and prophets in the court of the temple were attracted by the words of Jeremiah, and joined the people gathered around him. They could hardly believe that he would dare to speak such things in such a place. Angrily they turned on him. "You will surely die for this!" they declared. "How dare you say that Yahweh will destroy this house and city!" (v. 8).

They roused the people against Jeremiah, and roughly hustled him



outside the gate of the temple. Here some of the princes were gathered together, and both priests and prophets accused Jeremiah before them. "This man is worthy of death," they declared, "for he has prophesied against this city."

But Jeremiah was ready to defend himself. "Yahweh has sent me to prophesy against this house [the temple] and against this city all the words you have heard," he replied. "Therefore change your ways and your doings, obey the voice of Yahweh your God, and escape the punishment that will otherwise come upon you. As for me, I am in your hands and you can do with me as you like. But you know that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves, your city, and its inhabitants."

The priests, prophets, princes, and people looked at the courageous, uncompromising prophet. They knew he spoke the truth. He had nothing to gain by so boldly setting before them these things. And there were some in their midst who believed what he said.\*

Among them was a man named Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, who had been of so much help to Josiah. With others, he stood up in the defence of Jeremiah. They pointed to the example of Hezekiah who had been induced to seek Yahweh's mercy through the words of Micah the prophet. "Micah prophesied in the days of Hezekiah, saying that Zion shall be ploughed like a field, and Jerusalem will become a heap," they said. "But did Hezekiah put him to death? Did he not call for prayer, and seek the help of God? And did not God help Hezekiah? But if we kill Jeremiah, we might bring great evil against ourselves!"

Others agreed with Ahikam, and for a time Jeremiah escaped the enmity of the priests. But many harbored hatred against him.

### **Shocking Murder of Urijah**

Though the intercession of his friends had saved Jeremiah from the anger of his enemies for a time, his life was now in real danger. King Jehoiakim was an evil man who was not prepared to tolerate any criticism of his actions. He had already shown the lengths to which he was prepared to go by arranging for the murder of another prophet who had dared to remind him of judgments which Yahweh had threatened against the nation.

The prophet's name was Urijah (*Yahweh is Light*). He had repeated some of the sayings of Jeremiah, warning the people of impending judgment against Judah and Jerusalem.

In company with the princes and leading men of his realm, Jehoiakim heard him proclaiming this message, and it stung the king to anger. He determined that Urijah must die.

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\* Notice how closely this incident foreshadows that recorded in John 7:45-53 when Nicodemus (like Ahikam) stood up in defence of the Lord.

The prophet heard of the evil intention of the king, and fled into Egypt for safety. But he could hardly have sought refuge in a worse place. Jehoiakim was subject to the power of Egypt and therefore had access to Pharaoh Neco. He sent Elnathan\*, a prince of Judah, to seek out Urijah and bring him back for punishment. The prophet was dragged in disgrace back to Jerusalem, and brought before the cruel, impious king. Jehoiakim did not waste any time on Urijah. He commanded him to be slain with the sword, and his dead body to be thrown into a common grave.

Thus Urijah died for doing his duty; he was vilely cast into a common, communal grave as a token that both he and his message were worthless and contemptible in the view of the king.

But “precious in the eyes of Yahweh is the death of His saints.” A terrible retribution was awaiting the evil king. He did not realise this. He imagined that he was completely rid of his enemy. Little did he know that such blasphemous actions were to play a part in his own destruction (Jer. 19:4). The eyes of Yahweh were upon all that happened, and He was not indifferent to such crimes. He is just in all His ways, and Urijah’s record of faith is preserved in the Book of Life. He is one of those heroes mentioned in Hebrews 11:37 whose faith triumphed over death even though they were “slain with the sword.” He will rise from the grave at the return of Christ to receive that “better thing” that is held in reserve for all those who serve God in life unto death (Rev. 2:10). Urijah’s triumph is yet to come.

The murder of Urijah (Jer. 26) must have impressed Jeremiah with the great danger into which a faithful testimony of the Word could bring him. In this there is another great similarity between the life of the prophet and that of the Lord Jesus. In the case of Christ, the murder of John the Baptist, under similar conditions, caused the Lord to seek the strength that came only from communion with his heavenly Father in prayer (Mat. 14:12-13). Jeremiah, likewise, had recourse to similar means to strengthen him for the task set before him.

### **Jeremiah Called Upon To Denounce Judah’s Wickedness**

Meanwhile, Jeremiah felt depressed at the spiritual conditions surrounding him. He discovered that the proclamation of God’s message brought little response from the people. He became bitterly hated and opposed, and was even threatened with violence. He found himself “a man of strife and contention to the

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\* Elnathan (*God hath given*) was father-in-law to Jehoiakim, being the father of Nehushta the queen (2Kings 24:8; Jer. 36:12, 25), and therefore a prince of high standing. He was used by the king on several missions of importance. However he does not appear to have been as depraved as were some of Jehoiakim’s other ministers, and on one occasion tried to stop the king burning the scroll of Jeremiah. Perhaps his position as father-in-law to the king gave him privileges greater than those enjoyed by the other ministers.

whole earth" (Jer. 15:10). And though Yahweh promised that it would be well in the end with him and the remnant that followed him (v. 11), the constant opposition he received, the hatred that was heaped upon him day after day, oppressed and depressed him.

His life in the Truth was one of contrasts. On the one hand, as he meditated upon the Word of God, he derived the greatest pleasure; on the other hand, when he proclaimed it to the people, he found only sorrow. The lonely prophet poured out his heart unto God, seeking some relief from his distress: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them\*; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by Thy name, O Yahweh..." And then: "Why is my pain perpetual, my wound incurable; wilt Thou be altogether unto me as a deceitful brook, as waters that fail?" (Jer. 15:16-18).

In his misery, in his depression, in his indignation with his godless contemporaries, the prophet became a little impatient with God, for he was human, and subject to the failings that are part of us all. He was gently reminded by a merciful and understanding God, that if he desired to "stand before" Yahweh as a servant, he must not adopt the attitude of the people with whom he mixed, but carefully perform all that he was commanded (Jer. 15:19-20). "Let them return unto thee," he was told, "but return not thou unto them!"

Later, explaining how deep-seated was the iniquity of Judah, Yahweh told the prophet: "The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond; it is engraven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of their altars" (Jer. 17:1). Whatever may have been the outward appearance of the people, whatever may have been pleaded on their behalf, in heart (which only Yahweh could see) they were desperately wicked.

### **Jeremiah Becomes a Man Apart (Jer. 16, 17)**

The prophet was now called upon to enact the words that he was proclaiming unto the people. He was forbidden to marry, told to refrain from entering the house of mourning, commanded to abstain from any festivity (Jer. 16). Like the Lord Jesus, he became a man separate and aloof from those about him. His separateness became a parable for the times, the significance of which would be discerned by those who thought upon it.

Why was he forbidden to marry? Under normal conditions, children were esteemed a blessing (Deut. 28:4), but that had ceased to be the case in the period that faced Judah in the days of Jeremiah, for

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\* These are words of the greatest significance when considered in the light of the times. Josiah had found the book of the Law which had been lost for so long, and this book Jeremiah had figuratively "eaten". Whilst others in the nation had merely read it, he had absorbed it into his very being, so that his thoughts and outlook were colored by its teaching.

they would be involved in the general trouble that was about to engulf the whole nation. Therefore Jeremiah was told to remain single. The Lord Jesus gave similar advice to the believers who were to face the turmoil and trouble of the days of AD 70 when Rome exacted a terrible vengeance throughout the land of Judea (Mat. 24:19).

But why not mourn? Under normal conditions, death would be mourned by a people who recognised its reality, but so terrible were the conditions about to be experienced by guilty Judah, that death would be preferred to life. Therefore Jeremiah was told not to enter the house of mourning.

Why abstain from feasting? Under normal conditions, times of blessedness would be celebrated by feasting and joy, but the future of Judah would be so heavy with calamity that any such celebrations were out of place. Therefore Jeremiah was told not to join in such functions.

He became a marked man, a man apart. A period of solitary watchfulness and strict separation commenced for him. Day by day he enacted a parable which provided a warning of the greatest significance to a people who attached the highest importance to marriage, the permanence of the family, the reality of death, to bring them to the recognition that true joy springs from attachment to the things of God. As the people saw the lonely prophet, and learned that God had commanded him not to marry, not to mourn, not to join in their celebrations of joy, the thoughtful among them must have been induced to ask the question, *WHY?* Jeremiah's action proclaimed more loudly than mere words could do the divine warning that offspring was no pledge of permanence, that widespread death was awaiting the condemned nation, and that the people were soon to be cut off from the source of true joy: Yahweh in the heavens.

And because people dislike seeing anybody acting differently from themselves, and especially in a way that adversely reflects upon them, they came to hate the prophet more than ever.

As a true servant of Yahweh, Jeremiah took this burden upon himself faithfully. He no longer complained at the divine will and of the suffering he was called upon to endure. He saw that he must refuse even natural and innocent pleasures for the sake of God's cause; that he must faithfully proclaim the calamity and ruin that faced the nation, even though it made him unpopular; that he must unceasingly denounce sin, and sacrifice his own will to that of his God for the



sake of the cause. He stood as a fortress of Truth in an age of shame, and for Truth he was prepared to give all, even life itself.

**Jeremiah Rebukes  
the King  
(Jer. 17:19-27)**

Shortly after this, an incident occurred which brought the prophet again face to face with the king. He was told to go down to the main gate of the city where the people gathered to conduct business or to gossip together, and where the king used to enter the city, and there to publicly proclaim a solemn warning.

He did so. The people must have been startled, when, as the king with his ministers was entering the city, the voice of Jeremiah was heard from the crowd, bidding him and the people to return to ways of righteousness. "Hear ye the word of Yahweh, ye kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that enter in by these gates..." he declared.

He called upon them to observe the sabbath in its true spirit. It was the token of the covenant that God had made with Israel through Moses; a token of the covenant proclaimed in the Book of the Law which Josiah, the father of the then reigning king, had found and tried to impress upon the nation. To obey the sabbath correctly, was to seek to obey the whole law of God.

But it was even more significant than that. The sabbath also commemorated the time when Yahweh broke the bonds of Egypt, and freed His people (Deut. 5:12-15). It was particularly apt for Jeremiah to bring this to the notice of the nation at that time, for not only was Jehoiakim a vassal to Egypt, not only was Judah in bondage again to that nation, but the people were greatly influenced by Egypt's godless ways (2Kings 23:35).

Jeremiah warned the king and the people that to return to the spirit of the Sabbath law would bring salvation to Judah; but to continue to disobey would bring the city and people to utter ruin.

We are not told how the haughty king reacted to this public declaration of the prophet. However, we are told that God protected him (Jer. 15:20). Though Jehoiakim was doubtless embarrassed by Jeremiah's action, he perhaps felt it better to ignore the words of the prophet for the time being.

**Jeremiah Rebukes  
the People (Jer. 18)**

At the command of Yahweh, Jeremiah enacted another parable before the people. He was told to go down to the house of the potter, and carefully consider the work being performed by the craftsman.

He did so. He thoughtfully watched the potter at work. He saw how he took up a piece of shapeless clay, and skilfully moulded it on the wheel of the machine in front of him until it took the shape of a beautiful vase.

But as Jeremiah watched, he saw that one vessel was spoiled. Something went wrong; the clay did not react to the skill of the potter. The purpose of the potter was not defeated, however, for, setting aside the spoiled vessel, he took up another piece of clay, and soon had another vessel to replace the one marred. It was easily and quickly done. And, finally, the potter achieved his object: the creation of an article of beauty which gave him real pleasure.

As Jeremiah watched, the Voice of Yahweh came to him, explaining the meaning of the parable.

The great Potter is Yahweh. Out of the clay of humanity He is moulding men and nations according to His purpose. But sometimes they do not react to His commands as He desires. Like the vessel that Jeremiah saw in the hands of the potter, they become marred, disfigured. When that happens, God sets them on one side, and uses others more pliable to His intentions. In that, He is like the potter whom Jeremiah watched, and who used other clay to produce many vessels that witnessed to his skill.

Jeremiah warned the people that God could act towards them as the potter did towards the marred vessel. They had proved disobedient and stubborn to the moulding influence of God's word and law, and if they did not mend their ways and become pliable to Him, they would be set aside as vessels unto dishonor (Jer. 18:11). He warned them that there was no hope for them if they resisted God in the way they had done. But they mocked at him. They took his very words in their mouths, and sardonically declared: "You say there is no hope! Very well, we will walk after our own desires and thoughts. If there is *no hope* we will not be any the worse by so doing" (Jer. 18:12).

"Act like that and God will absolutely desert you," replied the prophet. "He will scatter you before the enemy, and will not assist you in the day of calamity."

The people did not like such straightforward talk. They developed an intense hatred for Jeremiah. They accused him of being a false prophet, declaring that such things as he threatened would never happen to them. They began to conspire among themselves against him (v. 18). They acted towards him as later their descendants acted towards the Lord Jesus (compare John 9:22). "Let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words," they said.

To whom could the prophet turn at such a time? There was but One who could help. Hated and detested by man, he lifted up his voice in prayer to Him who reads the heart. "Give heed unto me, O Yahweh! Harken to the voice of them that contend with me!"

It can truly be said of Jeremiah, as it is said of the Lord: "They hated him without a cause" (John 15:25).

Let us also bear in mind that God is today "calling out of the Gentiles a people for His name" (Acts 15:14). If we answer that call, we

will set ourselves as clay under the moulding hand of the Divine Potter. His Word and His influence on our lives can help shape us for His kingdom if we make ourselves pliable to His will (see 2Cor. 4:7). On the other hand, if we act as Judah did by resisting His influence, we will become a vessel unfit for glory being fit only for “dishonor” (2Tim. 2:20). Judah’s fate should remind us that true happiness and joy result from allowing ourselves to be moulded according to the divine pattern.

### **Jeremiah Rebukes the Priests (Jer. 19)**

The next parable that Jeremiah enacted turned the priests completely against him. He was told to choose some elders of the priests and people as witnesses, and take them to a place in Jerusalem called *The Gate of the Potsherd*s (Jer. 19:2, RV). This city gate gave access to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, known today as Gehenna, which runs on the west and south sides of Jerusalem.

The Valley of Hinnom had a horrible reputation. It was set aside as a place sacred to the worship of Molech, the cruel, vile pagan god which Yahweh seemed to hate more than any other. It is said that this god was made of metal, which was heated to red heat by internal fires. On the outstretched arms of this red-hot god were placed children given in human sacrifice. As this was done, the loud beating of drums sounded throughout the valley to drown the shrieks of the poor children being sacrificed to this terrible worship. Thus the valley was also called Tophet, which comes from a Hebrew word signifying “drums”.

Good king Josiah had destroyed this vile, wicked worship, and had defiled the so-called “holy” place (2Kings 23:10). Since that time, it had become a dumping ground for rubbish, including the broken sherds of vessels rejected from the potters’ workshops. Hence the significance of the name of the Gate: The Gate of the Potsherds.

### **Jeremiah at the Gate of the Potsherds**

In the words and parable of the prophet, proclaimed and enacted against the priests and elders of the people whom he gathered together as witnesses, there is set forth a remarkable type of the betrayal of Jesus Christ. Notice firstly, the words that were spoken by Jeremiah are recorded in Mat. 27:9-10, though not included in his written prophecies, and with these in mind, follow through the remarkable words and incidents recorded in Jeremiah 19, in the light of history’s greatest crime: the betrayal of Christ by Judas. Jeremiah said: “Ye have filled this place with the blood of innocents” (v. 4).

Notice the following parallels. Christ declared: “Fill ye up the measure of your fathers” (Mat. 23:30-32). Judas lamented: “I have betrayed the innocent blood” (Mat. 27:4). The priests answered:

“What is that to us ?” Jeremiah said: “This place (Valley of Hinnom: Gehenna) shall be called the Valley of Slaughter.” Christ declared: “How shall ye escape the condemnation of Gehenna” (Mat. 23:33). Matthew comments: “That field (the very place where Jeremiah took his witnesses — compare Mat. 27:7 with Jer. 19:2, R.V. mg), was called The Field of Blood.” Jeremiah said: “I (Yahweh) will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place, and I will cause them to fall by the sword” (Jer. 19:7). Christ declared: “Behold your house is left unto you desolate” (Mat. 23:38-39).

Now compare Jeremiah 19:11 with Mat. 24:15 and Luke 21:24. Note how that, following this prophecy, Jeremiah taught in the temple (v. 14), incited the anger of the priests (ch. 20:1), was scourged, imprisoned, then restored (vv. 2-3) — and thus observe a like repetition in the life of the Lord.

This incident took place at the Pottery Gate (Jer. 19:2, R.V. mg). It was the potter’s field that the priests purchased with the betrayal money (Mat. 27:7), and it was there that Judas committed suicide and met his end in a manner reminiscent of the vessel broken by Jeremiah (Acts 1:18). The death of Judas appears as a foreshadowing of the suicide of the whole nation in their rejection and betrayal of the Lord. A careful consideration of Jeremiah’s wonderful book will reveal many similar foreshadowings of the Lord’s life as “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”

Purchasing an earthenware bottle, Jeremiah led the men he had selected to this valley until he came to the very site of this terrible worship. Though the idols had long since been destroyed, he knew the people were as idolatrous in heart as they had been before the days of Josiah. In heart they still worshipped such blasphemous idols as Molech, and in such murders as that of Urijah, had filled Jerusalem with “the blood of innocents” (Jer. 19:4). Sternly the prophet turned to the priests and elders he had brought with him and told them what God proposed to do because of this. “Behold, the days come, saith Yahweh, that this place shall no more be called Tophet, nor the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter!”

These were words of the grimmest foreboding. The word “Hinnom” signifies that which is overlooked. Jeremiah’s words seem to imply that the sin of Judah would not be overlooked, nor would there be drums enough to drown the shrieks of pain and dismay that would be uttered by the disobedient and God-defying people when the nation was given over to slaughter.

Jeremiah poured out the contents of the bottle\*, declaring, as he did so, that God would empty out the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem so that it would prove useless in the face of the enemy into whose

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\* This is implied by the words of Jeremiah in ch. 19:7. “Make void” signifies to “empty out” and is so rendered in the Revised Version margin.



hands the people would be surely delivered.

Then came the most dramatic action of all. He took up the bottle, and crashing it on the ground, broke it into pieces. There was no hope of repairing that bottle! Then turning to the priests and elders, the prophet sternly declared: "Even so will I (Yahweh) break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again; and they shall bury them in Tophet, till there be no place to bury" (v. 11).

In short, he predicted such complete and utter ruin for the people as only Yahweh could heal (cp. Jer. 31:28). Apart from the redemptive work of God, Judah would be completely ruined for ever.

Having shown the priests and elders by word and action what Yahweh intended them to know, Jeremiah returned to Jerusalem and, entering the temple, commenced to warn the people in similar terms.

But he had not gone very far with his discourse before he was rudely interrupted. One of the chief priests, a man by name of Pashur, whose position demanded that he maintain order in the temple, angrily called upon Jeremiah to cease, and commanded that he be scourged and flung into prison (Jer. 20:2).

This was done. Sore with the cruel beating he had received, Jeremiah lay in the uncomfortable prison all night. Next day he was again brought before Pashur. Pashur doubtless expected to see the prophet submissive and apologetic, crushed and despondent after suffering the pain and indignity of his experience, and ready to plead for mercy. If that were so, Pashur was disappointed. As the haughty chief priest in all his resplendent robes of office, stood before Jeremiah, he found the bruised and suffering servant of Yahweh courageously defiant, and heard words which decried him as an enemy of Yahweh and of the State: "Yahweh has not called your name Pashur (*The Multiplier of Liberty*), but Magor-missabib (*Terror all Around*)," declared Jeremiah. "For thus saith Yahweh, Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself, and to all your friends, and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and your eyes shall behold it! You and all your house shall go into captivity; and you will die in Babylon!"

Whatever Pashur must have thought of such a defiant speech as this, he evidently did nothing about it. Perhaps the boldness of the prophet frightened him; perhaps he could see that Yahweh was with him, and therefore it would be best for him if he let him go. In any case, the indignant prophet was allowed to go free again.

### **Jeremiah Rebukes the Nation (Jer. 22)**

Once again set at liberty, Jeremiah was called upon to do something even more courageous, an action well calculated to bring him quickly back into prison again! He was told to go

down to the very palace itself, and, outside its gates, to pronounce

publicly the divine judgment against the wicked king Jehoiakim and his family.

This involved the prophet in considerable risk. He had already been scourged and imprisoned; he knew what had happened to Urijah and others, and realised that it could be his fate as well. But he was the servant of Yahweh, and determined to do His will.

He presented himself outside the palace gates, and, in the hearing of the people, proclaimed the message of Yahweh. Publicly he warned that unless the king changed his ways the whole nation would be involved in disaster. He contrasted the vile wickedness of Jehoiakim with the goodness of Josiah his father. He decried him for wasting public money in building an elaborate palace at the expense of the people. He accused him of oppressing his own workmen, and of robbing them of their wages.

He predicted the death of Jehoiakim. He would be given the burial of an ass, "drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem." Nobody would lament his end, but rather rejoice that a tyrant had been justly punished.

Jeremiah declared that the godless example of Jehoiakim would bring his whole family to ruin. His son, Coniah, would prove worthy of his father, and would walk in the same path of evil. He, too, would be involved in calamity: "Thus saith Yahweh, 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. 22:30).

We can imagine what a sensation such an inflammatory speech as this must have caused, especially as it was publicly proclaimed outside the very gates of the king's palace.

But with every word of denunciation and criticism, Jeremiah also had a message of hope. Thus in this discourse, whilst he condemned the leaders of the nation, and spoke of the calamity which would sweep away the ungodly kings from the throne of David, he also predicted the time when "Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely," and "a king (a righteous Branch of David) shall reign and

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\* The word "childless" in Hebrew signifies "bare," or "destitute". The *Septuagint* renders the word "an ejected or expelled man," "an outcast." Coniah had seven sons (2Chron. 3:17), and through him is traced the Messiah (Mat. 1:11-12), but none of his sons sat upon the throne of David. Nebuchadnezzar deposed Coniah and appointed his uncle, Mattaniah, as king, changing his name to Zedekiah (2Kings 24). But will not Christ sit on the "throne of David in Judah," and is not he of the seed of Coniah in the light of Mat. 1:11? It is true that Christ will sit on the throne of David, but it will not then be limited to Judah. It will embrace the whole of Israel as Jeremiah himself was careful to point out in the very same prophecy (Jer. 23:5-6). His words undoubtedly mean that none of the sons of Coniah would sit upon the throne of David as it was then constituted, "ruling any more in Judah." His words were thus fulfilled to the very letter.

prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth" (Jer. 23:5-6).\*

Thoughtful people gathered around the gate of the king's palace and, listening to Jeremiah's words, must have wondered at the glory of such a prophecy. Judah and Israel joined as one! A righteous king on the throne of David dispensing judgment and justice! The nation experiencing peace, prosperity and happiness! The Passover changed so that it would not merely celebrate deliverance from Egypt, but deliverance from the north country and from all countries where Israelites were scattered!\*\*

This was the message of hope that the people heard on the momentous day when Jeremiah took up his stand outside the palace gate of the haughty and indifferent king of Judah.

On the one hand he showed that Coniah's sons would not sit on the throne of David, and at the same time, he spoke of the future glory of this throne when all tribes shall be again gathered together in one family under Christ. Jeremiah spoke of a great regathering of the people of Israel from all parts of the earth, of a great deliverance that will supersede the deliverance from Egypt under Moses, and of the restoration of the kingdom to its glory (Jer. 23:7-8).

The people thus heard not words of sedition but of true patriotism. They heard not only of the folly of their leaders, but were presented with a vision of great glory under the greatest of all leaders: the promised seed of David. This vision could help them in times of difficulty which were then about to fall upon them, and enable them to see beyond the days of gloom.

The partial return of Jews to their homeland today, 2,500 years after Jeremiah's dramatic speech outside the palace of the king, not only reveals how true are his words, but constitutes a token fulfilment indicating that the time is at hand for the final restoration of Israel under the Lord Jesus, their king. Thus Jeremiah's words live today.

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\* The Book of Jeremiah is not a continuous narrative, but records a series of independent incidents and prophecies which are not set out in chronological order. Some of these end in the middle of a chapter, and it is helpful to note where this occurs in order that the power of his words may be better appreciated. For example, the prophecy of chapter 22 continues on to chapter 23:8 where it is brought to a thrilling conclusion in the vision of the righteous Branch who is destined to ascend the very throne disgraced by the kings Jehoiakim and Coniah.

\*\* Notice the language of Jer. 23:7-8. The words "that they shall no more say" are words repeated when the Passover is celebrated. In the future age, they will be superseded by words which shall commemorate the deliverance from all the lands of dispersion when the nation is fully returned to its ancient land after the coming of Messiah.

## Chapter Four

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### CARCHEMISH: ONE OF HISTORY'S DECISIVE BATTLES

**W**HILST Jeremiah was valiantly waging a war of words against the people of Judah, the international crisis among the nations reached a climax. The Babylonians had consolidated their power, and believed the time was ripe to lay claim to the lands of Syria and Palestine.

But Egypt stood in the pathway of Babylonish ambition.

We have already traced how that Pharaoh Neco had marched north to the help of Assyria, brushing aside the tragic attempt of king Josiah to stop him at the Battle of Megiddo. Though Neco had been unable to restore Assyrian power as he desired, he had successfully resisted the efforts of the Babylonians to extend their influence south of the river Euphrates. Instead, Neco had seized all the lands of Syria and Palestine for himself, and was busy gathering in rich tribute from each one.

The aged king Nabopolassar of Babylon was unable to dislodge the Egyptians from Carchemish on the Euphrates which was the spearhead of their power.

Thus the Euphrates constituted the northern border of Egypt at that time, and all the kings south of it paid obeisance to the haughty Egyptian Pharaoh.

Four years passed by. They were not spent idly by the Babylonians. Every preparation was made for the clash with Egypt that they knew must come. At the head of the army was a brilliant military leader of whom much was destined to be known: Nebuchadnezzar, the crown prince of Babylon. In the third year of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar at the head of the army, left Babylon for Carchemish (Dan. 1:1).\*

Although the mighty Babylonian army was on the march, Neco, in Egypt, heard the news without much concern. He, too, had been preparing, and believed that he was more than a match for the Babylonians. He had defeated them in the past and would do so again! Perhaps on this occasion, however, he could make the battle decisive, and push beyond the Euphrates. Great preparations were made in Egypt, which Jeremiah graphically described with great poetic vigor:

*What is this, rising like the Nile, with tossing flood?*

*'Tis Egypt shouting, 'I will engulf the world,*

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\* The word "came" in Dan. 1:1 is the Hebrew *bow* signifying "to go". Nebuchadnezzar was sent, or went, in the third year of Jehoiakim, but took Jerusalem in the fourth year as recorded in Jeremiah 25:1.

*I rise to sweep o' its inhabitants!'  
Prance on, horses! rage away, chariots! charge on, warriors!  
The Ethiopians and the Libyans that handle the shield;  
The Lydians, that handle and bend the bow. (Jer. 46:8-9).*

As Neco reviewed his troops he thought only of success. Little did he realise that in the impending battle the purpose of the God of despised Judah would be vindicated, and that Egypt would fall.

*But this is the day of Yahweh of hosts.  
A day of vengeance on His foes;  
A day of vengeance for the sword;  
It shall be filled and made drunk with their blood;  
For Yahweh of hosts hath a sacrifice  
In the north country by the river Euphrates (v. 10).*

As Neco left Egypt, he was determined that the battle would be decisive, and decisive it was. The battle of Carchemish (as it came to be called) is recognised as a battle that altered the course of history. Egypt was destined to suffer a blow from which it would not recover until Christ returns and redeems the nation (Isa 19:24-25). For centuries before the battle of Carchemish, Egypt had played a most important part in history. It had contested world power with Assyria from the north, it had dominated Palestine, it had been feared by nations near and far. That fear was about to end, in a most unexpected defeat.

Neco knew nothing of this as, confidently and proudly, he led his large army from the land of the Nile northwards towards the Euphrates. He marched through Palestine and Syria and his progress was like a triumphal procession. Throughout the lands all the kings acknowledged him as their overlord, and made obeisance to him. Neco must have swelled with pride as he marched northward, but it was a pride that preceded one of the most disastrous falls in history.

At Carchemish he found the Babylonians massed against him. Neco did not know that the brilliant young strategist at their head had been described by Jeremiah as "Yahweh's servant" to accomplish His purpose, and that he had predicted his unqualified success.

It was early in the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign that the battle took place (Jer. 46:2). The Egyptians were overwhelmingly defeated. They fled ignominiously from the field of battle, panic-stricken as death struck at their ranks. In disorderly retreat they sought to escape the Babylonians, but were routed in another attack that almost completely annihilated the numerous army gathered together from the south. The kings of Syria and of Palestine who had previously acknowledged the might of Neco, now viewed with consternation the scattered remnants of his army, fleeing in disarray through the land.

In Judah, the people heard the jeers of Jeremiah, mocking at the defeat of this nation that had exerted such an evil influence over

Israel. He saw in this disgraceful retreat the predicted punishment of the God of Israel:

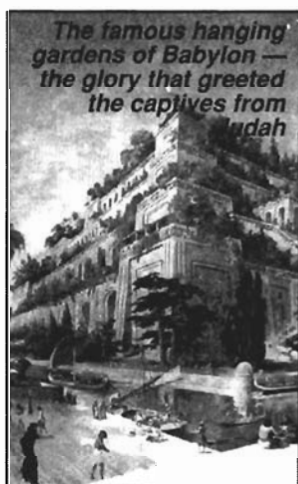
*"You may get balsam from Gilead  
My lady Egypt !  
But all your salves are vain,  
For there is no healing.  
The whole world has heard of thy shame,  
Thy cry has filled the land;  
For one soldier stumbles over another,  
And both drop to the ground" ( Jer. 46:11-12) .*

Judah had been warned of the folly of putting confidence in Egypt, and in the fleeing remnants of the fear-stricken army there was evidence of the value of such advice. What was to be the future policy of Judah? The presence of Babylonish troops soon solved that problem! Nebuchadnezzar's army poured down through the land, chasing the fleeing Egyptians, until he came to the very valley of the Nile. Then news was received that forced Nebuchadnezzar to call a halt. Back in Babylon his father had died. His presence was urgently required in the capital in order that he might secure the supreme power for himself. He had no time to invade Egypt. He demanded that the nations of Palestine and Syria acknowledge him as their Lord. Among them Jehoiakim was anxious to comply. What else could he do? He had not the courage of Josiah, nor the faith of Hezekiah, to pit his miserable forces of Judah against the massive might of Gentile power.

Jehoiakim quickly changed sides, accepting Nebuchadnezzar as overlord, and offering him his allegiance (2Kings 24:1). Certain demands were made on him. Judah had to supply to Babylon a number of hostages and, in addition, Nebuchadnezzar demanded that some of the sacred vessels of the temple should likewise be sent back home with him to grace the temple of his god.

Jehoiakim readily agreed to these demands. The desecration of the holy temple meant little to him, nor was he greatly concerned about the fate of hostages, so long as he did not suffer himself.

Among those sent to Babylon at this time were four young princes called Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (Daniel 1), together with a strange group of people who had taken refuge in Jerusalem at this time, called the Rechabites.



## Chapter Five

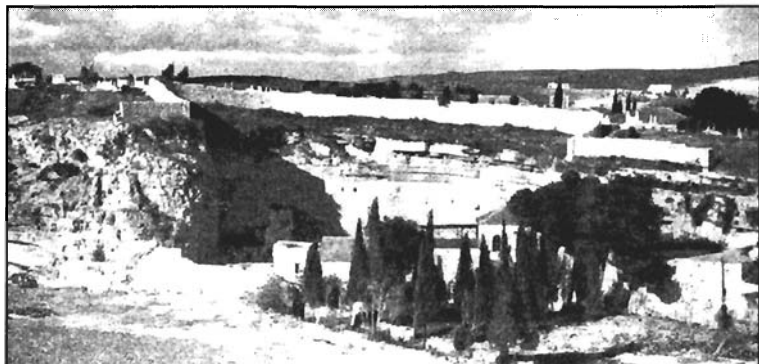
### WONDERFUL EXAMPLE OF THE RECHABITES

**A**S the army of Nebuchadnezzar swept southwards, many people who normally lived outside of the cities, took refuge behind the stout walls of those that were fortified. Among them was a group of people called Rechabites, after one of their number whose name was Rechab.

They were not true Israelites according to the flesh, but were descendants of Jethro, the Kenite father-in-law of Moses. The Kenites had joined forces with Israel when they had left Egypt for Sinai. Since then they had remained a separate group in the midst of the nation (Jud. 4:11). Jael, who destroyed Sisera, was the wife of Heber, a descendant of Jethro (Jud. 5:23-27). Jehonadab, the son of Rechab, who showed such zeal for Yahweh in the days of Jehu, was likewise of their number (2Kings 10:15). The Bible tells how this group of Gentiles who had embraced the hope of Israel, became identified with the royal tribe of Judah (1Chron. 2:55), and remained faithful to their calling.

Jehonadab, in particular, ruled them with a rod of iron. He insisted upon them following certain precepts designed to remind them constantly of their high calling.

He lived at a time of great apostasy which he realised must end in Israel being driven from the land. He recognised that there was to be “no continuing city” in the kingdom as it was then constituted, and to remind his followers of this, he insisted that they live as pilgrims in



Outside the northern wall of Jerusalem and near Herod's Gate is an ancient natural cave seen under the rocky escarpment in this photograph. According to tradition it was here that Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations.

the land, abstain from the settled pursuit of agriculture and, like the priests in the holy place, or Israelites under the Nazarite vow, refuse to partake of wine (Lev. 10:9).

These Gentiles were thus more truly Israelitish than the people of Judah. They were a standing reproach to the more worldly-minded Jews. They looked to the time when the kingdom would be established in perpetuity. They refused wine because they considered themselves to be like the priests, a people dedicated to the will of God.

The invasion of the Babylonians had forced them to seek refuge in Jerusalem, and their presence in the city was used by Yahweh to enforce a lesson on the people, as well as to encourage the Rechabites themselves.

### **Jeremiah Visits the Rechabites (Jer. 35)**

Thus to impress upon Judah the full extent of their wickedness, Jeremiah was commanded by God to visit the company of Rechabites that had taken refuge in Jerusalem and bring them before the elders of Judah, and offer them wine to drink. The Rechabites were Gentiles who had embraced the Hope of Israel, and who followed the commandment of one of their leaders to abstain from wine.

Accordingly, Jeremiah approached Jaazaniah, the leader of the Rechabites, and induced him to bring his followers to the temple, to the chamber of the sons of Hanan, the son of Igdaliah, who was of the prophetic order. This chamber was close by where the Sanhedrin met, and the rooms where dwelt the "Keeper of the Threshold" of the temple, whose duty was to guard it against pollution (Jer. 35:4).

The Rechabites were therefore brought into the presence of the leaders of the land: the prophets, princes and priests.

When all was ready, Jeremiah took pots full of wine and set them before the Rechabites. "Drink this wine," he invited them.

But they refused. "We will not drink wine," they answered, "because Jonadab, the son of Rechab our father, commanded us, saying, 'Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever; neither shall you build houses, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyards, nor have any; but all your days you will dwell in tents; that you may live many days in the land where ye be strangers'. We have obeyed the voice of Jonadab" (Jer. 35:6-7).

The attitude of obedience shown by the Rechabites was in great contrast to the state of disobedience manifested by the people of Judah. Jeremiah impressed this upon the leaders gathered together to witness his action, by pointing out how that in five directions these Gentiles had proved themselves more righteous than Israelites:

1. They had hearkened to an earthly father of limited wisdom; the men of Judah had rejected the counsel of a heavenly Father of infinite wisdom.



2. Jonadab was dead, and thus ignorant of the obedience, or otherwise, of his descendants — they could not pain him by their disobedience; but Yahweh lived, and could see the wickedness of His sons.
3. The Rechabites had no one personally sent from their leader to remind them of their responsibilities; but Yahweh had constantly sent messengers to His people.
4. Jonadab could neither reward nor punish his followers; but Yahweh could do both.
5. Jonadab had brought severe restrictions on his followers which demanded great sacrifices, yet they were obeyed; Yahweh did not do this to His people, but they disobeyed the laws He gave them.

So Jeremiah warned the leaders of Judah: “Receive instruction from these things. They obey their father; you do not obey your Father. Therefore, God will punish Judah, the nation will be scattered and destroyed.”

Turning to the Rechabites, the prophet declared: “Because you have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father... Therefore thus saith Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel: Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not lack a man to stand before Me for ever.”

This has proved true in two senses: in a natural way and a spiritual way. History has proved that the Rechabites have remained separate down through the ages, and “tribes of spiritual Rechabites” are in existence today, constituting those who worship Yahweh “in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:23).

But the true fulfilment awaits the future. To “stand before me” (Jer. 35:19) implies attendance upon royalty. When the Prince, the Lord Jesus, is in the earth again, Jonadab and his followers will be brought from the grave and clothed upon with immortality. They will be among the attendants of the Lord Jesus. And though, in the past, they lived in the land as strangers and Gentiles, it will be said of them that they have been truly “born in Zion” (Psa. 87:5-6). It will be in that day that the promise of Jonadab to his followers will be fulfilled, and they will “live many days in the land where they were strangers” (Jer. 35:7).

Meanwhile, some of their number were apparently included among the hostages sent to Babylon at this time. The Greek Old Testament (*The Septuagint*) has a superscription to the 71st Psalm which states that this Psalm was “sung by the sons of Jonadab, among the first that were taken captive.”

But though taken captive with Daniel and others, it was, as Jeremiah later showed, “for their good” (Jer. 24:6). They had an opportunity to testify to the faith in the land of their captivity, and this shall stand them good stead in the Age to Come.

## Chapter Six

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### JEHOIAKIM BURNS THE BIBLE

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**T**HE shocking wickedness of Jehoiakim came to a climax in a dramatic incident recorded in Jeremiah 36, by which the foolish king tried to show his contempt for Yahweh. It took place in the fourth year of his reign, after the city had been captured by Nebuchadnezzar, and some of its people taken into captivity (v. 1).

This partial fulfilment of Jeremiah's warnings should have caused any thoughtful Israelite to take heed to his ways. It was followed by an act of great mercy on the part of Yahweh by which the lesson was brought home more directly to the people.

He instructed Jeremiah to record his prophecies in a book, a scroll probably made out of animal skins, and read them before a gathering of the people as a last, final appeal. "It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and sin," declared Yahweh.

These words must have been encouraging to the prophet, for they showed that there was some hope for the nation he loved so dearly.

That hope was to be destroyed by the stupid action of the king.

Meanwhile, Jeremiah called for the help of his friend Baruch. Baruch was a scribe, and thus skilled in writing. The two friends settled down to the work before them. Jeremiah repeated all the prophecies he had uttered,\* and Baruch carefully wrote them in a book.

But as the work proceeded, Baruch became depressed. For the first time, perhaps, the full enormity of Judah's sin came home to him as he saw before him, in the words of the book he had written under instruction from Jeremiah, all that the people had done, and what God threatened against them.

He put down his pen with a troubled face, and sighed for the iniquity of the people. He realised that the words he had written proclaimed the destruction of the nation.

But Jeremiah had words of encouragement for him. It was true that terrible punishments would fall upon the guilty nation, and that it would be completely broken up if it continued in the paths of folly. But whatever the fate of the nation, or of "all flesh" against which warnings were proclaimed, men like Baruch would be saved.

To the faithful scribe, Jeremiah uttered the promise of God: "Thy

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\* How was the prophet able to recall all the prophecies he had uttered over the 22 years of his ministry? The answer is found in John 14:26. The Holy Spirit enabled him to bring them all again to his remembrance.

life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places wither thou goest" (Jer. 45:5).\*

Yahweh is not unjust to destroy the righteous with the wicked! Having written the book, the troubled Baruch next learned that he also had to publicly read it to the people. "I am shut up",\*\* declared Jeremiah. "I cannot go into the House of Yahweh. Therefore you go and read what you have written from my mouth in the ears of the people, upon the fasting day when they gather from all the cities of Judah" (Jer. 36:5-6).

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\* Jer. 45 follows in sequence the 36th chapter (see v. 1), but it is placed later in the Biblical record because the following chapters record the additional words given the prophet at that time. See Jer. 36:32.

\*\* We are not exactly sure what Jeremiah meant by this. He was not imprisoned at the time as is shown by the instructions of the princes that he should hide himself. There must have been another cause — sickness, legal defilement, or some other reason — that prevented him going into the temple at that time.

### **Mr. Phillips answers a Question about Jehoiakim**

In searching through the Bible to find difficulties with which to challenge his father, Peter found that the name of Jehoiakim was omitted from the genealogy of the Lord Jesus given in Matthew 1. He asked his father why this should be so, and Mr. Phillips replied:

"Matthew does not undertake to give a complete list of all the rulers who reigned. For example, four rulers are excluded between Joram and Uzziah in v. 8, and the reason for this we discussed at the time (see *Story of the Bible*, page 25). We saw that they were not really of the line of David, but were treated as of the house of Ahab.

"Notice that Matthew divides the genealogy into three sections of fourteen rulers each (v. 17). The **first group** includes those who came before the kingdom was set up; the second to those who ruled during the kingdom; the third to those who came when the kingdom was in dispersion. In the second group, Athaliah, Ahaziah, Joash and Amaziah were excluded, for they are treated as being linked with the house of Ahab, as I mentioned before (2Kgs. 8:27). Jehoiakim is also excluded from this **second group** because the independence of the kingdom came to an end with the defeat of Josiah at Megiddo before his time. He never received mention in the **third group** because he never went into exile. He therefore could not be included in the three divisions into which Matthew set the genealogy of Christ, and is therefore rightly excluded. He never received personal mention because of his great apostasy, and that 'which was found in him' showed that he was not truly of the seed of David in heart" (2Chron. 36:8).

This “fasting day” had been appointed for the next year (v. 9). It probably commemorated the overthrow of the city by Nebuchadnezzar that had taken place the year before.

**Baruch Publicly  
Reads the Book**

Knowing full well that his action would bring down upon his head the wrath of the people, but full of courage and faith, Baruch did as he was told. He took up his stand in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan, which overlooked the court of the temple, and, probably from a window or balcony, he read the prophecies of Jeremiah to the people gathered below.

They had come together to solemnly lament the evil that had fallen upon the city and nation, and in the words read to them by Baruch, they heard the real cause of all their misery. They heard again the bitter lament of Jeremiah and the accusations he thundered against them; they were again reminded that even greater punishments were threatened against them.

Among those who heard this reading was Michaiah, the son of Gemariah. Filled with concern at the seriousness of the charges that Jeremiah had laid against the nation, he reported the matter to the assembly of the princes. They desired to hear what Jeremiah had to say, and demanded that Baruch come and read the book to them.

He did so. Quietly the princes listened to the long list of sins charged against the nation, of the dire punishment threatened against it — signs of which were already in evidence around them, and gradually they realised the importance and seriousness of the words read to them.

They became afraid. “Let us tell the king of these words,” they declared among themselves. Turning to Baruch, they enquired how he had come to record the prophecies.

“Jeremiah spoke them unto me, and I wrote them in this scroll,” he replied. “Go, hide, both you and Jeremiah, whilst we take this scroll to the king,” the princes commanded. They well knew what type of man Jehoiakim was, and realised that the lives of the prophet and his scribe would be in dire danger once the king knew the contents of the scroll.

**Jehoiakim  
Contemptuously  
Burns the Scroll**

It was winter time in Jerusalem, towards the latter end of November or early December, and the king was seated in the Winter House of the luxurious palace he had built for himself. In front of him there was a fire burning, and on a table before him were the implements for writing, including the knife of the scribe, used in those days for cutting paper.

Solemnly the princes made their way into the presence of the king,

and explained their mission. Jehudi, a prominent member among them, commenced to read the scroll of Jeremiah. He read the sacred words of Yahweh, proclaimed by the prophet since the days of Josiah. He read of the shocking sins of the people, of the threatened judgments upon a guilty nation, of pleas for reform that were rejected, of warnings of terrible punishments that were ignored, of tearful exhortations by which the prophet had sought to cause the people to return to ways of sanity and righteousness.

These words had made even the hardened princes fearful. But they meant nothing to the luxury-loving, God-defying, self-centred king. In his selfish conceit he thought up a dramatic action to show his princes they should not heed such words. If they were frightened, he was not! Taking up the scribe's knife on the table before him, he hacked at the scroll in the hands of Jehudi, and threw the pieces in the fire.

"Do not heed these words," he declared. "The king of Babylon shall not come and destroy this land" (Jer. 36:29).

A few of the princes looked on in dismay and tried to save the burning scroll. To their credit, Elnathan (the king's father-in-law), Delaiah, and Gemariah dared the king's displeasure by protesting at his insulting action towards the great King of the Heavens.

But most of the princes were unconcerned. In fact, they were comforted by the bold action of the king. They found little pleasure in the words of Jeremiah that Baruch had read to them. The king's impious action, his bold, contemptuous words, emboldened them, and made them feel a little ashamed of their previous fear.

Thus the ungodly example of the king caused ungodliness to grow in his princes. They no longer cared about the fate of Jeremiah and Baruch. The king issued a command that the two faithful men should be executed for daring to proclaim such things, and some of the very princes who previously had warned them to hide, now hurried away to find them and drag them before the king.

But they could not be found. Yahweh still had a work for them to do, and hid them from their enemies.

Through its king, the nation had contemptuously rejected the mercy of Yahweh and His offer of forgiveness, and now but one thing remained: the execution of the threatened punishment.

Jehoiakim had not only rejected the words of Jeremiah, but also the wise sayings of his predecessor, Solomon. He could have found faithfully recorded in the Book of Proverbs the fate of such a defiant attitude as he had adopted:

"When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you; then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; you shall seek Me early, but shall not find Me; for that you hated knowledge, and did not choose



*Jeremiah and Baruch restore the lost scrolls of the Law*

the fear of Yahweh: you would none of My counsel; you despised all My reproof" (Prov. 1:27-30). "Thou shalt mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof" (ch. 5:12). "Whoso despiseth the Word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded" (ch. 13:13). "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of Yahweh, that shall stand" (ch. 19:21). "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against Yahweh" (ch. 21:30). "He, that being often

reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (ch. 29:1).

The foolish, egotistical king, anxious to impress his fawning princes, contemptuous of the love of God or the true welfare of his people, burnt the Bible, and thus showed that he "despised knowledge." We likewise "despise knowledge" when we leave the Bible unread; when we forsake the mercy of Yahweh by failing to do those things He requires of us. Christ laid down three principles as the fundamentals of acceptable service leading to life eternal: (1) Belief of the Gospel; (2) Baptism into the Name; (3) Continued obedience of his precepts (Mark 16:16; Mat. 28:20).

Let us heed these words, and solemnly revere God's Holy Book, carefully treasuring its message in our hearts, and striving to obey His precepts from day to day. We shall find the way to please Him if we seek Him through His Son, the Lord Jesus (Phil. 4:13).

**The Scroll Rewritten** Jehoiakim had burnt the book, but the words still remained. He had not destroyed God when he thrust the book from him. All that he had done was to add to the work of the prophet and his scribe. Another scroll was obtained and, in their hiding place, Jeremiah and his faithful friend replaced

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\* The word "sit" is from the Hebrew *yashab* signifying "to dwell", "to remain at length". Jehoiakim's son Jeconiah came to the throne, but was removed in three months in fulfilment of Jeremiah's words.

the burnt portion of the Bible.

We can take up those very words ourselves when we open the Bible at the Book of Jeremiah. Is it not significant, that the prophet's words still *LIVE*, though the foolish king has been *DEAD* these many years, and the very book he burnt, records the full measure of his own folly and fate!

Additional words were written on the new scroll. Among them was the following terrible threat: "Thus saith Yahweh 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 (the princes who sought Jeremiah's life) for their iniquity, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah I will bring all the evil that I have pronounced against them" (Jer. 36:30-31). These words were fulfilled to the very letter shortly afterwards.

**The Miserable Death of Jehoiakim** For three years Jehoiakim continued to pay the tribute demanded by Nebuchadnezzar (2Kings 24:1) and then events occurred which led him to refuse to continue the heavy payments.

Nebuchadnezzar led an army down to Egypt with the intention of invading the country. In desperation the Egyptians rallied around their king, and fought off the Babylonians, so completely defeating them that Nebuchadnezzar had to retire back home in order to recover and re-equip his forces.\*

Jehoiakim joyfully heard the news. It seemed to him as though the Babylonian power was on the wane. As he learned how the crestfallen and defeated Chaldean troops had to retreat back to Babylon, he promptly refused to pay them any further tribute.

This action became the means of his own undoing, and led to the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecies against him.

**Jerusalem Again Besieged** At first, Nebuchadnezzar was content to punish Jehoiakim by sending against him small bands of soldiers recruited from the other nations round about Judah, and strengthened by some of his own troops from Chaldea. But Judah's revolt, being followed by other nations, demanded more decisive action on the part of Nebuchadnezzar if he were to retain his control of Palestine.

From Josephus' history of the times, we learn that Ithobal, the king of Tyre, also rebelled about this time, and Nebuchadnezzar

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\* We do not read of this in the Bible, but in contemporary history. The Bible merely says that he rebelled after three years servitude (2Kings 24:1), but contemporary history gives us details which indicate the causes which led him to rebel.

invaded Syria at the head of a large army. Tyre and Jerusalem were both besieged at the same time, but whilst Tyre resisted with great obstinacy, Jerusalem was soon overthrown.

The haughty, godless Jehoiakim now found himself at the mercy of the Babylonians. He was placed in fetters, and dragged before Nebuchadnezzar himself. As Jehoiakim humbly bowed before his mighty conqueror, Nebuchadnezzar was disposed to spare his life and take him to Babylon (2Chron. 36:6). For a moment, it seemed as if Jeremiah's prophecy would not be fulfilled (Jer. 22:18-19). But at the last moment Nebuchadnezzar changed his mind. He ordered him to be executed, and given the "burial of an ass." His dead body was cast outside the city of Jerusalem to remain day and night for some time in full view of the people. Nebuchadnezzar intended it as a warning to the people of the fate of those who dare act treacherously towards Babylon. But the more thoughtful in Judah, remembering the words of Jeremiah, and the godless action of the king, were warned that this is the fate of those who reject the counsel of Yahweh. Later Jehoiakim's remains were gathered and buried out of sight.

Terrible miseries were thus experienced by the people because of their foolish attitude towards the things of God. Their idolatry, their contempt of Yahweh's prophets, the murders committed against such righteous men as Urijah were receiving their just deserts in the evils the nation now experienced.

As a further lesson, Nebuchadnezzar took some 3,023 Jews (or perhaps families of Jews) as captives to Babylon (Jer. 52:28). Gradually the nation was breaking up, as the weeping Jeremiah could see.

#### **REMARKABLE LINK BETWEEN JEREMIAH AND DANIEL**

In the very year (perhaps the very time) when Jehoiakim burnt the Bible in contempt of Yahweh, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the supremacy of the God of Israel.

This is shown by a comparison of the dates given.

The first year of Nebuchadnezzar was the 4th of Jehoiakim (Jer. 25:1). Therefore the 5th of Jehoiakim (when he burnt the Bible; see Jer. 36:9) was the 2nd of Nebuchadnezzar when the Gentile king had his dream of the great emblematic image, and learned of the purpose of God throughout the ages leading to the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth (Dan. 2:1, 44). This led the king to exclaim: "Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a Revealer of secrets" (v. 47). It is significant and very dramatic that at the very time when a king on David's throne was rejecting the counsel of Yahweh, a king on a Gentile throne was accepting it and testifying to its truth. There are several such interesting and significant links in the combined work of the three prophets: Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.



## Chapter Seven

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### JEHOIACHIN: A DESPISED AND BROKEN IDOL

**C**ONIAH was 18 years of age when his father was miserably executed by Nebuchadnezzar. He was permitted to ascend the throne, but only reigned for a little over three months in Jerusalem. He was then taken to Babylon where he lived for many years, to be finally treated with great kindness by the son of Nebuchadnezzar. His mother appears to have been a very dominant woman.

She was the daughter of the powerful noble, Elnathan, whom Jehoiakim employed on various missions. Jeremiah refers to the queen-mother on several occasions (Jer. 13:18; 29:2, etc).

Mr. Phillips discussed the story of Jehoiachin with his family one evening after they had all done a Bible reading, with the following comments:

#### **Jeremiah Takes A Long Journey (Jeremiah 13)**

“This is a very dramatic story,” remarked Mr. Phillips enthusiastically after the family had finished reading Jeremiah 13. “From the statement of v. 18, it seems obvious that it

took place in the reign of Jehoiachin, and in order to understand it better, we need to learn something about the background of the times.

“For several years Judah had been troubled with small armies invading its territory and bringing misery on the people. King Jehoiakim had proved a traitor both to God and to man. In spite of the warning of the prophet Jeremiah, he had gone his headstrong way, until disaster caught up with him. Nebuchadnezzar had invaded the land, besieged Jerusalem, slain the king, and had taken a large number of people into captivity.

“But he allowed Coniah, the eighteen year old son of Jehoiakim to remain in control, together with the Queen mother.

“The name Coniah means *Establish*, but Nebuchadnezzar changed it to Jehoiachin which means, *Yahweh will establish*.

“The people hoped that this ideal would prove true for the nation, but shortly after Nebuchadnezzar had left the city, Jeremiah showed that it would be otherwise by dramatically announcing that he, himself, like the Jewish captives, would soon have to take a long, lonely journey. It was a journey he wanted to avoid, but God required him to undertake it. But before this, Yahweh had commanded him to wear a linen girdle and to keep on wearing it even if it became soiled. He was not to wash it on any account. Through this means God desired to

teach the people an important lesson.”

“What was the lesson?” asked Ann who was taking notes of her father’s comments.

“Linen is used in the Bible as a symbol of righteousness, and a girdle is a symbol of truth,” explained Mr. Phillips (see Rev. 19:8; Eph. 6:14). “Thus the linen girdle spoke of righteousness based on truth. It was an ornament used by the priests of Israel (Exod. 28:39; Lev. 16:4), and therefore became a fit emblem for the nation as a whole, for it was likened to ‘a kingdom of priests’ (Exod. 19:5-6; Deut. 7:6-8). Yahweh had given Israel important laws to keep, and if they were properly kept, then the nation would be as an ornament of righteousness reflecting the glory of Yahweh to the whole world (Deut. 4:6; 28:9).”

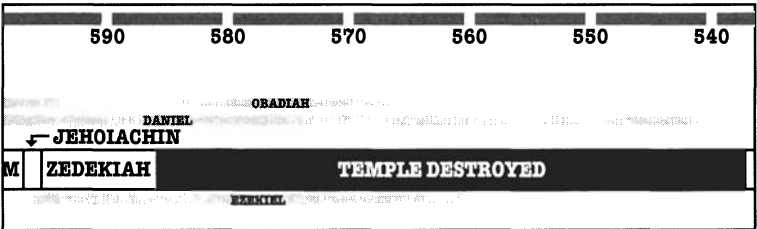
“Are you sure that is the right explanation?” asked Peter who tends to be a little critical.

“Yes, for in verse 11, Jeremiah explained its meaning. He declared: ‘As the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto Me the whole house of Israel and of Judah, saith Yahweh; that they might be unto Me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory’.”

“In other words,” suggested Graeham, “God called Israel out of Egypt that they might reflect to His glory.”

“That is correct,” replied Mr. Phillips, “and it is a most important lesson to learn. Some think that God called Israel out of Egypt to save them. Whilst that is true, it is only half the story. They had first of all to be made worth saving. That was the purpose of the Law with all its instructions in righteousness. If Israel had obeyed those precepts from the heart, they would have reflected to the glory of their Creator, and been worth saving. Israel thus becomes an object lesson for us. For if God refused to save His people unless they reflected His glory, He will likewise refuse to save us if we do not respond to His will. Yahweh chose the people, guided them, educated them, revealed His will to them, in order that they might reflect His glory, and that they might be equipped to pass on to others the message of His plan. If they had obeyed Him, they would have been like the gleaming white girdle — an ornament of grace.

“But notice that Jeremiah adds the words: ‘they would not hear.’



And because they would not hear, they became like the dirty, soiled girdle he was wearing; a disgrace to the wearer! Thus, before Jeremiah took his long journey, he walked around Jerusalem with the filthy girdle on his loins, explaining to all who were interested the meaning of his action.

“He then commenced the journey commanded by Yahweh. He had been told to take the girdle to the River Euphrates, and hide it in a hole of the rock. This involved a long, tiring journey of about 350 miles (563 km), and it symbolised the journey into captivity which some of the Jews had already taken, and others were yet destined to take.

“Later he was told to recover the girdle. Again, Jeremiah made the difficult journey. He found the girdle alright, but it was now completely marred, and good for nothing. ‘Yahweh is going to mar your pride like this girdle is marred,’ declared the prophet as he displayed the filthy, rotten garment to the people.

“He warned the people that their folly would result in terrible trouble coming upon Judah. They were acting as though befogged with drink, and he told them that they would be left to stagger around until they were completely broken as a nation. He pleaded with them: ‘Be not proud; Give glory to Yahweh before He causes darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and whilst you look for light, He turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness’.

“He told the young king and his queen-mother not to make the mistake of placing confidence in help from Egypt: ‘Humble yourselves, for you will be deposed’, he declared. ‘Egypt will not help you. Judah shall go into captivity at the hands of the northern power’ (Jer. 13:18-19).\*

### **Nebuchadnezzar Attacks Jehoiachin**

“Was Judah seeking the aid of Egypt?” asked Graeham as his father paused. “The words of Jeremiah 13:18 suggest that it was,” replied his father. “That is possibly the cause of the

next move in the drama of the times, for a little over three months after the king came to the throne, the tramp of Babylonish soldiers was again heard, and people saw the foreign army marching towards the capital.”

“Where do we read that?” interrupted Peter.

“We must now turn from Jer. 13 to 2Kings 24 or 2Chron. 36 in order to trace the events of the times. In 2Kings 24:10-12 we learn that Jehoiachin quickly gave way to Nebuchadnezzar: ‘The king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he and his mother.’ Whether

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\* Mr. Phillips has paraphrased Jer. 13 :18-19. It implies what he has said, though it does not directly state it.

they liked it or not, they were compelled to ‘humble themselves,’ as Jeremiah had predicted.

“On this occasion, Nebuchadnezzar treated Judah with much more severity than he had done three months before. A wholesale deportation of some 10,000 of the elite of the nation were taken back to Babylon (2Kings 24:14). All the military leaders, most of the princes, many of the priests, great numbers of skilled workmen were included. They left, as we read, only ‘the poorest sort of people in the land’.

“Nebuchadnezzar also violated the temple and the palace, taking therefrom all the vessels of gold to grace his temple in Babylon.

“But he did not completely destroy the nation. He gave it one last chance. Though Jehoiachin was taken captive to Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar set over Judah another king whom he called Zedekiah.”

“Did Jeremiah go into captivity?” asked Joan.

“No, he remained in the city. Nevertheless some very prominent men of the Bible went into captivity at this time. Among them were Ezekiel the prophet, and Mordecai the uncle of Esther.”

“Where do we learn that?” asked Peter.

“In Ezekiel 1:2 and Esther 2:6.”

“Was Jehoiachin slain?”, asked Ann as she busily continued with her notes.

“No, he was taken to Babylon with his mother, and there flung into prison. Some 37 years later, however, the son of Nebuchadnezzar took pity on him, and honored him in Babylon (2Kings 25:27-30). Meanwhile Jehoiachin had married, and among his grandchildren was a son destined to come to great prominence in leading the people back from captivity. His name was Zerubbabel (1 Chron. 3:17-19; Hag. 1:1).”

### **The Poorest Sort of People Remain**

“Did Jeremiah have any other adventures during the reign of Jehoiachin?” asked Ann.

“Not that we know of,” replied her Father. “but he had a vision which helps us to understand some of the circumstances of his day a little better.”

“What was that?”

“It is recorded in his 24th chapter. He saw a vision of two baskets of figs. One basket contained good figs, but the other basket contained figs that were worthless. He was told that the basket of good figs represented those Jews that were taken into captivity, for they had been taken away for their own good. On the other hand, the basket of bad figs represented the Jews who remained in the land. God had allowed them to stay there because they were deserving of more punishment. Jeremiah was told that both the nation and its king were destined for greater evils to come.”

“Is that what is meant by the statement of 2Kings 24:14, that

‘none remained, save the poorest sort of people of the land’?” asked Graeham.

“Yes, they were poor in every sense; not only in material riches, but in spiritual matters also. Yet they thought that they were favored by God in being left to dwell in the land. They vainly imagined that those taken into captivity had been justly dealt with by God because of their sins. This feeling was even shared by some of those who had been taken into captivity, and the major part of Ezekiel’s work during the early years of his ministry was to destroy this belief among the people in exile.

“This prophecy, enacted by Jeremiah, showed that the nation was doomed, and that shortly even greater punishments would fall upon it.”



*The sad state of Jerusalem in desolation*

## Chapter Eight

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### ZEDEKIAH: BREAKER OF COVENANTS

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**T**HE tragedy of the kingdom of God in the past came to its climax in the reign of this weak, vacillating king. Zedekiah had no policy, and therefore lacked the indispensable qualifications for true leadership. He was easily persuaded to rebel against the Chaldeans (2Kings 25), and yet under Jeremiah's advice he was almost persuaded to surrender the city to them. Unfortunately Zedekiah did not follow the prophet's advice, for "fear of the Jews" prevented him (see Jer. 21:9-10; 38:18-19).

His troubled reign ended in tragedy.

Zedekiah cowardly attempted to escape from the disaster Jeremiah predicted, but was overtaken and brought before Nebuchadnezzar, who slew the captive king's children before his eyes, then blinded the king himself and sent him in chains to Babylon.

Zedekiah's reign was a period of great activity for Jeremiah. He knew that his time was limited, and therefore strove all the more to win over a few of his people to righteousness, and save them for the kingdom of the future.

Thus, the history of this period looms large in his writings. There are almost fifty references to Zedekiah in the Book of Jeremiah, and they reveal many dramatic incidents as the prophet opposed the foolish policy of the king and the people.

Zedekiah was the third of Josiah's sons to become king. His original name was Mattaniah (*Gift of Yahweh*), but Nebuchadnezzar renamed him Zedekiah (*Righteousness of Yahweh*). He probably thought that by so renaming him, the king would remain true to the oath of allegiance that he had sworn to Babylon.

There is a drama about the name of Zedekiah. It is compounded of two words: *Zedek* and *Yah*, and signifies YAHWEH IS RIGHTEOUS. He was the last king to sit upon the throne of David, and it seems that Jeremiah made a play on his name as he described the glory of the *next* king to sit upon this throne, giving him (Christ) a similar name:

"Behold the days come, saith Yahweh, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby He shall be called, YAHWEH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer. 23:5-6).

The "Zedekiah" of the future will provide a great contrast to the Zedekiah of the past!

Meanwhile, the events connected with the Zedekiah of the past are

## The Nation Zedekiah Ruled

The temple and the palace had been robbed of their treasures; little of true glory remained. And the king himself was but a vassal to the haughty Nebuchadnezzar, who exercised dominance over his subject kingdoms and delighted to be known as a “King of kings” (Dan. 2:37).

Having thus humiliated Zedekiah and extracted this promise from him, Nebuchadnezzar left him to his small, poverty-stricken nation.

Shortly after he ascended the throne, Zedekiah had cause to send to Babylon two nobles on affairs of State (Jer. 29:2-3). It pro-

*The sad picture of some of the Jews being dragged into exile in the days of Zedekiah.*



children," he advised them, for there was to be no early return (v. 5-7). This was contrary to the advice that the people had received from false prophets at home and abroad, for they were busy telling them that they would soon be restored to their land.

Jeremiah denounced such false teachers: "Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed," he wrote.

They were letting their self-delusions run away with them, and dreaming of restoration, repeating to one another as though Yahweh was behind these dreams. Jeremiah told them that seventy years would pass away before there would be a return, and at the end of that time, Yahweh would visit them and restore them to their own land again. In his letter, he included words received directly from Yahweh, which are among the most beautiful found in the Bible:

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith Yahweh. Thoughts of peace, and not of evil to *make your latter end an object of hope*.\* Then shall ye call upon Me, and ye shall go and pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith Yahweh; and I will turn away your captivity..." (vv. 11-14).

What beautiful, tender words are these! They breathe the very spirit of divine love. Notwithstanding all the insults Yahweh had suffered from the people, His heart was toward them; He was anxious to help them; He felt their sufferings (Isa. 63:9), and hated the thought of them being oppressed. Like a father to his children, He would have delighted to bring about their restoration, but in His wisdom He knew that they must learn through painful discipline to forsake their evil ways. He was prepared to overlook their wickedness, their base ingratitude, their foolish thoughtlessness, if they would but turn to Him with their hearts, and not merely with empty words upon their lips. Let us also remember that this is the character of God, and learn to approach Him with every confidence.

In his letter, Jeremiah warned that greater troubles were about to fall on Jerusalem, and that Zedekiah, together with the remnant of the people, would go into captivity. They would become like the vile figs he had seen in his vision (Jer. 29:17; Jer. 24).

## **Second Letter to Babylon**

Many of the Jews in exile must have been comforted by the letter of Jeremiah, but he also had enemies amongst them. To them the message of the letter was depressing. They did not want to believe that they must remain in Babylon for so long. They replied to Jeremiah, saying that they had prophets in Babylon who predicted that there

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\* See margin. These words can thus be rendered according to the Hebrew text.



would be an early return; that Babylon was about to fall. Among these prophets were two notable men named Ahab and Zedekiah.

Jeremiah vigorously replied to this letter. He warned the people against the wicked teaching and false comfort that these so-called prophets were providing. He declared that they would be delivered into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar who would burn them to death.\*

On this occasion, Shemaiah the Dreamer (Jer. 29:24; margin), one of those against whom Jeremiah had warned, replied. He wrote to Zephaniah the priest in Jerusalem complaining against the letters of Jeremiah, declaring that he must be mad to write in such a way (v. 26).\*\* He called upon Zephaniah to throw Jeremiah into prison and restrain him with fetters.

### **Jeremiah Warns Shemaiah**

Jeremiah wrote again to Babylon, this time warning the people not to heed Shemaiah. “He is causing you to trust in a lie,” he

wrote. As for Shemaiah who was predicting an early return, he would not only himself die in exile, but none of his posterity would see the promised good that Yahweh had reserved for many of the exiles, for “he hath taught rebellion against Yahweh” (v. 32).

This ended Jeremiah’s correspondence with the exiles in Babylon as far as we are aware. But it was the prelude to a wonderful prophecy of ultimate restoration of Israel back to the land at the second coming of Christ, which is contained in Jeremiah chs. 30, 31. This prophecy gives a vision of hope out of trouble, of rejoicing out of sorrow, of strength manifested out of weakness. It shows how the nation will be re-established in its greatness, how the temple will be built in glory, how Jerusalem will be restored as the seat of universal power.

Jeremiah received this vision whilst he was asleep, and he records: “Upon this I awakened, and beheld; and my sleep was sweet unto me” (Jer. 31:26).

The false dreamers of Babylon were speaking of a mere return to former conditions; Jeremiah saw the glorious vision of a true restoration beyond the present, when the glory and power of David and Solomon’s times will be eclipsed by that of Messiah.

No wonder his sleep was sweet unto him in spite of all his troubles.

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\* Cp Jer. 29:22 with Daniel 3 where the faithful Jews “quenched the violence of fire” by their faith (Heb. 11:34). Apparently Ahab and Zedekiah were likewise thrown into a fiery furnace, but did not escape.

\*\* Thus again foreshadowing the experiences of Christ — see John 7:20, 10:20, 39.

**Zedekiah Influenced by False Prophets** Four years went by. The terrible shock of the invasion and captivity lessened in the minds of the people. They began to congratulate themselves that they had not been so affected, and to cast about for a reason for this favor. False prophets seized upon the general attitude by spreading the idea that those left in the land, those “poorest sort of people” were really the favored of God, whilst those who had been taken away in exile had been justly punished for their misdeeds (Ezek. 11:15).

The deadly dope of this false teaching had the effect of blinding the people left in the land to their own disloyal attitude to Yahweh.

Zedekiah was influenced by such smooth teaching. His pride was also fed when ambassadors came to his capital from the surrounding nations. Stimulated by Egyptian intrigue, the smaller nations were plotting to oppose Babylon. Flattered by such attention, the weak king was disposed to forget the oath he had so easily entered into with Nebuchadnezzar, and prepared to join this new anti-Chaldean coalition.

But he was arrested in so doing, by a remarkable action performed by Jeremiah the prophet.

**Jeremiah's Yoke (Jer. 27, 28)** Jeremiah had often angered the people by his words, and puzzled them by his actions. On several occasions he had impersonated the prophecies he proclaimed. He did so on this occasion. As the king was contemplating joining the league against Babylon, Jeremiah walked in the streets of Jerusalem wearing wooden yokes around his neck. To explain what this meant, he sent a yoke to each of the ambassadors who had come to Jerusalem with the following message: “Tell your masters, that I, Yahweh, who made the earth and all that is in it by My great power, and outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto Me, have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My slave... And it shall come to pass, that the nation that will not serve him, that will not put its neck under the yoke I have sent it, I will severely punish with sword, famine and pestilence. Therefore, hearken not to the false prophets that speak otherwise, for they prophesy a lie unto you” (Jer. 27:4-10).

The ambassadors were doubtless surprised at the unusual appearance of Jeremiah and his uncompromising message. This would also have been embarrassing to Zedekiah, but before he could do anything about it, he was boldly confronted by the prophet himself, still wearing the wooden yokes. Harshly and abruptly Jeremiah addressed the king: “Why will you die, you and your people, by the sword, the famine, the pestilence! That will be your fate if you do not serve

Babylon. Do not hearken to the prophets that speak otherwise, for they prophesy a lie unto you!"

In the face of this fierce verbal attack, the weak vacillating king reversed his policy. Jeremiah continued his agitation. Jerusalem re-echoed with the voice of the prophet warning the people against the false prophets that were leading them astray. One phrase occurred time and again, and became the theme of his discourses in the public places of the city, in the courts of the temple.

"They prophesy a lie unto you!" was his fierce, challenging theme.

Some of the false prophets were predicting that the vessels of the temple that Nebuchadnezzar had taken to Babylon, would shortly be restored. Jeremiah treated such prophecies with sarcastic contempt.

"If they be true prophets," he rejoined, "let them intercede with Yahweh that the vessels which remain might not be taken, for Yahweh declares that all will be removed and the temple itself destroyed."

The only thing that could stop this prophecy being fulfilled was a change of heart, and sincere, faithful actions on the part of the people.

### **Hananiah Breaks Jeremiah's Yoke (Jer. 28)**

Jeremiah's forthright action had angered the false prophets, and one of them now stood forward as their champion. His name was Hananiah. He accosted Jeremiah in the temple, and in front of the assembled people and priests, he boldly refuted the message of the prophet.

"Thus speaketh Yahweh," declared Hananiah, "I have broken the yoke of Babylon. Within two full years I will bring back into this place, all the vessels of the temple that Nebuchadnezzar took away into Babylon. And I will also bring back Jehoiachin with all the captives of Judah."

This was a message such as the people delighted to hear, but it was not true. It was a complete contradiction of Jeremiah's warning, and the people now looked curiously at the prophet with the wooden yokes hanging around his neck, wondering how he would react to the challenge of Hananiah.

Vigorously Jeremiah made his reply: "Amen to those words," he sarcastically rejoined. "Let Yahweh act as you say! Nevertheless, hear this. Prophets before me and before you have prophesied of great evils that Yahweh will bring upon this nation! But the prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall it be known, that Yahweh hath truly sent him."

The people knew that prophets such as Joel, Amos, Hosea, Micah and others had predicted evil against Jerusalem, and therefore their words supported those of Jeremiah. But as Jeremiah had often told them, these evils could be averted if the people responded to the will

of Yahweh. Therefore, his words were conditional upon the reaction of the people. On the other hand, Hananiah's prophecy was unconditional, and Jeremiah drew his attention to the words of Deut. 18:22 asking if he was prepared to submit to the test there laid down.

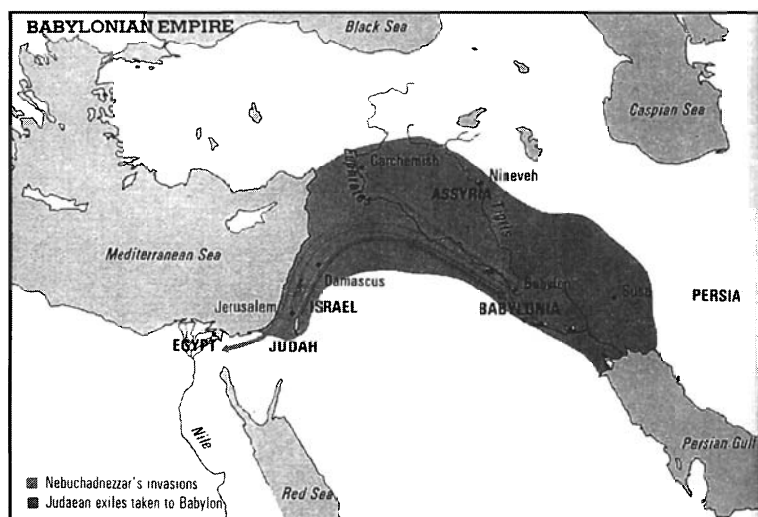
Hananiah knew what that meant. The Law prescribed death for a false prophet (Deut. 18:20), and a false prophet was defined as one whose words did not come to pass at the time laid down.

But Hananiah was too incensed with Jeremiah to reason properly. Snatching the yoke from off the neck of Jeremiah, he dramatically broke it, and turning to the people, declared: "Yahweh has said that He will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar from the neck of all nations within two years!"

Jeremiah refused to answer such a foolish and impious prophecy. Time would tell where the truth lay. He quietly withdrew from the temple leaving the people to ponder over all that had taken place.

But later there came a private message for Hananiah. He was told that instead of yokes of wood there would be yokes of iron for the people. He was told that because he had made the people trust in a lie, and had taught apostasy to them that he would die, not within two years, the time he had specified, but within two months!

And exactly two months later Hananiah was dead; a terrible warning to the people. It was the seventh month, the month in which the Day of Atonement was celebrated wherein the sins of the people were forgiven. But there was no forgiveness for such a blatant lie against the truth as Hananiah had committed. It was blasphemy against the Holy Spirit-Word (Mark 3:29), and for it he died.



## Chapter Nine

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### DRAMA AT THE EUPHRATES

**I**N the fourth year of his reign, Zedekiah travelled to Babylon to personally present his tribute to Nebuchadnezzar. Why he was forced to do this, we are not told. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar had heard that ambassadors of surrounding nations had visited Jerusalem to conspire with the king of Judah to break the yoke of Babylon (Jer. 27:3), and to forestall any such move, he commanded his vassal to come to Babylon and again renew his vows of allegiance.

Whatever the cause, the king made the journey (Jer. 51:59), and took with him a prince of the realm named Seraiah.\* This provided Jeremiah with an opportunity of sending a message of encouragement to the Jews in exile, that they might remain true to the ways of God. For Seraiah was well-known to the prophet. He was brother to Baruch, the close friend of Jeremiah (cp. Jer. 51:59 with 32:12), and was willing to convey the message of Yahweh to the people in exile.

In due time, Jeremiah delivered to Seraiah a small scroll, and gave him careful instructions as to what he was to do with it when he arrived at the city of Babylon. It contained the prophecy that we can today read in Jeremiah chapters 50 and 51. In it, Yahweh revealed that, despite its mighty power, Babylon would ultimately be overthrown never again to rise. When that happened, those Jews who remained true to their trust in God, would return and restore their nation. This implied that there was more enduring strength in the captive, broken Israel, than in mighty, powerful Babylon.

One passage reads vividly: "Thus saith Yahweh of hosts: The children of Israel and the children of Judah were oppressed together; and all that took them captives held them fast; they refused to let them go. Their Redeemer is strong; Yahweh of hosts is His name; He shall thoroughly plead their cause, that He may give rest to the land, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon" (Jer. 50:33-34).

**The Book is Read**      Babylon, the mightiest city of antiquity, was then at the height of its pomp and glory. In the massive walls of this great city, in its splendid architecture, in its hanging gardens and lavish display, the captive Jews saw about them the material evidence of fleshly might. It all looked so permanent and

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\* He is described as a "quiet prince" (Jer. 51:59). The Hebrew word rendered "quiet" is *menucha* signifying "peace". Perhaps he carried the tribute by which Zedekiah hoped to purchase his peace with Nebuchadnezzar. One translation renders the phrase: "Seraiah carried a present" thus conveying the idiom of the original into the translation.

powerful, and emphasised their poverty and helplessness.

It was in such circumstances, that Seraiah called the Jews together as Jeremiah had commanded him, and read them the scroll that the prophet had prepared.

It proclaimed that Babylon was to be completely destroyed so that it would never again be inhabited. It spoke of the fear that would fall upon the king of Babylon when the time of judgment came, so that his hands would wax feeble (Jer. 50:43). It outlined the vengeance of Yahweh against a people who had violated His temple (Jer. 50:28). It decreed the ultimate restoration of Zion (Jer. 50:19-20).

Among those who hearkened to the reading of the scroll were Daniel and his friends. They must have listened with intense interest and pleasure to the predicted overthrow of the enemy of their people. We know that Daniel was greatly influenced by the writings of Jeremiah (Dan. 9:2). As he listened to Seraiah reading this scroll he would have heard much to confirm the prophecies he had already received from God.

After he had completed the reading, Seraiah, as Jeremiah had instructed him, led the assembled Jews in a short public prayer: "O Yahweh, Thou hast spoken against this place, to cut it off, that none shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but that it shall be desolate for ever!"

### **The Book is Thrown Away**

By both the prophecy and the prayer, the captive Jews were taught neither to envy the pomp of Babylon nor to fear its power, but to look with contempt on all its false glory and illusive pleasures, seeing beyond these things to the ultimate purpose of God: the destruction of Babylon and the redemption of Israel.

They were taught that there is nothing permanent in fleshly glory, for it all shall finally come to an end. The same exhortation should be heeded today, when on every side there are seen the tokens of modern Babylon's power (Rev. 17). We are taught, by the words and action of Jeremiah, to look beyond these things to the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth (Dan. 2:44).

Still following the instructions of Jeremiah, Seraiah next tied a stone to the scroll, and as the Jewish exiles watched, he cast it into the River Euphrates. As it sank beneath its waters, he turned to the people, and declared: "Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her..." (Jer. 51:64).

### **The Book Revived**

About 700 years after the dramatic incident on the banks of the Euphrates had taken place, a lonely man, who had been banished to the rocky island of Patmos in the Mediterranean because he had fearlessly proclaimed the

truths of God, saw a similar vision. He saw not ancient Babylon, but a modern Babylon — the world about us, particularly in its religious power — and he was shown how it, too, will be brought to a dramatic and complete end, like the ancient city. He described the vision he saw: “A mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.” (Rev. 18:21).



How important it is for us to learn the lesson that Jeremiah tried to impress upon the captive Jews so long ago: that there is nothing enduring in the way of life about us, and that ultimately the way of God will triumph in all the earth (Num. 14:21).

How powerfully impressed a man like Daniel must have been as he listened to such words being read. At the very time when Seraiah was reciting words that spelt the doom of Babylon, Zedekiah, the last king to sit on David's throne, was humbling himself before its proud king!

Zedekiah's name means: *Yahweh is righteous*. The prophecy which Jeremiah set before the captives has never yet been completely fulfilled, but it will be when the mighty king, the Lord Jesus Christ, returns to destroy modern Babylon. In that day, the great king of Israel shall not humble himself before the Gentiles, but instead they will prostrate themselves before him. One of his titles will be similar to the name Zedekiah, for he will be called: *Yahweh our Righteousness* (Jer. 23:5-7). Thus there is a link between the name of the last king to sit on David's throne and the next one to do so assuming that which is "his right" (Ezek. 21:25-27).

## Chapter Ten

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### NEBUCHADNEZZAR ATTACKS JERUSALEM

**I** have been trying to trace the events that led to the destruction of Jerusalem in the days of Jeremiah, but I find it very difficult to do so,” remarked Graeham one evening after the family had completed a reading from the Book of Jeremiah.

“There is a general outline in 2Kings 25, and 2Chron. 36 which is very easy to follow,” replied his father, “but a great deal of care is necessary if you desire to fill in all the details supplied by Jeremiah, for the chapters in his book do not follow in chronological order.”

“Yes, I have noticed that,” said Graeham. “For example, the events of chapter 21 really occurred after those of chapter 37. What puzzles me at this moment, however, is why Nebuchadnezzar should suddenly attack Jerusalem in the 9th year of Zedekiah (Jer. 52:4). After all, Nebuchadnezzar had placed him on the throne! Had Zedekiah revolted against him after going to Babylon and paying the tribute money as recorded in Jeremiah 51:59?”

“Yes, he had. It was in the fourth year of his reign that he had gone to Babylon with the tribute money, and swore that he would remain true to Nebuchadnezzar. But Zedekiah did not keep his word. He lied both to God and man. He was a weak man, and many in Judah were pressing him to seek assistance from Egypt, and throw off the oppressive yoke of Babylon. The time seemed ripe for such an adventure. A young and enterprising prince by name of Pharaoh Hophra (see Jer. 44:30), who is known to historians as Pharaoh Apries, had just ascended the throne of Egypt. The Jews thought he might help them in a struggle for independence. Zedekiah sent ambassadors to his court, offering his allegiance, and asking that troops might be sent to his assistance should Babylon attack (see Ezek. 17:15). A secret treaty was probably signed, and about the ninth year of his reign, Zedekiah took the plunge. Despite the warnings of Jeremiah, he broke his fealty with Babylon and openly raised the standard of revolt (2Kings 24:20; 2Chron. 36:13), an act which is described by Ezekiel the prophet as a heinous crime and as typical of the loose way in which this weak king treated his word (Ezek. 17:15-24).

#### **Zedekiah Breaks His Word**

“Nebuchadnezzar did not lose any time. He immediately set his troops in motion. He had an army stationed on the coast of Syria, occupied in the siege of Tyre. But this could not be spared from its appointed task. Nevertheless he did not minimise the importance of



Zedekiah's revolt. He decided to come in person himself, and sit down before Jerusalem (2Kings 25:1). Judah was not his only, nor even his principal enemy. Moab, Ammon, Edom and Philistia were all in a state of revolt against him, possibly spurred on by Egypt. At first Nebuchadnezzar was in a quandary as to which he should first attack, and by severe punishment against them, provide an example for the others. He pondered whether he should attack Ammon or Jerusalem. For a time, the fate of the Jews rested in the balance. At last the powerful Babylonish troops marched to the crossroads where a decision had to be made. Here they paused whilst Nebuchadnezzar made up his mind. The prophet Ezekiel describes how the king made use of divination. This pointed in the direction of Jerusalem. The fateful decision having been made, Nebuchadnezzar commenced his march south against the City of God."

"Where do we read that in Ezekiel?" asked Peter.

"In Ezekiel 21:21. In the same chapter, the prophet addresses the king and shows how he would be deposed from the throne, 'until he comes whose right it is; and I (Yahweh) will give it him' (v. 27). You, of course, know who that is!"

"It is the one promised to David in 2Samuel 7:12-16," remarked Joan.

"That is correct, but who is that?"

"The Lord Jesus Christ."

"True. At his birth, his mother was told that he was the one destined to fill this honored role: 'He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end' (Luke 1:32-33)."

### **Zedekiah Appeals to Jeremiah**

"Did the Egyptians assist Zedekiah?" asked Graham, anxious to obtain a clear outline of the events leading to the tragic destruction of Jerusalem that caused the nation to be taken into exile.

"Not at first," replied Mr. Phillips. "The Jews waited in vain for a sign of them, and as news of the approaching Babylonians reached Jerusalem, the king panicked. At that moment of crisis there was but one man who could help him: Jeremiah! Perhaps he recalled the earlier action of Hezekiah. When, in those days, the Assyrians attacked the city he had sent for Isaiah the prophet and by their joint prayers had saved the city. In any case, Zedekiah now sent a deputation of princes and priests to Jeremiah with the following message: 'Enquire, I pray thee, of Yahweh for us; for Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon makes war against us; perhaps Yahweh will deal with us according to all His wondrous works, that He may leave us!' (Jer. 21:2)".

"That was rather hypocritical after the way in which the people

had turned to idolatry," remarked Peter.

"Yes," agreed his father. "This weak, foolish king, who had constantly refused to heed the message of Jeremiah, expected Yahweh to work a miracle for him, now that his folly had resulted in the attack of the Chaldeans against him!

"But he received no sympathy from Jeremiah. The time for that was gone. He clearly told Zedekiah what the outcome of the war was to be. The weapons of war which the Jews had prepared for the battle would be rendered useless; the city would fall, and the king be taken captive by the Babylonians, whilst famine, pestilence and the sword would decimate the defenders. The prophet advised the king that the only thing to do, was to flee the doomed city when the enemy approached."

"That is very similar to the advice of the Lord Jesus to his disciples when the Romans would attack the city (see Mat. 24:15-21)," remarked Graham.

"Yes. Jeremiah's words and advice to the king are very similar to those of the Lord when speaking to his disciples on the Mount of Olives. As Christ warned his followers to flee Jerusalem on the approach of the Romans, Jeremiah did likewise on the approach of the Babylonians. As Christ later warned that resistance would prove vain, so did Jeremiah on this occasion (Jer. 21:8-9). And as the Romans temporarily withdrew after besieging the city, allowing Christians to escape to Pella in AD67, so did the Babylonians temporarily withdraw from their attack against Jerusalem, as we will see when we check through the events of the times (Jer. 37:5). This permitted those who remembered Jeremiah's advice to escape. And those who listened to the advice of Christ in his day and who were familiar with the history of Jeremiah's day, would be able to see a foreshadowing of these events, and would be impressed with the importance of following the Lord's counsel.

**How Zedekiah Acted on Jeremiah's Advice** "In addition to this warning, Jeremiah gave the king some good advice. He urged him to put trust in Yahweh, and do His will by executing judgment, and helping those threatened by the oppression (Jer. 21:12). By such means Zedekiah might avoid the greatest evils. But, warned the prophet, unless the king acted quickly, destruction would come fast and heavy upon the guilty nation."

"Did Zedekiah act upon this advice?"

"Yes, he did. As the army of Nebuchadnezzar moved south and nothing was heard of the supporting Egyptian forces that had been promised, the weak, vacillating king panicked. He decided to act on Jeremiah's advice.

Hastily he called together a general meeting of the people and



### **The Holy City Stricken.**

*"How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary! She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks: among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her: all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies" (Lamentations 1:1-2).*

bound them to a covenant to keep the Law of Moses. Jeremiah had told him to 'Execute judgment, and relieve the oppressed,' and the king instructed that this should be done. He appointed that all who had Hebrew slaves, should let them go free as the Law commanded should be done in the year of liberty (Jer. 34:14). He warned the people of the seriousness of the crisis that faced them, and reminded them that as their Egyptian allies had failed, God alone could help them. But God would only help if the people turned to Him and demonstrated their genuineness by such an action as he suggested. The people agreed to all that was proposed. The covenant was endorsed by a most solemn sacrifice. A calf was offered in confirmation of the covenant. As was the practice on such occasions, it was divided into two parts, and the leaders of the nation, as its representatives, passed between the pieces as a token that the covenant was accepted (Jer. 34:18)."

"What does that mean?" asked Ann.

"The two parts of the sacrifice represented the two parties who had agreed to the covenant," explained Mr. Phillips. "The passing through between the two pieces by the people, indicated that they were joined in agreement with God to fulfil the terms of the covenant. It was a most solemn rite, and indicated that if they failed to fulfil their obligation, the fate of the animal would be their's. In this way contracts or covenants were confirmed in ancient days. In Heb. 9:16, the apostle shows that Christ's offering was regarded in a similar manner. The Lord represented himself to his apostles as the covenant victim, and those who partake of the bread and wine which is representative of that, 'eat and drink condemnation to themselves' unless they strive earnestly to fulfil the terms of the covenant (see 1Cor. 11:26-29). Yahweh entered into a covenant with Abraham by a similar sacrifice as is recorded in Genesis 15."

"Did Zedekiah's action avert the danger to the city?"

"As a matter of fact, it did, temporarily. In due course, Nebuchadnezzar encamped outside its walls, and lay siege to the city. Within the walls the sacrificial ceremony had taken place, and the nation proclaimed its readiness to obey the terms of Yahweh's covenant, and give freedom to the slaves. Then news was heard that at last the Egyptians were on the march. Suddenly Nebuchadnezzar withdrew his forces and rapidly moved south to meet the new threat. The people of Jerusalem went wild with joy. It seemed to them as though the false prophets, who had predicted the failure of the Babylonish attack, were right after all, and that Jeremiah, who had denounced any trust in Egypt, was wrong! Many of the nobles began to regret that they had been so hasty in proclaiming that they would release all the servants they had in their power, and went back on their agreement. Jeremiah was shocked at this blatant violation of so solemn a contract. He raised his voice in protest. He dearly loved the city of

Jerusalem, and his heart ached for the misguided people. He warned them that the results of so acting in disregard to the covenant would be disastrous. The nation must suffer the fate of the sacrificial calf if it did not remain true to its word. There would be no help from God if the people turned from their covenant and sought the help of Egypt.

"But his protests were in vain. The people did not want to hear his warnings of doom. They became impatient with him. In the end, he went to the king with a final admonition that his folly would result in national destruction (Jer. 37:17).

"And then he put into practice the very advice he had given the people. He tried to flee the city, and reach the refuge of the village of Anathoth (Jer. 37:12).

"He was discovered by some of the princes of the kingdom. False-ly they accused him of deserting to the Chaldeans. They scourged him, and then put him in prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe."

### **Jeremiah in Prison**

"It seems strange to turn the house of a scribe into a prison, don't you think?" asked Graeham.

"It does seem strange to us," answered his father, "but it was the custom of the day for those in authority in a town to set aside a section of their house as a prison, and even appoint one of their servants to act as jailor. Sometimes a deep pit was dug in the middle court around which a large house would be built; in the sides were scooped out niches in which to sleep, and down into these dungeons the prisoner was thrown. It was like being buried alive to be put into one of those horrible places, and, in fact, the same word is used for grave as is used for such dungeons."

"Wouldn't the rain beat into such a pit?" asked Peter.

"Yes, they became very damp and soggy in the winter, very hot and unbearable in the summer. Sometimes they became filled with soft mire, and prisoners would sink into the mud.

"Into such a prison Jeremiah was now flung. But something soon happened which sent Zedekiah the king hurrying to him for advice. The Babylonians returned to besiege the city. The Egyptians had been easily turned back, and now the Chaldeans were bent on vengeance. Secretly Zedekiah came to the dungeon and called for Jeremiah: 'Is there any word from Yahweh?' he asked.

"'There is,' replied Jeremiah, 'You will be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon.'

"Having waited for a moment to let that message sink in, the prophet continued: 'What have I offended against you, or against your servants, or against this people, that you have put me in prison? Where are now your prophets which prophesied unto you, saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this

land? Therefore hear now, I pray you. O my lord the king: Let my supplication be accepted before you; that you cause me not to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there!’

“Zedekiah realised that if he wanted the help of Jeremiah, he must be prepared to assist him. He therefore commanded that the prophet be transferred to the court of the prison in his own house, and that he should be given a ration of bread in common with all the people. For now the siege was taking effect. It was realised that it would be of long duration. Food was carefully rationed, and every preparation made to withstand the Babylonians.”

### ***Jeremiah laments the fall of Jerusalem***



## Chapter Eleven

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### JEREMIAH INVESTS IN THE FUTURE

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**T**HE incidents we have been discussing are recorded in Jeremiah 37,” said Mr. Phillips as he continued the story of the prophet. “From there we must turn back to Jeremiah 32 for the next dramatic incident in the life of the prophet. An event occurred of the greatest significance to Jeremiah, and which is going to stand him in good stead at the time of Christ’s coming.

“He was shut up in the court of the prison in the king’s house. It was the tenth year of Zedekiah, the year before the city fell. The Babylonians were now besieging the city, and the future looked very grim indeed.

#### **Jeremiah Invests Some Money Wisely**

“One day, a man named Hanameel, a cousin of Jeremiah, visited the prophet and offered to sell him his field in Anathoth. ‘The right of redemption is yours, and the redemption is yours, buy it for yourself!’

“But of what use was the field to Jeremiah? It was then in the hands of the Babylonians, and would under normal conditions have to be returned to Hanameel at the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:25; Num. 35:2).<sup>\*</sup> Jeremiah could not occupy the land until he was freed from prison, and the Babylonians ejected from the land. And he knew that that would not occur for many years to come (Jer. 29:10).

“The price was cheap enough! All Hanameel asked was seventeen shekels of silver (Jer. 32:9) — about £2-10-0<sup>\*\*</sup>! But under the circumstances of the impending invasion by the Babylonians, even that cheap price was more than the value of the land.

“But Yahweh had told Jeremiah that Hanameel was about to make this offer, and he was to accept it. So he called for the title deeds of the property, and a contract of the purchase (v. 11) and having completed the transaction before witnesses, he delivered the documents

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<sup>\*</sup> The Law of Moses directed that land once given for a possession should never be completely sold. If the possessor became poor and had to raise money, the land had to be given back to him freely in the year of Jubilee. If he died in the meantime, it went to his next of kin. That is what will happen in the case of Jeremiah and Hanameel in the coming great Year of Jubilee when all Israel shall return, as Yahweh proceeded to tell the prophet (Jer. 32:36-44).

<sup>\*\*</sup> This equals A\$5, but at the time of publication (1995) would be worth in value approximately A\$80.

into the hands of his friend Baruch the scribe, and explained unto the witnesses the reason why he made the purchase: 'Yahweh has commanded me to take these evidences, the title deeds and contract, and place them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days. For thus saith Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel: houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land.'

"He then delivered it into the hands of Baruch with instructions to place this evidence where it would be preserved for many days. Then Jeremiah prayed unto God that He would give him further enlightenment as to why He had commanded him to make this unusual purchase.

"He was told that though the nation would be punished, yet it was not to be entirely destroyed; that the time would come when it would be restored to the land, and an 'everlasting covenant' (v. 40) be made with it. At that time the people would return from exile to enter into the inheritances that they possessed in the land. So if any are able to produce evidence that a certain piece of land belongs to them, they will be able to possess it (v. 44)."

"Does that mean that Jeremiah will possess that piece of land he bought so long ago?" asked Graeham.

"Yes, it means that for a little over £2 [\$5—see footnote p. 227—Ed.] he purchased an everlasting inheritance. On the other hand, Hanameel was so concerned with the presence of the Babylonians that he was prepared to sell his divinely given inheritance for a mere pittance."

"But didn't you say that the land would have to go back to Hanameel in the year of Jubilee?" insisted Peter.

"Under normal conditions it would," replied his father. "But in this case, Hanameel was not to be there to claim it, therefore it reverts to Jeremiah who possesses the title deeds."

"Will he yet receive it?" asked Ann.

"I believe he will, at Christ's return. The city of Anathoth is north of Jerusalem. It will be a portion of the land given over to immortal priests when Christ rules on earth (see Ezek. 48:10-11). We are told that Christ will divide the land by lot\* for inheritance (Ezek. 45:1). We know that Bethel has been promised to Jacob (Gen. 28:13), and Shechem to Joseph (Gen. 48:22) and now it seems as though Anathoth will be given to Jeremiah."

"I notice that Baruch was told to so place the title deeds that they might 'continue many days' (v. 14)," remarked Graeham. "Do you think that they will be recovered at Christ's return?"

"I do," replied his father. "I think it will be a moment of triumph for Jeremiah when he produces the title deeds before the Lord Jesus and the company of the redeemed in that day. Those resurrected title

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\* By "lot" it does not mean by chance, but by divine direction.



1 deeds will be an evidence of his great faith. In fact, his faith, will constitute the real signature thereon. In that regard, we can link up in a wonderful way the 32nd chapter of Jeremiah with Hebrews 11, that great chapter on faith. For in Hebrews we read: 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for.' Scholars tell us that the Greek word rendered 'substance' is *hypostasis*, and that this was a legal term indicating the right to property. Thus the phrase can be rendered: 'Faith is the title deeds of things hoped for.' Faith is like a title deed indicating our right to the inheritance promised us. In Jeremiah's case, he has real title deeds to produce, that are indicative of his great faith in a time of difficulty and persecution".

### **Jeremiah Again Cast Into the Dungeon**

"Whilst these incidents were taking place, the Babylonians were besieging the city, and the state of the Jews worsened every day. As the enemy battering-rams thundered against the walls of the city, the Jews used the rubble to erect another wall of defence (Jer. 33:4). But this determined resistance only resulted in greater slaughter.

"Yahweh declared to the people through Jeremiah (ch. 33:5), that 'They come to fight with the Chaldeans, but it is to fill them with the dead bodies of men, whom I have slain in mine anger and in my fury. Because of all the wickedness I have hid my face from this city'. The statement indicated that destruction awaited the city which had turned away from its God, but the prophecy in Jeremiah 33 pointed to the far distant future, when Israel was to be purified from its evil, and submit to the king whom God would then provide them. Meanwhile, Jeremiah told them that to fight on was hopeless."

"Was Jeremiah still in the prison court of the king's house when he proclaimed this?" asked Graeham.

"Yes. The people evidently had access to him, and came to enquire of him concerning the war".

"The leaders of the Jews would not be very pleased with him speaking such words as those to the people, would they?" asked Peter.

"No, they were not. From chapter 33 we must turn over to chapter 38 to read the sequel. A powerful faction among the priests and princes of the people heard the words of Jeremiah and were bitterly offended by them. They heard him warning the people that it would be better for them to 'go forth to the Chaldeans,' than to remain in the city. They angrily demanded of the king that Jeremiah should be slain: 'Let this man be put to death,' they declared, 'for he weakeneth the hands of the men of war that remain in the city, as well as the hands of the people. He does not seek the good of this people, but their hurt.'

"The weak king did not want the responsibility of putting a prophet of Yahweh to death; at the same time he did not have the strength of character to oppose the princes. Weakly he (like Pilate

before the angry Jews in Christ's day) washed his hands of the matter, declaring: 'I can do nothing against you!'

"Thus encouraged, the princes took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah, the son of the king. This was a most evil place. The bottom was soft in mire, and as the prophet was flung therein, he sank deeply in the mire .

"And there they left him without food or protection."

"In my Bible it does not say that Malchiah was the son of Zedekiah," questioned Peter.

"It does if you look in the margin," replied his father. "The word *Hammelech* signifies 'the king.' He was therefore a son of Zedekiah, and though only in his teens, he was evidently dominated by the evil influence of the faction opposed to Jeremiah."

### **A Gentile Helps Jeremiah**

"But at this time when those who should have known better were busy persecuting the prophet of Yahweh, a Gentile came to his rescue. He was Ebed-melech the Ethiopian. The name Ebed-melech signifies *The Servant of the King*, and this was evidently the position he occupied. With sorrow he saw the heartless attitude of the king's young son towards the aged prophet, and interceded with Zedekiah.

"The king was sitting in the gate of the city as judge. Ebed-melech went to him, and pleaded the cause of Jeremiah: 'These men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon, and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city!'

"The city was rapidly approaching its lowest extremity. Death, famine, pestilence were awaiting it. In such circumstances, the case of Ebed-melech himself would have been grave enough, and most people would be more concerned with looking after their own good than caring about an unpopular prophet of doom. But not so this man. Though his skin was black, his heart was white; though he was a Gentile by birth, he was a true Israelite in belief and action: though, as Jeremiah himself had earlier said (see ch. 13:23), 'the Ethiopian cannot change his skin', he can change his character. At a time of great personal difficulty, and of risk of his own life, this humane and noble-minded man raised his voice against a most powerful and intolerant faction in the stricken city in the support of an unpopular cause.

"The king was touched by the appeal. He commanded that Jeremiah was to be taken out of the dungeon. In case the princes attempted to prevent the rescue by force, he told Ebed-melech to take thirty men with him, and draw the prophet out of the mire.

"So Ebed-melech took some worn-out garments and pieces of wood. He went to the deep dungeon where the poor prophet was sunk deep in the mire, and calling upon Jeremiah to place the clouts of wood and the garments under his armpits, they drew him out of the

dungeon.

"Once out of the miry dungeon, Jeremiah was again retained in the court of the king's house. This was not pleasing to the princes who feared his influence with the king, and their anger was turned on Ebed-melech. But he was given a personal message of encouragement. He was told not to fear, for he would be delivered from the men that sought his life, and though the city was assuredly to fall, he would save his life."

"Where do we read that?" asked Peter.

"In Jeremiah 39:15-18."

"He was like faithful Rahab in Jericho," suggested Ann.

"That is a very good illustration," replied her father.

"I am afraid that I am still confused," said Graeham. "We seem to dodge about from chapter to chapter in Jeremiah without any sequential order. Can you set the chapters out for me?"

"Yes, I will write you out a guide to those chapters later on," said his father.

### **Zedekiah Sinks In The Mire**

"Still the siege continued. For eighteen long, terrible months it continued. It continued until all the food was eaten, until people were famished, and walked around the city like living skeletons, until all feelings of humanity towards one another were driven out by the urgent desire for food. Conditions became so bad, that people were prepared to murder one another for food, but they were not prepared to give way to the Babylonians, as Jeremiah had earlier advised them. They remained inflexible in their determination to continue the hopeless fight, manifesting a courage worthy of a better cause. Dreadful sights were daily seen in the stricken city. It became common to see men and women wasted with famine collapsing in the streets to die, or to see corpses black with pestilence dead in the streets. But still the Jews would not give way. Stubbornly, with weakened hands the soldiers defended the walls, with mad hatred in their hearts they murdered anybody who tried to escape, with stupid obstinacy they battled on in the hopeless struggle.

"The king sought a further audience with the prophet. Secretly he spoke with him where nobody could see them conversing together (Jer. 38:14). He sought counsel from Yahweh. He received it, but would not act upon it. Jeremiah demanded that the king should surrender the city to the Babylonians. Zedekiah was willing to do so, but he feared the Jews (v. 19). Despite the awful evidence of famine and pestilence about him; despite the fact that in the streets there could be seen those dying 'stricken through for want of the fruits of the field' (Lam. 4:9), with faces blacker than coal, with skin cleaving to their bones, with famished bodies 'become like a stick' (Lam. 4:8), he had not the courage to oppose the powerful faction of princes who would

not give way.

“Jeremiah warned him that his folly would bring greater retribution on himself and his household. He told him that his friends who had ‘set him on’ could not help him. Plainly he declared to the king: *‘Your feet are sunk in the mire!’* (ch. 38:22).

“Thus both prophet and king had sunk in the mire: one literally in the dungeon, the other figuratively in the troubles that encompassed him (Jer. 38:6, 22); one because he had faithfully proclaimed the Word of God, the other because he had followed the foolish wisdom of the flesh.

“The king was morally too weak to follow the advice of Jeremiah. He still feared the princes, and told Jeremiah not to reveal to them any of his conversation. He commanded him that if they did approach him, he was merely to say that he presented his supplications to the king that he might not be put back into the dungeon.

“Thus, when the princes approached the prophet to enquire of his conversation with the king, threatening him with death if he did not disclose what he had said, he told them what the king had commanded him. This was the truth, and nothing but the truth, but it was not the whole truth. Jeremiah had not the liberty to tell them what the king had prohibited him to say, and so the matter was not known”.

#### **THE CHAPTERS OF JEREMIAH IN HISTORICAL SEQUENCE**

Mr. Phillips promised his family he would outline the historical chapters of Jeremiah in sequence as they relate to the reign of Zedekiah. Here is what he prepared:

Zedekiah's oath of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar at his ascension: Ezek. 17:13.

First letter of Jeremiah to exiles, and embassy of two nobles from Jerusalem to Babylon: Jer. 29.

4th year — Jeremiah advises him to reject the ambassadors suggesting that he revolt: Jer. 27.

Jeremiah opposes the false prophets for the same reason: Jer. 28.

Zedekiah goes the same year to Babylon with tribute and to convey his second and final letter to the Jews there: Jer. 51:59.

Deputation to Jeremiah in 9th year Zedekiah: Jer. 21.

Further prophecy as Nebuchadnezzar sweeps south: Jer. 34.

Jerusalem besieged, Egypt advances, siege raised: Jer. 37.

The Broken Covenant: Jer. 34:8-22.

Jeremiah attempts to flee; the prophet imprisoned; the siege renewed: Jer. 37:6-21.

Jeremiah taken by Zedekiah from the dungeon to the court of the prison: Jer. 37:21; 32:1-2. He purchases the field of Hanameel: Jer. 32 and 33.

• From Jeremiah 38 to 44 the narrative follows historical sequence.

## Chapter Twelve

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### LAST DAYS OF JEREMIAH

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**W**E have spent much time with Jeremiah, but we believe that it has been profitable. The events connected with his life form the background of the important prophecies he delivered, as well as those proclaimed by Ezekiel and Daniel. At the same time, they provide wonderful lessons of faith and courage for times of gloom and sadness. Very few “Stories of the Bible” would be concerned with the details we have set before the reader — but we feel that it has been well worth while pausing to consider these matters, especially if we are prepared to apply in our lives the lessons revealed in the circumstances of Jeremiah’s times.

**Fall of Jerusalem**      The siege had lasted nearly 18 months. It was early July, and the wheat harvest ought to have been near. But provisions had long since begun to fail. Still there was no thought of surrender. Zedekiah stayed within the walls from very weakness of mind; the princes because they would rather starve than surrender. Sights of horror were enacted in the homes, where in the mad ferocity of hunger and despair, women ate their own babies (Lam. 2:20; 4:10). The famished warriors could no longer defend the one weak point in their fortifications.

At long last it was breached.

With a wild shout, the besiegers poured through a breach in the northern wall, slaying as they came, so that the sword mercifully put an end to the sufferings of many.

Haughty Babylonish princes, with high-sounding titles, ceremoniously took up their position in the centre portion of the city, ready to pass judgment on those who had broken their word so flagrantly.

But Zedekiah had escaped. It was night when the city was breached, and under cover of darkness, the king with a few supporters hurried in the opposite direction. They fled down the rocky ravine of the Kidron, as far as the plains of Jericho, hoping to cross the Jordan and elude the Chaldeans.

But it was in vain. News was received that the king had attempted to escape. The Chaldeans pursued him, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho. This notable spot, which had witnessed the first victory of Israel when the nation entered the land under Joshua (of which it is recorded that the walls fell down “in faith”), now became the scene of Israel’s final humiliation and disgrace, as the desperate king was caught scurrying away like a rat, deserting the city and people he had

failed to defend.

He was caught, and sent north to Riblah in the land of Hamath, where Nebuchadnezzar was stationed at the time.

This, like Jericho, was also a notable place. It was here that David had his greatest victory (2Sam. 8). But now, the last king to sit on David's throne, was ignominiously dragged before the haughty pagan that judgment might be passed on him.

And a terrible judgment it was.

First of all his sons were slain before his eyes. They had been foremost in persecuting the prophet (Jer. 38:6), and now received no mercy from Nebuchadnezzar.

Then Zedekiah had his eyes put out, and was led away blinded to Babylon, there to live in darkness and die in disgrace.

Jerusalem was systematically destroyed. The Babylonish soldiers went throughout the city, killing and destroying. The temple was broken up and burnt. Its furniture and anything of value was taken back to Babylon as a token of victory for the gods of Babylon. The walls and principal buildings of the city were destroyed. People were dragged out of the ruins, chained together as captives and deported into foreign parts.

Yet ruthless as the Babylonian monarch was, he showed kindness to Jeremiah, and even to the nation. He did not completely destroy Judah, but allowed a remnant, "the poor of the people which had nothing", to remain there, the merest shadow of an once proud nation.

***So the kingdom came to an end.***

It was a sorrowful time for Jeremiah; it was sorrowful for Yahweh. And we too, as we think of the stricken city, as we think of what it might have been if only the people had hearkened to the voice of the prophets, are sorrowful at its passing.

For, if we have truly accepted Christ in the way appointed, this is our nation, this is our history, this is our city. It is our history in more ways than one, for the same folly as was manifest in Jerusalem so long ago, is oftentimes manifested by ourselves in weakness today. Judah was blind to its sin. Like the poor, blinded king stumbling his way to Babylon, the people had stumbled spiritually in the same direction. And we can do likewise. We need to beware. Many who supported the princes in the days of Zedekiah *thought* they were doing right, *thought* that wisdom was with them, *thought* that Jeremiah was a traitor to the cause.

Time revealed that he was a true patriot; he had the good of the people at heart. And as the prophet, that man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, saw the captives depart, he gave vent to his feelings in a beautiful book known as ***The Lamentations of Jeremiah***. He lamented Jerusalem's sad plight, how she sought false friends, how the adversary mocked her worship, how the people deserted their God.

*"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?  
Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow,  
Which is done unto me, wherewith Yahweh hath afflicted me  
in the day of His fierce anger."*

Perhaps Jeremiah's sorrow was only equalled by that of the Lord Jesus as he, too, wept over Jerusalem in anticipation of the time of trouble that came upon the city shortly afterwards.

**Honored by** In the stricken city of Jerusalem, the haughty  
**Nebuchadnezzar** Babylonish leaders supervised the removal  
of the Jewish captives. Bound with chains,  
forming a long line, these captives started on the wearying journey  
from the Land of Promise to the Land of Exile.

Israel had rejected the counsel of God, had turned its back on the high calling for which it had been chosen, and was now to return to the land from whence Abraham had originally been taken.

They had not gone far, when a halt was called at Ramah. This is a dreary, lonesome spot, about five miles (eight kilometres) north of Jerusalem. Here other captives joined the main body, and final preparations were made before leaving for the north.

It was at Ramah that Jeremiah had seen in vision the weeping Rachel distraught because of her captive children (Jer. 31:15); now, in sober reality, he saw and heard the bitter grief of the last representatives of the nation, as they were taken into banishment.

For Jeremiah was also at Ramah, manacled with the other prisoners (Jer. 40:1). But he was not long so to remain. Nebuchadnezzar had heard of Jeremiah, and instructed that he should be released. He recognised him as a prophet of the God of Israel for whom he had a profound respect (Dan. 2:47), and, doubtless, he had also learned how Jeremiah pleaded with the people to submit to the authority of Babylon.

This pagan king instructed that the prophet should be publicly honoured before the Jews who had rejected his message.

The captain of the guard took Jeremiah from among the prisoners, and in their presence publicly addressed him in words that were a reproach to the sullen, grief-stricken Jews who listened. "This evil has come upon this nation because it has opposed the will of Yahweh your God", declared the captain of the guard. "But as for you, Jeremiah, I loose from you this day the chains which are upon your hand. You are free to do as you will. If you come with me to Babylon, I will look well after you; but if you prefer to stay in the land, go back to Gedaliah, and put yourself under his protection."

What was Jeremiah to do? He had the choice of luxury and ease in Babylon, or hardship and suffering with the few Jews left in the land. He did not take long to ponder the decision. The exiles already had

Ezekiel and Daniel to help them; the poverty-stricken Jews who remained in the land had need of Jeremiah!

The prophet elected to stay with the people.

He was given a reward and food (for the famine was still severe in the land) and permitted to return to Gedaliah, whom Nebuchadnezzar had set up as governor.

### **The Policy and Rule of Gedaliah**

Gedaliah was well chosen for the position of governor. He was a friend of Jeremiah, and a grandson of Shaphan the scribe who had been such a help to the good king Josiah (2Kings 22:9). Gedaliah had also held high position as a prince of the realm under Jehoiakim, and was a man of the greatest integrity, one whom Nebuchadnezzar felt that he could trust.

He had one failing, however. He was, himself, of too trusting a nature. And this led to tragedy.

Meanwhile, his policy was precisely that which Jeremiah had so long vainly called upon the people to obey. He set it before the remaining people of the land in the following terms: "Fear not to serve the Chaldeans; dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you" (Jer. 40:9).

The people knew that they could trust Gedaliah. They realised that with such a man in control there would be some hope for the future. Numbers of Jewish fugitives resorted to him from their temporary hiding places in foreign lands (v. 6). Even the leaders of the Jewish guerilla bands, who had been scattered throughout the land, gathered together under Gedaliah, and were induced at his integrity to engage in husbandry (v. 10).

And the land began to prosper.

Many of the "poor of the people" found themselves as landed proprietors for the first time (Jer. 39:10). Nature also, seemed to do its best to efface the sad marks of invasion, so that the people "gathered very much" (Jer. 40:12).

For the first time in many years, the people looked about them in hope.

### **Gedaliah is Murdered**

But this happy state did not last long. Among the leaders of the bands that had gathered to Gedaliah was a man who proved a perfect marvel of craft and villainy, duping the unsuspecting and trusting Gedaliah.

His name was Ishmael the son of Nethaniah (Jer. 40:8). He was of the seed royal (2Kings 25:25), and therefore probably was jealous of the authority given to Gedaliah.

He was also a tool of the Ammonites who hated the Jews, and



fanatically opposed to serving the Chaldeans. He would rather destroy every Jew than have that happen!

Ishmael began to conspire against Gedaliah.

He found little support among the other captains of bands gathered to Gedaliah. In fact, instead of helping him, one of their number, Johanan by name, warned Gedaliah of what Ishmael was about.

But the trusting Gedaliah refused to believe it.

Johanan was gravely concerned. He recognised the urgency of the matter, and realised that if Gedaliah did not move quickly his life would be seriously endangered and the hopes of the remnant of the Jews would be dashed to the ground.

He sought Gedaliah out in secret, warned him of the intentions of Ishmael, told him that if he did not act quickly all that he was trying to achieve would be destroyed. And then he made an astounding offer to Gedaliah.

"Baalis, the king of the Ammonites, has sent Ishmael to slay you," he warned. "Now let me go, and I will slay Ishmael so that no one shall know who did it! Why should all the remnant of the Jews perish because of him!"

Gedaliah was shocked! Not at Ishmael, for he did not believe the accusations brought against him, but at the "lies" of Johanan (as he believed his accusations to be).

"You shall not do this thing," he warned, "for you speak falsely of Ishmael." Ishmael had acted very cleverly to take Gedaliah off guard, doubtless posing as a great supporter of his policy to submit to Babylon.

The weeks went by. An uneasy feeling of impending tragedy settled over the remnant of the Jews in the land.

It was October, the seventh month. Gedaliah had occupied his position about two months, and was well pleased with the progress he was making. The only point of disagreement, so far as he could see, had been the foolish accusation of Johanan against Ishmael.

To the trusting Gedaliah, it seemed as though Ishmael was playing his part in the restoration of the land quite well. Besides, he was a man to be won over to his cause, for being of the seed royal he could be of great help in the governing of the land.

Gedaliah was therefore pleased to learn that Ishmael was about to visit Mizpeh, where he had set up his headquarters. He went out of his way to welcome him, and the ten men that he had with him, all of whom had been princes of the king.

Unsuspectingly, he took them into his home, and they ate bread together. To Jews this was an act of friendship, almost like entering into a solemn agreement. But Ishmael's friendly appearance was like the kiss of Judas at the betrayal of Jesus. He had determined that the time had come when Gedaliah must die. If the other captains would

not help him, he would do it on his own with his own supporters. Merrily the meal continued, Gedaliah probably congratulating himself upon winning over to his cause the powerful chieftain at his table, and the crafty Ishmael pleased to see that his host was taken off his guard.

But suddenly the feasting ceased. At a sign from Ishmael the startled Gedaliah saw the ten princes arise, push the food from them, and with grimly determined faces draw their swords and attack him. It was over in a moment of time. The murdered body of Gedaliah wallowed in his blood.

His short reign, his life of usefulness, was over.

**Massacre at Mizpeh** And now the brutal Ishmael set about systematically to destroy all who might have supported Gedaliah. The city ran with blood. Not only Jews, but Chaldeans as well, were murdered.

This was virtually a declaration of war against Babylon. Ishmael had completely destroyed any opportunity for his own salvation. His action must inevitably bring Babylon down upon the remnant of the Jews.

Yet still the senseless slaughter continued.

Some pilgrims came to Mizpeh from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria. These cities had once been noted for the past glory of Israel, but in them the pilgrims had seen only ruins, the tokens of the sad misery that had fallen on the nation.

So they came towards Mizpeh mourning the evil that had fallen on Israel. Their beards were shaven; their clothes were rent; they had cut themselves in an ecstasy of grief. In their hands were offerings to take to the temple. Though it was destroyed, they loved the very site, and thought to mourn its past glory and beseech Yahweh to look upon His city once again.

They were harmless pilgrims, about to pay their last respects to the stricken nation.

But the ruthless, bloodthirsty Ishmael heard of their approach, and went out to meet them. Were they supporters of Gedaliah? Would they reveal to others the murders that had been committed in Mizpeh?

Ishmael could not afford to let one of these pilgrims escape.

Disguising his true feelings, he went out and joined their company, weeping with them over the past glories of Israel.

"Come and meet Gedaliah," he said.

They agreed to this, and in so doing sealed their fate. Their acceptance of Ishmael's invitation proved that they were supporters of Gedaliah, and brought about their death. The brutal Ishmael conducted them into the city, and then called upon his supporters to murder them in cold blood, callously throwing their bodies in a pit in the centre of Mizpeh.

Ten of them purchased their lives. "Spare us!" they pleaded, "for we have treasures in the field of wheat, barley, oil and honey."

For this they were saved.

And now Ishmael made preparations to leave Mizpeh. The people were gathered together, including Jeremiah and his friend Baruch, and forced to get ready to flee to the land of the Ammonites. Their route lay first to the north, to Gibeon, where they paused to replenish their water supply.

There Johanan, with his guerilla band of warriors, found them.

News of the massacre had reached him, and he had hastened to Mizpeh to avenge the murder of Gedaliah. Finding the city deserted he hurried north to Gibeon, and immediately attacked. Ishmael attempted to fight back, but the Jews of Mizpeh turned on him. Two of his supporters were slain, but the rest escaped with him to find refuge in the land of Ammon.

Johanan now found himself in an awkward and dangerous predicament. Had he been able to deliver the arch-conspirator to the Chaldeans, he might have been able to obtain a continuance of Nebuchadnezzar's favors. But appearances were against him. He had allowed a few bold men to overthrow the existing government, to kill the representative of Babylon and escape unpunished. Vengeance would surely be exacted for this. Johanan decided that the company with him had to seek a refuge somewhere, and Egypt seemed the only place of safety. In any case, they had to get as far from the scene of murder as soon as possible. Bypassing Mizpeh, he led the company of Jews to a place near Bethlehem, where they paused for the night, and held a council of war.

### **Jeremiah's Help Sought**

At first wise counsels prevailed. The people remembered that Jeremiah was in their company, and decided they would seek his help. A deputation approached him, requesting that he should lead them in prayer to Yahweh: "Pray for us, that Yahweh thy God may shew us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do," they asked him (Jer. 42:2-3).

"I will pray for you and will clearly reveal the answer of Yahweh," replied the prophet.

"Whatever Yahweh says we should do, we will obey His voice whether it be good or evil," promised the people.

So Jeremiah gave himself in prayer to Yahweh. But at first there was no answer! Ten days went by, as he communed with God.

The delay must have severely tested the faith of the Jews. As each day went by they would have become more and more filled with fear lest the Babylonians swoop down upon them. They had not learned the lesson that Moses had tried to teach the nation when he led them

from Egypt, and Yahweh had declared: "Stand still and see the Salvation of Yahweh". As day followed day, they became more and more impatient with the still, silent prophet, who remained apart from the people, awaiting the answer of God.

The more they thought upon their problem, the more they believed that the only solution was to flee into Egypt.

They hoped that Yahweh would confirm them in this intention.

Then, at last, the answer came. Jeremiah called the leaders together and told them the will of God. "Thus saith Yahweh, the God of Israel, unto whom you sent me to present your supplications before Him. If you will still abide in this land, then will I build you and not pull you down, and I will plant you, and not pluck you up; for I repent Me of the evil that I have done unto you. Be not afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid, saith Yahweh; for I am with you to save you, and to deliver you from his hand. And I will show mercies unto you, that he may have mercy upon you, and cause you to return to your own land."

This answer demanded faith and courage. The Jews had none of the first and little of the second. In sullen anger they listened to the words of the prophet. He could see from the looks on their faces what reaction he could expect at such a proposition as this. Sternly he warned them: "If you say, we will not dwell in this land, neither obey the voice of Yahweh, saying: No, but we will go into the land of Egypt, where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor have hunger of bread, and there will we dwell; then it shall come to pass that the sword, which you feared, shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine, whereof you were afraid shall follow close after you in Egypt; and there shall you die; none shall escape from the evil that I will bring upon you."

The Jews wanted to flee into Egypt; they wanted to return from the land of slavery and death from which Yahweh through Moses had delivered them. They had no confidence in God to save them.

What a dismal end to the glorious kingdom established in the days of David and Solomon! One section of the nation had been taken captive back into the land from whence Abraham had been called; the other remnant wanted to go back to the land of oppression from which Moses had earlier delivered them.

They turned their backs upon the lessons of their own history, they treated with contempt the efforts that Yahweh had made to take them out of that land through the strivings of Moses. Jeremiah could plainly see that they did not intend to obey the voice of God, and his indignation burst upon them in a forthright speech of condemnation: "You are hypocrites!" declared the angry prophet. "You dissembled in your hearts when you sent me to Yahweh saying, Pray for us, and according to all that He shall say, declare it unto us, and we will do it. Know

of a certainty that you will die by the sword, the famine, and the pestilence in the place where you desire to go and sojourn.”

This scathing revelation of their real motives angered the people. Murmurings broke out among them. One of the captains, Azariah, became the mouthpiece of the people, and accused Jeremiah of lying.

“Yahweh has not sent you to say, Go not into Egypt to sojourn there. Baruch has set you against us, to deliver us into the hands of the Chaldeans that they might put us to death.”

This speech pleased the people. It suggested an excuse for disobeying the command of Yahweh, and of getting out of the solemn promise that they had made. It was easy and convenient to call Jeremiah a liar, and refuse to remain in a land in which the future seemed so forbidding. Soon the camp of the Jews was busy, as the people packed in order to leave as quickly as possible.

What of Jeremiah? Should they leave him behind? No, they decided that he must come as well. They forced him to leave with them. If he could not help them with his prophesying, he should, at least, share their fate! He had told them what they could expect in Egypt; let him therefore share it!

So he and Baruch were forced to go into the land of slavery and idolatry.

In Egypt the Jews fondly imagined that they could bury themselves out of sight of Babylon and of Yahweh. This foolish remnant looked forward in hope to the land of sin and death!

### **Further Warning in Egypt**

They came to the city of Tahpanhes, a royal city on the eastern frontier of Lower Egypt.

There they were honorably received. The Egyptians hated and feared the Babylonians, and welcomed with pleasure this group of Jewish allies. Among the Jews were the daughters of king Zedekiah (Jer. 41:10; 43:6) and a special honor was paid to them. As befitted royalty, a special palace was given them as a place of residence.\*

Such a reception was beyond the expectations of the Jews, and they settled down comfortably in Egypt, as though they had never been away from it. Soon they were eagerly entering into all phases of life about them.

Jeremiah looked on this with regret. He knew that the appearance of ease and pleasure was not the reality. He could see that this remnant of the Jews would soon be completely involved in the idolatry of

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\* The Bible merely says that these daughters of the king went down into the land of Egypt, but, significantly, in the year 1886, the archaeologist, Flinders Petrie, discovered a ruin called Kasr el Bint Yehudi — *The Palace of the Daughter of Judah*. Doubtless it was a residence assigned to these daughters of Zedekiah.

the land, and caught up in the destruction that he knew (for he had predicted it: Jer. 46) would soon fall upon Egypt.

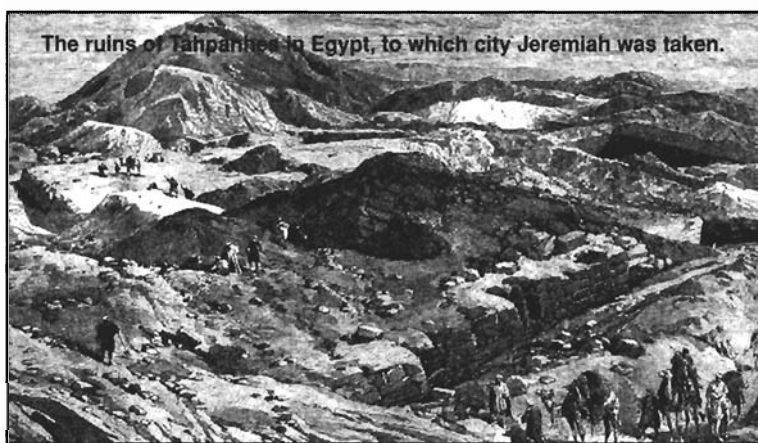
The Jews imagined that the protection of Pharaoh was greater than the protection of Yahweh and saw in the glory of the palace in Tahpanhes a symbol of the permanence and power of Egypt's ruler. In front of this palace was a great courtyard, a great open air platform of brickwork.\* They were startled one day, to see Jeremiah taking great stones and setting them up publicly in the full view of all who were watching.

"What ever is the mad prophet doing?" they asked among themselves. "What does it all mean?"

Jeremiah hoped that they would ask such questions, and was not afraid to give an answer. "Thus saith Yahweh," he told the Jews, "Behold, I will send Nebuchadnezzar My servant, and will set his throne upon these stones that I have hid; and he shall spread his royal pavilion over them. He will bring death, captivity and the sword to the land of Egypt. He will destroy its temples, break its images, and clothe himself with the land of Egypt as easily as a shepherd puts on his garment; and he shall return to his land in peace" (Jer. 43:10-13).

How impatiently the people must have turned from the prophet; how they must have gritted their teeth in anger at his words. Just when they were beginning to enjoy life in Egypt, he must start up with some wild prophecy of doom, and remind them of the worship of Yahweh! Who was Yahweh, anyway! They had only experienced trouble when they worshipped Him! He had not protected them much!

So the foolish people reasoned among themselves and soon forgot the words of the prophet.



\* Archaeologists have discovered this courtyard.

## Chapter Thirteen

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### JEREMIAH'S LAST PROPHECY

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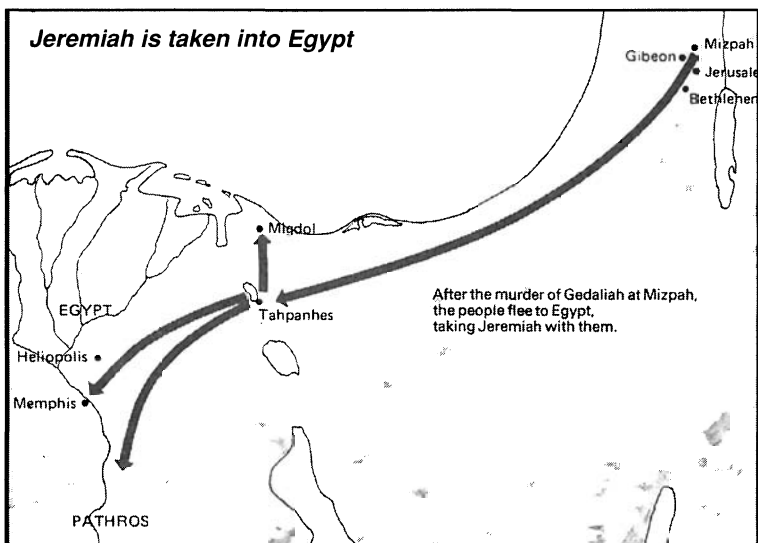
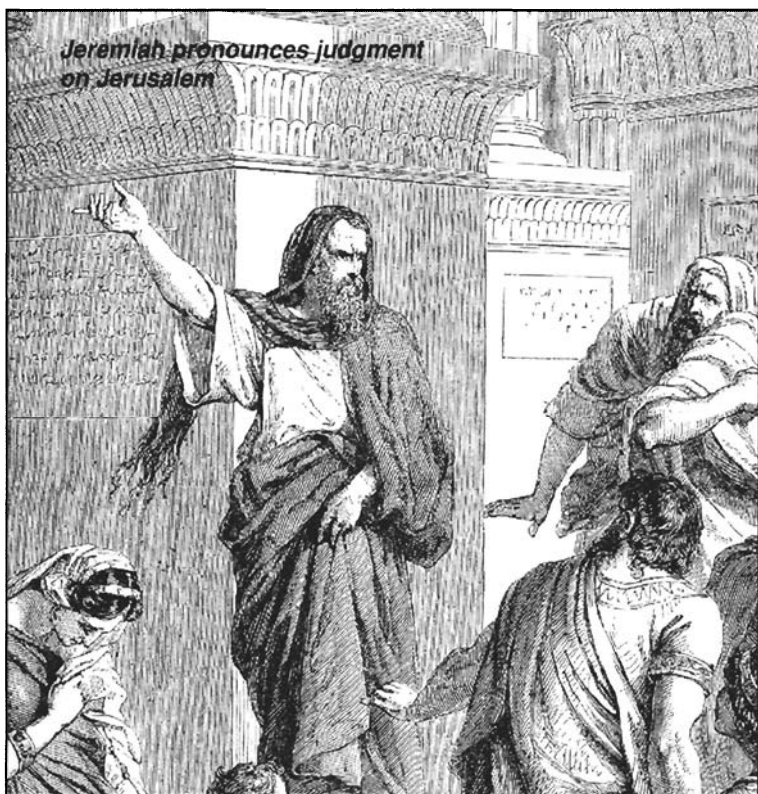
**T**HIS faithful man of God made one last attempt to redeem the people. They had become scattered into different parts of Egypt (Jer. 44:1), and were gradually being drawn into the idolatry of this Land of Sin. Once again he raised the voice of warning. He called upon the Jews to look at the state of Jerusalem — a burnt ruin — to consider their own condition — wanderers in a strange land — and reflect that all this had come upon them because of flagrant wickedness and senseless indifference to divine principles. He proclaimed the word of Yahweh to them: “You provoke me to wrath with the works of your hands, burning incense unto other gods in the land of Egypt, whither you have gone to dwell that you might cut yourselves off, and that you might be a curse and a reproach among all the nations of the earth! Have you forgotten the wickedness of your fathers, the wickedness of the kings of Judah, the wickedness of their wives, the wickedness of yourselves, the wickedness of your wives which they have committed?”

Again Jeremiah warned them that it was useless seeking a refuge in Egypt, for everybody who attempted to do so would be destroyed. Only those who sought to escape from Egypt would be delivered, to become Yahweh's witnesses that His words were performed to the letter (cp. Jer. 44:14, 28).

Jeremiah's verbal attack angered the Jews. He had not only reproved the men but their wives, who, probably through the influence of the daughters of Zedekiah, had taken the lead in idolatry in Egypt. And now these domineering, wicked women turned on the sorrowful prophet with spiteful words designed to hurt him.

“We will not listen to you!” they exclaimed. “We will do whatever thing goes out of our mouth to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes in Judah and Jerusalem, for *then we had plenty of food and were well and saw no evil*. All our troubles have come upon us since we left off burning incense to the queen of heaven, and pouring out drink offerings unto her. We have not done these things without our men; they have supported us in it!”

This was the terrible state into which the Jews in Egypt had fallen. They had turned from God, and were worshipping the queen of heaven. It was fashionable to do so, and the Jewish women took the lead, supported in their wickedness by their menfolk. They did this on the plea that Yahweh was unable to help.





“Your idolatry is the cause of all your troubles,” retorted the courageous prophet, well knowing that his opposition would rouse their anger. “Yahweh sees the things you do, and because of them He has brought you into the state where you find yourselves today. And as you have fulfilled your vow to worship the queen of heaven, listen to the vow of Yahweh. Thus says Yahweh: ‘Behold I have sworn by My great Name, that My Name shall be no more named in the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt, but I will watch over them for evil and not good; and all the men of Judah in Egypt shall be consumed by the sword and the famine until a complete end is brought of them. A small remnant shall escape to record how true are these words, and they shall be able to testify whose words have stood, Mine or theirs. And this shall be a sign to you: I will give Pharaoh Hophra, the king of Egypt, into the hand of his enemies, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon’.”

**Death of Jeremiah**      These are the last recorded words of Jeremiah. We are not told in the Bible what happened to him after this heated argument with the foolish remnant in Egypt. Tradition says that he was stoned to death in Egypt by the Jews following this forthright prophecy.

This could be so. To rebuke them so personally was the greatest insult as far as the people were concerned. Smitten in conscience, they angrily rushed upon him, doubtless spurred on by the foolish women who had taken the lead in idolatry and folly, and, dragging the prophet away, stoned him to death.

So died this great hero of the faith, a man who had dedicated his whole life to help the people who murdered him, and to serve his God without reserve. Never (except in the case of the Lord Jesus) was a more wicked murder committed than this. Jeremiah was a warm-hearted prophet whose sorrow and tears showed how keenly he felt the troubles of the people, how ardently he would have helped them if they had allowed him to do so.

In his wonderful honor roll of faithful heroes, Paul says that “some were stoned to death” (Heb. 11:37). He could have had Jeremiah in mind. But the apostle said more than that; he declared that “the world was not worthy of such.” The truth of these words is surely evident in the life of this wonderful man of faith, this man who became intimately connected with sorrow and grief because he really felt and lived the message he delivered.

His life was not all sorrow, however. He looked forward with anticipation to Christ’s return, when he will claim the inheritance recorded on the title deeds that he buried so long ago. He rejoiced with his friends in this “joy that was set before him.” To him the words of Paul apply: “He died in faith, not having received the

promises, but having seen them afar off, were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that he was a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth" (Heb. 11:13).

As such he leaves a wonderful example for us.

We bid a temporary farewell to this great hero with whom we have been living in spirit during the past weeks as we have prepared these notes on his life, hoping that we may be accounted worthy to stand with him in the day of his glory. Let us so order our lives, that we, too, will attain unto "that better thing" that God has reserved for all those who serve Him as did Jeremiah. Surely James must have had him in mind when he wrote: "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold we count them happy which endure..." (James 5:10-11).

The faithless remnant in Egypt are gone; their record is a record of folly. They thought they could silence the voice of Jeremiah, whom they hated, by murdering him. But his testimony lives, and one day he shall live also, to inherit that which God has in store for him. But the folly of the others has sealed their doom. Egypt claimed them, and swallowed them up; the millennium is not for them, nor for such as them. They had the privilege of listening to Jeremiah, but they spurned his message and scorned the opportunity that was their's.

Remember, this is "our day of opportunity!"

### **Nebuchadnezzar Avenges the Death of Jeremiah**

It was Pharaoh Hophra (or Apries, as he is known to historians), who had stimulated Zedekiah to revolt. He was therefore indirectly responsible for the Babylonish attack on Jerusalem that brought destruction to the city and temple of God. Hophra had promised the Jews support, but as the prophets had warned, Egypt always proved a broken reed to Israel.

It was the same Pharaoh who welcomed the remnant into the land of Egypt, and promised them a refuge.

Eagerly they had accepted his promise and turned to the gods he served. But it was soon apparent that he lacked the power to do what he proposed, and that Jeremiah's words would prove true. Those who had heeded the prophet's warning, and who were watching the "signs of the times," soon detected evidences of impending divine judgment on Egypt. A revolt against the authority of Hophra flared up in a portion of his territory. He sent a prominent general, a man named Amasis, to reduce the people to their duty. But no sooner had Amasis begun to appeal to the people, than they fixed a helmet on his head and proclaimed him king.

The surprised Amasis was delighted with the honor. He was a skilled soldier, and capable of leading the rebellion. He raised the

standard of revolt against Hophra, and soon had the greater part of Egypt supporting him. Hophra was obliged to retire into Upper Egypt whilst civil war swept the nation.

The sword began to threaten the Jewish remnant in Egypt as Jeremiah had warned!

This was but the beginning of trouble. Egypt was next threatened with foreign invasion. News was received in the land that Nebuchadnezzar was on the march. He was out to crush, once and for all, the ability of Egypt to counter his plans. And the nation, hopelessly divided among itself, was ripe for invasion and conquest. It could only offer a token resistance. Nebuchadnezzar's conquest was rapid and successful. He overthrew all opposition; he confirmed Amasis as the puppet king of Babylon; and then he retired.

But Egypt's miseries were not yet over. Sword, famine and pestilence continued to sweep the nation, including the miserable remnant of Jews that had fled there to escape these things. Civil war still raged. Hophra tried to regain his power. He attacked Amasis but was defeated. Taken captive, he was carried to Sais, and strangled in his own palace.

The conquest of Egypt had been as easy for Nebuchadnezzar as Jeremiah predicted it would be. It had been no more difficult for him than for "a shepherd to put on his garment" (Jer. 43:12).

### **The Land Enjoys its Sabbaths**

With the removal of this final remnant of Jews from the land, a dismal silence fell upon Palestine. The words of Jeremiah were fulfilled. He had warned the people that they would suffer the fate threatened by the Law of Moses if they did not turn from their evil ways. In Leviticus 26, Moses strictly warned the people that they had to "keep Yahweh's sabbaths and reverence His sanctuary" (v. 2). If they failed to do that, they would suffer pestilence (v. 16), invasion (vv. 17-19), famine (v. 20), desolation of their cities and sanctuaries (v. 31) and national captivity (v. 33). "Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths" (Lev. 26:34).

Jeremiah had pleaded with the people to "keep Yahweh's sabbaths" (Jer. 17) and "reverence His sanctuary" (Jer. 7). But they rejected his message.

He had warned them that they would be subjected to a captivity of seventy years, or ten sabbatical years, a fulfilment of Leviticus 26:34.

And for this length of time, in far-away Babylon, the captives remained "to fulfil the word of Yahweh by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths; for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years."

So declares the Bible record in 2Chronicles 36:21.



The sad scene of the Jewish captives taken to Babylon. Yet this experience was to prove to be the merciful hand of Yahweh protecting a faithful remnant who would become strengthened in faith. It was through the exile in Babylon that the folly of idolatry was largely purged from the nation, and they eventually returned to the Promised Land under Joshua and Zerubbabel to re-establish their roots in Jerusalem.

# *Israel in the Enemies' Land*



**T**HE prophet Jeremiah had courageously witnessed against the folly of the rulers and people in Jerusalem, warning them to put their trust in the salvation of Yahweh. He told them that God intended to subject His people to exile in a foreign land — but that this would only last for seventy years. Now that time had arrived, and the ministry of Jeremiah was to be taken up by others. Daniel and Ezekiel were amongst the prominent captives in Chaldea, whose voices were heard, encouraging the people to remain true to their heritage, and to look for the promised redemption that would ultimately come. Many of the Jews ignored their messages, as they had ignored the prophets that went before. But there was a faithful remnant who associated with these two men, and kept separate from the influence of Babylon. They were to become the foundation of the new epoch in Jewish history, when the nation would return to the land.

## Chapter One

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### EZEKIEL: MESSENGER OF HOPE

**W**HILST Jeremiah was ministering to the people in Jerusalem, Daniel and Ezekiel were proclaiming their message to the Israelites in exile. Like the book of Jeremiah, the record of Daniel is full of historical detail, and we hope to tell the story of his adventures shortly. But only few personal experiences of Ezekiel are revealed to us, so that in our story we propose merely to summarise his message.

#### **Condition of the Jews in Captivity**

Ezekiel was taken into captivity with the third deportation of Jews that were led away, this being the time of “king Jehoiachin’s captivity” (Ezek. 1:2). There were at least six deportations of Jews: [1] In the 4th year of Jehoiakim (Dan. 1:1); [2] Six years later when 3023 were taken captive (Jer 52:28); [3] The following year in the reign of Jehoiachin when 10,000 were taken (2Kgs. 24:12-16); [4] Ten years later, when a further 832 were taken (Jer. 52:29); [5] The following year when there was a further deportation of the upper classes (2Kgs. 25:8-12); [6] Four years later (23rd Nebuchadnezzar) when a further 745 persons were taken (Jer. 52:30). Some of these numbers might relate to families rather than individuals.

The Jewish exiles were distributed into different settlements throughout Babylonia where they formed small communities with certain organization and freedom of worship.

One such colony was at Tel-Abib (Ezek. 3:15), and in it Ezekiel must have been a dominant personality. The elders of the community came to highly regard him for his message (ch. 8:1), and delighted to hear him expound the purpose of Yahweh (ch. 33:31).

At this time, in Jerusalem, Jeremiah was battling against the deadly dope of the false prophets (see Jer. 27:9; 28:1-11) who had spread the idea that those who remained in the city were Heaven’s favorites, that the city would be divinely protected, and they would not be removed (Ezek. 11:15; 33:24).

This idea even spread to those in exile from the earlier deportations. There, infatuated Jews were seized with the idea that their captivity would soon end (Ezek. 13:16, 19) in spite of the messages of Jeremiah to the contrary. Their teaching was supported by the false prophet of Jerusalem, Hananiah, who predicted that they would return within two years with the vessels of the temple (Jer. 28). Jeremiah wrote to the exiles warning them to take no heed to such foolish pre-

**DANIEL:  
PRINCE OF THE PROPHETS**

With the death of the Jewish State, our attention is diverted to the exiles in Babylon, and particularly to Daniel the prophet who played such a remarkable role in the captivity.



His book predicts the destiny of two powers: the Kingdom of Men (Dan. 4:17), and the Kingdom of God (Dan. 2:44; 4:3; 7:27). He shows that the triumph of one must be at the expense of the other. When the Kingdom of Men is in the ascendancy, the Kingdom of God is found in decline, and vice versa.

A lot of antagonism has been expressed towards the book of Daniel. It has been assailed by critics more than any other book of the Bible, but no lesser person than the Lord Jesus himself commended the study of this book (Mat. 24:15), and the angel told Daniel that "the wise shall understand" (Dan. 12:10). A person is wise who studies this book with a desire to learn its message.

Daniel was a man of high position (Dan. 1:3), well-known to his contemporaries for his wisdom and righteousness (Ezek. 14:14, 20; 28:3). His integrity towards Yahweh was reflected in his relations towards men (Dan. 6:4-5). He was a man of steadfast determination (Dan. 1:8), faithful (Dan. 2:16-18), courageous (Dan. 6), and yet modest (Dan. 2:30).

**The Greatly Beloved.**

He is granted this title in Daniel 10:11. It is a title given by Yahweh to His son (Mat. 3:17), and by the Son to the apostle John (John 13:23). There is thus a link between Daniel, Christ and John. Daniel was given certain revelations, the times of which were sealed (Dan. 12:4) until the "time of the end," in our days (Rev. 16); Christ opened the sealed book (Rev. 5:5), and passed the information on to John (Rev. 1:1). The Book of Revelation thus unfolds and extends the prophetic revelations delivered through Daniel.

Daniel not only predicted future events in common with other prophets, but he went further and fixed a time for their coming to pass!

His book is divided into two parts. The first six chapters of Daniel are historical; the last six chapters are prophetic. The first six chapters are given in the third person ("Daniel answered the king"; "Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar was astonished"), the last six chapters are given in the first person ("I saw"; "I believe"; etc.). From Daniel 2:4 to 7:28 the narrative is recorded in the Syrian tongue; the rest is in Hebrew.

The reason for this division seems to be:



- [1] The remarkable historical details in the first half authenticated the remarkable prophetic message in the second half.
- [2] The use of the third person in the first half is natural inasmuch as Daniel would be reluctant to express in the first person the notable acts of courage and faith of which he was the hero, whereas there is no reluctance in revealing in the first person, the remarkable revelations given him in the second portion of the book.
- [3] The use of Aramaic (a language common to Babylonia) to record the remarkable historical details of the book was appropriate, for it permitted Babylonians to read of these things for themselves. The narrative reveals the omnipotence of the God of Israel and shows that though His people were in captivity, Yahweh was still mighty to save. It was important for this to be plainly known, for Nebuchadnezzar had attempted to discredit the God of Israel before all the people (Dan. 1:2), but ultimately had to acknowledge His superiority.

### **The Greatest Miracle in the Book of Daniel.**

The greatest miracle is not the saving of friends from the fire, or the closing of the mouth of the lions, or the revealing of the dream to the king, but something that is not openly recorded in the book, yet which testifies to the greatness of both Ezekiel and Daniel, and the wisdom of Yahweh in disciplining His people.

We refer to the change in the attitude of the people. The Jews went into exile as hopeless addicts to idolatry (Ezek. 14:3). They returned from a brief interval in exile as the most rigid and fiercely monotheistic nation in the world. This was a tremendous change. It indicated the truth of Jeremiah's words that it was the "good figs" that were taken into captivity "for their good" (Jer. 24:5). It also witnesses to the tremendous influence for good wielded by Ezekiel and Daniel, and particularly the latter. Undoubtedly his ministrations to the people helped in causing this great change. Therefore, though nothing is said of this in the narrative itself, the faithful actions of Daniel and his quiet ministrations to the people were of the greatest importance, and gradually changed their whole attitude towards God. Thus seventy years after the captivity began, the exiles were so reformed that they were ready to return and rebuild the temple, and set about restoring again the true worship.

To our mind that is the greatest miracle in the Book of Daniel. What caused it? Obviously the prophecies recorded in the book. These were well-known to the people and revealed to them, at long last, the value of worshipping Yahweh in truth.

Daniel's name signifies *The Judgment of God*. He predicted the tremendous judgments that will be manifested in the earth at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to rule (Acts 17:31).

dictions (Jer. 29). His letter was replied to by one of the exiles, She-maiah, who suggested that the priest Zephaniah should imprison Jeremiah as a madman (Jer. 29:24-28).

But the death of Hananiah, the testimony of Ezekiel, and successive captivities, soon destroyed all hopes of a speedy return.

### **Ezekiel the Man**

The prophet Ezekiel was a man of determination who refused to be deterred by opposition (Ezek. 3:8-9). He was commanded to proclaim the Word whether people hearkened or not, and this he did (ch. 2:5-7). He was not a fluent man, and words did not come easily from him (ch. 3:26), but when they did they were weighty and impressive. Later, after the fall of Jerusalem, when his prophecies had been vindicated in part, he found himself speaking much more fluently (ch. 33:22).

He seems to have been respected by the Jews though they did not heed his words (ch. 33:21). He gives us the impression of being rather austere, standing aloof from what took place about him, condemning the attitude of the Jews both by word as by symbolic action.

His name signifies *God (El) will Strengthen*, and as he uses the title "Son of man" nearly one hundred times, we have the joint expression: *God will Strengthen the Son of Man*. Thus our attention is drawn to the Lord Jesus who is described as the "Son of man, whom Thou (Yahweh) madest strong for Thyself" (Psa. 80:17). As a type of the Messiah, Ezekiel is reported as enacting the very things that Christ would accomplish, and some of his prophecies relate to the glory of the Lord in the Age to come and of the temple that would then be built.

Ezekiel was a priest, and (again like Christ) commenced his ministry at the age of thirty years (Ezek. 1:1). He was married (ch. 24:16-17), and lived in his own house at Tel-Abib (ch. 8:1). He dramatised the message he delivered to the people, lying on his side for a period of 430 days whilst he enacted the siege of Jerusalem (ch. 4), shaving his head to indicate that the Nazarite nation had "defiled the head of its consecration" (ch. 5; Num. 6:9), and so on. The sudden death of his dearly-beloved wife came as a shock, but he was commanded not to mourn (Ezek. 24:16-17), as in the same year Jerusalem (Yahweh's wife: Isa. 54:4) had likewise come to its death.

### **Ezekiel's Theme**

The recurring statement of his prophecy is: "They shall know that I am Yahweh". It is a significant declaration, considering that it was made to a nation in exile, and confirmed the fact that Israel's God was not unmindful of the condition of the people. The statement occurs 29 times in recording punishment on Jerusalem, 24 times in recording punishment on Gentile nations, 17 times in recording the restoration and final blessing.

The Book of Ezekiel can be summarised as follows: Chapters 1-3 describe his call and commission; chapters 4-24 outline Jerusalem's impending judgment; chapters 25-39 foretell judgments on the Gentiles intermixed with the restoration of Israel; chapters 40-48 take us into the final glory when the kingdom of God will be restored.

Ezekiel is noted for two major themes: the Cherubim and the Temple of the Age to Come. In the symbolism of the Cherubim he saw Yahweh's glory depart from Jerusalem (Ezek. 9:3, 10:4, 18; 11:23) only to return in a new form in the future age (Ezek. 43:1-2). In his indictment on Jerusalem Ezekiel predicted the defilement and destruction of the temple, whilst his latter chapters describe its restoration as a House of Prayer for all nations in the Age to come.

Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel comprise the *Apocalypse* (Book of Revelation) of the Old Testament. There is hardly a theme in the Revelation that is not dealt with by these prophets. Jeremiah predicted the complete downfall of Babylon in language similar to that in which John records the overthrow of mystical Babylon. Ezekiel wrote of the cherubim, as also does John in the book of Revelation. Ezekiel was given a little book to eat (Ezek. 3:1-4), as was also John in Patmos (Rev. 10). Ezekiel spoke of Gogue and Magog, as also did John (Rev. 20:8). Ezekiel had a vision of a material temple, and the Revelation reveals John's vision of a spiritual temple. And as Ezekiel concludes with the statement: "Yahweh is there" (Ezek. 48:35), so John ends his with the prayer: "Even so come, Lord Jesus!"

Ezekiel performed a valuable service in exile. His ministrations prepared a generation which was fit to return to the land after the seventy years' captivity predicted by Jeremiah had been completed. A study of his writings can help fit us for a place in the kingdom that Christ will set up on earth when he returns to restore the throne of David as predicted by Ezekiel the prophet (Ezek. 21).



The great temple on Mt. Zion, of which Ezekiel prophesied. It will be constructed under the guidance of the Lord Jesus Christ, who will reign therein over the whole world at peace.

## Chapter Two

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### DANIEL IS TAUGHT THE WISDOM OF BABYLON

“TO study the story of Daniel properly, we must go back in thought to the first invasion of Nebuchadnezzar in the days of Jehoiakim the king,” remarked Mr. Phillips in answer to a question raised by his son, Graeham.

“Do you think it is necessary to study the book of Daniel?” asked Peter innocently, winking at his sisters, trying to draw his father out.

“Undoubtedly!” replied Mr. Phillips enthusiastically. “Why, in the book of Daniel...”

“I know, I know,” interrupted Peter, “we have some of the most dramatic incidents recorded in Scripture!”

“That is true,” remarked Mr Phillips, “but in fact I was not going to say that! I was going to say that in the book of Daniel we have some profound subjects so simply expressed that even you would be able to grasp them, Peter!”

“Oh!” said Peter, somewhat taken aback.

“It is very true,” remarked his father. “Though this book appears difficult to understand, in my opinion it is one of the simplest of the prophets to grasp.”

“Don’t take any notice of Peter’s interruptions, Daddy, tell us what you were going to say about Jehoiakim,” said Ann, who felt that the interchange between her father and brother had gone far enough.

#### Off Into Exile

“In the days of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, and took hostages back with him to Babylon, together with portion of the vessels of the temple in Jerusalem. These were to show the people of Babylon that he had won yet another remarkable victory. The vessels of the temple in Jerusalem were taken back to Babylon to be placed in the temple of his god, to show the superiority of Bel-Merodach, one of the many gods of Babylon, over Yahweh, the God of Israel.”

“Daniel 1:2 says that he took them to the Land of Shinar. Is that Babylon?” asked Graeham.

“Yes, you will find it helpful to study the book of Daniel with the book entitled *Exposition of Daniel* written by J. Thomas”, said Mr. Phillips. “In addition, you will find further interesting matter in his other books, *Elpis Israel* and *Eureka*. If you use the index in each of these volumes, you will find where they comment upon the teaching of Daniel. The author shows that the name Shinar is most significant. It is compounded of two Hebrew words, *shiyin* meaning ‘a tooth,’ and

ar signifying 'enemy.' Thus *Shinar* signifies the *Enemy's Tooth*, and the name suggests the serpent power, of which Babylon was the headquarters at that time. You find the word used in Gen. 11:2 for the plain upon which was built the Tower of Babel, or *Confusion*. That is the significance of the name Babylon, as far as the Jews were concerned."

"Daniel 1:4 speaks of the prophet as a 'child'," said Ann. "How old would he have been?"

"We do not know exactly," replied her father: "In IKgs. 12:8 the same word in the Hebrew is used to describe youths, probably teenagers. Daniel and his companions would have been perhaps about eighteen years of age. They were very important young men, for they were 'of seed royal' (Dan. 1:3). And in this there was fulfilled the prophecy spoken to Hezekiah."

"What prophecy was that?"

"Don't you remember how Hezekiah welcomed the Babylonish princes who came to visit him after the destruction of Sennacherib?"

"Yes, Isaiah rebuked him for it."

"That is true. Isaiah also told him that the king of Babylon would take of his seed to be eunuchs in Babylon (2Kgs. 20:14-18). In the deportation of Daniel and his friends, these words were fulfilled."

"That is very interesting" commented Peter. "I did not know that Daniel was a descendant of David!"

"These young men were specially selected for the court of Babylon, not only because they were of the seed royal, but also because of their royal bearing. They were well-built, handsome, intelligent young men, such as could grace the court of the king. They were taken to the mighty city of Babylon which must have impressed them with the sense of fleshly power and grandeur. Everywhere there was wealth and magnificence. A vast wall enclosed the city. The mighty river Euphrates flowed through it. Its streets were wide and straight, and divided it into handsome squares. In every street there were temples to the gods, and these were decorated with precious metals, gems, and wealth robbed from the many cities that Nebuchadnezzar had conquered. On all sides stood idols with incense arising to them. In the very centre of the city they could have seen the ruined Tower of Babel, which later Nebuchadnezzar restored. Daniel was destined to remain in this city over seventy years, and during that time was to witness the tremendous building activity embarked upon by the king once he had established his empire."

### **Educated in the Wisdom of Babylon**

"Daniel had three close friends with whom he was taken into captivity," continued Mr. Phillips. "Once in Babylon they were selected for a high honor. They were soon to be young men of exceptional ability, and so they were put into the charge of the Chaldeans, that

they might be educated in the sciences and language of the Babylonians, and skilled in all their teachings.”

“But were not all the Babylonians called Chaldeans?” asked Graeham.

“The Chaldeans were a section of the Babylonians. They filled the ecclesiastical positions in the capital to such an extent that the name became used for the priests of Bel-Merodach. So Herodotus the Greek historian tells us. Thus the Chaldeans were the pagan clergy of Babylon.”

“Was it only paganism that Daniel was taught?” asked Peter.

“No, the learning of the Chaldeans included much that was of value. They were far advanced over the rest of the world in knowledge. They had the rudiments of science, they possessed the elements of the telescope, and they were advanced in the study of the heavenly bodies. But their astronomy was combined with superstitious astrology and divination. They believed in magic. Their gods were legion. It was a ‘land of graven images, and they were mad upon their idols’ as Jeremiah had warned (Jer. 50:38). They had their seers of the heavens, their stargazers, their monthly prognosticators who pretended to foretell coming events (Isa. 47:13). All this Daniel had to learn, together with the new language of Babylon.”

“Why did Nebuchadnezzar want Daniel to learn this?” asked Ann.

“The king was very jealous of the honor of the gods he worshipped, and wanted to show their superiority over everything else. His very name honored one of these gods, for the name Nebuchadnezzar means *Nebo Defend the Borders*, and Nebo was a god of Babylon (Isa. 46:1). The king had placed the vessels of the temple of Yahweh in the temple of his god to show that Yahweh was subject to the gods of Babylon, and now he brought these splendid young men, who were of the Jewish seed royal, to force upon them the teaching of paganism, that he might draw them away from the Truth and worship of the true God of Israel”.

### **Daniel: Prince of the Prophets.**

“But though this was a great test on these young men, the king utterly failed, for they already possessed a knowledge that showed them how false and shallow was the wisdom of Babylon. Daniel was certain and fixed in his conception of the Truth. He was like Moses, who, though he became skilled in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, remembered the wise counsel of his mother, her careful instruction in the days of his childhood, her daily exhortations that he should avoid the evil of Egypt, and therefore did not depart from these things when he grew up (Acts 7:22).”

“Who helped Daniel?”

“We do not know. It could have been the influence of godly par-

ents. It could have been the help of Jeremiah. Perhaps good king Josiah had a hand in it. Daniel would have been a young boy when the reforms of Josiah took place, and they could have had a tremendous influence on him. Perhaps he had heard faithful Jeremiah proclaiming his message in the streets of Jerusalem, standing up boldly in the temple, warning the people of the folly of their conduct and pleading with them to turn wholeheartedly to Yahweh.

“All this could have made a strong impression on a young boy looking on and listening, perhaps deciding that Jeremiah was his hero, and he would follow his faithful example.

“Knowledge and education create habits of thinking which, once fixed, are hard to shift. They enable one to become skilled in amassing information in all phases of instruction, and what is more important, once established in the mind, gives the ability to resist false notions or teachings.

“So Daniel was equipped to be able to listen to the instruction of the Chaldeans, but to resist its influence. He could see the folly of it all. As Isaiah declared, they made their gods wholesale, manufacturing them in factories, selling them to the people, as the Roman Catholics do today. Their prophets predicted events, but they seldom came to pass. They had gods many, but they were gods that could not see, or hear, or move — whereas Daniel knew that the God he served was living and powerful. By study and prayer he had been brought close to Yahweh, and was well equipped to oppose all the blandishment that might be set before him. He was not to be drawn from his allegiance to God by a false philosophy, or by promises of reward, or positions of honor — but remained faithful to his calling, even in the midst of tremendous pressure from the society about him in Babylon.

“In this Daniel stands as a wonderful example to young people in these last days. The spirit of Babylon is repeated today in the desire for materialism and achievement that is promoted by a godless world, and we must help each other to withstand its influence and power. That is what we will find out as we tell the dramatic story of this young man.”

### **Daniel's Name is Changed**

“The young captives from Judah had names that honored the God of Israel. However, Nebuchadnezzar instructed that they be changed to names honoring the gods of Babylon. Daniel means *The Judgment of God*, but he was given the name of Belteshazzar which some have interpreted as *Keeper of the Hid Treasures of Bel*. The name of his friend Hananiah means *Yahweh has been Gracious*, but this was changed to Shadrach which signifies *Inspiration of the Sun* which the Babylonians worshipped. Mishael, another friend, means *Who is like God?*, but they changed his name to Meshach which sig-

nifies *He who Belongs to the Goddess Shaca* (or *Sheshak*). Azariah, the fourth friend, means *Helped of Yahweh*, but they changed his name to *Abed-nego* (or *nebo*) which signifies *Servant of the Shining Fire*, or *Servant of Nebo*. Thus the Babylonians gave them names that honored the gods of Babylon, hoping that by teaching them pagan wisdom and giving them pagan names, they might identify themselves with the worship of the mighty city of the Gentiles which was prepared to highly honor them if they did so."

"Are you sure this was the reason?" asked Peter, doubtfully.

"In the statement recorded in Dan. 4:8, Nebuchadnezzar himself tells us that was the reason: 'Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the *name of my god*, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods'."

### **He Refuses the King's Meat**

"Finally the king instructed that these young men be given a special diet of his own meat and wine. This was a great honor, but it was rejected by Daniel. He was determined that he would not accept it. He did this, not on the grounds of vegetarianism, but because it was customary in those days to provide meat for the king's table that had been first offered to idols. Daniel determined he would have nothing to do with such meat (cp Acts 15:29; 1Cor. 8:10; 10:28). To eat such meat would indicate to others that he was a worshipper of the idols, and he was determined to 'avoid the very appearance of evil.' In addition, the Mosaic Law prescribed that only certain meats should be eaten by Jews, and even that had to be killed according to special instructions set down. But the meat on the king's table was not selected and killed in that fashion, and to eat it would defile the conscience of the young Jews. They determined that they would not compromise themselves in order to please the Babylonians."

"What was wrong with the wine?" asked Peter. "Why should they refuse that?"

"For the same reason. Special wine was selected for the king, portion of which was usually poured out in oblation to the gods. In drinking such wine, Daniel felt that he would be compromising himself in the sight of those who would see him; it would be as though he honored the pagan gods to whom it had been first offered.

"He determined he would not touch it!

"Thus commenced a religious struggle by these young men against the spiritual pretensions of the mighty universal empire of Babylon.

"Daniel appealed to Ashpenaz (i.e., chief of the eunuchs) that he and his friends might be excused from eating and drinking that which was set before them.

"But Ashpenaz was reluctant to do this. The king had demanded



it, and he had to obey the command. He was extremely sorry, for he had developed a great compassion for Daniel. He sympathised with him in his distress. As the wise man declares: 'When a man's ways please Yahweh, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him' (Prov. 16:7).

"And in Babylon, far from his homeland and the holy city of Jerusalem, Daniel found an unexpected ally in Ashpenaz, but he expressed his anxiety as disobeying the king: 'I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your meat and drink,' he told the young prophet, 'what reason could I give him if you appear thin and haggard before him. It would endanger my head to the king'.

"But Daniel had an answer. He told Melzar, the chief of the stewards, whom Ashpenaz had set over Daniel and his friends (Dan. 1:11): 'Test your servants,' he invited him. 'Give us pulse\* to eat and water to drink for ten days. Then compare us with those who are eating the king's meat. If you feel we look the worse for it, then treat us as you feel fit.'

"Daniel had confidence that Yahweh would help him.

"Melzar agreed to the suggestion and put them to the test. At the end of the period, he found that they were fairer and fatter in flesh than those who had eaten the king's meat. They had suffered nothing by denying themselves the food of Babylon and living according to the divine law. And Melzar, who had come to have a deep regard for Daniel, consented that they should continue to so live".

"But how would they fare before the king?" asked Joan.

"God had given them skill in understanding. He blessed them in all their ways. Their prayers were answered. And at the end of the three years set aside for their instruction, Daniel and his friends stood before the king. Amazingly, Nebuchadnezzar found them to have skill in all learning and wisdom exceeding anybody else. In fact, they were ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers in his vast realm.

"But before this, an event had taken place that had shown the king that he could put more reliance on Daniel than in anybody else. But we must reserve the telling of that story for another evening."

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\* The word in the Hebrew is *zeroa*, which means *something sown*; thus signifies the product of the earth: anything grown such as fruit, vegetables, or grain!

## Chapter Three

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### HOW GOD REVEALED HIMSELF TO BE A GOD OF WISDOM

**T**HE second year of Nebuchadnezzar's sole reign found him well established in power (Dan. 2:1). Two years earlier (ch. 1:1), he had left Babylon after having been appointed co-ruler by his father, to fight with the powerful Egyptian army at Carchemish. The result was a resounding victory. The Egyptians had been ignominiously chased throughout Palestine, drawing Nebuchadnezzar as far south as Jerusalem, which city he took in conquest (Jer. 25:1).

But his plans were suddenly interrupted by the sad news that his father had died in Babylon, and his presence was immediately required in the capital. Quickly he returned, bringing with him many spoils from his victories, to assume sole position as dictator over a powerful and growing empire.

Now, as the second year of his sole reign commenced, he could contemplate the future. He had tasted power and found it sweet. The large empire he already ruled, the recent victories he had already won, filled his mind with the possibilities of greater triumphs yet before him. A world awaited to be conquered, and he had the power and ability to do it.

What would the future reveal? Nebuchadnezzar's mind was filled with these exciting thoughts as he lay down one night to sleep.

And in his sleep he dreamed.

#### **Nebuchadnezzar's Frightening Dream**

The king saw a vast metallic image suddenly materialise out of the darkness. Its head was of shining gold, its breast and arms were of gleaming silver, its belly and thighs of polished brass, its two legs powerfully encased in iron, its feet were the weakest part, being of clay and iron. A powerful light blazed around it which caused all the metals to glow. The vision towered over the king, a massive warrior with its frowning face, looking harsh and forbidding, causing Nebuchadnezzar to shrink back upon his bed in terror.

Then, suddenly, he saw a small stone, aimed at the image by some unseen Hand. It smote the feet with such force that the top-heavy image toppled over and smashed to pieces. In a moment its glory was destroyed, and it was no longer an object of fear. Meanwhile the stone continued to grow until it became a huge mountain. It crushed the metals into powder, so that they were blown away by the wind. And still it grew until it filled the earth.

Nebuchadnezzar awoke with a start, violently agitated and dis-

turbed in mind at what he had seen. What did it all mean?

**“Tell Me  
the Dream!”**

Nebuchadnezzar was convinced that there was a fearful meaning to this dream that he should know. Evidently the gods whom he worshipped were trying to convey some important message to him.

He could not rest until he found out what that message was! He was convinced that the magicians, astrologers, sorcerers and Chaldeans of his realm could help him. They were the clergy of Babylon, and were paid to interpret such things as dreams. Chief among them were the Chaldeans. They filled the ecclesiastical positions, and were highly respected as the priests of the nation. They were esteemed as the wise men of Babylon.

They were called before the king to explain the meaning of the dream. They came full of confidence that they could pacify his disturbed mind.

They had done it so often before for his father. They were used to divination and interpretation of dreams. They were skilled in giving hidden meanings to such things, and pretending to reveal the future. This would be another moment of triumph for them. What a shock they received!

“I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit is troubled to understand it,” declared the king.

“There is nothing difficult about that!” thought the Chaldeans. They had often pretended to reveal such things. Smoothly and soothingly their spokesman invited the king to confide in them: “O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation.”

Steadily the king looked at the Chaldeans before him. He was a man of outstanding intellect, and was not easily deceived. The dream had really worried him and he desperately wanted a true answer. Could he trust the Chaldeans to do that? As he pondered this he found his answer. If the gods were with them so that they could correctly interpret the dream, then they should be able to tell him what the dream was, without him having to disclose it to them. If he was satisfied that they could do that, he would be certain that the interpretation was a true one.

Quickly making up his mind, he spoke to the Chaldeans: “The word from me is sure: If you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins! But if you show the dream and the interpretation thereof, ye shall receive of me gifts, rewards and great honor: therefore show me the dream, and the interpretation thereof” (RSV).

The Chaldeans could hardly believe their ears. What folly was this! How could they tell the king his dreams! Certainly if he were

prepared to tell them what he had dreamed, they would soon work out an interpretation to fit it, but what he asked was impossible!

They were now as terrified as the king had been. They knew that he was a determined man who would not hesitate to do as he said. As they saw that death faced them for failure to discover the dream, they pleaded with the king to reveal to them the dream: "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation of it."

But the king had made up his mind and would not change it. Harshly he spoke: "I know with certainty that you are only trying to gain time, because you see that the word from me is sure, that if you do not make known the dream to me there is but one sentence for you; for you have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, until the time be changed. Therefore tell me the dream, and I *will know that you can shew me the interpretation thereof*' (Dan. 2:8-9; see RSV).

Desperately the Chaldeans pleaded with the king: "There is not a man upon the earth that can do what the king requires. No king, lord, nor ruler has ever asked such impossible things! The gods that dwell with flesh cannot reveal what you want."

This answer only infuriated the king. He began to doubt the ability of the Chaldeans to provide a true answer. Sternly warning them of their plight, he dismissed them from his presence, decreeing that if they could not do what he asked, they were to be immediately destroyed.

Thus the command went out throughout Babylon that the wise men were to be put to death.

### **Daniel Seeks Help of God**

Among those classed as wise men were Daniel and his friends. They had been selected from among the captives to learn the wisdom and the language of the Chaldeans. They had not appeared before Nebuchadnezzar because the time of their apprenticeship was not then completed (cp. Dan. 1:5 with 2:1).

They were startled to receive a visit from Arioch, the Chief of the Police,\* and to learn that they, together with the rest of the "wise men" were to be put to death.

"Why is the decree so hasty from the king?" enquired Daniel.

Arioch explained the circumstances to him, and Daniel immediately perceived that there was some divine purpose in these events. He personally approached the king, requesting an extension of time, claiming that if he were granted this he would reveal the interpretation to the king.

Nebuchadnezzar was pleased to grant the petition; he did not want to destroy all the "wise men" of his realm, if the information he desired was revealed to him.

Armed with this concession, Daniel went about his problem in a way that provides a wonderful example for all those who are prepared to maintain their ways faithfully before God. He went to his house, gathered his friends about him, and plainly stating the issues facing them, they communally besought the mercy of the God of heaven that He might reveal this secret, and so save them from perishing with the rest of the “wise men” of Babylon.

Daniel knew that these “wise men” were really fools; that they were enemies of God’s truth. But his approach to God was similar to that of Abraham under similar circumstances. Abraham had pleaded the cause of Lot by saying: “It be far from Thee (O Yahweh) that the righteous should be as the wicked: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25). And now Daniel prayed that “he and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon” (Dan. 2:18).

### **Daniel’s Request is Granted**

The God who ever overshadows the lives of His servants, heard the prayer that ascended from the faithful house in troubled Babylon, and granted Daniel his request. Again, during the time of sleep (v. 19), the dream appeared, this time to Daniel, and now the interpretation was clear.

How thrilled Daniel was with the interpretation he received. It was a vindication of the attitude he had shown in refusing to defile himself with the things of Babylon; it endorsed all that he believed to be true, the knowledge he had acquired in Jerusalem and from the Scriptures. In the face of this, the fact that it would save him and his friends from death was of secondary importance.

Full of gratitude to God, Daniel poured out his heart in an answering prayer of thanksgiving. It is a wonderful prayer that he uttered, and we need to read it as it comes from the lips of Daniel, as recorded in Daniel 2:20-23. Notice these points:

**“Blessed”** — The word is *barak* and signifies to kneel before; to adore.

**“Wisdom and Might are His”** — God has the wisdom to design His purpose and the power to implement it.

**“He Changeth the Times and the Seasons”** — God alters the course of history to conform to His purpose at “set times”. He appoints (see Acts 17:26; Psalms 102:13; Psalm 75:2, mg). The dream showed that the history of mankind is not left to chance.

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\* Arioch signifies *Servant of the Moon Goddess*, which was worshipped in Chaldea. “Captain of the guard” in the original text signifies, *Chief of the Butchers!!* (see margin). Such an expressive title was in itself enough to cause fear. How would you like to be visited by a police-officer bearing the name, “Chief of the Butchers”!!

***“He Removeth Kings, and Setteth up Kings”*** — God is behind the rise and fall of nations, guiding their destinies (cp. Psa. 89:18; 95:3; Prov. 21:31, etc.).

***“He Giveth Wisdom unto the Wise”*** — Not to the “wise men” of Babylon. The “wise” are those who seek divine wisdom which the Chaldeans did not (Prov. 2:6-7; 1Cor. 2:13; James 1:5-7).

***“Knowledge, to Them that Know Understanding”*** — The word “understanding” in the original comes from a Hebrew root signifying *to separate or distinguish*. Thus to those who can distinguish between worldly and spiritual knowledge, between the knowledge of the Chaldeans and that of Yahweh, He will grant further understanding.

***“He Revealeth the Deep and Secret Things”*** — He did so to Joseph (Gen. 41:16), the prophets (Amos 3:7), Daniel, and will do so to all who truly seek Him (Psa. 25:14) .

***“He Knoweth what is in the Darkness, and the Light Dwelleth with Him”*** — God is light and in this light is life, and it will destroy darkness (John 1:4-5).

Daniel praised God by making mention of these wonderful divine characteristics in his prayer, and earnestly thanked Him that He had granted him “wisdom and might” in the knowledge that had been given him.

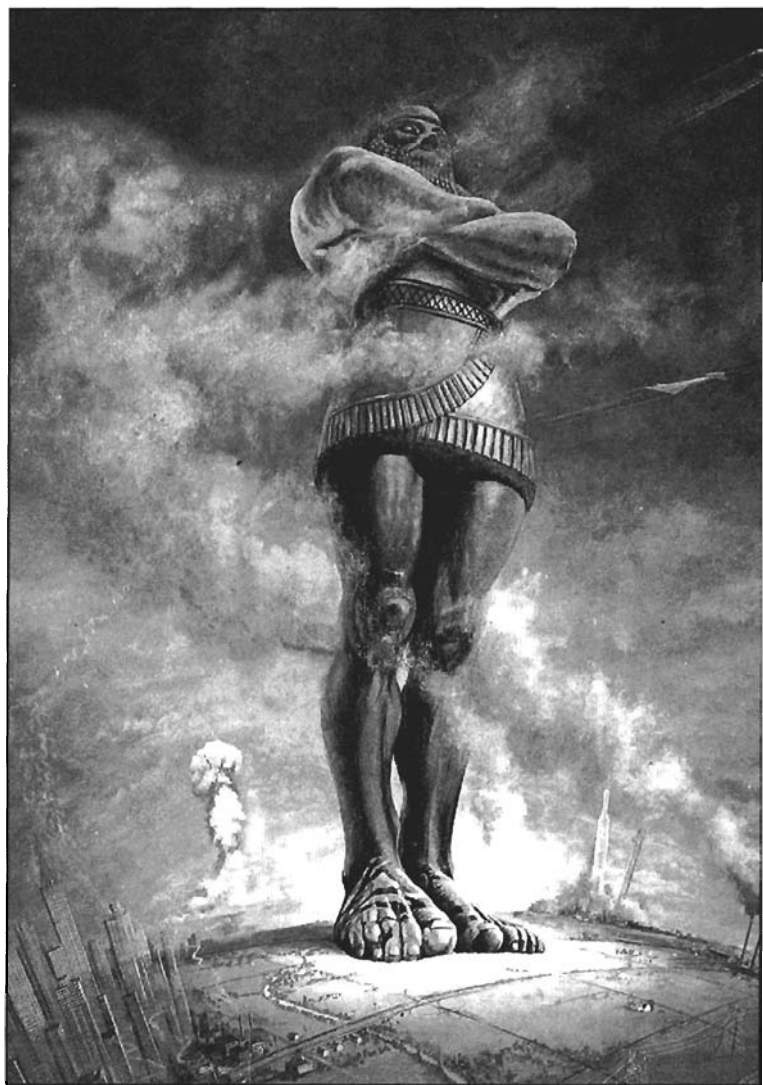
### **The Captive Jew Before the Mighty King**

Armed with this revelation, Daniel sought out Arioch to prevent the massacre. He had a message of hope and of life. “Destroy not the wise men of Babylon,” he declared, “bring me in before the king and I will show unto him the interpretation.”

Hastily Arioch brought Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar, for the extension of time that had been given was quickly running out. Bowing before the king he explained the purpose of his visit. “I have found a man of the captives of Judah, who will make known unto the king the interpretation,” he declared.

The king wanted more than this. He desired to hear Daniel retell the dream as well as the interpretation. Impatiently the worried king spoke to the captive Jew before him. “Are you able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof?” he asked. Daniel did not claim to be able to do so; instead he directed the king to the God of heaven from whence alone all such revelations come. He answered: “The secret which the king hath demanded, the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers cannot shew unto the king; but there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these; As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into your mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and He that revealeth secrets

maketh known to thee what shall come to pass. But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart. Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was great, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible .”



The startled king realised that the despised Jew before him not only was telling him the dream, but the very thoughts of his mind! This knowledge could only come from the God he worshipped (Dan. 4:18). Obviously the king could rely upon the interpretation of Daniel.

The words of the prophet revealed why the revelation had been given:

1. It revealed to the king the thing he desired to know.
2. It saved Yaweh's servants from the fate they would have suffered with the Chaldeans.
3. It brought the knowledge of the true God prominently before the ruler of Babylon.
4. It demonstrated how useless were the false systems of religion which cluttered the city.
5. It elevated Yahweh's holy Name by revealing the ultimate triumph of the hope of Israel.
6. It demonstrated that Gentile might was completely dependent upon the favor of the God of Israel.

### **The Remarkable Interpretation**

Daniel now proceeded to give the interpretation. How humbling this would be to the haughty Gentile dictator! He learned that all his power came from the God of Israel whom previously he had despised. He learned that just as easily as that power had been granted to him it could be taken away. All the power, the glory, and the riches, that he had amassed were very temporary and destined quickly to pass away. He learned a new concept of history: "Thou, O king, art a king of kings..." Nebuchadnezzar could fully agree with that! He described himself as such on his own inscriptions. "For the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength and glory..." That, Nebuchadnezzar had never realised. He had fondly imagined that he, personally, was responsible for all his wealth and power. He now learned that he was but the slave of the God of Israel.

Daniel was expressing the very same truths as Jeremiah later told the Jewish people in Jerusalem: "Thus saith Yahweh, the God of Israel... I have made the earth, the man and beast that are upon the ground, by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto Me. And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My slave" (Jer. 27:4-6 where the word "servant" signifies "slave").

Meanwhile, in Babylon, the king listened to the interpretation with wonder. He learned that the four metals represented four world dominions: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome. The toes represented the divided state of Europe consequent upon the breaking up of the Roman Empire. These were of iron and clay to show that some divi-



sions would be strong and some would be weak.

It was not difficult for the king to recognise the simple truth of the interpretation. The Medes and Persians were noted for silver, and the Greeks for brass (or copper) even in his days (Ezek. 27:13). That part of the vision was easy to follow.

But there was one part not so easy. The king had seen the image standing up complete in all its power and glory, to be smitten by a little stone. This, Daniel said, would take place in the "latter days" (v. 28). That could only mean that in "the latter days" all the nations represented by all the different metals would be welded into one great power; that there is destined to be manifested in the earth in "the latter days" a mighty confederacy of nations that will cause fear in the hearts of all who might be opposed to its power.

But what was meant by "the latter days"? Obviously the last days of the image, destined to be broken by "the little stone".

What did the "little stone" represent? pondered the puzzled king. Daniel explained: "The God of heaven shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter; and the dream is certain and the interpretation is sure".

The king knew that the dream was certain; he could not doubt that the interpretation was sure. He thus learned that the very God who placed him in power would remove him from it in due time, would cause four great world empires to subsequently arise, would break up the fourth into various parts, cause a great confederacy in the last days which would bring all these nations under one head again — and then destroy its power to establish His own glorious kingdom on earth.

The "little stone" which smote the image thus represents the kingdom of God which Jesus Christ shall establish on earth.

In Nebuchadnezzar's day much of the fulfilment lay in the future; today much of it has been wonderfully fulfilled. We look forward to its glorious completion when a divine kingdom on earth will replace all the warring, quarrelling nations of men! The symbol representing this kingdom is a little stone which grows into a vast mountain filling the whole earth.

In the king's dream it must have seemed impossible that a little stone could destroy such a mighty image — but it happened. And in that there is an important lesson for us. Men do not realise the power of the things of God. In Mat. 13:31-33 the Lord Jesus likened the kingdom of God to "a grain of mustard seed... the least of all seeds... which grows into the greatest among herbs, and becomes a great tree so that the birds lodge in its branches..."

The things of God are small and contemptible in the estimation of men today, but they are destined to cause vast changes in the future. This was indicated in some words used by the Lord Jesus. Speaking to the leaders of Jewry\* he declared: "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Mat. 21:43-44).

Like Daniel, Jesus Christ likened the kingdom of God to a little stone that will destroy all on which it shall fall. The kingdom Christ will set up on earth at his return will do that (Isa. 60:12). The nucleus of the kingdom is the Lord himself, who is styled in Scripture "the Stone of Israel" (Gen. 49:24; Ps. 118:22; Isa. 8:14; Mat. 21:44). He will have as his associates in that day those who build their lives upon the truths that he has set before men (Eph. 2:20; 1Pet. 2:4-8), and they will rule with him (Rev. 5:9-10).

With these immortal kings he will overthrow the present rule of man and establish his own glorious reign on earth (Isa. 2:2-4; Zech. 14:9; Isa. 11). His kingdom is fittingly represented as a "stone growing into a mountain and filling the earth".

### **The King honors Daniel**

Amazed by this wonderful revelation, the king looked upon Daniel as a god. He fell down before him in order to worship him, calling upon his servants to offer sacrifice and incense before the young captive Jew. But Daniel refused such worship, and directed the king to the mighty God of Israel who had made known the secret.

The king then answered Daniel: "Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a Revealer of secrets, seeing you could reveal this secret!"

He was forced to acknowledge that the God of the Hebrews whom earlier he had despised (see ch. 1:2) was ALL WISE — greater than the gods of Babylon.

He honoured his servant, Daniel. The king made him a great man, loading him with gifts, elevating him to rulership over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.

And in his new-found honored and privileged position, Daniel did not forget his friends. He requested Nebuchadnezzar on their behalf, and they, too, were raised to positions of authority in Babylon.

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\* The kingdom of Israel in the past is described as the kingdom of God (1Chron. 28:5; 29:23) and will be so again in the future (Jer. 3:17). Meanwhile that power has been taken from the nation, as Christ showed, until the time when, as a changed and redeemed nation, it will bring forth the fruits thereof by submitting to the rule of Jesus Christ, and acknowledging his right to reign as king (see Rom. 11:26; Ezek. 36:25-33; Zech. 13:8-9).

## **The Significance Of The Vision**

This wonderful chapter of the Bible can be studied as history, as prophecy or as a typical foreshadowing of what shall yet be. Daniel, whose name means *The Judgment of God*, stands as a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the nations at the set time designed of God (Acts 17:31). As Daniel was made ruler over Babylon, so also will be the Lord Jesus Christ (Rev. 18). As Daniel caused his friends to be elevated also, so likewise will the Lord Jesus Christ (Isa. 32:1). As Nebuchadnezzar (representative of the Gentiles) was forced to acknowledge the wisdom and truth of the revelation given him and to honor Daniel, so the world will do likewise to the Lord Jesus Christ in the Age to come (Ps. 72:10-12).

The fulfilment of the prophetic vision of the image will see the future Judge, who will be one of God's appointment, elevated as ruler over Babylon, and his friends placed in high authority throughout the earth.

Those whose faith is like Daniel's will find a place with the friends of the Lord Jesus in that day.

## **Daniel Made Chief of the Wise Men**

The king appointed that Daniel should be given the official title of *Chief of the Wise Men*. He completed the three years' course of instruction that he had been set (Dan. 1:18), and then was officially presented before Nebuchadnezzar.

The king found him in all matters of understanding "ten times better" than all the magicians and astrologers that were in his realm. Daniel's knowledge was greater than those of the scientists, the politicians, and the religious teachers of Babylon because it was based upon the revelation of Yahweh.

The "wise men" of Babylon, and those later of Medo-Persia, must have heeded his words and his prophecies. During the course of the many years he spent in Babylon, Daniel predicted some wonderful events, including the very year when the Lord Jesus would be crucified (Dan. 9:24-27). His words were heeded not only by the Jews in exile, but also by some of the "wise men" of Babylon and Persia. His teaching was carefully preserved, passed on from generation to generation, until at the birth of the Lord there was a great expectancy for the appearing of the Messiah.

And this expectancy was not only among the Jews. In the days of Herod, "wise men of the east" made their appearance in Jerusalem, saying: "Where is he that is born king of the Jews?" (Mat. 2:2). Why should "wise men of the east" be interested in that matter? Perhaps Daniel used his position as *Chief of the Wise Men* very profitably, in teaching some of the Chaldeans about the language and wisdom of the Hebrews!

## Chapter Four

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### HOW GOD REVEALED HIMSELF AS A GOD OF POWER

**D**ANIEL'S interpretation of the vision worried Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Though he could not help but recognise its truth, the future decline of his kingdom, revealed in the prophecy of this servant of God, was a bitter pill for him to swallow. Babylon was rising to an eminence greater than any city before it. The king had great plans for its future. It was galling to think that this power and standing depended upon the God of the Hebrews, and that it was destined to pass from the golden city of Babylon to the silver monarchy of the Medes and Persians !

#### **Nebuchadnezzar Tries to Defeat the Teaching of the Image**

Could not some means be devised to prevent this happening? The king pondered the matter. He remembered that Daniel had said: "Thou art this head of gold." Babylon was identified in the minds of many people as "the golden city" (Isa. 14:4). If only the image he had seen in his dream were all of gold, from head to toe, it would mean that his power and kingdom would last forever.

The king determined that he would try and defeat the lesson of the image. He built his own image all of gold, and set it on a large pedestal in the plain of Dura, not far from Babylon. The image with its pedestal was 60 cubits high and 6 cubits broad. These numbers are interesting, because in the Bible, numbers have a special significance. The number 7 for example, stands for completion, because in the Hebrew, the same word does duty for "seven" as for "oath," and an oath of confirmation completes and binds an agreement. The number "6" is also interesting, for it was on the sixth day that man appeared. In the Bible, 6 is termed the "number of man" that is, of the flesh (Rev. 13: 18).

So the golden image, with these significant measurements, set up by the king of Babylon, represented the worship of the flesh and the power of the king. By forcing all people to bow down to this golden image, the king supposed he could guarantee the perpetuity of the rule of Babylon throughout the ages.

#### **Universal Worship of The Golden Image**

Having set up his image, the king commanded that all the heads of state in the provinces of his realm should gather together to worship it (cp. Rev. 18:2). This involved Shadrach, Meshach, and

Abednego, the friends of Daniel, but not the prophet himself. He was set up over the affairs of Babylon itself (Dan. 2:49), and it was only the subordinate rulers of the provinces that were called together (Dan. 3:3). We can imagine how these four men of faith would have discussed the problem together, how they would make it a matter of fervent prayer, and how they would decide that they would only obey the laws of the land to the point where they did not conflict with the laws of God.

In due time, the three friends assembled with the other rulers of the realm at the place appointed. A large orchestra, made up of six different forms of musical instruments, was gathered together to play rousing hymns to the glorification of the flesh. Not far from the massive, golden image, a furnace threw out fierce flames of fire, evidence of the royal authority and power and as a grim warning of what the obstinate could expect if they did not bow to the image.

The decree was read. At the hour appointed, the orchestra would play, and everyone in the audience had to bow before the image. Those who did not would be consigned to the fiery furnace.

This was religion by compulsion; and the great fiery furnace represented the *Inquisition of Babylon*. It was religious in character. The Babylonians worshipped fire, so that the punishment decreed for those who refused the king's command was a sacrificial death to the god of flame.

We are not told what hour of the day was appointed for the worship, but most likely it would have been the dawn. The rays of the early sun, catching the golden image caused it to sparkle like fire. Immediately, with a clash of sound the orchestra commenced to play, and, as one united group, the assembled multitude of princes, governors, captains and rulers bowed to the golden image of flesh which represented the power of Babylon.

### **The Three Friends Defy the King's Command**

But not quite as one. Whilst all the others were prostrate on the ground, humbly bowing to the golden image, the three Jews remained boldly and defiantly standing upright. They had obeyed the Law of the land as much as possible, as God commands (Rom. 13:1, I Pet 2:13-15); they had gathered together with the others as the decree instructed they should, but to bow down in worship to an idol they could not and would not. It would be an act of wickedness, suggesting that it was possible to worship both God and Mammon (Mat. 6:24), which cannot be done.

Some of the Chaldeans noted their defiance, and doubtless jealous of the elevation of Daniel and his friends, hurried to accuse the Jews before Nebuchadnezzar: "There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach and

Abednego; these men, O King have not regarded thee; they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up!"

Had they only known it, they could not have paid the three friends a greater compliment than to say: "They regard not thee; they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image ..." It is a wonderful testimony to their integrity and faith given by their very enemies. The words of the Chaldean accusers show how the three friends had kept themselves separate from the things of the world about them, even though they were in the midst of it. They were in Babylon but not of it (John 17:14-15). They had remained faithful to their calling, and honored the God of Israel in their actions and attitude.

But their defiance filled the king with rage and fury. This refusal of a small minority to bow down to his image could destroy the very purpose he had in setting it up. It reminded him of the "little stone" which seemed so insignificant compared to the mighty image in his dream, but which ended in destroying it.

His anger blinded him to reason. He was not prepared to tolerate



any disobedience. He decided that he would make an example of these three Jews. Calling them before him, he gave them one last chance. He declared: "Is it on purpose that you do not serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? I will give you one last chance. If you do not fall down and worship the image when you hear the sound of music, you will be cast immediately into the midst of the burning fiery furnace, and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"

Fiercely the king spoke the words, and sternly he looked at the young Jews before him. In the not far distance, the roar of the furnace could be heard, as though to underline the threat in his voice.

But the young men were not deterred. They had counted the cost, and prepared themselves for the crisis. Much thought and prayer had gone into their decision, and their minds were fully made up. All the threats of man would not change them. Calmly and courageously they answered the king in words of faith that have echoed down the ages: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need a moment to think over the answer to that question! There *IS* a God able to save us, the God whom we serve is able to save us from the burning furnace and from your power, O king. But *EVEN IF HE DOES NOT*, understand this, we will not serve your gods, and we will not bow down before the golden image which you have erected" (Moffatt's translation).

### **Fed to the Flames**

What a wonderful testimony of faith and courage. But it did not impress the king. He only saw it as a challenge to his own power. His temper angrily rose like the flames of the furnace. His face became distorted with hate and fury. He was not prepared to parley any further. Swinging around to his attendants, he harshly commanded them to stoke up the fire until it was seven times hotter than normal, and to fling the young Jews into its midst. He would show his subjects that it did not pay to defy his commands! Let this be a lesson to all onlookers to instantly obey the voice of the king!

Furiously he urged his soldiers on. Roughly they seized the three young men, and without waiting to remove any of their clothing, they hastily bound them that they might not struggle, and dragged them to the furnace. Meanwhile, others had been heating it up, until the flames now rose with an angry roar. With the infuriated, hasty king urging them on, they at last flung the three friends into the midst of the furnace.

A gasp of horror rose from the crowd of onlookers. As the three Jews were thrown into the furnace, fierce tongues of flame leapt out and consumed the very soldiers at the face of the furnace, who had thrown them in.

But within the furnace, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fell

down bound in the midst of the roaring, raging fire.

### **Escaping the Fury of the Fire**

Nebuchadnezzar's rage now subsided. His dignity had been upheld, a principle had been plainly set before the onlookers. They could see that it did not pay to defy the royal commands. The king peered into the furnace, expecting to see three dead corpses. What he saw made him gasp with surprise. He was filled with terror and confusion — as well it might!

Turning to his counsellors he anxiously exclaimed: "Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?"

"True, O King," was the reply.

"Behold," cried the startled king, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like a son of the gods." \*

The astonished counsellors saw that it was even as the king had said.

The king was staggered at the sight of the three men walking unharmed in the midst of the furnace. He could not understand it. How ridiculous his mocking words now sounded in relation to the God they served. Obviously the God of the Hebrews was more powerful than any other god he knew, to thus send His angel and save His servants.

He must learn more about this miracle. He called to the men in the furnace to come out: "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither!" he declared.

At the bidding of the king, the three young Jews came out of the midst of the furnace to become the object of the greatest curiosity to the onlookers. They gathered around them feeling their clothing and bodies. They found that the fire had had no power over them at all. Though the ropes that had bound them had been destroyed, their hair was not singed, their clothing not burnt! Even the very smell of fire could not be detected on them!

The king recognised his foolish mistake, and immediately issued a further decree acknowledging that the God of the Hebrews is all-powerful, greater than any other god: "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who hath sent His angel, and delivered His servants that trusted in Him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god,

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\* This is the real significance of the words in the original. Nebuchadnezzar used this term to signify an angel — not the Lord Jesus as some imagine. Notice his words in v. 28. Some quote this passage to teach that Christ was then in existence, but the king knew nothing of the Lord Jesus. He recognised the fourth figure in the furnace as divine.



except their own God. Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill; because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort."

The three young Jews were restored to their positions of authority they held in the land.

### **What Conquered the Flames**

As it was *Faith* that caused the walls of Jericho to fall in the days of Joshua, so it was *Faith* that "quenched the violence of the fire" in the days of Daniel. That is the explanation of the apostle Paul in Heb. 11:30-34. God sent His angel and delivered His servants because they manifested faith in His protection and courage against His enemies.

There were some in Babylon at that time who did not manifest these virtues, and who were consumed of the flames. They were false prophets who proclaimed lies in the name of Yahweh. Their terrible fate became proverbial among the Jews of the captivity, and stands as a great contrast to the remarkable deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Jeremiah refers to them as follows: "This curse shall be taken up by all the captivity of Judah which are in Babylon, saying, Yahweh make thee like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire" (Jer. 29:21-22).

What a lesson for the Jews of the captivity! On the one hand they saw false prophets flung into the flames and there left to perish; on the other hand they witnessed the wonderful victory of faith in the three defiant, courageous Jews on the plain of Dura. Thus they learned the folly of their ways, and that if they worshipped Yahweh in truth, He would help them in time of need. Such a miracle must have played a great part in changing the character of the Jewish captives in Babylon.

### **HOW THE INCIDENT OF THE FIERY FURNACE FORESHADOWED THE FUTURE**

This remarkable incident that took place in Babylon has a counterpart in that recorded in the book of Revelation relating to Babylon the Great (Rev. 18:5). In Rev. 13:14-15 this system is represented as "making an image" and calling upon everybody to worship it on pain of death. Students of prophecy recognise in this "image to the beast" a prophetic reference to the Papacy which enslaves men's minds to a false conception of divine worship.

The same chapter states that those who "would not worship the image... should be killed" (v. 15).

History shows how this was done. The Papal Inquisition was set up in the times when the popes of Rome reigned supreme (by pope Gregory 9th, in AD 1231), and any who refused to bow down to the form of worship established by the Papacy were cruelly tortured and put to death. Millions of people died by torture, rack and flame during what is called the *Dark Ages*. They died because they refused to bow down to the image which Babylon the Great had set up for worship.

But if, like Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, they were men of faith, they did not die in vain. The same chapter shows how those “whose names are written in the book of life” will witness the overthrow of the evil system that persecuted them (Rev.13:8-10). They will be brought from the dead, and will be seen walking in company with one who will then be recognised as the Son of God (2Thes. 1:7-10).

This will be a “time of trouble such as never was” (Dan. 12:1-2), but out of it, Daniel was told, “thy people shall be delivered”. Malachi likened this time of trouble to the “burning of an oven” (Mal. 4:1), which (like Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace) shall consume those who stoke its flames. Thus he declared: “All the proud, all that do wickedly shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch... But unto you that fear My Name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings (beams)” (Mal. 4:2).

Thus, a terrible time of trouble is coming that shall consume like the fiery furnace of Nebuchadnezzar, but in the midst of the flame will be seen Israel natural and spiritual, walking in company with the Lord Jesus Christ, untouched by the fire.

All this was enacted long ago, when the three young Jews faithfully refused to bow down to the image, courageously dared the violence of the fire, and were saved because Yahweh “will never leave nor forsake” those who put their trust in Him. He has promised such: “when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee” (Isa. 43:2).

Again: “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of Yahweh, and their righteousness is of Me, saith Yahweh” (Isa. 54:17).

The startled king on the plain of Dura could testify to the truth of those words of the Hebrew prophet!

## Chapter Five

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### HOW THE CAPTIVES FARED IN BABYLON

**D**ANIEL lived over seventy years in captivity and witnessed great changes in the mighty city of Babylon, for once Nebuchadnezzar had established his power, he engaged in a vast rebuilding project. The king determined that Babylon would be the most wonderful city there ever was, with such strong fortifications that it would be impossible for any enemy to successfully attack it.

He almost entirely changed Babylon into a huge, modern city. Even the ancient tower of Babel (known then as the Temple of Belus), which was in ruins when Daniel first came to the city, was restored and glorified.

#### **The Magnificence and Beauty of Babylon**

Babylon was a mighty city. According to ancient historians, it was in a regular square, about 70 kilometres in compass, enclosed by a wall some 60 meters high, and 15 meters

broad, in which there were one hundred gates of brass. Its principal building was the temple of Belus, in the midst of which was a tower of eight storeys (or towers placed one above another, diminishing as they went up) upon a base four hundred meters square. It was a most magnificent palace, and the famous hanging gardens, which were an artificial mountain raised upon arches, and planted with trees of the largest as well as the most beautiful and exotic sorts.

Imagine Daniel walking the streets of this mighty city, and witnessing its wealth and magnificence. Through its centre flowed the great river Euphrates, and along its quays he would see the produce of countries afar off being unloaded. In the crowded streets were numerous and elegant temples dedicated to the many gods of Babylon. The walls of the buildings were made of plaster, in which here and there a row of bricks were imbedded. As Daniel might stand to gaze at the scene before him, he would see a grand flight of steps leading to the temple door up to which worshippers would be constantly climbing. He would notice the wealth lavished upon these places of pagan worship: the lintel, bolt, and lock of the doors overlaid with gold; the cedar roofs overlaid with silver or with fine burnished gold; massive bulls of bronze, huge serpents of the same metal, guarding the entrance. Stores of rich food for the use of well-fed priests would constantly be carried up the steps to be offered first to the gods.

It was this rich food that Daniel had refused!

Daniel saw other spacious mansions dedicated to a different kind

of god, such as are familiar today! They were the commercial houses and banks where business was transacted on a very progressive basis. The records of one such company, *Egibi & Co*, have actually been discovered by archaeologists.

In the streets of the city police were controlling the heavy traffic. At the massive gates — large and roomy halls furnished with seats — Daniel could stop and listen to all the processes of law if he so desired. There, people confirmed contracts, argued points of law, bought and sold their goods.

As the years rolled by, Daniel saw another city grow up amidst the old, to attain a magnitude and splendor unrivalled in any age. Jeremiah referred to this building activity when he declared: "Though Babylon should mount up to heaven, and though she should fortify the height of her strength, yet from Me shall spoilers come unto her, saith Yahweh" (Jer. 51:53).

Nebuchadnezzar recorded his building projects in an inscription that has been found amidst the ruins of Babylon: *"I finished the great twofold wall of Babylon. I made strong the city with bricks burnt hard as stones, and piled high in huge masses as mountains. Behold, besides, the Imgoul-Bel, the impregnable fortifications of Babylon. I made inside Babylon on the eastern bank of the river such a fortification as no king before me had ever made. I excavated the ditch; with bricks and mortar I bound its bed; I built above it a strong rampart. I adorned its gates. The portals and pillars I plated with bronze. Against presumptuous enemies, the foes of Babylon, I made use of great waters like those of the seas. Thus I made strong the defences of Babylon. May it last forever, Babylon the city which is the delight of my eyes, which I have made glorious"*.

Daniel chapters 3, 4 and 5 fall into a pattern. They record a series of wonderful incidents in which Yahweh revealed Himself successively to Nebuchadnezzar as All-wise, All-powerful and Supreme. He did the first when He revealed the significance of the great metallic image seen by the king in his dream. He did the second when He saved the three friends from the burning, fiery furnace. He did the third in the remarkable incident we are about to consider. As the pagan king saw these miracles and heard the wonderful things proclaimed to him, he was forced to confess the complete supremacy of the God of the Hebrews over any of the gods of Babylon.

Ultimately all mankind will be forced to honour Yahweh likewise, and will thus repeat what Nebuchadnezzar proclaimed so long ago.

The list of public works that were undertaken for the improvement of the city by Nebuchadnezzar, during the period Daniel was in the city, is amazing. It includes the building of more than twenty temples, the strengthening of fortifications, the excavations of canals, the raising of vast embankments by the river, the establishment of the hanging gardens, as well as many other lesser projects. Bricks stamped with the name of Nebuchadnezzar, found today among the ruins, attest to his enterprise as well as to his wealth and taste.

Daniel saw it all.

But with sadness he saw another scene.

Periodically, during the forty-three years' reign of Nebuchadnezzar, he saw companies of weary Jewish captives enter the city, telling the dismal story of Judah's decline, of a nation rapidly rushing towards its ruin.

### **The Voice of Two Contemporary Prophets**

He received news that in the town of Tel Abib, some distance north of Babylon, among the Jewish colony established there, a young priest, by name of Ezekiel, had seen visions of the future, had received revelations from God telling of dire judgments to come upon nations, of the certainty of Jerusalem's overthrow, but also describing a greater glory that would one day be revealed in that city. Then, according to the visions which came to this young priest, a vast and glorious temple would be built to the honor and worship of Yahweh, replacing the temple at Jerusalem that had been disgraced by the wicked worship of hypocritical priests and people.

Daniel heard the letters from Jeremiah who was in Jerusalem, warning of the terrible fate of that city, being read to the captives; heard them debated and rejected by some foolish and false prophets. But the letters were true, as Daniel knew. They told the people in exile to seek peace in the city of their dispersion, for they would remain there many years.

Daniel put that advice into practice.

### **A Sad Moment Of Judah's Disgrace**

A day of humiliation came when, in the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign, the captives saw the weak, foolish king of Judah arrive in Babylon to humbly prostrate himself before Nebuchadnezzar, beseech his pardon for breaking his word, and promise to render full obedience in the future (Jer. 51:59).

But the humiliation was turned to joy when the prince Seraiah, who had come with Zedekiah, gathered the captive Jews together, that he might read to them the prophecy of Jeremiah foretelling the sudden and complete overthrow of the mighty city. It must have sounded

strange to these captives who saw about them such evidences of power, in the mighty projects of the king. Therefore, to dramatise the message, a great stone was tied to the scroll and it was roughly thrown into the Euphrates as a sign of the violent overthrow of Babylon, then yet in the future.

Saddest sight of all must have been the tragic figure of Zedekiah when, after the overthrow of Jerusalem, the blinded king stumbled his way into the city. Daniel would have heard with sorrow and anguish the details of the death throes of the nation he loved so much.

He also saw a gradual change in the attitude of many of the captives. The punishment they suffered taught them to seek their God. They put aside the gods of Babylon; they hearkened to Daniel, Ezekiel and others; they profited from their mistakes.

In the remarkable events of the times they saw the goodness of God; in the wonderful prophecies they learned of His loving providence; and in their anguish they turned to Him again.

Such Jews could not rejoice in Babylon. We read of them:

*By the rivers of Babylon they sat down and wept;*

*They remembered Zion.*

*They hanged their harps on the willows along its banks.*

Some of the Babylonians asked them to sing the songs of Zion, but faithful Jews refused to do so. Their answer was:

*How shall we sing Yahweh's songs in a strange land?*

*If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.*

*If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth;*

*If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.*

They remembered the prophecies of Isaiah (ch. 13) and Jeremiah (ch. 51) which spoke of the overthrow of Babylon by the Medes and Persians. They looked for that time, as the time of release:

*O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed;*

*Happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou has served us.*

(Psa. 137)

But further remarkable events were to take place before that happened.

Meanwhile, it was the time of "the captivity". The Hebrew word (*guloth*: to be stripped bare) expresses a bitter sense of bereavement. They were stripped bare of their country and their sanctuary. They could no longer worship in the great temple. But their God was still with them as the wonderful incidents in Babylon revealed.

## **The King at Peace**

Many years had flown by since Nebuchadnezzar, as a young prince, heard the sad news that his father had died, and had hurried back home to take control of

the kingdom.

By great skill and success in war, he had converted the kingdom into a mighty empire, over which he ruled as undisputed lord. Even Babylon was greatly changed from the city that had celebrated his early victories. With the wealth grasped from many conquered countries, Nebuchadnezzar had rebuilt the city on a grand scale that was the admiration of all who saw it.

He was at rest and prosperous. All nations were subdued under him. No one dared oppose or obstruct anything that he wanted to do. His kingdom, majesty, glory and honor extended on all sides (Dan. 5:18). *"All people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down."*

He was even worshipped. People looked upon him as a god, and when they entered his presence they bowed low to the ground. Nebuchadnezzar saw nothing wrong in that! He gloried in the power and majesty he wielded; he claimed it as his right. As he saw about him the signs of his greatness, his heart was uplifted. Surely there was no one equal to him in all the earth! He had not only conquered the gods of the nations, but even the gods of Babylon were elevated by his success! Was he not higher than the gods!

Exciting thoughts like these filled the king's mind as one night he lay himself down to sleep (Isa. 14:13).

And then he dreamed. It seemed as though he was standing on a vast plain. In the centre of it was a tree, and as the king watched, he saw that it was rapidly growing and pushing itself up into heaven. It was a mighty tree of great beauty. Great crops of fruit hung from its branches; birds sheltered on its boughs; beasts of the field rested in its shade.

It grew and grew until it stretched over the whole plain, and seemed, to the admiring king, to embrace the whole of the earth.

But suddenly the king was startled by an angel descending from heaven. With a tremendous voice, the angel shouted a command:

*"Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit; let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches; nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth; let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him; and let seven times pass over him! This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know, that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men."*

The king awoke with a start! It seemed as though the voice of the angel was still ringing in his ears. He remembered distinctly all the words that had been uttered.

And now he could not sleep! He was confident that the dream was meant to convey some important message, and he was restless to find out what it was. He commanded that the wise men of Babylon gather together to interpret the meaning of the dream.

But they could make nothing of it.

### **Daniel Before the King**

At last Daniel was brought before Nebuchadnezzar. He held a position of great honor, for Nebuchadnezzar had made him chief of the wise men of Babylon. The king had a great respect for his wisdom, and therefore told Daniel his dream, confidently expecting to hear the interpretation thereof: "Though all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known unto me the interpretation, thou art able," he declared (v. 18).

But Daniel stood silent before the king with downcast face. He instantly understood the meaning of the dream, for not only had God revealed it to him, but the key to its interpretation had already been revealed in a vision that Ezekiel – a fellow captive – earlier received (see Ezek. 31:3, 10, 11, 16).

The king saw Daniel's worried look, and encouraged him to speak: "Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble you!" he said.

But Daniel answered: "My lord, the dream be to them that hate you, and the interpretation thereof to your enemies."

He thus warned the king to expect bad news from the dream. The tree represented the king himself. Its size, beauty, and strength represented the Babylonish Empire. The birds and the beasts that sheltered in its branches and in its shade, represented the nations that had been conquered by the king. But as the tree was cut down, and guarded with a band of iron and brass, so a time of terrible sadness was about to come upon the king, foreshadowing the overthrow of the empire he had established.

*"They shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you to eat grass as oxen, and shall wet you with the dew of heaven, until seven years pass over you, and you learn that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will. But whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots, your kingdom shall be sure unto you, after you have learned that the heavens do rule."*

Sadly the prophet looked at the king as he gave the interpretation, for he recognised many good qualities in Nebuchadnezzar. But there was one way of defeating the dream. Boldly he made it known to the



king: "O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto you, and break off your sins by righteousness, and your iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; it may be that you will then receive a lengthening of your peace!"

Daniel was dismissed from the presence of the king, and twelve months went by. The king doubtless forgot the strange dream. All he could think about was his own glory. On all sides he saw evidences of it. From the top of his lofty palace, he could look down on a scene of beauty and magnificence. The city of Babylon lay stretched out before him. Far to the distance extended the skyline of tall and handsome buildings: temples, business houses, palaces. Dominating it was the Temple of Belus with its huge tower. Not far from the king's palace were the hanging gardens on an artificial mountain, built to satisfy the whim of one of his wives. The great gates of the city, like vast buildings, the temples glittering with gold and silver, the busy hum of a mighty city, all lay there before him.

It spoke of earthly glory and power.

It was all his!

Flushed with pride in what he had accomplished, the king boasted: "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?"

But no sooner had he uttered these words to himself than the king was startled by a loud voice from heaven, saying: "*O king Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken:*

*The kingdom is departed from you. And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; they shall make you to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over you, until you come to know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will.*"

The Voice disturbed the king. He no longer gained pleasure from the sight of the earthly glory stretched out before him. A strange feeling came over him; suddenly he felt ill. Gradually a form of madness took possession of him. He



imagined that he was a wild animal and acted accordingly. When his servants approached him, he ran at them to bite and tear them. The palace was turned into an uproar. His attendants could do nothing with the king. Finally he was driven outside, and the madness now fully possessing him, he began to eat grass like an oxen, and live like an animal. Soon his hair was long and unkempt, the nails on his hands and feet were like bird claws.

What was the use of all his glory now! He acted like a beast, and was treated accordingly.

Seven years passed away. Then one day, the king's reason returned to him. He wondered at his strange appearance, wondered what he was doing sleeping and living in the fields. He then remembered the dream and recalled the words of the angel and the prophet. He realised the truth of all that had been told him. He recognised that he only ruled by the grace of God, and that no one can effectively oppose the divine will.

He returned to the palace a cured and humbled man, ready to acknowledge that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men. He published a decree telling of his remarkable experience, explaining the nature and reason of his recent sickness, concluding with the statement: *"Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment; and those that walk in pride He is able to abase."*

**Mr. Phillips Discusses Nebuchadnezzar's Strange Experience** The family had read the fourth chapter of Daniel, and had been discussing the circumstances for some time, when Peter who has rather a doubting nature asked his father the question: "Is there any historical confirmation of this having taken place?"

"To date, excavations at Babylon have not revealed any direct evidence," answered Mr. Phillips, "but there is indirect evidence. In a passage in one of the inscriptions, the king mentions a period during which 'the kingdom did not rejoice his heart', and during which he did no building, nor 'sung the praises of Merodach.' Nebuchadnezzar could have been referring to the time of his temporary madness."

"In v. 17, it says that God sets up over the nations 'the basest of men.' What does that mean?" asked Joan.

"The word really means 'humblest' of men, and not necessarily those who are evil," replied her father. "And further, in the Hebrew, reference is made to a particular individual, as you will see if you compare the A.V. with Rotherham's translation on the bookshelf over there. Rotherham renders the words: 'one low among men, He setteth up over it.' The Septuagint version gives the words as 'Him who is set at nought by man.' That one is the Lord Jesus Christ."

“Does that mean that the angel was telling the king that the very One who had placed him in power could take him from power, and that ultimately this same God will give all the power and glory into the hands of one who is set at nought by man, namely Jesus Christ?”

“Exactly.”

“There is confirmation of that in 1Corinthians 1:28, where Paul says that God has not chosen the mighty, or the noble, but those esteemed foolish and base by the world, that they might rule with Christ, so that ‘no flesh should glory in his presence’,” remarked Graham.

“That is a very good reference to link with Daniel 4:17,” replied Mr. Phillips.

“Is there any deeper significance in this chapter apart from humbling the king?” asked Ann.

“Yes, it is like a parable foretelling what would happen to the kingdom of men, of which Nebuchadnezzar was a type,” replied her father. “Nebuchadnezzar’s boastfulness and pride is matched by that of the nations. As the wise man declared, men do not see that ‘they are beasts’ (Ecc. 3:18). But the actions of men and nations are very bestial as we know. Consider all the violence and wickedness that goes on! What real difference is there between men and the wild beasts which prey upon one another? Nebuchadnezzar enacted that. He revealed himself as a beast for a period of seven years or 2520 days (for there were 360 days in a Jewish year). At the end of that time, reason was restored to him, and he praised God. In the future the nations will do the same. At the end of the time decreed by Yahweh, they will be brought into subjection to Jesus Christ, and will learn the truth of the statement that ‘the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will, and will set up over it him who is set at nought by men.’ They will then praise God as Nebuchadnezzar did.”

“Do the seven years represent any definite time?” asked Ann.

“Yes. They represent 2520 days, and as days are frequently used in Scripture for years when considered prophetically, so this seems to measure off the period of madness for the nations. Nebuchadnezzar had his great vision of the metallic image in the year BC603 after conquering Jerusalem. It represented the kingdom of Men: the mad rule of the Gentiles that would occur for a long period of history. 2520 years from that date brings us to AD1917 when Britain drove the Turks from Jerusalem and invited the Jews to return. We can be sure, therefore, that we are living in the epoch that will witness the end of Gentile madness and the establishment of the kingdom of God.”

“I notice that the roots were left in the earth and protected with a band of iron and brass,” remarked Ann. “Does that have any significance?”

"It does indeed! Remember that the brass in the image stood for Greece, and the iron for Rome. These two powers, more than any others, have preserved Babylonish ways down to our times. In the Book of Revelation, as you know, Babylon is referred to in a mystical sense. There is a modern, symbolic Babylon, as there was a literal Babylon in the days of Daniel the prophet. The modern Babylon is called 'the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth' (Rev. 17:5). It is revealed as a great religious system, easily identified with Catholicism. History shows how the Catholic Church was eventually divided into two parts, known today as the Roman and the Greek Catholic Churches. In the terms of the prophecy, they represent the band of iron and brass that preserved the roots of Babylon when the tree was cut down."

"I think I see what you are getting at," interrupted Peter. "In the dream that Nebuchadnezzar saw, the tree (representing Babylon of old) was cut down, but its roots, hidden away from the sight of man, were preserved in the earth, protected by the band of iron and brass. These things represent the so-called Christian organisations of today, which are really Babylonish in character, though this fact is hidden from men."

"Peter is getting quite eloquent!" murmured Ann.

"That is the idea," commented Mr. Phillips. "In my bookshelf you will find a book entitled *The Two Babylons*, which shows very clearly that the teaching and ceremonies of the Catholic Church are all derived from a pagan source — from ancient Babylon. Through the centuries of history, whilst the nations have acted like wild animals (as did Nebuchadnezzar), the teaching of Babylon has also been preserved."

"But Nebuchadnezzar was restored!" said Ann.

"True! His reason returned to him, and he praised God. The nations will do likewise. They will eventually learn that they have been mad (Jer. 51:7), but when reason is restored to them, they, too, will praise the God of heaven. They will do this when Christ returns and sets up the kingdom of God."

"One more question," said Peter as he noticed his father becoming a little impatient, "Why are the angels called 'watchers' (v. 17)?"

"For the very good reason that they are the ministers of God (Psa. 103:20-22), who overlook affairs for the benefit of the heirs of salvation (see Heb. 1:14). They are like the eyes of God, constantly watching and guiding events in accordance with the purpose of God. Take a note of these references, and look them up when you have time: 2Chr. 16:9; Gen. 11:5; 18:21; 48:16; Exod. 23:20. These watchers are active today, working under the Lord Jesus, for the ultimate establishment of the kingdom of God on earth (1 Peter 3:22)."

## Chapter Six

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### TROUBLES IN BABYLON

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**T**HE mighty empire that Nebuchadnezzar established lasted only as long as God required for the disciplining of His people. His dynasty continued for seventy years as Jeremiah had predicted (Jer. 25:12, 17), and then passed away.

Nebuchadnezzar reigned for 43 of those seventy years. On his death, his son, Evil-Merodach, came to the throne. Little is known of him, except an act of kindness that he did to king Jehoiachin who had languished in prison for 37 years (Jer. 52:31). He brought him out of prison, elevated him above all the other captive kings in Babylon, set him up in royal state as his friend and guest (Jer. 52:33).

Evil-Merodach decreed that Jehoiachin should be so treated for as long as he lived.

Many Jews must have looked with pleasure on the way the king of Babylon honored their captive king; but the friendship of Babylon proved a snare and a delusion for the king of Judah. Perhaps these Jews saw in the improvement of the king's state a possibility that their captivity would soon come to an end. That was not to be. Jeremiah had warned that seventy years would pass before Israel returned home, and his words proved true.

Evil-Merodach did not live long, and his death dragged Jehoiachin to ruin. A conspiracy was formed among his generals to get rid of him. It was successful, and within two years of the beginning of his reign, Evil-Merodach was slain by the generals of his own army. Jehoiachin found that the friendship of the king was his undoing.

Meanwhile, a man called Neriglissar, a general in the Babylonian army and son-in-law to Nebuchadnezzar, seized the throne. It was hoped that he might bring some order into the seething unrest that was now sweeping the nation. But within four years he, too, was dead, leaving his son Labarosoarkod, a mere child, to reign. In less than a year he also was murdered, and Nabonidus, a Babylonian lord who had been foremost in the plot, ascended the throne. In order to make his position sure, he married a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. From her he had a son whom he named Belshazzar, which means: "Bel Protect the King." But Bel (a Babylonish god) certainly did not protect the king as we shall see!

#### **Nabonidus Seeks To Improve the People**

Nabonidus tried to rule wisely. He was intensely interested in culture and learning, and tried to impress the need of this on the people, though he did not succeed very well. Instead, the unrest con-

tinued and even increased. Nabonidus tried to interfere with the various forms of worship which abounded in Babylon, but this only aggravated the antagonism of the people.

When his son Belshazzar was old enough, Nabonidus made him joint ruler, so for a time both Nabonidus and Belshazzar reigned as kings.

**Daniel Is Deposed** Through all these changing fortunes, Daniel retained his position in Babylon. The Babylonish kings recognised that he was trustworthy and reliable, and in consequence he was often away on "the king's business" (Dan. 8:27).

Meanwhile he received further communications from God.

In the first year of Belshazzar, he received night visions similar in meaning to the metallic image that Nebuchadnezzar had earlier seen in his dream (ch. 7:1), and which even more clearly showed that whilst Gentile nations might triumph for a time, God's kingdom will ultimately be set up (v. 27).

In the third year of Belshazzar's reign, Daniel was apparently sent to Shushan, the Persian palace, on official business connected with the empire (ch. 8:1, 27). There God revealed to him the remarkable vision of the ram and the goat, which clearly predicted the coming warfare between Persia and Grecia, which was to result in the triumph of the latter. His mind was thus well prepared for the impending fall of Babylon.

Shortly after this, Daniel was deposed from his high position by Belshazzar, and sent into retirement.

International events at the time caused Nabonidus great concern and he left Babylon at the head of his army, giving full control into the hands of his son Belshazzar. Whilst Babylon was concentrating on its own affairs, important activities were taking place in the east: the powers of Media and Persia were developing. That was the state of affairs when Cyrus finally attacked the city and Babylon fell.

**Cyrus on the March** There was great excitement among the Jewish captives in Babylon. Those who were keenly watching the signs of the times, had heard that a new young king had come to power in Persia, a small, relatively weak country, east of Babylon.

His name was Cyrus. He had overthrown Astyages the Mede, in the adjoining country of Media, and established his uncle in his place, who assumed the title of Darius.

Media had formerly been a powerful nation, and had played an important part in conquering Assyria; now it formed part of the joint empire of Medo-Persia.

Nabonidus viewed these moves with foreboding, and made ready

his defences. He had troubles enough within, without these added troubles from without!

The elevation of Cyrus was also of the greatest significance to the Jewish captives. Some 200 years before, Isaiah the prophet had revealed that this would be the name of the king who would conquer Babylon (Isa. 45:1)!

How excited the Jews must have been when they learned that a king bearing such a name was ruling in the east. How captives like Daniel, must have pored over the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah, that they might understand better the significance of current events!

Remarkable things were heard of this Cyrus. Men spoke of his wisdom and moderation, his skill in war as victory after victory was reported, the affection and respect that he commanded of his soldiers. Rumors were heard that the new power of Medo-Persia might shortly launch an attack against Babylon.

Jewish captives, who were students of the Word, realised that they were living in the epoch of Babylon's impending fall. They recognised that this was the time of restoration spoken of by Jeremiah the prophet. In many Jewish homes throughout Babylonia, these things must have been excitedly discussed, as little groups gathered around the scrolls of the prophets.

But it was difficult to place in exact sequence the events predicted. They could not understand the movements of Cyrus, though they tried to align them with Bible in hand. He did not make a frontal attack on Babylon as they might expect. Instead, he attacked other cities and nations. He was reported to be first here, then there, but not at Babylon where he was expected!

It was most frustrating to the impatient Jewish captives as they discussed together the signs of the times! They would have liked to have forcibly compelled Cyrus to march on Babylon as was predicted.

But, at last, news came through that the kings of the east (Darius and Cyrus) were on the march against Babylon.

The Jews settled back to await the inevitable end.

With Nabonidus absent, organising an army to attack Cyrus elsewhere, Belshazzar remained in supreme control in Babylon, awaiting his father's return.



**Cyrus, king of Persia,  
depicted on a stone relief**

## Chapter Seven

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### BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST

**B**ELSHAZZAR was a young man in his teens. Power had spoiled him, had made him conceited, arrogant, pompous. He did not fear the approaching enemy. There was no army powerful enough to breach the mighty walls that his grandfather had set up. Babylon would never fall to any such attack.

So Belshazzar thought. Therefore he gave little attention to the developing power of the Persians in the east, and devoted his time to other matters.

Daniel 5 introduces us to the time of an annual religious festival, celebrated in the most depraved manner.

Belshazzar set himself out to excel in the pleasures of the moment. He invited all the lords and the princes of Babylon, together with their wives and concubines, to the great feast he had prepared. Wine was supplied without measure. The king drank to excess, and became completely intoxicated.\* As the wine took possession of his senses, and the drunken orgy became louder and wilder, he became absolutely reckless in his folly. "Bring the golden and silver vessels that Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple in Jerusalem," he ordered.

Quickly they were brought to him. Boldly he filled them with wine, and passed them around to his guests that they might drink out of them. As he did so, he drunkenly mocked the God of Israel, praising the gods of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood and stone that abounded in Babylon, and which he thought had given them victory over the Jews and Yahweh their God.

The feast became more and more abandoned and riotous. The king, flushed with wine, excited by the revelry and laughter about him, became more reckless in his blasphemous talk. The great banqueting hall in the palace of Babylon echoed with drunken shouts of abandoned pleasure, and vile, blasphemous talk.

But suddenly, dramatically, it ceased.

When the revelry was at its height, the talk and laughter were at their noisiest, the blasphemy the most reckless, the guests saw the king suddenly freeze in horror. No longer did he mock the God of heaven. He was shaking with terror, his eyes wild with fear, fixedly gazing at the wall over by the great chandelier, the brightest place in

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\* The word "tasted" (Dan. 5:2) signifies more than to merely sip. It indicates to be moved or warmed by wine. Belshazzar was completely drunk, and his blasphemy was the result. This has a typical significance, pointing to the heady, intoxicating doctrines of modern Babylon — See Rev. 18:3; Jer. 51:7.



the banqueting hall.

The guests followed the eyes of the king, and they, too, went silent in fear. For a Hand was writing on the wall! There was no arm or body attached to it, merely a Hand! They, too, stared in wonder as a chill of fear passed through them.

It wrote in Hebrew from right to left, so that as the letters were formed, the Hand covered the writing.

At last it stopped; the message was finished.

A deathly silence had come over the wild party. The sight of that strange Hand, quietly moving across the wall, writing a sentence that nobody could read, quite indifferent to the noise and rioting that was going on, completely unnerved the people.

The king was absolutely transfixed with terror. His wide-open eyes stared aghast at the wall; his knees knocked together with fright; his face was white as a sheet. Without taking his eyes off the Hand, he called for the wise men of Babylon. Hastily they gathered at the Palace. Pointing to the hand that was still at the wall, the king declared: "Whosoever shall read this writing, and show me the interpretation thereof shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler\* in the kingdom."

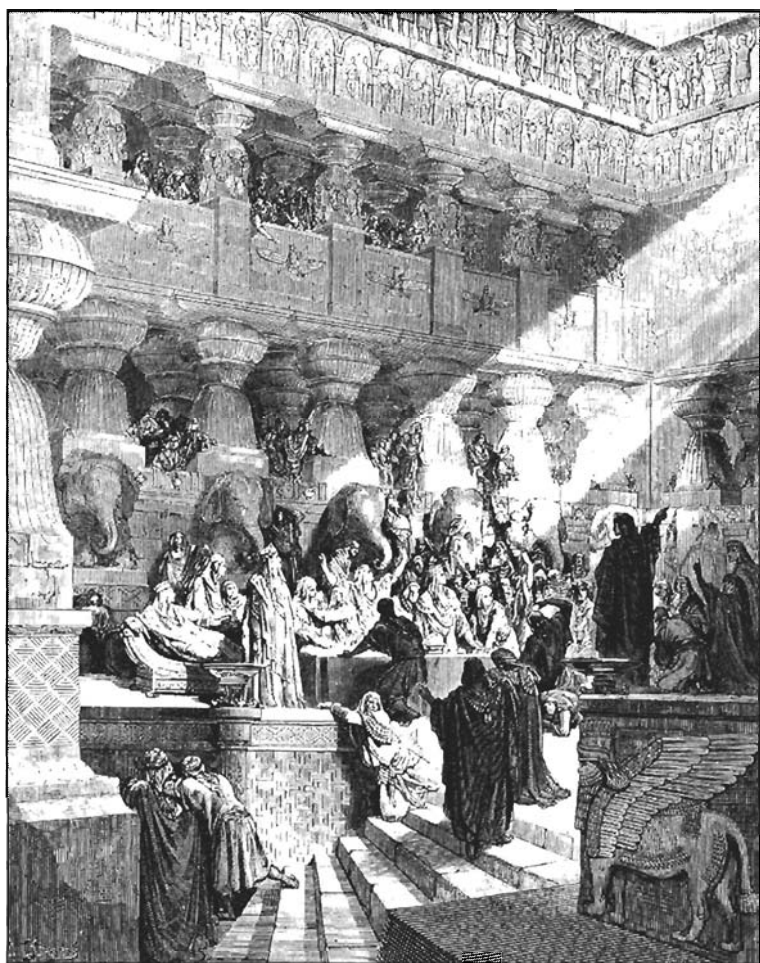
But in vain did the wise men look at the hand, in the hope that it might move aside, and reveal the writing on the wall. Their inability to help caused the king's fear to increase. His night of feasting had no pleasure any more. As Isaiah had predicted: "The night of pleasure was turned into a night of fear" (Isa. 21:4).

But there still remained, even in Babylon, an element of wisdom. The queen-mother (for the wives of the king had been at the party: v. 3) remembered the help that Daniel had rendered Nebuchadnezzar in similar circumstances. She had not attended the feast, but had heard of the mysterious hand and the concealed writing. Hurrying to the palace, she saw how fear-stricken were the king and his guests, and sought to pacify him: "O king, let not your thoughts trouble you, nor your countenance be fearful," she said. "There is a man in your kingdom able to help you at this time; for in the days of your grandfather, light, understanding and wisdom were found in this Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar made him chief of the wise men, for he found him better than all the magicians, soothsayers and Chaldeans of the realm. Let him be called, and he will show you the interpretation."

There was wisdom in her words as the king knew. But it was humiliating having to ask help of Daniel whom he despised, and whom he had deposed. In such a crisis as this, however, with the enemy at the door, the mysterious Hand still hiding the writing, and his own fear-stricken condition, the king was ready to accept help from anybody.

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\* Nabonidus was the first, Belshazzar the second, and whoever interpreted the writing would be made the third.



*Above:* Belshazzar's Feast and the Hand-writing on the wall of the palace of Babylon — spell the destruction of the city which had exerted its influence over the Jews.



*Right:* The Jewish captives on their way to Babylon. Their sorrow of exile was now to be turned to joy in the day of restoration about to occur.

Daniel was called for, and offered the rich rewards promised the wise men if he would make known the writing and the interpretation. But such offers of reward, in a Babylon doomed to destruction, held no appeal for Daniel. "Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another," he boldly replied.

Daniel was prepared to accept honor from Nebuchadnezzar because he had manifested a different spirit to that of Belshazzar — but he would have none of the latter. Nebuchadnezzar honored the God of Israel; Belshazzar openly blasphemed Him.

Nevertheless Daniel did offer to read the writing on the wall, and interpret the message.

But first he reminded Belshazzar of the notable incident that had occurred late in the life of Nebuchadnezzar. God had given him power, wealth, and glory, but when the king's heart had been lifted up, these things were taken from him. He was deposed from his authority, and driven from the palace like an animal, until he learned the fundamental lesson that the Most High rules in the kingdom of Men.

Belshazzar had refused to acknowledge that lesson. The startled guests heard the aged Jewish captive warn the young, pompous king in forthright words: "Thou his son,\* O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though you knew all this!"

What a courageous, faithful man was this Daniel, to speak so openly and directly to a king! How humiliated the king must have felt in front of his guests. But he dared not oppose the prophet. He knew he would not receive help from anybody else. As he looked at the lined face of the old man before him,\*\* he saw therein strength of purpose, integrity, and the dignity of wisdom.

"You have lifted up yourself against the Lord of Heaven," continued Daniel in his rebuke, "and have brought the vessels of His house before you; and you, your lords, your wives, your concubines, have drunk wine in them. You have praised the gods of silver and gold, but the God in whose hand your breath is, and whose are all your ways, you have not glorified!"

It was a dramatic moment in the banquet hall of the king. All thoughts of drinking wine, and of pleasure, were forgotten, as the startled guests looked at the humbled king and the indignant, fearless prophet before him.

Daniel then turned to the Hand that shadowed the writing on the

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\* The same word in Hebrew does duty for both son and grandson. Belshazzar was the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar.

\*\* Daniel was about 90 years of age at this time.

wall. As he did so, the hand moved away and disappeared.\* All now could see the writing and read it for themselves:

**“MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN!”**

The words mean: “*NUMBERED, NUMBERED, WEIGHED, DIVIDED!*”

The first words were given twice to show the certainty and completeness of what was done (see Gen. 41:32). Daniel then supplied the interpretation to the king:

**“Mene:** *God has **numbered** your kingdom, and finished it!”*

**“Tekel:** *You are **weighed** in the balances and found wanting!”*

**“Peres:** *Your kingdom is **divided** and given to the Medes and Persians!*” Daniel used “Peres” in his explanation because it is a participle of the same verb from whence “Upharsin” is derived. Upharsin signifies: “and they divided it”, but when Daniel used the related word “peres,” he gave greater meaning to the writing. The Persians were known to the Chaldeans as *Paros*, so there was a play on the words, enabling him not only to say that the kingdom would be divided, but also given to the Persians.

A deep silence followed the words of the prophet. There was no doubt about the writing. And the interpretation, though ominous, had every possibility of being fulfilled, for at that very moment, the Medes and Persians were hammering at the doors of Babylon.

As a final gesture of defiance, the king commanded that Daniel be honored as he had decreed. They clothed the prophet in scarlet, put a chain of gold about his neck, and proclaimed to all that he was the third ruler in the kingdom. This position of prominence stood Daniel in good stead when the Medes and Persians ultimately took the city.

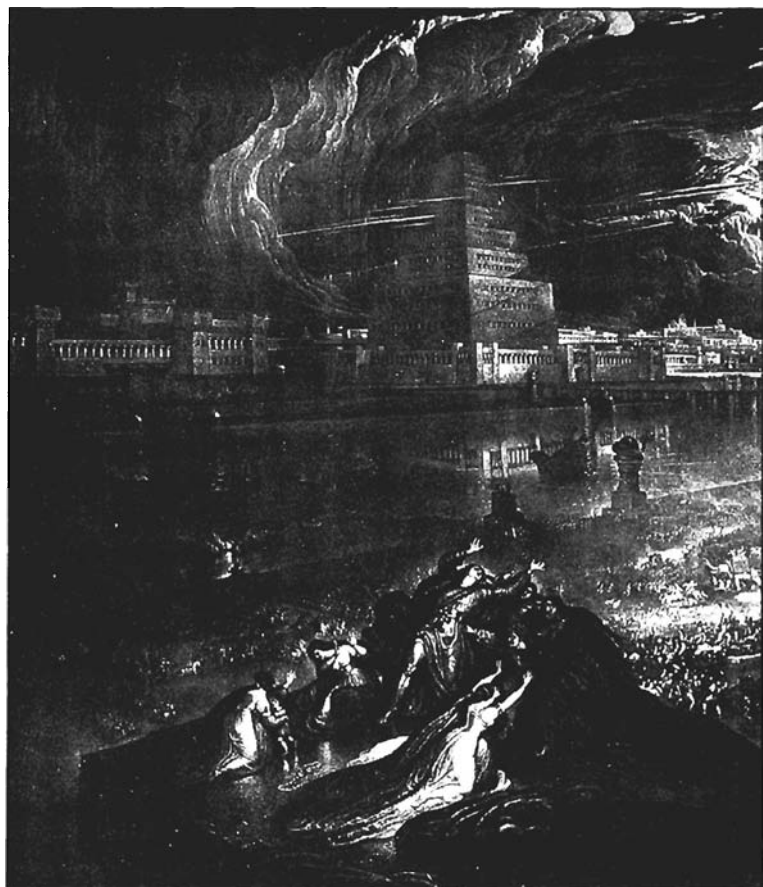
**Death of Belshazzar** Meanwhile, outside the palace, all was in confusion. A messenger was seen hurrying towards the palace gates, urgently demanding to see the king on a matter of greatest priority (Jer. 51:31). Brought into the presence of Belshazzar, he burst out with the terrible news that the city had been invaded. Some traitor had left the wharf gates along the Euphrates open, and the enemy had entered therein (Isa. 45:1)\*\*. Many Babylonish soldiers had mutinied and refused to fight (Jer. 51:30)! Parts of the city were already in the hands of the enemy!

How did it all happen?

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\* The original Hebrew (see Rotherham’s translation) favors the A.V. rather than the R.V. which makes Dan. 5:24 part of Daniel’s discourse. Unless the hand covered the words upon the wall there would have been no difficulty in anybody reading the writing, even though the wise men may not have been able to give an interpretation. But the hand apparently prevented them from either reading or interpreting the message, and was removed at the request of Daniel.

\*\* Archaeological research has confirmed this prophecy of Isaiah, and shows how some within the city co-operated with the enemy without.



***“The word that Yahweh spake against Babylon and against the land of the Chaldeans by Jeremiah the prophet. Declare ye among the nations, and publish, and set up a standard; publish, and conceal not: say, Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces; her idols are confounded, her images are broken in pieces. For out of the north there cometh up a nation against her, which shall make her land desolate, and none shall dwell therein: they shall remove, they shall depart, both man and beast” (Jeremiah 50:1-3).***

The messenger explained. The army of Cyrus had dug a huge trench, and diverted the course of the River Euphrates that ran through the city. The waters of the river being thus “dried up,” the Medo-Persian army had entered the city along the dry river bed, to find that remarkably a wharf gate had been left unlocked — through the forgetfulness of the Babylonians, or perhaps the work of a spy within the city. The enemy was thus able to obtain access into the city which had been considered otherwise to be impregnable.

The city was in an uproar. There was very little resistance. Babylon fell easily. A proclamation was issued calling upon all Babylonians to lay down their arms, to submit to the conquerors, and to stay within their homes. Most did so, and avoided the slaughter that otherwise would have taken place. In fact, unrest had been in evidence for some years, and many welcomed the change that a new régime would bring.

One man was not preserved from the violence of the moment. He was the king Belshazzar. On that very night when he had given himself with his family over to blasphemous pleasure at the expense of the holy things of God, he was slain.

As Nabonidus, his father, was absent from the city, Daniel, as third ruler, was brought prominently before the notice of Darius and Cyrus, the “kings of the east” (Rev. 16:12) For a time, however, Cyrus was busy elsewhere establishing his power, so that “Darius the Mede took the kingdom.”

**Babylon’s Overthrow** In Revelation 16:12-21, the overthrow of  
**Typical of** Babylon in the past is used as typical of  
**Present-Day Events** events that shall lead to the overthrow of the present way of life on earth, and the establishment of the kingdom of God.

In Revelation, the events are used symbolically. The drying Euphrates has reference to the receding Turkish power. The “*way of the kings of the east*” relates to the modern revival of Israel and the development of events in the Middle East in conformity to Bible prophecy; the kings mentioned being Christ and his glorified followers. Thus the judgment on Babylon administered by the Medes and Persians is like that of Armageddon upon the modern world. “Great Babylon shall come in remembrance before God” (Rev. 16:19). And, as in the past, divine judgments shall fall upon modern civilisation, that sweep it and its Belshazzars out of existence, to make way for the setting up of the kingdom of God.

## Chapter Eight

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### DANIEL PRAYS FOR THE PEACE OF JERUSALEM

**I**N Isaiah 62:6-7, God has caused some very important words to be recorded. They are: *“I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of Yahweh, keep not silence, and give Him no rest, till He establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.”* In Psalm 122, the Psalmist sang: *“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, They shall prosper that love thee!”*

Men of faith are exhorted thus to pray because the purpose of God is bound up with the future of Jerusalem. It is to be the “city of the great king” (Mat. 5:35), the “place of his throne” (Ezek. 43:7), the “throne of Yahweh” (Jer. 3:17), the headquarters of Christ’s rule (Isa. 2:2-4), the site of a glorious temple where people of all nations will assemble to worship (Zech. 14:16).

True Israelites have ever watched and prayed for this time of glory for their city. Not the least among their number was the prophet Daniel. He rejoiced at the downfall of Babylon. He knew how hopeless was the future of Israel so long as Babylon ruled, and he had long looked for its overthrow.

Now, at last, the rule of Babylon was at an end; a foreigner reigned over the city.

Eagerly Daniel studied the books of the Bible to learn more about these times. Keenly he considered the signs taking place. From Jeremiah’s prophecies he learned that a seventy years’ captivity was decreed for the people of God (Jer. 25).

It was almost seventy years since he, as a young man, had been taken to Babylon as a captive, and forced to study pagan learning. In BC606 Nebuchadnezzar had come against Jerusalem for the first time, and in BC538 Babylon had fallen to the Medes and Persians.

Nearly seventy years! Jeremiah’s prophecy almost fulfilled! The time for the glory to be restored to Jerusalem!

So Daniel thought.

There had been other deportations by the Babylonians after that of BC606, and the seventy years of Jeremiah’s prophecy apply to them as well. But Daniel had studied enough to know that the time was at hand. As a prophet of God he set his heart to pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

The glorious prayer he uttered is recorded in Daniel 9. It was evening time. In Jerusalem, in happier days, the incense would have been smoking in the Holy Place, a symbol of the prayers of the peo-

ple. Outside, faithful Israelites would gather to pray; to mingle their words with the sweet ascending fragrance.

Though in captivity, Daniel continued this practice. And now he poured out his heart to Yahweh, beseeching that He might heal the hurt of His people, and restore their greatness. He spoke of the sins of the people, of the justness of God in all his ways, of His abounding mercy. He recognised that the nation was deserving of the punishment it had received, that by its actions it had called down upon it the curse of the Law, but he pleaded with Yahweh to forgive these sins:

*“O Yahweh, according to all Thy righteousness, I beseech Thee, let Thine anger and Thy fury be turned away from Thy city Jerusalem, Thy holy mountain... and cause Thy face to shine upon Thy sanctuary that is desolate, for Thy sake. O my God, incline Thine ear and hear; open Thine eyes and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by Thy name; for we do not present our supplications before Thee for our righteousnesses, but for Thy great mercies. O Yahweh hear! O Yahweh forgive! O Yahweh hearken and do! Defer not, for Thine own sake, and, O my God, for Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy name...”*

As he finished his prayer, Daniel sensed the presence of somebody by his side. He turned, and there, indeed, was an angel! Daniel recognised him as the one who had appeared before. “O Daniel, greatly beloved, from the beginning of your prayer, I was sent to give you





skill and understanding,” said the angel.

But the angel did not give him hope that the things promised would be immediately realised. Rather, Daniel was told that, although the seventy years of Jeremiah’s prophesying were almost at an end, there was to commence a “70 times 7” period for Jewry, which would end in a most disastrous manner: with the death of the Messiah! A foreign prince would enter Jerusalem, to destroy the city and the sanctuary, and bring about an abomination that would make the holy place desolate. And this desolating period, Daniel was told, would continue until the time decreed for its end.

Poor Daniel! At 90 years of age he was expectantly looking for the full glory to come to Jerusalem, and had prayed for it. Now he was told that Jerusalem would indeed, be built, but only to commence a period of disaster ending in Messiah being slain, the temple thrown down, city destroyed, people scattered — until a time determined but not plainly revealed.

This was the answer to his prayer!

There was one vital feature, however. The death of Messiah was to be a sacrificial death; a means whereby life would be brought to others.

Meanwhile, the request of his prayer was not *refused*, it was only delayed. It remains on record as a constant reminder of a faithful man’s prayer for the “peace of Jerusalem.” One day it shall be answered in the affirmative, and Daniel will be living to see it fulfilled.

## Chapter Nine

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### DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN

**T**HE empire of Cyrus soon embraced the whole of the ancient world. In order that it might be more efficiently controlled, it was divided into three main sections, and 120 smaller groups. Three presidents controlled the three main divisions, and chief of these was Daniel himself. He quickly established himself in a favorable light in the sight of the Medes and Persians. Though they were pagans, they believed in one god, so that there was a greater affinity between their worship and that of Daniel's, than the idolatrous religion of Babylon.

Darius\* found Daniel more trustworthy, more single-minded in his service, than other rulers, and came to put great confidence in him. Gradually a deep friendship developed between the aged prophet and the king.

This aroused the jealousy of the other presidents. They determined that they must get rid of Daniel. But how would they do it? It was no use charging him with dishonesty, or betrayal of trust. It was obvious that the Jewish prophet was thoroughly reliable. As one of them said: "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God" (Dan. 6:5).

#### **The King's Foolish Decree**

This gave another ruler an idea. He revealed it to the others, and soon a plot was hatched.

It was an idea that commended itself to the king. The empire of Medo-Persia had only recently developed. Many nations had come under its dominion for the first time. Could the rulers who had been newly appointed to their positions be trusted? Let them all be put to the test. Issue a decree that nobody is to ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days unless they obtain permission of the king! Let the penalty, if the decree is broken, be death by the lions.

The king was told that *all* the presidents, governors, princes, counsellors and captains had agreed that such a decree should be made, and therefore he readily authorized that it be issued.

But this was a lie, for Daniel, the *chief of presidents*, had obviously not agreed to it.

The basis of the law of the Medes and Persians, however, was that

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\* Darius was a common title meaning *Retainer*, used as we would that of king. There are good reasons for believing that the Darius of Daniel 6 was Cyrus. Verse 28 can be rendered "Darius, *even* in the reign of Cyrus."

once the king had signed a decree in writing, it could not be changed.  
Thus the decree having been made, it had to stand.

### **Daniel Breaks The Law**

The crafty presidents, aware of Daniel's habits, determined that the law would be soon broken by him; for he had an determined and unalterable practice. Three times a day: at morning, mid-day and evening, he ascended the upper part of his house, and, kneeling towards Jerusalem, prayed unto Yahweh.

Daniel's house was a sort of semi-governmental building. The lower part was occupied by various officers of state who were under his superintendence. At the top, however, was a spacious, airy room, in which were set large open windows, where the prophet could obtain complete privacy, unless somebody decided to spy on him.\*

Daniel knew the decree had been signed, and understood full well its purport, but was determined that nothing would cause him to alter his practice in regularly praying unto God.

He was prepared to submit to the king in everything except where the decrees of the king violated the laws of God. When that occurred, he believed that Yahweh's servants "ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

He continued to pray as beforetime; he did not even latch the window, to prevent others watching him. He felt that he had to uphold his commitment to Yahweh, and not conceal from others his loyalty to the Truth. He accepted the intrigue of the presidents as a challenge to faith, and in faith he reacted to it.

**Flung To The Lions**     Meanwhile, the presidents, knowing Daniel's habits of prayer, assembled that they might spy on him and then accuse him before Darius. Having secured the evidence, they hurried to the king, and told him of this breach of law: "Daniel, which is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not you, O king, nor the decree that you have signed, but makes his petitions three times a day!"

They probably thought that by mixing a lie in with their accusation, and saying that Daniel did not regard the king and by revealing him as a Jew, this would increase the king's hatred of him.

But in that they were mistaken.

The king recognised their motives. He saw plainly that they had trapped him, and was distressed at having permitted himself to be influenced in this way. He tried to prevent the decree being put into effect, but without success. All day long, he strove to find some way out of the situation, but at the end of the day, wearied with the effort,

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\* This description of Daniel's house is gathered from reports of the homes of governmental officials of the times.

he had to admit despondently that he had failed. He believed Daniel was as good as dead.

When the other presidents insisted that the law be set in motion, there was nothing else but to comply. With heavy heart the king commanded that Daniel be brought before him. The aged prophet, now over ninety years of age, stood before the king. There was a serenity in his attitude, a majesty in his bearing that made the king seem like a commoner before him. What Darius saw was a man of absolute faith, a man who had spent over seventy years in captivity, patiently serving his God, seeking the welfare of his brethren. A man who, without the companionship of wife and family, without the help of a large and prosperous independent community, had maintained his integrity despite his isolation in the midst of a blasphemous people.

His very presence evinced faith, courage, determination.

There was something about Daniel that bred confidence. As the frustrated king looked at the prophet, he involuntarily gave utterance to words he hardly dared believe, and did not properly understand: *"Thy God whom thou servest continually, He will deliver thee!"*

He acknowledged that the God of the despised Jew wielded greater power than he did! He probably had heard of the remarkable miracles that had earlier taken place in Babylon. He had doubtless learned of the mysterious hand that had revealed the message of judgment against Belshazzar, at the bidding of Daniel.

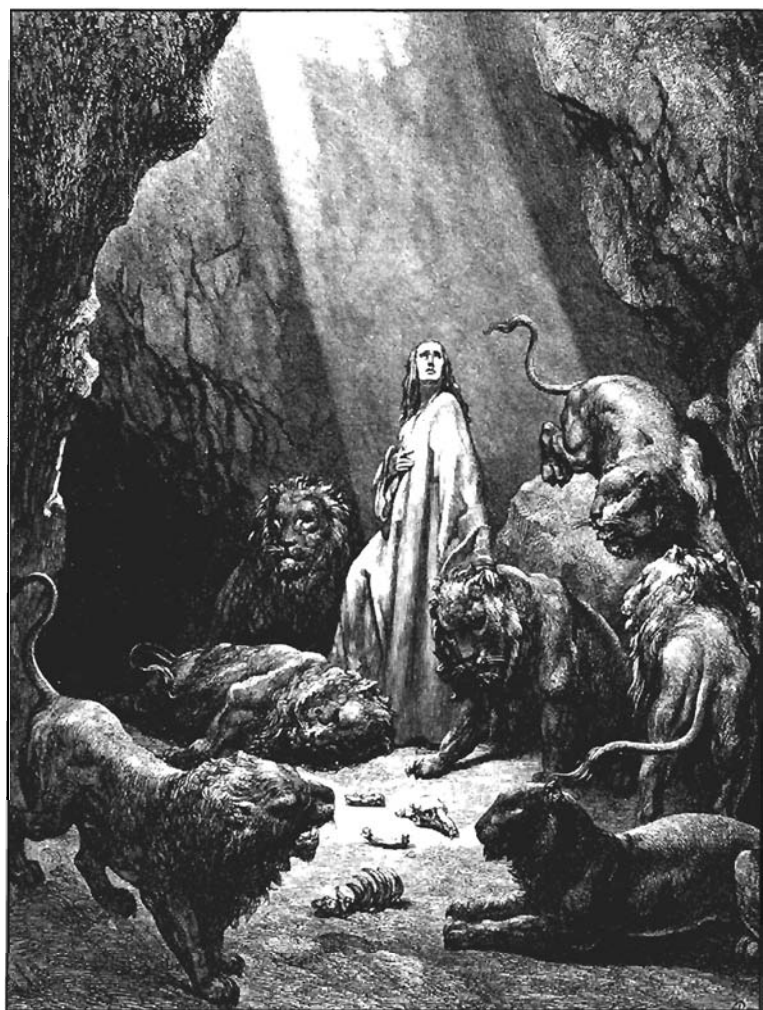
But it was with a very heavy heart that he witnessed Daniel being flung into the lions' den, and his lords sealing the stone door that shut it off.

He returned to his palace and spent a restless night. There was something in the transactions of the day that perplexed him. Against hope, he felt sure that Daniel would come out of the den alive. But such a thing was impossible! It had never happened before! It was senseless and unreasonable to hope that the impossible would now happen!

But the king continued to hope. Pacing up and down in the palace, he impatiently awaited the light of morning. As soon as day had broken, he hastened down to the lions' den and called to Daniel: *"O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?"*

Back came the voice of Daniel: *"My God sent His angel, and shut the lions' mouths that they should not hurt me; forasmuch as before Him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt."*

How relieved the king was to hear that voice! His favorite minister, the one he could truly rely upon, was saved! Undoubtedly the God of the Hebrews is more powerful than any other! Quickly at the command of the king, the stone was rolled back, and Daniel stepped forth



*"The king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt" (Daniel 6:19-22).*

to safety. Faith which comes by belief and is revealed under trial, had saved him (Dan. 6:23; Heb. 11:33).

### **The Jealous**

### **Presidents Destroyed**

It was a moment of triumph for both king and prophet. What now of the jealous presidents who, in their ruthless ambition, sought to rid themselves of a rival who stood in the way of their own advancement!

They had an answer. They refused to believe that a miracle had been performed. They claimed that the lions were secretly fed, that Daniel had been saved by trickery. Later a similar guise was used by the leaders of Jewry at the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ, to “explain” why his body could not be found (Mat. 27:63-64; 28:13-15). But in this, as in the case of Daniel, Almighty God had miraculously acted to defeat the wickedness of his adversaries.

Sternly the king listened to such unbelieving comments. With grim humor he gave the presidents opportunity to test the validity of their theory. He commanded that they, and their families should be thrown into the lions’ den. If the lions were as well fed as these men claimed, they had nothing to fear.

But those lions were ravenously hungry. As the men were thrown into the den, the great beasts leaped upon them, and destroyed them before they reached the bottom of the cage.\*

### **The King’s New Decree**

In the face of such remarkable evidence of divine power, the king issued a new decree.

It proclaimed peace to his mighty empire on the basis of certain principles that he set before men (Dan. 6:25-26), which he called upon them to recognise. They were:

- 1. God lives, and therefore knows all that happens;*
- 2. God is supreme and men should fear and tremble before Him;*
- 3. God has a purpose that is unchangeable;*
- 4. His kingdom shall last forever;*
- 5. His dominion shall be universal;*
- 6. He is a Redeemer of His people;*
- 7. The evidences of His power are seen on all sides;*
- 8. He is a Saviour as was shown by the experience of Daniel.*

Where did the king obtain this knowledge of the God of Israel? Undoubtedly from Daniel. Long and earnest must have been the conversations that the prophet had with the king.

This wonderful act of faith on the part of the aged prophet has

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\* This is according to Josephus. The narrative in Daniel states: “they brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came to the bottom of the den” (ch. 6:24), supports Josephus’ words by emphasising how ravenously hungry were the lions.

moved and inspired his brethren and sisters down through the ages. The apostles saw it as typical of the experiences they faced. They were not thrown into literal dens of lions, but they were surrounded by men who sought to harm and destroy them. Paul wrote: "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion" (2 Tim. 4:17).

He must have had Daniel's example in mind.

Thus men of faith throughout the ages have stood where Daniel stood so long ago when his faith was tested, and he came forth triumphant. They have *dared to be Daniels, dared to stand alone, dared to have a purpose true, and dared to make it known.*

And they too, and all of like precious faith, will be brought from the grave and given eternal life, that they might hear a royal decree so similar to the one proclaimed in the days of the prophet: "Preach to every nation, kindred, tongue and people, saying: Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of His judgment is come; and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters" (Rev. 14:6-7).



## Chapter Ten

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### DANIEL'S DEATH

**D**ANIEL lived to hear the exciting news that the way was open for his people to return to their land. This was issued in a decree by Cyrus in the first year of his sole reign, bc536. For two years, Cyrus and Darius reigned jointly. In the third year (Dan. 10:1), which was the first year of Cyrus' sole reign, the aged Daniel passed to his rest (Dan. 1:21).

It was an important year, for it was exactly seventy years since the first attack on Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. Earnestly, impatiently, Daniel awaited some political move that would end the captivity of Judah; but days went by and nothing happened.

Daniel decided to give himself to fasting and prayer, to seek the guidance of God in the matter. He did so for twenty-one days. He was by the great river Hiddekel at the time, doubtless upon the king's business, and with his assistants in attendance.

Suddenly they were startled by the appearance of a most remarkable man. Like the image seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream, this man before Daniel, was composed of metals (Dan. 10). In addition he was clothed with fine gold, his body was like the beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were as lamps of fire, his arms and his feet were like polished brass, his voice sounded like a multitude.

The vision glowed with light and power. It struck terror into the hearts of Daniel's attendants, so that they ran and hid themselves.

The fear-stricken prophet was left on his own. Nevertheless he understood the meaning of the vision. He recognised that whereas the metallic image seen by Nebuchadnezzar represented the fearsome Kingdom of Men, this brilliant, linen-garbed figure represented the saints in glory.

It was the complete opposite of the image seen by Nebuchadnezzar. It represented those who down the ages have been oppressed in the Kingdom of Man, have lived in faith, and have developed godly characteristics in spite of the temptations surrounding them. It represented Daniel, and thousands like him welded together as one; destined to conquer and destroy the vast, awe-inspiring, terror-inducing, metallic image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.



## **Daniel Enacts His Own Resurrection**

As Daniel looked on the glory of the vision, he felt his own insignificance, the unworthiness of his association therewith. He felt weak, and ill, and fell down in a dead faint. Then, as in a dream, he felt a hand touch him, and lift him to his knees. He heard a kind voice speaking: "O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright, for unto thee am I now sent."

Trembling, Daniel stood upon his feet. "Fear not, Daniel", continued the kind voice of the angel. "From the very day you set yourself to understand and humble yourself before God, your words were heard, your actions noticed, and I am come to help you. For twenty-one days the king of Persia withstood me, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia."

Twenty-one days was the period occupied by Daniel in his fast. As he fasted and prayed, the angels of God were invisibly guiding events in order that Cyrus might issue the proclamation that invited the Jews to return to their homeland!

Daniel's efforts had not been without effect. The voice of the angel continued: "Now I am come to make you understand what shall befall your people in the latter days; for yet the vision is for many days."

But despite the kind voice of the angel, Daniel dared not look at the glory again. He stood dumb, with his face to the ground.

An angel touched his lips, and caused him to speak. "O my lord," he said, "by the vision I am weak and retain no strength. How can I speak with you, I who am so weak!" So he humbled himself, confessing his weakness in the face of the glory of the vision.

But a further angel touched him, and strengthened him. "O man greatly beloved," said this angel, "***Fear not! Peace be unto you! Be Strong, yea, Be Strong!***"

## **The Final Message**

Immediately Daniel felt strength flooding his being. He was no longer weak and ill, no longer unable to look at the angel. He felt younger, and virile, abounding in strength. He listened intently to the voice of the angel as he outlined a long prophecy, recorded in chapter 11, which foretold the future of Israel down to "the time of the end", when full restoration would ultimately be accomplished.

The prophecy referred to the reverses and trials the Jews would

suffer, of warfare which would involve their land, of disappointments, defeats, moments of "little strength", of some being purified for the future, of a tremendous battle in the last days when a mighty "King of the North" shall be manifested, of the standing up of Michael the Messiah-prince of Israel, of a resurrection of the faithful to life eternal, and of the disobedient to disgrace, of the establishment of the kingdom of God, of the limitation of time for the fulfilment of the divine purpose.

He heard it all, and then he received the last message: "*Go thou thy way till the end be; for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.*"

With that final message of personal hope, his life came to an end. Shortly after receiving this vision, he heard the wonderful decree issued by Cyrus, calling upon the Jews to return and rebuild the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem. Daniel probably played some part in this, probably showing king Cyrus the prophecy of Isaiah, which, 200 years earlier, directly named Cyrus as the author of such a decree.

So Daniel died. But he died in the sure hope of a resurrection. In fact, he had enacted his own death, resurrection, and glorification to life. When he gazed upon the glory of the vision and fell to the ground as dead, it was as though he had died. When one touched him and set him upright, it was as though he had been raised from the dead. When he stood trembling and his mouth was opened to speak, it was as though he was before the judgment seat. When he continued in weakened condition, it was as though mortality still claimed him awaiting the change that finally shall come upon the righteous. But when he heard the glorious, reviving words: "Be strong, yea, be strong", and felt strength flooding his being, it was as though eternal life had been granted him; as though he experienced the thrilling words of Isaiah: "*Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon Yahweh shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint*" (Isa. 40:31).

Daniel was dead. But the influence of his work remained. A changed, disciplined people were ready to put into effect the proclamation of Cyrus that had been issued to the Jewish captives.

# Israel Returns to the Holy Land

1948-1949

**O**UR story has brought us to the dramatic events related to the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon. They returned to rebuild the nation that had been overthrown by Nebuchadnezzar, and in doing so, they established the background against which the ministry of the Lord was ultimately performed. The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther provide the source of our story. They tell of the mercy and goodness of Yahweh towards a people who had earlier despised His word. They show how He was behind the restoration, the reconstruction, and the preservation of His people.

These three words epitomise the story that now unfolds. As an aid to memory we can look upon Ezra as the book of RESTORATION; Nehemiah as the book of RECONSTRUCTION; Esther as the book of PRESERVATION. These three words also epitomise the purpose of Yahweh with His people. In the modern restoration of the Jewish State of Israel, there is revealed a foreshadowing of what will be accomplished in a more perfect way at Christ's coming. It is almost a repetition of what is revealed in the three books of the Bible before us. "Almost", but not quite — for there is much more of God's involvement in the regathering as recorded by Ezra, than what is seen in the modern restoration of the Jews to their land.

It is important to understand that in the Hebrew Bible the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are joined as one. This is more natural than the present division into two books, for they tell the continuous story of one epoch. The two books are mostly compilations,

*and are made up of extracts from the personal diaries of Ezra and Nehemiah, records from the archives of nations, and quotations from official documents.*

*But, wonderful to relate, even in these dry governmental documents is revealed the hand of God in world affairs, moving on the behalf of His people.*

*It is all welded together into a most dramatic story.*

*Ezra signifies "Help". The book that bears his name shows how Yahweh helped His people. If a phrase were to be chosen to illustrate the basic message of the book, perhaps no better one could be selected than that found in Psalm 94:17, "Unless Yahweh had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence". The word "help" in this sentence is "ezrah" in Hebrew. The same word is found frequently in other places, including Psa. 40:17; 60:11; 71:12 and 108:12.*

*The following chapters in our Story of the Bible will show how Yahweh helped His people in a wonderful way, and laid the foundation for the coming of the Redeemer whose wondrous act of love in providing a covering for sin, so greatly "helps" those who approach God through him.*

## Chapter One

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### THE DECREE OF CYRUS

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**B**ABYLON had fallen. Belshazzar the blasphemous Babylonian king had been slain after elevating Daniel to the position of third ruler in the Empire (Dan. 5). Darius had entered the mighty city as king, to reign jointly for two years with Cyrus, who was extending his conquests elsewhere.

And now Cyrus reigned alone. In pomp he had entered Babylon as conqueror. Immediately he instituted a policy of religious tolerance. He invited those people who had been taken into captivity by Babylon, to return to their respective countries if they desired to do so.

But he gave special attention, and greater help to one group of captives. They were the Jewish people. His great interest in them was probably induced through the influence of Daniel. He had enjoyed a position of the greatest prominence under Darius (Dan. 6:2), and must have come immediately before the notice of Cyrus when he assumed sole control.

He took the opportunity of directing the Persian king to the remarkable prophecy of Isaiah.\*

Over 200 years earlier, Isaiah had predicted: "Thus saith Yahweh to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him... I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build My city, and he shall let go My captives" (Isa. 45:1, 13). "He saith of Cyrus, He is My Shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure; even saying to Jerusalem: thou shalt be built, and to the temple, thy foundation shall be laid" (Isa. 44:28).

How amazed Cyrus must have been to see his own name mentioned and his work clearly revealed in this ancient prophecy. Immediately he realised that the God of heaven ruled in the kingdom of men, and it was through His influence that he had risen to such power. He felt that he must carry out to the letter the work he had been appointed to do.

Meanwhile, many Jews throughout Babylonia had been roused to the highest level of excitement by the events of the times, and awaited impatiently the restoration to the Land they knew would come.

And, at last, Cyrus issued his decree, proclaiming the restoration of the Jewish people. It was couched in remarkable language. Cyrus declared: "Yahweh, the God of heaven, hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He hath charged me to build Him an house at

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\* This is according to Josephus, who states that in consequence Cyrus was seized with an earnest desire and ambition to fulfil what was so written.

Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? His God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, gold, goods and beasts, besides the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:2-4).

Thus Cyrus decreed that the Jews should return to their own land, the Temple should be built, and those Jews who did not return home should, at least, help the work with their wealth.\*

It was BC536: a most significant year. It was exactly seventy years since Nebuchadnezzar had proudly entered the city of Jerusalem as conqueror. Thus was partially fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah that the captivity would last for seventy years (Jer. 25:11-12).

### **Sheshbazzar and Joshua Organise The Return (Ezra 1)**

The reaction of the Jews to the decree of Cyrus was immediate. The godly among them, who had been waiting for the restoration, could hardly believe their ears for joy.

Their previous despondency now gave way to anticipations of the greatest pleasure.

Psalms 137 expresses their earlier feelings. It speaks of how they sat by the rivers of Babylon and wept when they remembered the fallen state of Zion. When some of the Babylonians asked them to sing one of the songs of Zion, their reply was: “How shall we sing Yahweh’s song in a strange land!” (v. 4).

But now there was joyous activity among them. Psalm 126 declares: “When Yahweh turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing; then said they among the heathen, Yahweh hath done great things for them, whereof we are glad” (Psa. 126:1-3).

Unfortunately, the number of those who desired to return was comparatively small. They were those who were moved by the things of God, and sought to do His will (Ezra 1:5). They were supported with wealth by those who preferred to remain behind, and Cyrus himself assisted by commanding that the vessels of the temple, that Nebuchadnezzar had taken to Babylon, should be delivered into the hands of the Jews to again grace the temple that they hoped to rebuild, and also providing the exiles with a grant of money to enable them to commence the work.

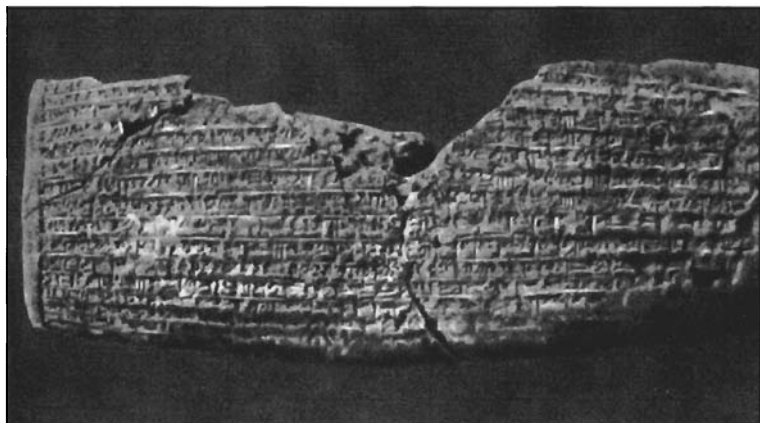
And this fulfilled another prophecy of Jeremiah. He had declared: “Thus saith Yahweh concerning the vessels that remain in the house

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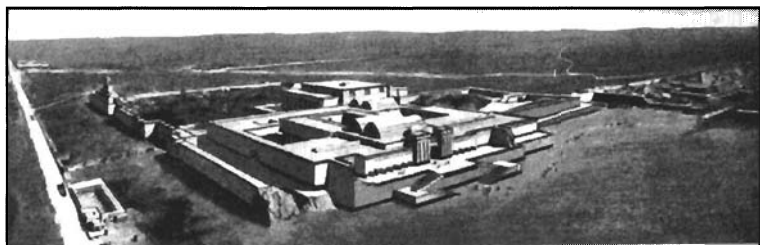
\* He even incorporated in his decree details of how the foundations should be laid, the height of the walls, etc., and other features, and commanded this should be a charge on the state (Ezra 6:4). An indication, doubtless, of the influence of Daniel.

of Yahweh. They shall be carried to Babylon, and there shall they be until the day that I visit them, saith Yahweh. Then will I bring them up, and restore them to this place" (Jer. 27:22. See also Jer. 50:28).

But who was to organise the return? The obvious choice was a man named Sheshbazzar (who also had the name of Zerubbabel; see pp. 317, 320), a descendant of David, and a notable prince among the Jews. Cyrus appointed him governor, and gave him the task of organising the work. He immediately set about doing this with the aid of Joshua the high priest.



*The cylinder of Cyrus, proclaiming the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem — approximately bc538. From the British Museum.*



*The impressive palace of the Persian kings. Shushan was originally built by Darius as a winter residence for the monarch.*



## Chapter Two

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### THE EXILES GATHER TOGETHER

**I**T was decided that the nation should be restored on a similar basis to that existing in the time of David. No obstacle to this was anticipated, for the Persian Government had given its support for the venture, specifically directing that the city and temple should be rebuilt. It was decided to take a register of all those who desired to return to the Land. From the genealogies thus revealed, priests and Levites would be given their duties in the worship to be re-established, and common Jews would be appointed their places of residence, according to their family inheritance, set down in the Law of Moses.

In addition, the register would prevent any undesirable migrants entering the Land, ensuring that only those of Israel, or Gentiles interested in the welfare of Israel would return (Ezra 2:62).

**Different Companies of Those Who Returned (Ezra 2)** Among those gathered to Zerubbabel were Jews who were able to proudly show their genealogy which was then recorded. There were others who had little to show except that they were undoubtedly of Israel (v. 59). They were gladly received.

There were Jews who had acted as Gentiles, but now that the fortunes of the nation had taken a turn for the better, wished to be associated with its rebuilding. The past was forgotten and they were gathered in.

There were Gentiles who had become completely Israelitish in their attitude, and were really more faithful than those Jews who preferred to remain behind in Babylon. Of this number were numerous Nethinim.\*

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\* "Nethinim" signifies those "given" or "dedicated". They are referred to seventeen times in Ezra and Nehemiah, but only once elsewhere (1Chr. 9:2). They are described as those "whom David appointed for the service of the Levites" (Ezra 8:20). They are closely connected with the "servants of Solomon" (ch. 2:55-58) who seem to have been descendants of the Canaanites he used in the building of the temple (2Chr. 2:17), and whose duties were possibly even humbler than those of the Nethinim who performed the menial tasks of the temple. The Midianites (Num. 31:47), the Gibeonites (Josh. 9:23), and other naturalised foreigners were used for this purpose. David organised these foreigners into the Nethinim, dedicating them for specific work associated with the temple (Ezra 8:20). Thus Gentiles were not only brought into Israel, but closely associated with the temple service — an honored position for them, and a symbol of hope to Gentiles of every age.

On the other hand, there were priests who had previously gloried in the flesh, but now wanted to redeem themselves. Among these were those who had married into the numerous family of Barzillai, the wealthy prince who was greatly honored by David (2Sam. 17:27). They had preferred to be known as members of his family rather than that of Aaron. Now, however, they wanted to be again classed as priests. What was to be done? When they came before Sheshbazzar the governor, he would not permit it. Such a decision was beyond him, and he determined that it should wait until direct guidance was received from God (Ezra 2:63).

But, at last, the register was complete, and it was found that 42,360 Jews, 7,337 servants and 200 singers had decided to return. They gathered together 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels and 6720 asses to convey them and their belongings to the land of Judah.

And, most precious possession of all, there was delivered into their hands the treasure of the temple that remained: some 5,400 gold and silver vessels.

The number of Jews that elected to return was disappointingly small in comparison with the large number in captivity. But it was sufficient for the purpose in hand.

### **Home Again!**

The cavalcade of Jews, bearing their belongings, carrying the precious vessels of the temple, left Babylon for their 1,400 km (800 mile) journey. It was about springtime, and the people were filled with the greatest enthusiasm. They arrived at their destination a few months later, after a tiring journey across the great desert that separated Babylon from Jerusalem, and almost immediately dispersed into the various cities of Judah according to their family inheritance.

There was plenty of hard work for them in every direction. Cities were in ruins; farms, vineyards, and orchards had to be restored; homes had to be built.

And there was no welcome for them from the inhabitants, or the neighboring nations. In fact, the returning exiles were viewed with growing resentment and hostility. There was no love for Israel among the Samaritans, the Moabites, the Edomites, and the remnant of other nations that remained. They hated the Jews and did not want to see the nation restored. The growing resentment and hatred was felt by the few Jews scattered throughout the land. The future looked very ominous for them (Ezra 3:3).

### **The Altar Set Up**

But despite all obstacles, the two leaders, Joshua and Zerubbabel, set about their task with an enthusiasm and determination that was contagious. Calling upon their immediate followers to assist, they cleared the site of the

altar, and rebuilt it once again. Thus amid the blackened ruins and rubble of the ancient city of Jerusalem, the smoke of sacrifices ascended unto Yahweh, and the foundations of worship were again laid.

By the beginning of the seventh month the work was completed. It was a significant month in the Jewish calendar. On the first day of this month, the law of Moses enjoined that there should be a memorial blowing of trumpets to gather people together. This was followed, on the tenth day, by the most solemn day in the Jewish year: the Day of Atonement. On that day every Jew was called upon to humble himself before Yahweh, to remember his sins, and participate in the sacrifices that were offered that they might be forgiven. On the fifteenth day of the month, the seven days' Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated. At this feast, the people were called upon to rejoice before Yahweh. They camped in the open for a week enjoying the mild, pleasant weather for which Judea is noted at that time of the year, and recalling the wonderful deliverance that Yahweh had effected for them in Egypt.

The returned exiles could not keep the Day of Atonement, for there was no temple built, but they could and did keep the Feast of Tabernacles. It was given a new meaning. Previously the people had rejoiced in remembrance of the deliverance from Egypt; now they did so because of release from the Babylonish captivity.

In the ruined city, with hostile enemies surrounding them, with all the problems of the future facing them, this faithful remnant rejoiced before Yahweh because they knew that He was with them.

**AN OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF EZRA**

Ezra is the book of the RESTORATION, and is divided into two parts. Chapters 1 to 6 form the first part; chapters 7 to 10 the second part. The former gives the history of the return under Zerubbabel; the latter gives that of the return under Ezra. The book shows how the work of one supplemented that of the other, as follows:

<b>ZERUBBABEL</b>		<b>EZRA</b>	
Decree of Cyrus .....	ch. 1:1-4	Decree of Artaxerxes .....	ch. 7:1, 11-26
Leader — Zerubbabel .....	ch. 1:8, 2:2	Leader — Ezra .....	ch. 7:1-10
Names & number of remnant .....	ch. 2:3-65	Names & number of company .....	ch. 8:1-20
Sacred vessels and gifts .....	ch. 2:68-70	Sacred vessels and gifts .....	ch. 8:24-27
Arrival at Jerusalem .....	ch. 3:1	Arrival at Jerusalem .....	ch. 8:32
Prophetic ministry of Haggai and Zechariah .....	ch. 5:1-2; 6:14	Intercessory ministry of Ezra .....	ch. 9:1-15
Final development:		Final development:	
Temple rebuilt .....	ch. 6:15-22	People rededicated .....	ch. 10:1-4

The chronology of this period is important in order to get a proper grasp of the important events that took place, and this will be set out in detail later in our *Story of the Bible*. We will then provide reasons for believing that the events of the book of Esther are contemporary with

the second half of the book of Ezra.

There were three stages in the regathering. The first under Zerubbabel, the second, and smaller, under Ezra, the third (mainly his personal attendants) under Nehemiah.

### ZERUBBABEL AND JOSHUA: REBUILDERS OF ISRAEL

There is little in the Bible upon which to assess the characters of Zerubbabel and Joshua. The mere historical facts of their work are set forth without much personal detail. They performed a valuable service among the exiles, and then faded from the scene without even their deaths being recorded. During their ministry, they not only organised the return to the Land, but when there, they supervised the work of building the altar, and restoring the temple of Yahweh.

They are described as "men of sign" (Zech. 3:8, mg). By this is meant that they were types of the Lord Jesus Christ. Zerubbabel was a descendant of Jehoiachin, the wicked king of Judah, and a predecessor of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mat. 1:11-12). He was a prince and a ruler in Israel, and was established as governor in the land. He thus represented the Lord Jesus as ruler. On the other hand, Joshua was a descendant of Aaron, and held the position of high priest. He represented the Lord Jesus as the appointed priest of God.

Combined, these two men represented the Lord Jesus as King-Priest of the Age to come. They were proclaimed "men of sign" in order that faithful Jews of those days, and later, might meditate upon the work they performed, and see foreshadowed in it, the work to be undertaken by the great **Restorer** of Israel (Rom. 11:26), the **Governor** promised through Jeremiah (ch. 30:21) and the **Branch** promised through Zechariah who shall combine the offices of both king and high priest (Zech. 6:12-13).

Their names were significant. Zerubbabel means "*Shoot of Babylon*". It is a fitting name to describe Jesus, for he is likened to a "root out of a dry ground" (Isa. 53:2), to a "branch" or shoot springing forth from out of the withered stem of Jesse (Isa. 11:1). But Zerubbabel was also known as Sheshbazzar\*, a name which means "*Joy in Affliction*". During the period of the captivity, Zerubbabel was doubtless sustained by the knowledge that Yahweh would move for the release of His people. Thus, like the Lord Jesus, there was a "joy set before him" which enabled him to see beyond the immediate affliction (see Heb. 12:2).

Joshua, of course, is the Hebrew form of Jesus, and means "*Yahweh will save*". He is described as the son of Josedech (Hag. 1:1), which signifies "*Yahweh has cleansed*". Thus his name expressed to the people of his day, the wonderful message that Yahweh will save

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\* See Ezra 1:8. Sheshbazzar is identified with Zerubbabel because of the following reason: he is said to have built the foundation of the temple in Ezra 5:16, a work assigned to Zerubbabel in Zech. 4:9. It was not unusual for people to have two names in those times.

because Yahweh has cleansed the people!

These two men were set before their contemporaries as “men of sign”. Those who thought deeply upon this fact, would be led to consider the purpose of God in Christ Jesus. There were six major incidents in their joint labors that illustrated this. They were:

- 1. *The return to the land — Ezra chs. 1 & 2.***
- 2. *The altar built — Ezra 3:1-6.***
- 3. *The new temple commenced — Ezra 3:8-13.***
- 4. *The opposition of their adversaries — Ezra 4.***
- 5. *The exhortation of the prophets to work — Ezra 5:1; 6:14.***
- 6. *The Temple completed — Ezra 6:15-22.***

The counterpart, in the work of the Lord Jesus, is as follows:

- 1. *The call to return to God through the ministry of Jesus.***
- 2. *The setting up of the altar of sacrifice: the Lord himself (Heb. 13:10).***
- 3. *The foundation of a spiritual temple laid through the apostles (Eph. 2:10).***
- 4. *The manifestation of the adversary (2Thes. 2:7-10).***
- 5. *The continued witness of the Word throughout the ages.***
- 6. *The ultimate completion of the spiritual temple (1Pet. 2:5-12).***

Many other types and shadows are presented in the labors of Zerubbabel and Joshua. Zechariah exhorted: “Who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel” (Zech. 4:10).

Today is a day of small things as far as the work of Christ is concerned. So small, indeed, that the world despises it as it did that of Zerubbabel. But if we “despise not” these things, and seek to serve Christ in faith, we shall ultimately rejoice as we “see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel” (the typical Lord Jesus), see him complete the spiritual temple whose foundations were laid so long ago, see it in all its glory with the headstone in place, and thus will rejoice in the consummation of the divine purpose. Let us study, with the greatest concentration, the dramatic and significant events that are unfolded in the book of Ezra.



## Chapter Three

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### THE TEMPLE FOUNDATIONS LAID

**T**HE next work, as far as Joshua and Zerubbabel were concerned, was the building of the Temple. Cyrus had given them a grant of money for this purpose, and, taking the pattern from Solomon, they hired craftsmen of Tyre and Sidon to assist in the work, and to bring cedar from Lebanon.

Soon the port of Joppa was a hive of activity as the materials were unloaded and carried overland to the city of Jerusalem. In the city, Joshua and his brethren supervised the work. They appointed Levites from twenty years old and upwards for that purpose. They labored in the rubble, clearing the site for the foundations of the temple, or they stored the materials that were beginning to arrive from Joppa.

At last the foundations of the temple were laid, and it was decided to hold a service of thanksgiving.

It was conducted by Joshua the high priest wearing his resplendent robes of office. The priests and Levites, likewise dressed in their apparel, together with the musicians and singers, took up their appointed places in what they hoped would one day be the temple court, and the glorious Psalms of David were chanted to allow the people to combine their personal emotions in the exercise of worship. Psalm 136, with its wonderful refrain: "O give thanks unto Yahweh; for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever", echoed from the hill of Zion over the ruined city beneath (Ezra 3:11).

It was a thrilling moment for the returned exiles. The foundation laid was something accomplished, and in thought they could see the completed temple. They entered fully into the spirit of the service of dedication, and as the Psalm came to an end, they applauded with a great shout.

But there were some old men among the returned exiles who did not shout for joy. They were old enough to remember the previous temple in all its glory. They thought of the things that it contained which this new temple would not have: the Ark of the Covenant, the Shekinah glory that Ezekiel saw depart from Solomon's Temple, the Urim that illuminated the breastplate of judgment (cp. Ezr. 2:63; Neh. 7:65)! As they thought of the glory that had departed, they wept! It was true that Cyrus, in his generosity, had given a large grant of money for the building of the temple, but it nowhere equalled that which David had stored up for Solomon's Temple, and as their eyes took in the ruined state of the city, they wept again.

But there was rejoicing in the hearts of the others, and in their

excitement they shouted aloud for joy. So much so, that the shout of joy echoing among the hills and valleys around Jerusalem, drowned the sound of tears (Ezra 3:13).

Though over seventy years had elapsed since the first attack of Nebuchadnezzar on Jerusalem, only fifty-three years had passed since the destruction of the temple. Like the city, the temple also had to await its seventy-years cycle, and events now occurred to delay its rebuilding.

### **The Samaritans Oppose the Jews**

North of Judah, there dwelt a mixed community of people, drawn from many nations, which had a semblance of Jewish religion.

They were known as Samaritans, because Samaria became their capital.

When the Assyrian kings took the ten tribes of Israel into captivity, they re-peopled the lands of the north with captives taken from other parts. These found the problems of settlement in Judah so great that they thought they were being cursed by the God of the land, and sought instruction as to how He should be worshipped. A priest of the ten tribes was sent to teach them, and he taught them the schismatic worship set up originally by Jeroboam (2Kgs. 17:28) intermixed with idolatry (vv. 29, 30, 41).

They claimed to worship the true God, but they did it in a corrupt manner.

True Israelites refused to associate with this false worship. The faithful remnant found themselves embarrassed with the presence of this perverted form of worship, for now the Samaritans wanted to help in building the temple: "Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do," they declared.

But Zerubbabel would have none of that. He knew the history of Israel was a record of the true worship being overthrown by such intermixtures of truth and error as the Samaritans embraced. He did not want that to happen again and preferred to keep separate and aloof from the false worship of the north. "You have nothing to do with us," declared Zerubbabel and Joshua, "We ourselves, together, will build an house unto Yahweh, as king Cyrus of Persia has commanded us."

Their refusal to allow the Samaritans to join with them in such work was based on religious grounds. They were not opposed to foreign labour, for they had already engaged foreigners of Tyre and Sidon to work for them (Ezra 3:7), but they refused to identify themselves with the false worship of the Samaritans. If the Samaritans genuinely wanted to help, let them first embrace the true worship in its entirety.

That was the attitude of the Jewish leaders, and it is the attitude that faithful worshippers of God have ever adopted.

But this attitude angered the Samaritans. They did everything possible to discourage the Jews in their labors. They even corrupted the Persian officials, so that the promised help became tardy and ineffectual (Ezra 4:5), and the work of the temple gradually slowed, until it ceased altogether.

Meanwhile, Cyrus who had assisted the Jews so much, died. It seemed to be the death-knell of their hopes.

Cambyses, his son (called Ahasuerus in Ezra 4:6) reigned in his stead, and continued for seven years, five months. The adversaries of the Jews wrote unto him an accusation against them. Though nothing appears to have been done at the time, it certainly did not help the Jewish cause at all. Much discouraged by continued reverses and opposition, the work of building the temple ceased.

The reign of Cambyses ended in tragedy and revolution. A group of Magian priests headed the revolution, and one of their number seized the throne, falsely claiming that he was Smerdis, the brother of Cambyses. He ruled Persia for a period of seven months with the help of his brother Patizithes.

But it was a most disastrous seven months for the Jews. The Samaritans had bribed some of the Persian officials, and with their support again wrote to the court of Persia. They reported that the work of rebuilding the temple had re-commenced, but suggested that if it be permitted to continue, it would to the disadvantage of Persia. They recommended that search be made in the national archives, in order to prove the truth of their accusation that "this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto the king and provinces, one noted for sedition, for which cause it had been overthrown." They warned that if the city be allowed to be rebuilt, it would not be long before Persian power would cease south of the Euphrates.

The letter frightened Pseudo-Smerdis. His authority was not very secure, and he knew that any revolt would prove disastrous to his rule. He checked the historical background of Jerusalem. He learned that the city did have a reputation for insurrection and rebellion; that mighty kings such as David and Solomon had extended its power far and wide, exacting toll and tribute from conquered nations. What had existed in the past could exist in the future: Judah could become a potential enemy of Persia.

Smerdis, whose troubles were growing daily, did not want any further problems on his hands. He commanded that the work cease forthwith.

It was a sad day for the Jewish people when this news was received; but it was a joyous day for the Samaritans. Armed with this prohibition, they compelled the Jews to cease by "force and power," probably bringing an army against the city, and breaking down any part of the wall that may have been erected (Ezra 4:23).



Thus the work of the restoration of the temple in Judah ceased for a time.

The Jewish remnant turned from it to look after its own welfare.

### THE MINISTRY OF HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH

They stood up at a crucial period to stimulate the people when it seemed that the cause of the returned exiles was doomed to failure, and when the early enthusiasm of the Jews had become blunted.

Their names provide an index to their respective missions. Haggai signifies *The Festal One*, from “*hag*”, a feast, sacrifice, a solemnity, and thus a gathering to rejoice before Yahweh. Isaiah suggests the idea in the following statement: “Ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of Yahweh, to the Rock of Israel” (Isa. 30:29).

Haggai’s mission was to gather the people together that they might rejoice before Yahweh. But they could only do so if they gave themselves without reserve to His work. Fourteen years had elapsed since the decree of Cyrus was issued, and delay and disappointment had drugged the people with apathy towards the work. Haggai was sent to rouse them out of sleep, to direct them to the work, and he performed his mission effectively.

Zechariah continued the work of Haggai by promising a blessing to those who did labor. His name, too, is significant. He is described as “Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet”. Zechariah signifies *Yahweh hath remembered*; Berechiah signifies *Yahweh hath blessed*; Iddo signifies *An Appointed Time*. Combined these names proclaimed the hopeful message: *Yahweh hath Remembered, and Yahweh hath Blessed, at the Appointed Time*.

That was the theme of Zechariah’s message to the nation. The people only had to look around them to see evidences of its truth.

## Chapter Four

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### THE WORK IS RESUMED AND COMPLETED

**T**HE Persian Empire became more and more convulsed in trouble. The usurper Gaumata, who claimed to be Smerdis and who had decreed that the Jewish work must cease, found revolts against his authority starting up on all sides. He lacked the ability or the power to rule effectively, and it was obvious that in a short time, he would be overthrown.

#### **Darius Hystaspes Grasps Power in Persia**

The challenge was taken up by Hystaspes who assumed the title of Darius. He overthrew Gaumata, and with energy and skill set about reviving the glory of Cyrus' empire.

Eight other pretenders to the throne of Persia were defeated, and then he turned his attention to enemies further afield. In the first five or six years of his reign, he had reconquered all the provinces of the empire that had revolted, including Elam, Susiana, Media, Babylonia, Parthia, Armenia, etc. He thus became known as the Artaxerxes, or Great Shah of Persia. He multiplied titles to himself, and in addition to *Darius* and *Artaxerxes*, he was known as the King of Assyria (Ezra 6:22), the King of kings (Ezra 7:12), the King of Babylon (Neh. 13:6), etc.

The enemies of Gaumata (Smerdis) became the friends of Darius Hystaspes; the friends of Gaumata were the enemies of Darius. Gaumata had supported the Samaritans and opposed the Jews. The enmity of Gaumata was now to stand the Jews in good stead.

But for a time the world watched the struggle for power in Persia itself. Darius came to power in BC521. During the first few months, his hands were busy overthrowing the forces ranged against him. However, by BC520, the second year of his reign, he was firmly established in power.

#### **Haggai and Zechariah Exhort the People to Work**

The year BC520 was crucial in Bible history, for it completed a further seventy years' cycle from the destruction of Jerusalem.

Seventy years earlier, Nebuchadnezzar had advanced against Jerusalem for the third and last time, determined to destroy the city, and uproot the people. After a protracted siege he succeeded.

That same date brought the Jews to the very eve of the seventy years' cycle of that time, and the temple still remained in ruins!

Jeremiah had prophesied that there would be a period of seventy years' captivity (Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10). The people had returned exactly seventy years after the first invasion of Nebuchadnezzar; now the question remained: would the temple be rebuilt at this time?

The Jewish people had become apathetic as far as the work was concerned. Their early enthusiasm had become blunted. The unexpected opposition to the work of God, the long delay of fourteen years during which the foundations lay neglected, had completely discouraged them. They could not understand why there should be any further delay. Was it not the work of God? Why did not He move to clear away all opposition?

They forgot that God tests His workmen, and that whilst they were building a literal temple, He was moulding their characters that they might form a part of the spiritual temple He will ultimately erect.

They could only see the ruin of their hopes. And there was plenty to remind them of that. If any part of the wall of the city had been set up as the Samaritans claimed (Ezra 4:12), it had been broken down again (v. 23, Neh. 2:17). Though the foundations of the temple had been built, they, too, were damaged, so that they had to be restored before actual building on them could recommence (Hag. 2:18). The people had dispersed to the various cities claiming that the time had not come for the building of the temple (Hag. 1:4). A spirit of gross materialism replaced the early enthusiasm for the work of Yahweh. Houses were built and glamorised (Hag. 1:4), every effort was made to establish personal wealth and prestige (Hag. 1:6), but the temple lay neglected. Yet despite their search for material gain, there was no true prosperity among the people (Zech. 8:9-11). A succession of bad seasons left them impoverished and completely dispirited (Hag. 1:10-11).

All their efforts to rebuild the nation seemed dogged by bad luck. They did not realise that this was the punishment of God because of their lack of faith.

A spiritual revival was needed. And Yahweh provided the men for the need. Two prophets, moved by the spirit of God, stood up to rouse the people again to the work of Yahweh, to tell them that the time had come to rebuild the temple, to remind them that if they dedicated themselves to the work of God then He would bless them.

They were the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

Haggai's voice was heard first. His message was: "**Consider your ways!**" He plainly told the people that they were lacking in spiritual virtues; he reminded them that despite all their seeking after material things, they did not really prosper (Hag. 1:5-6).

He appealed to them: "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your panelled houses, and this House (the temple) lie waste?" (Hag. 1:4). "You look for much," he told them, "but you receive little because

you neglect the work of God.” He promised that if they set about building the temple, God would take pleasure in it, no matter how humble the work might appear in human eyes (Hag. 1:8).

His message stirred up Zerubbabel and Joshua. They issued a call for work. They revived the early enthusiasm. Many gathered at the site of the temple with a desire to rebuild it (Hag. 1:14).

Haggai’s message had been delivered in the sixth month of the second year of Darius. It was a very opportune time, for it just preceded the Feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month, when all the people were gathered together to celebrate the national deliverance from Egypt. This feast provided an ideal opportunity for further instructions. Again, stirred up by the spirit of God, Haggai called the people before him on the final day of the feast, and delivered the divine message (Hag. 2:1). He singled out those who had wept when they saw the foundations of the new temple laid some fourteen years earlier, because they remembered the glory of Solomon’s Temple. “Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?” he asked.

But he pointed out that in despising the temple, they were despising the work of God. And turning to the people who clustered around him listening to his message, he cried: “*Be strong, O Zerubbabel! Be strong, O Joshua! Be strong, all ye people of the land, and WORK! For I am with you, saith Yahweh of hosts!*” (Hag. 2:4).

He called upon them not to be despondent at reverses. Their humble acts of faith were pleasing in the eyes of Yahweh, and through faith, they would one day see the fruits of their toil. The time is coming he told them, when Yahweh will shake all the nations, destroy their power, send the Messiah with all the faithful to rule, and fill His house with glory. “The latter-day glory of this house shall be greater than the former,” cried the prophet (according to the Hebrew).

The people were stirred by this message. They returned home from the Feast of Tabernacles determined to dedicate themselves anew to the work. A month later (see Hag. 1:1, 2:1, and compare with Zech. 1:1) Zechariah lifted up his voice to support and confirm the message of Haggai. From then onwards the voices of the two prophets were periodically raised to encourage the people to labor for God.

### **The Jews Defy Their Enemies**

The people now returned to the work with vigor. They refused to be deterred by opposition or discouragement of any kind. Stimulated by the example of Zerubbabel and Joshua, they assembled at the site of the temple to clear it of rubble, to restore the foundations, and to prepare material for building.

Their adversaries viewed this renewed activity with fear and hostility. Shetharboznai, a leader of the Apharsachites, a remnant of

Assyrian tribes in the area, hastened to Tatnai, the Governor-general of the region to lodge a complaint that the Jews were violating the express decree of Persia. They forced him to intervene, and to warn the Jewish leaders that their action could bring upon them the opposition of the Government. "Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall?" he enquired.

The Jews had an answer. They directed his attention to the decree of Cyrus, the legitimate ruler of Persia. For evidence they pointed to the grant of money given them officially by the government, to the wealth of gold and silver vessels from the temple that had been delivered into their hands by command of Cyrus.

The governor did not know what to do. He knew that Smerdis had prohibited the building of the temple by the Jews, but Smerdis was a usurper, and it was dangerous, at that time, to show any sympathy for his policy. The governor was in a dilemma, and decided to appeal to the court of Persia for a decision. He wrote a report to Darius outlining the defence of the Jews, and including an appeal by the Samaritans that the work cease.

Meanwhile the work continued. The Jews, inspired by the action of their leaders, and stimulated by the fiery messages of the two prophets, continued to labor. They cleared the site, repaired the foundations, prepared to build the wall. They felt there was a divine destiny in their work, that "the eye of their God was upon them" (Ezra 5:5).

They were greatly encouraged by a series of prophetic visions seen and recorded at this time by Zechariah in the name of Yahweh (Zech. 1:7—6:15). In vision he saw horsemen going forth to combat the enemies of Judah. He saw a "man with a measuring line" (Zech. 2), and heard an announcement: "Jerusalem shall be inhabited... I, Yahweh, will be a wall of fire around about." He saw Joshua with garments tainted and filthy through laboring amidst the rubble of the temple, and heard the command that he should change these garments for resplendent gowns of office, that he might take his place in the completed temple. He heard a voice proclaiming a message of encouragement for Zerubbabel, telling him that the spirit of Yahweh was with him, and the mountain of Gentile opposition that



sought to frustrate the work he was engaged upon would be levelled as a plain. "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that Yahweh of hosts has sent me unto you," cried the prophet (Zech. 4:9).\*

Not so encouraging were other visions that the people did not fully understand. But sufficient was clear to them that God was with them, and they could afford to ignore the opposition of their enemies.

They continued to labor with a purpose, confident that they would succeed in completing the temple this time.

### **The Confidence Of The Prophets Confirmed**

Meanwhile the Samaritans waited expectantly, hoping for confirmation of the previous decree, certain that Darius would prevent the development of such a troublesome nation as the Jews. At last his answer came. But what a shock for the enemies of the Jews!

Darius had discovered the decree of Cyrus, and not only confirmed it, but extended it! He not only commanded the governor of the region and the Samaritans that they must not oppose the work, but specifically ordered that it was to be assisted out of the public revenue. "Let the work of this house of God alone," he ordered. "Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in its place."

He ordered that out of the tribute paid by such nations as the Samaritans, expenses be given the Jews "that they be not hindered," and that adequate animals be provided, "that they may offer sacrifices unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons." And he warned, that if any tried to oppose this work, the most severe punishment would be meted out to them.

The very opposition of the Samaritans had thus turned to the good of the Jews.

From a political point of view, the policy of Darius was a sound one. He could anticipate that the rising power of Judah would soon be a force in the lands south of the Euphrates. In supporting them, and arranging for daily sacrifices to be offered in their temple on his

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\* The historical incidents of the Book of Ezra, provide the foundation for the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah. They are shown to be typical of the glory of the future Age when the Lord Jesus, as King-priest (the antitypical Zerubbabel and Joshua) shall reign. See, for example, the remarkable prophecy of Zechariah 3, where Satan (the adversary), is shown standing at the right hand to resist Joshua. The type is based on historical events of the day (Ezra 4:1-6). The adversaries of Judah caused the work of building the temple to temporarily cease (v. 24). Joshua instituted a reform (Ezra 5:2). He was again opposed by Satan (the adversary), but "the eye of their God" (the angel Exod. 23:20) was upon the elders of Israel (Ezra 5:5), and the work was advanced and completed. Though here historically recorded, this is also prophetic of the work of Christ — the true Joshua.

behalf, the king bound the nation to his cause, converted it into a valuable ally.

That was doubtless his policy, but in implementing it, the purpose of Yahweh was consummated. Thus are the wonderful ways of Providence revealed. God uses natural events to fulfil His plans.

The Jews now redoubled their activity. All doubt and indecision was at an end. The messages of the prophets had been thoroughly vindicated. With complete confidence the people gave themselves to the work, and as they did so they were urged on by continued words of encouragement from the prophets (Ezra 6:14).

### **Fasts Turned To Feasts**

The whole Jewish nation: princes, priests, prophets and people were thus united in a common cause, joyful in the realisation that they were doing a good work, and that God was with them.

Until then solemn fasts had been held on certain days of the year which commemorated disastrous events in the fall of Jerusalem. On those days the people would abstain from eating, and would lament the evils that had befallen them.

But with such evidences of God's goodness now manifested, the fasts had lost their power and significance for the excited people. A deputation was sent to Zechariah to seek the guidance of Yahweh as to whether these fasts should be continued.\* The deputation was told to go back to the nation, and remind the people that these disasters had come upon it because they had departed from the ways of God. Therefore, they needed to take heed to the warning, by obeying the divine law from the heart.

Zechariah reminded the deputation that before the people set their hearts to building the temple, there had been severe distress throughout the land; but since the time that they had given themselves wholeheartedly to the work, they experienced the blessings of God. There was no point in celebrating *fasts* under such conditions; best to turn them into *feasts* to commemorate the blessings that they were then experiencing (Zech. 7:1-3, 9; 8:18-19).

Thus the fasts were converted into feasts of thanksgiving.

**The Work Completed** In the month Adar, the sixth month of the civil year, but the twelfth month of the Jewish religious year, in the sixth year of Darius (Ezra 6:15), the work was completed, and once again the Jews had a temple at which to worship.

*Adar* signifies "dark, cloudy," and a dark, cloudy period of Jewish history had just come to an end. A new beginning stretched before the

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\* Notice the date that this was done: "the fourth year of Darius" (Zech. 7:1). The temple was completed in the sixth year (Ezra 6:15).

nation, of which the opening year, the following month, could well be the token. The dedication of the temple was immediately celebrated, in order that it might be ready for the Passover to be observed the following month. It was kept with the greatest joy, for the people could see about them the evidences of the divine blessing. Not only was the temple erected again, not only did they have a tangible centre of worship, but their material prosperity had advanced through the blessing from on high as the prophets had declared it would. Zerubbabel, Joshua, the prophets, the people, could look about them with a sense of something accomplished; with a knowledge that their captivity was at an end.\*

There was no weeping on this occasion! It did not matter that the temple lacked the glory of Solomon's; it was Yahweh's work, and in His time, He would fill it with a glory greater than the nation had ever seen. And the people celebrated, not merely as Judah, but as Israel, as the whole united nation, for among those who had returned, were representatives of all tribes. Thus, in the course of the dedication service, twelve he-goats were sacrificed, "according to the number of the tribes" (Ezra 6:17). The people viewing the scene before them, saw their prince, Zerubbabel, rejoicing in the completed task; saw their high priest, Joshua, resplendent in his robes; saw the priests and Levites in the order designed by David about the altar; heard the singers chanting the glorious Psalms of David and the musicians accompanying their singing with the instruments; saw the sacrifices smoking upon the altar; saw the new temple as a background to all this, awaiting the worship of the nation. It was a glorious moment of victory for the faithful in Israel.

A few days later, the Passover was celebrated with a deep sense of gratitude for the deliverance that had been granted them. They kept it with the solemn realisation that God was with them. And on that day of thankfulness and rejoicing, there were present with them thankful Gentiles who had seen what Yahweh had done for His people, and who threw in their lot with the destiny of the holy nation (Ezra 6:21).

The joint labors of Zerubbabel and Joshua had been brought to a successful completion.



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\* The Jews are described as the "children of captivity". The word in Hebrew signifies "to strip bare". Their captivity was not merely dispersion, but a stripping bare of all the good things of life — especially in a spiritual direction.



## Chapter Five

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### THE TIMES OF ESTHER

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“**I**T is a most interesting book that we have commenced tonight!” remarked Mr. Phillips with enthusiasm, as the family completed reading the first chapter of Esther. “I cannot see much interest in it” grumbled Peter. “All it seems to contain are a lot of hard names, and a not very interesting story of a despotic king!”

“Peter is getting quite good at adjectives,” commented Ann mischievously.

“I can supply a few for you, if you like,” answered Peter cheerfully, seeking somewhat to incite his sister.

#### **A Contrast To That Of Ruth**

“I suppose you would contrast the Book of Esther with the Book of Ruth,” suggested Graeham, ignoring the interchange of compliments between his brother and sister.

“Indeed, yes!” replied his father. “In the Book of Ruth we have the account of a Gentile girl who married a Jew; in that of Esther we read of a Jewess who married a Gentile. In Ruth, we are taken into the most humbling circumstances of the greatest poverty; whilst in Esther we are introduced to the luxurious palace of one of the wealthiest monarchs of history. In the Book of Ruth there is dramatised the principle of individual salvation; in the book of Esther there is enacted that of national salvation. Both Ruth and Esther had this in common, that their personal beauty was crowned with a faithful, courageous and lovable character. And both the books have this in common, that they reveal the hidden hand of God, guiding the ultimate outcome of the adventures recorded therein, to the glory of His name, and the benefit of His people.”

“The Jews must find much comfort in the book”, said Joan.

“Indeed, yes! They celebrate the circumstances of the great deliverance of their people recorded therein in what is called the Feast of Purim. They have kept this feast throughout the years to the present time. In it they rejoice at the triumph of their people over their deadly enemy, Haman, and during the centuries of persecution that they have suffered, they must have derived much encouragement by so doing. It should have taught them that Yahweh will help them if they but turn to Him. During the celebration of this feast, the Book of Esther is publicly read.”

“I have read, somewhere, that the word ‘God’ does not appear therein”, remarked Graeham.

## DETAILED CHRONOLOGY OF EZRA, NEHEMIAH AND ESTHER

Day	Mth	Yr	King	Reference	Event
-	.....	.....2	Darius	Ezra 4:24	Rebuilding of temple commenced
-	.....	.....3	Ahasuerus	Est. 1:19-22	Vashti deposed
4	.....9	.....4	Darius	Zech. 7:1	Instructions regarding fasts
-	.....	.....6	Ahasuerus	Est. 2:8-16	Esther brought to Shushan
3	.....12	.....6	Darius	Ezra 6:15	Temple completed
14	.....1	.....7	Darius	Ezra 6:19	Passover observed
-	.....10	.....7	Ahasuerus	Est. 2:16-18	Esther's marriage
1	.....1	.....7	Artaxerxes	Ezra 7:1-9	Ezra leaves Babylon
9	.....1	.....7	Artaxerxes	Ezra 8:15-21	Ezra halts 3 days at Ahava
12	.....1	.....7	Artaxerxes	Ezra 8:31	Ezra leaves Ahava
1	.....5	.....7	Artaxerxes	Ezra 7:9	Ezra arrives at Jerusalem
4	.....5	.....7	Artaxerxes	Ezra 8:33	Vessels delivered to the temple
20	.....9	.....	Artaxerxes	Ezra 10:9	Assembly at Jerusalem
1	.....10	.....	Artaxerxes	Ezra 10:16	Assize begun to assess heathen marriages
1	.....1	.....	Artaxerxes	Ezra 10:17	Assize finished
-	.....1	.....12	Ahasuerus	Est. 3:7	Haman casts lots
13	.....1	.....12	Ahasuerus	Est. 3:12	Posts go out
15	.....1	.....12	Ahasuerus	Est. 5:1-8	Esther's appeal
16	.....1	.....12	Ahasuerus	Est. 5:8	Esther's banquet
23	.....3	.....12	Ahasuerus	Est. 8:9-14	Mordecai's posts
13	.....12	.....12	Ahasuerus	Est. 9:1-12	Massacre day
14	.....12	.....12	Ahasuerus	Est. 9:15-17	First Purim
15	.....12	.....12	Ahasuerus	Est. 9:18-27	Second Purim
-	.....9	.....20	Artaxerxes	Neh. 1:1	Hanani's report
-	.....1	.....20	Artaxerxes	Neh. 2:6	Nehemiah leaves for Jerusalem
25	.....6	.....20	Artaxerxes	Neh. 6:15	The wall is finished
1	.....7	.....	Artaxerxes	Neh. 8:2	Public reading of Law by Ezra
2	.....7	.....	Artaxerxes	Neh. 8:14	They read of dwelling in booths
15	.....7	.....	Artaxerxes	Neh. 8:18	Feast of Tabernacles
21	.....7	.....	Artaxerxes	Neh. 8:18	Completion of Feast
22	.....7	.....	Artaxerxes	Neh. 8:18	Day of solemn assembly
24	.....7	.....	Artaxerxes	Neh. 9:1-2	Heathen wives put away
-	.....	.....32	Artaxerxes	Neh. 13:6	Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem after leave of absence

The above chronology, which gathers together most of the references to time periods in these contemporary books, is based upon the suggestion that *Darius*, *Ahasuerus* and *Artaxerxes* are titles assumed by one king — *Hystaspes*. A slight confusion is apparent in a few cases where months are numbered according to their position on the calendar instead of from the time when the king began to reign. For example, "*Adar*" of Ezra 6:15 is the twelfth month of the sacred year, whereas the "*first month*" of v. 19 is the first month of the ensuing year. But both occurred in the sixth year of Darius, for his sixth year overlapped the Jewish sacred year. The above chronology is an attempt to synchronise the events of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther, and appears the most logical and consistent when all problems are considered. It also explains some very interesting facets of this period of Bible history, as will be revealed as our story of the period unfolds.

"That is true," said his father, "but in no book of the Bible is the influence of God more powerfully revealed. The book wonderfully illustrates the truth stated by Daniel 4:17 that 'God rules in the kingdom of men,' and that is beautifully expressed in Isaiah 51: 22-23. You might read it for us, Joan."

Joan turned up the place, and read: "Thus saith Yahweh that pleadeth the cause of His people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of My fury; thou shalt no more drink it again; but I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over; and thou hast laid thy body as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over."

"Of course, these words of Isaiah relate to the future," explained Mr. Phillips, "but the principle involved is illustrated by the Book of Esther. As we shall see, Yahweh turned the curse that was pronounced by Haman against the Jewish people in the time of Esther, into a blessing and, saving His people out of their troubles, He brought upon their enemies the evil they had conspired to bring upon the Jews."

### **The Chronology of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther**

"At what time did Esther live?" asked Ann. "I believe that we should fit the book of Esther in between the fifth and sixth chapters of Ezra," replied her father.

"That cannot be," said Peter, who was looking at the chapters referred to in Ezra, "for Darius is the king referred to in Ezra, whilst Ahasuerus was reigning at the time of Esther."

"That is true," replied his father, "but Darius, Ahasuerus, and Artaxerxes were titles used by several kings, and are not the names of individual monarchs. Often the kings of Persia used more than one such title, and I believe that in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther, they all relate to one person."

"Have the titles any significance?"

"Yes. Ahasuerus means '*the Mighty*,' and is the title used by at least four different Median and Persian kings. Artaxerxes means '*Great King*,' and is equivalent to the modern title of Shah. Darius means '*the Restrainer*' or '*Maintainer*,' and signifies King or Ruler. All these titles seem to have been used interchangeably by different Monarchs."

"Have you any examples of that?"

"Yes. Xerxes, a monarch of ancient Persia is one such. In an inscription that he caused to be erected at Persepolis, he called himself in one sentence both '*Xerxes the great king*,' and '*Darius the king*.' He thus claimed to be both '*Artaxerxes*' and '*Darius*.' Remember, too, that we read tonight from Esther 1:1, that Ahasuerus was

‘that Ahasuerus that reigned from India unto Ethiopia.’ This statement alone, shows that other monarchs of Persia claimed the title; but the Ahasuerus of Esther was the one who ruled over the provinces thus named. Josephus calls Ahasuerus ‘*Artaxerxes*’, thus identifying the name as a title.”

“And you think that the three titles as used in Ezra and Esther relate to the one king?” asked Graham.

“Yes, I believe that all three titles relate to the king historically known as Darius Hystaspes”.

“Your statement sounds almost convincing,” interrupted Peter who had been doing some rapid Bible searching whilst his father had been talking, “and I am sorry to destroy your theory, but there is a verse that explodes it!”

“What verse is that?”

“Ezra 6:14. This shows beyond doubt that Darius and Artaxerxes were two different persons. It reads: ‘They (the Jews) builded and finished it (i.e. the temple) according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia’.”

“That seems to prove conclusively that Darius and Artaxerxes related to two different kings,” agreed Graham.

“It does until the verse is considered more closely,” said Mr. Phillips with a smile. “But the Hebrew ‘*vav*’ rendered ‘*and*’ can also be rendered ‘*even*’. If we read the verse that way, it identifies Darius and Artaxerxes as one: Darius, *even* Artaxerxes.”

“But are we justified in so reading the verse?” asked the boys.

“Yes, for there was only one decree to build the temple in Jerusalem to which two kings gave their support, and not three as the verse would teach if we accepted the Authorised Version. Cyrus originated the decree, and it was endorsed and extended by Darius as we read in Ezra 6:1. But there is nothing in the Bible about a third decree by Artaxerxes to build the temple,\* nor a confirmation of the decree of Cyrus by any other king than Darius. Therefore I believe this statement should be read: ‘Darius, *even* Artaxerxes’. And I believe that the Darius in question was the king known historically as Darius Hystaspes.”

“When did he reign?”

“Approximately BC521. It might be useful for you to make a list of the Persian kings, for several of them played an important part in Bible history and prophecy. They are as follows:

- Cyrus reigned nine years from BC536.
- Cambyzes reigned six years from BC529.
- Pseudo-Smerdis reigned seven months from BC522.

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\* Notice that the decree of Artaxerxes mentioned in Ezra 7 was to “beautify” that already built (Ezra 7:27), not to rebuild the temple.

- Darius Hystaspes reigned thirty-six years from BC521.
- Xerxes reigned twenty-one years from BC485.
- Artaxerxes Longimanus reigned forty-one years from BC464.
- Darius Nothus reigned nineteen years from BC423.
- Artaxerxes Mnemon reigned forty-six years from BC404.
- Artaxerxes Ochus reigned twenty-one years from BC358.
- Arses reigned two years from BC337.
- Darius III reigned four years from BC335.
- Alexander the Great commenced to reign in BC331.

“Is it usual to identify Ahasuerus with Darius Hystaspes?” asked Graeham.

“No, it is usual to identify him with Xerxes the Great, and to identify the Artaxerxes of Ezra 7 with Artaxerxes Longimanus. This requires a break of about sixty years between the completion of the temple as recorded in Ezra 6, and the arrival of Ezra himself at Jerusalem, as recorded in subsequent chapters.”

“And why do you differ from that?”

“Because I believe that it creates too many difficulties. For example, the book of Esther states that Mordecai was taken captive with Jeconiah, King of Judah (Est. 2:6). That was in the year BC597. If Ahasuerus is identified with Xerxes instead of with Darius Hystaspes, Mordecai would have been at least 123 years old when he was made prime minister! And that would have been most unlikely. As Esther was his cousin (Est. 2:7), she must have been ‘an aged beauty’ to say the least, when she was brought before the king, if that king was Xerxes! Therefore, I prefer to identify the Ahasuerus of Esther with Hystaspes, whose reign agrees so well with the details contained in Esther. In a book called *1st Esdras*, which was written before Christ, the Ahasuerus of Esther is identified with Darius Hystaspes (see ch. 3:1-2).

“That seems quite sound in regard to Ahasuerus,” said Graeham, “but why do you think that Artaxerxes must also be identified with Darius Hystaspes?”

“I have already given you some reasons,” replied his father, “and the further you look into the matter, the more it seems evident that Hystaspes is the king referred to. For example, if we identify Artaxerxes with Longimanus, we must provide a long break of sixty years between chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra, and I do not think the internal evidence allows for such a long break. Such a break would require that Ezra be at least 126 years of age when he left Babylon for the long and tiring journey to Jerusalem, and at least 141 years of age when he walked in procession at the dedication of the wall!”

“How do you make that out?”

“Because he is said to be the son of Seraiah (Ezra 7:1) who was put to death by Nebuchadnezzar (2Kgs. 25:8, 18-21). He would thus,

at the latest, have been born by the year BC587 when this took place, and at least 126 years of age when he first comes under our notice. I do not think it practicable to suggest that Ezra was so old when he left Babylon, and therefore I feel we must identify Artaxerxes with an earlier king than Longimanus, and only Hystaspes provides the necessary qualifications. Further, a careful consideration of Nehemiah 10:2-10 with Ezra 2, reveals that twenty out of the thirty priests and Levites who returned with Zerubbabel in the year BC536 signed the covenant with Nehemiah who returned in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes. If Artaxerxes is identified with Longimanus, they were all still alive 91 years after their return under Zerubbabel. That is not very logical. So, again, for this reason, we are forced to identify the Artaxerxes of Ezra and Nehemiah with Darius Hystaspes, and do away with the long break of time usually provided between Ezra 6 and 7."

"I can follow your reasoning there," remarked Graeham, "but does this king Hystaspes answer to the requirements of the book of Esther from an historical point of view?"

"Yes, even in a detailed way," answered Mr. Phillips. "Esther 1:1 states that 'this Ahasuerus reigned from India even unto Ethiopia', and history records that Hystaspes conquered India. Further Esther 10:1 states that Ahasuerus 'laid a tribute upon the land and upon the isles of the sea,' and Herodotus records that late in the reign of Hystaspes he laid a 'tribute on the islands and nations of Europe as far as Thessaly' (Book 3:96). Historians of ancient history also add that the control of these islands was lost by Xerxes before the twelfth year of his reign, which proves conclusively that he does not answer to the Ahasuerus of Esther. The only other king in Persian history that answers to the description set forth in the book of Esther is Hystaspes. Thus, all the evidence I have been able to gather together suggests that Cambyses is the Ahasuerus of Ezra 4:6, Smerdis is the Artaxerxes of Ezra 4:7-23; Darius Hystaspes is at once the Darius of Ezra 4:5, 24; 5:5-6; 6:1, 12, 13, the Artaxerxes of Ezra 6:14; 7:1, 7; Neh. 2:1, 5:14; 13:6, and the Ahasuerus of Esther. As we discovered earlier, Darius, Artaxerxes and Ahasuerus were titles which the monarchs of Persia assumed. Sometimes one monarch claimed several of them. They were not the only titles they used. Thy also claimed to be 'King of kings', 'King of Assyria' (Ezra 6:22), and doubtless other high-sounding titles."

"It is a little difficult for me to follow," confessed Ann.

"I agree that it is a difficult subject," answered her father, "but if we can grasp it, it will help us to understand these important books better. To that end I have written out for you a suggested chronology of the times (p. 334), based upon the suggestion that Artaxerxes, Darius, Ahasuerus were titles relating to the same monarch, namely Darius Hystaspes."

"According to this chronology, the chapter we read in Esther tonight was taking place whilst the exiles were rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. Is that right?"

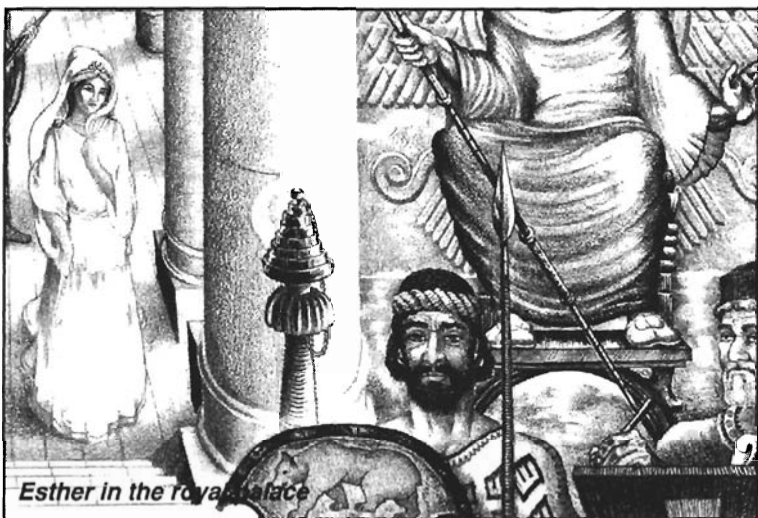
"Yes, I believe that to be the case," answered her father.

"I am afraid all these dates are beyond me," confessed Joan. "And I also found it somewhat difficult to understand the chapter we read. What is it all about?"

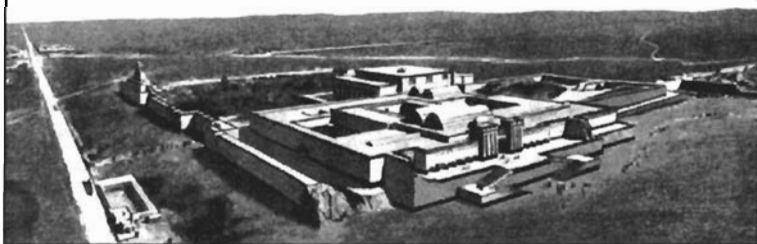
"Let us briefly review the chapter," suggested Mr. Phillips.

### **Ahasuerus' Royal Feasts**

"A mighty king reigned in Persia whose name was Hystaspes, and the Jews in Jerusalem were at that very time completing the building of the temple" observed Graeham. "That is right," continued his father, "the king had overthrown many pretenders to the throne, and had grasped power himself. Historians tell us that the first two years of his reign were occupied in this way. He was a capable



***Shushan, the royal city of Persia.***



ruler, and ultimately extended the power of Persia in all directions, until he reigned from India unto Ethiopia, over 127 provinces.\*

"The first two years of his reign had been troublous ones, during which many enemies rose up against him, and had to be suppressed. But now they had all been overthrown, and he decided to consolidate his reign by two great feasts to which he commanded all the rulers of his realm to attend.

"The first feast occupied some 180 days. All the nobles and princes of the provinces were required to be present at this feast, to pay their allegiance to Ahasuerus (Est. 1:4). It was followed by a more intimate feast which lasted seven days, which the more personal princes and servants of Persia itself had to attend".

"Were his guests feasting all that time?" asked Peter as his father paused.

"No, I believe the purpose of the long feast was to give an oppor-

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\* The dates and events of the Book of Esther fit in exactly with the reign of Darius Hystaspes. Hystaspes occupied the first two years of his reign in overthrowing Gaumates, and other pretenders to the throne of Persia. The third year was thus a year of peace (cp. Est. 1:3). Babylon revolted against him twice; once in the first year of his reign, and again in the fourth. On this second occasion, the siege was a tedious affair, lasting nearly two years (Herodotus 3:151). This brings us to the sixth year of Hystaspes, and explains how it was that though Vashti was divorced in the third year of Ahasuerus, he was not married to Esther until his seventh year (Est. 1:3; 2:16). He was busily engaged in the Babylonian war.

There is nothing in the character of Ahasuerus that does not fit all we know of Darius from classical literature. In fact, the reference to tribute and money matters, to the postal service, and above all to his friendly disposition towards the Jews, agrees exactly with what we know of Darius, the organiser of the empire who issued the decrees of Ezra 6:6-12; 7:12-26.

The extent of Persian rule under Ahasuerus (Est. 1:1) also agrees with that under Darius Hystaspes. He conquered India in BC508, divided the empire into Satrapies, assigning to each its governor, and fixing the tribute which was to be paid him by the several nations. He ruled over the full extent of the land indicated in Esther 1:1. Herodotus writes concerning Hystaspes: "The Indians, who were more numerous than any other nation with which we are acquainted, paid a tribute exceeding that of any other people" (see Est. 10:1). Herodotus speaks of the tribute he exacted from the nations "and the isles of the sea" (again see Est. 10:1). Herodotus (Book 3:96), Thucydides (Greek historian; Book 1), and Plato, all state that Darius Hystaspes subdued all the islands of the Aegean Sea, and another Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (Book 12) states that they were all lost again by his son Xerxes before the twelfth year of his reign. The later kings of Persia held none of these islands. In view of Est. 1:1 and 10:1 this evidence is conclusive both for the identification of Ahasuerus as Hystaspes, and against his identification with Xerxes. It is usual to identify Ahasuerus with Xerxes because of the similarity between the old Persian name Khshayarsha, the Hebrew Achashverosh (Ahasuerus) and the Great Xerxes. But the identification is of no force for the word in any form, and however spelt, is simply the Persian word Shah, and might be applied to any monarch who sat on the throne of Persia (See "*Romance of Bible Chronology*").



tunity for all princes of the realm to attend. Such a great number of guests could not be accommodated at one time, so the feast was extended over the 180 days. This allowed all to come at different times, and permitted the king to entertain different guests from all over the widespread empire of Persia.

"The shorter feast was designed for his more intimate associates. All the people in Shushan the palace were present on that occasion. They saw the king in all his glory. They viewed with admiration the beautiful tapestries, the magnificent decorations of the palace, all of which were indicative of his outstanding wealth and power. They were invited to recline at their meals on couches covered with gold and silver cloth, standing on a vast floor of brilliant mosaics made up of costly red, blue, white and black marble. The drinking vessels were of gold, and royal wine flowed in an endless stream to the favored guests. At the same time, however, the king commanded that there was to be no compulsion in the drinking; each could take what he desired (v. 8).

"Meanwhile, Queen Vashti gave a feast for the women."

"What does Vashti's name mean?" asked Graeham who was taking notes.

"It means '*Beautiful Woman*' and she was noted for her great beauty. She was looked upon as an ornament to the king. Thus, on the seventh day of the second feast, when all his local princes were gathered together, the king commanded that she should come into his presence dressed in her royal robes (v. 11) that he might show her beauty unto the admiring people.

"It was a grand occasion for the king. The procession of nobles and princes from all over his realm to pay him honor, had demonstrated the power and extent of his kingdom. A sense of well-being flooded his heart, and he looked forward to the regal appearance of Vashti as the crowning ornament and sharer of his glory.

"But she refused to come. Presiding over her own feast, admired of her personal guests, she was not prepared to submit to the king's command. She had become proud and conceited in her own glory, and too high in her self-esteem to submit to the king.

"Haughtily she told the seven chamberlains whom the king had sent to bring her, that she would not come!

"It was most embarrassing for Ahasuerus when these chamberlains returned with the Queen's message. Every other ruler, all over his realm had obeyed his command; but his wife, who should have been foremost in paying him the honor due to him, had contemptuously spurned his request, and had shamed him before all his guests.

"It was a very awkward moment for the king, and he realised that some rebuke had to be made to the foolish queen, in order that he might retain his dignity.

## **Let Vashti Be Put Away!**

“But what should be done? At the king’s feast were the seven privy counsellors who ‘saw the king’s face, and sat first in his kingdom’ (v. 14). The king appealed to them for advice.

“The chief of their number, a man bearing the title of Memucan replied: ‘Vashti the queen has not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and all the people that are in the provinces; for her deed will come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes. Others will follow her example, so that contempt and wrath will arise. If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, that Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she. And when the king’s decree which he shall make shall be published throughout all his empire (for it is great) all the wives shall give to their husbands honor, both to great and small.’

“This action was very extreme, but the king realised that if he were to let Vashti’s rebellion go unrebuked, it would show weakness on his part, before all the people of the land and could result in many enemies arising (as they had previously done) to challenge his authority.

“He therefore ordered the decree to be sent throughout his empire, and the foolish queen was deposed from her position of authority.

## **Search for a New Queen**

“And now the seven privy counsellors set about seeking a new queen for the king. Officers were appointed in all the provinces, and ordered to gather together the most beautiful girls in all the realm, that suitable choice might be made to replace Vashti.

“But even the most beautiful was not fit for the king without undergoing a special form of purification. The king was worshipped almost as a god and therefore the bride selected for him must not only be beautiful in form and appearance, but also had to be carefully instructed and prepared in every way, to grace the king’s presence. Amongst those so selected for this possible honor was a Jewess called Esther”.

## **Esther Finds Favor**

“In Shushan the palace, there was a certain Jew named Mordecai. He had been taken captive to Babylon at the time of Jeconiah, king of Judah, nearly eighty years before. He had doubtless heard the prophecies of Daniel, and witnessed some of the marvellous things that had taken place in Babylon. He had seen Cyrus come to power, and had gradually risen to a position of authority in the service of the kings of Persia. Darius Hystaspes had shown a kindness to the Jews when he decreed that every assistance should be given to them in rebuilding the temple, shortly after he had come to power. Perhaps Mordecai did have some

influence in such a decision.

“He had a young cousin whose Hebrew name was Hadassah (which means *Myrtle*), but whom we know better as Esther (from the Persian *Stara*: thus *Star*, or from *Ishtar*, a Babylonian goddess — cp. Est. 2:7).<sup>\*</sup> Early in her life, her father and mother had died, leaving her an orphan. But Mordecai had taken her into his own home, and looked after her as his daughter.

“She grew up to be a very beautiful young lady, attractive in every way; not only in appearance, but in manners and deportment also.

“Together with other young ladies selected as possible brides to replace Vashti, she was brought into the custody of Hegai the king’s chamberlain, who had the official title of *Keeper of the Women*. He was attracted to Esther, not only by the beauty of her appearance, but also by the modest and pleasing manner in which she conducted herself. He sought to advance her cause in every way possible. He gave her preferential treatment, carefully selecting for her seven maidens who were to act as her attendant virgins, and arranging that whatsoever she desired, she quickly received. Esther soon found herself promoted to the very best place in the *House of the Women*.

“He did not know that Esther was a Jewess, for on the instructions of Mordecai, she had not yet revealed that fact.

“Nor did she realise, at that time, the purpose that God had in this sudden elevation to honor. But God, in His wisdom, could foresee the crisis that was about to fall upon the Jewish people, and was preparing the means whereby they could escape the evil that their enemies would attempt to bring upon them. Thus, invisibly, unknown to the various parties concerned, the ways of Providence were being worked out.”

“Why did Mordecai instruct her not to reveal her real identity?” asked Graeham.

“We are not told”, replied his father, “and in the absence of anything specific, we can but suggest a reason. Mordecai was undoubtedly a man of faith. As such, though he would not be happy in the prospect of the marriage of his young cousin to a Gentile, he doubtless perceived in her sudden elevation to possible honor, the guiding hand of God in her affairs, even though he did not comprehend the purpose behind it. He decided not to precipitate matters by revealing her identity, but allow God to work the matter out according to His will. I am quite sure that he would have made it all a matter of earnest prayer.

“Meanwhile, he was greatly concerned at the turn things had taken. This is suggested by the statement of Esther 2:11. Though he was appointed to a position at the gate of the palace, each day he contrived somehow to visit the court of the seraglio (women’s quarters) in order to see Esther, or to obtain information concerning her.

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<sup>\*</sup> Her name is also identified with the root *sathar* — to hide, because her identification was hidden.

## Chapter Six

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### THE KING'S BRIDE SELECTED

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**M**R. Phillips is describing the wonderful experiences in the life of Esther; how she found favour in the King's Court; and the events that brought her to the highest position in the land. He continues his description: "So important was the position of queen in the realm of Persia, and so high was the king held in the esteem of the people, that a long course of preparation was required for each of the maidens who were selected as eligible for the honor of being his bride. They were subjected to a special course of instruction and purification. For six months they were purified with the oil of myrrh, and for another six months with sweet odours and other things.

"After this long preparation, each one of the young maidens was permitted to select whatever clothing she desired, that she might appear to the very best advantage before the king. If, however, he did not select her for the coveted position of bride, she returned, disappointed, into the 'second house of the women,' the residence of the concubines (v. 14), there to remain until her death. She saw the king's face no more unless specially called, and was never given in marriage to any other man. Thus, if she were rejected by the king, her life became a living death. We shall see, later on, how these things typify the state of true believers before God and Christ!

#### **Esther Before The King**

"At last the time came for Esther to be presented before the king. Hegai, who sought to promote the cause of the beautiful young Jewess, invited her to select whatever aids to beauty she might desire. But she put herself completely in his hands, accepting only those things he thought were necessary. She put no confidence in artificial aids, but preferred to stand before the king relying upon her natural beauty and grace of manner. As far as choice of clothing was concerned, she readily accepted the guidance of the king's chamberlain.

"All this stood her in good stead; for when she stood forth dressed ready to be presented to the king, the beauty of her appearance brought forth a gasp of admiration from all who beheld her. The record says: 'She obtained favor in the sight of all them that looked upon her' (v. 15).

"It was the month Tebeth in the seventh year of the king's realm, when Esther was presented unto the king. This answers to the tenth month in the Jewish calendar. Many beautiful women, elegantly dressed, and skilled in deportment had already appeared before the

king, but Esther excelled them all. She entered the palace room where the king was seated on his throne, the very personification of virtue and beauty. Her modesty, simplicity, and graceful deportment instantly appealed to the king. She stood out entirely different from all those who had appeared before her. They had been sophisticated and artificial in their approach and appearance; but here was one who relied on no such aids, but stood before him in fresh, feminine beauty. The simplicity of her dress added to the loveliness of her countenance; the gracefulness of her form was emphasised by her shy, modest deportment. How completely different she was to those who had appeared before! She instantly commanded the affection of the king. He had no hesitation in placing the crown on her head. This humble Jewish maiden was suddenly elevated to the position of the highest honor.

“What was the significance for all this? That, neither Esther nor Mordecai knew at the time! Wonderingly, they both awaited events to reveal themselves.

### **Esther’s Marriage Feast**

“The marriage of Esther to Ahasuerus was celebrated by a grand feast. The king invited all his realm to join with him in this happy time. As an assistance to that end, he issued a decree, releasing the provinces from certain obligations to him, so that Esther’s elevation brought real joy to all people.

“In Shushan itself, the marriage was celebrated in a royal fashion. All rejoiced that the king had obtained a bride worthy to take the important place of Vashti. Thus this time of happiness, stemming from the king, extended to the palace and the capital, and reached out to the utmost limits of the Empire. The marriage of Esther was a matter of rejoicing to all the world.

“Meanwhile, Mordecai remained in his position of trust at the gate of the king. He continued to advise Esther not to reveal her identity, doubtless awaiting God to reveal His purpose, and Esther implicitly obeyed him, as she had been taught to do from childhood (Est. 2:20). Mordecai thus acted very unselfishly, for there is no doubt, that if the beautiful Esther had revealed that Mordecai was her cousin, the king would have been delighted to honor the Jew who already had a position of trust at the gate of the palace. However, events were to unfold which revealed the wisdom of Mordecai’s action,” said Mr. Phillips as he concluded this part of the story.

“But we must leave the rest of the story for another occasion. In the meantime, are there any questions you would like to ask?”

“Yes,” replied Ann who was busily taking notes. “A long time seems to have elapsed between the putting away of Vashti, and the marriage of Esther. The former took place in the third year of the king (ch. 1:3), the latter in his seventh year (ch. 2:16). Is there any reason

for the delay?"

"There seems to be both a typical reason, and an historical one," explained her father. "It is best to await an explanation of the former, until we have considered the whole book. The historical reason is quite interesting, however, for if we identify Ahasuerus as Darius Hystaspes, the history of his reign answers exactly to this requirement. The first two years of his reign were occupied in quelling his enemies, including Babylon which revolted in the first year of his reign. His third year was comparatively peaceful, however, and could well provide the reason for the grand feast that he gave. In the fourth year, Babylon again revolted, and forced a two years' siege before the revolt was suppressed (Herodotus, 3:151). This brings us to the sixth year of Darius, and explains how it was that, though Vashti was divorced in his third year, he was not married to Esther until his seventh year. The typical significance we must leave for the moment, merely pointing out however, that there is a great marriage feast to be celebrated in the seventh millennium, of which this suggests a type!"

"What would the third year represent then?" asked Peter.

"We will defer that until the matter is outlined properly," answered his father. "That will be all for tonight!"

#### **EZRA: THE HELPER WHO HONORED GOD'S WORD**

Five years passed by in Shushan the palace, without anything notable occurring as far as Esther was concerned (cp. Est. 2:16-18 with ch. 3:7). But if we accept the chronology of the times, as suggested by Mr. Phillips in his conversation above, an event of the greatest significance took place in the city of Babylon. Ezra, a notable scribe, and man of outstanding repute among Jewry, left Babylon for Jerusalem, under the patronage of the king of Persia. If Mr. Phillips' suggestion is accepted (that Darius and Ahasuerus were titles adopted by the same king: Darius Hystaspes) then possibly Esther could have played some influential part in causing the king to so liberally support the Jewish cause, as is revealed later in the story, and in the account of Nehemiah (see Neh. 2:6).

We therefore break off the story of Esther at this point, and turn to that of Ezra. We will first consider the man, and then the work he performed.

Ezra's name means "*The Helper*." He became a true help to Jewry because of his intense love, and deep devotion to the Word of God. The Bible gives him a wonderful testimony. It states: "Ezra had prepared his heart to **SEEK** the law of Yahweh, and to **DO** it, and to **TEACH** in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10).

He was thus a deep student, an obedient worshipper, and a skillful expounder of the Word of God. He was a man who **HEARD, DID,**

and TAUGHT, so that he earned the caption of a "ready scribe in the law of Moses" (Ezra 7:6). He was also an able administrator.

Ezra was a man of prayer (Ezra 7:27-28; 10:1) and of faith. He was so convinced that Yahweh was with him, that he tells us himself, he "was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help" him and his company against the enemy in the way, for he had spoken unto the king, saying, "The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him" (Ezra 8:22).

He was a man of deep piety, keenly feeling the sins of his people, and sparing no pains to bring them to repentance (Ezra 9:3; 10:6).

He was devout, perceiving the outworking of providence in the everyday incidents of life, for he several times mentions how "the hand of Yahweh his God was upon him" for good (Ezra 7:6, 28; 8:18, 31). In temperament, he was passionate and emotional, rending his garments, and tearing his hair in his excess grief, when the sins of the people were revealed (Ezra 9:3, 4), publicly casting himself down before the house of God, and mingling weeping with his prayers as he sought the divine aid in times of spiritual crisis (Ezra 10:1).

Above all Ezra had a deep sense of the majesty of Yahweh. This is expressed in the wonderful public prayer recorded in Nehemiah 9 which almost certainly was composed by Ezra. He acknowledged the just severity of Yahweh (Ezra 9:14; 10:14), but also spoke of His abounding mercy (Ezra 9:13; Neh. 9:17, 32). With this two-fold character of God before him, he not only warned and rebuked, but also encouraged with words that were hopeful and helpful (Neh. 8:9-10).

Jewish tradition makes Ezra one of the most celebrated persons in the history of the nation. It ascribes to him:

(1) *The founding of the Great Synagogue or synod of learned Jewish scholars consisting of 120 members, the successors of the schools of the prophets. Their aim was to restore again the crown and glory of Israel, in the spiritual life of the nation. They collected the sacred writings and completed the canon of Scripture, organised the ritual of the synagogue, etc.*

(2) *The settlement of the canon of Scripture, and its arrangement into Law, Prophets, and Writings.*

(3) *The transition from the old Hebrew script to the new Assyrian square characters.*

(4) *The compilation of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah.*

(5) *The institution of local synagogues, thus associating Jews in dispersion with the temple service.*

How much of this tradition is true, we do not know, but there is

not the slightest doubt that Ezra exercised considerable influence upon his generation. His leadership contributed to the Judaism of Maccabean times all that was good in it. Its zeal, its fervent patriotism, its passionate attachment to the Law, its burning desire to keep itself unpolluted from the impure idolatries and debasing superstitions of heathenism, set it apart from the pagan idolatry that surrounded it. He gave it the stubbornness and strength to resist the persecuting Hellenism of Antiochus, and to battle for years on almost equal terms against the mighty legions of Rome. With the synagogue, and the exclusiveness of the Law, established among the Jews, Ezra's spirit remained with the nation, so that through his influence its elders continued to "sit in Moses' seat" (Mat. 23:2), until the promised prophet "like unto Moses" made his appearance to take over his rightful position.

Thus the work of Ezra laid the foundation for the ministry of Christ.

If Ezra lacked the vigor of Nehemiah, it must be remembered that he was also older, being over seventy years of age when commissioned by the king for the work before him. He was the son of Seraiah, who had been slain by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezra 7:1; 2Kings 25:8, 18-21), and therefore would have been at least seventy-three if Artaxerxes is identified with Darius Hystaspes, but over 128 if identified with Artaxerxes Longimanus. As the son of Seraiah, he was the uncle of Joshua who had returned with Zerubbabel (Ezra 3:2; 1Chron. 6:14).

In our outline of the Book of Ezra, we showed that the book is divided between the labors of Zerubbabel and Ezra, and that one is the counterpart of the other.

The *restoration* under Zerubbabel was followed by the *reformation* under Ezra. The former supervised the building of the *material temple*; the latter looked to the wellbeing of the *spiritual temple*. Both men did a wonderful service for God and their brethren.



**Ezra: Scribe and  
Teacher of the Law**



## Chapter Seven

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### EZRA'S LONG JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

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**T**HERE were doubtless many throughout the Persian Empire, besides Mordecai, who viewed with interest the elevation of Esther to favor, and wondered what the divine purpose was behind this move. It could have been the cause of Ezra seeking an audience with the king, and beseeching his assistance in sponsoring a further return of Jews to Palestine. For Ezra was among the number of faithful Jews in dispersion at this time. He was a deeply pious man, keenly interested in the revelation of God, and in high repute among his Jewish contemporaries.

#### **His Successful**

#### **Petition To The King**

Ezra was favorably received by the king, who, in view of the troublous nature of the times, was interested in establishing a powerful ally to the southwest border of his realm, and thus hearkened with intelligent interest to all that Ezra told him.

Ezra outlined something of the hope of Israel to the king, and stressed that the blessing of God rested on those nations that helped the Jew. "The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him; but His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him," he told the king (Ezra 8:22).

The seven counsellors, who had assisted the king to find a bride to replace the rebellious Vashti, were present at this interview between Ezra and the king (Ezra 7:14; Esther 1:14) and assisted him in arriving at a decision. In a long conversation with the king and his counsellors, Ezra had pointed out that there was a great need in Judea for consolidation among the people, and the establishment of complete authority among those in control. He pressed that it was to the advantage of Persia to have Judea both spiritually and politically strong, and asked that the king should assist him in his quest by stimulating interest in a further return of Jews back to the land (Ezra 7:13-23).

After due consideration of Ezra's petition, the king issued his decree. It went beyond that for which Ezra had dared to hope! It not only invited all who were "minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem," to do so, but it commissioned Ezra to "enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of his God" when he arrived there (Ezra 7:14). Thus Ezra was given authority, by the greatest ruler of his age, to establish the law of God as a way of life in Israel.

In addition to all this, the king and his counsellors delivered into

the hands of the scribe, a large sum of money to purchase sacrifices to be offered in Jerusalem, and invited him to take up a collection in Babylon from those who desired to give a freewill offering for the same purpose. The king further directed, that whatever money was left over after the sacrifices had been purchased, should be used as Ezra thought best. At the same time, he delivered into the hands of Ezra certain vessels for use in the temple when he arrived in Jerusalem.

Thus every effort was made by the king of Persia to further the plans of Ezra. He even decreed that the tax-gatherers of Persia, resident in nations adjacent to Judea, should deliver into the hands of Ezra a specified amount of silver, wheat, wine, oil and salt, and ordered that this provision should be carried out diligently, "for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons," declared the king\* (Ezra 7:23).

From this statement, contained in the king's decree, it seems apparent that Ezra must have shown him that Yahweh suitably repays those who curse or bless Israel. He could have pointed to the downfall of Babylon and Belshazzar as an example of that.

Two final provisions in the decree were of the highest significance and greatest value to Ezra when he did arrive in the land. The king ordered that all the officers of the temple in Jerusalem be exempt from taxation (v. 24), and authorised that Ezra should set up magistrates and judges to instruct and judge the people in the law of God, granting him the power to execute judgment against those who refused to do so.

### **Ezra's Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Ezra was deeply moved by the decree of the king. He saw in it an evidence of the goodness of Yahweh, guiding the issues of nations for the benefit of His people. His approach to the king had been successful beyond what he thought possible. He not only obtained a liberal decree but a most generous gift. Esther may have had some hand in this, but, whoever was indirectly responsible, undoubtedly it manifested the blessing of God. The devout and faithful scribe poured out his heart to God in a prayer of thanksgiving: "Blessed be Yahweh God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart to beautify the house of Yahweh which is in Jerusalem: and hath extended mercy unto me before the king and his counsellors, and

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\* Darius Hystaspes had three sons by his first wife, born before he was king, and four others by Atossa, the daughter of Cyrus, whom he also married. There was some dispute about the succession which was decided by Darius in favour of Xerxes who succeeded him (Herodotus, Book 6). This anxiety of the king, relating to his sons, and expressed in his statement to Ezra, is a further slight evidence in favor of identifying Artaxerxes (in common with Darius) as the Darius Hystaspes of history.

before all the king's mighty princes.”

Ezra, the scribe, felt greatly strengthened by this visible evidence of the goodness and reality of God, and immediately set about gathering together a company of chief men to go up to Jerusalem with him.

The king also offered to supply a company of soldiers to protect him during this journey. But Ezra refused the offer. He had told the king that the hand of God was upon all that seek Him, and he felt that to avail himself of these soldiers as a guard when he looked to the protection of God, would be to exhibit a lack of faith.

He left the king's presence to make preparations for his long journey.

### **Ezra Gathers His Company Together**

Armed with the decree of Artaxerxes, empowering him to organise a pilgrimage of Jews back to the land, Ezra set about the task with enthusiasm. He published his intention among the Jews of Babylon, but his appeal did not meet with an overwhelming response. Few were interested in it. Some were deterred, perhaps, by news of difficulties that had come upon the newly formed State of Judah. Others had established their roots too deeply in Babylon to want to return. Many supported the project financially, but hesitated to go themselves; they would not make the great sacrifice that the call demanded.

Thus the company that ultimately gathered to Ezra was not very prepossessing. Some priests threw in their lot with him, one member of the Davidic line, some relatives of those already in the land, and the rest — a few undistinguished families (Ezra 8).

It was a disappointing response, particularly for the purpose that Ezra had in mind, and the work he was commissioned to do by the king — that of educating the people in the Law of God, and establishing it as the way of life in the land (Ezra 7:25-26).

But Ezra was not the type of person to be easily discouraged by such lack of enthusiasm on the part of those who should have known better. He was a man of faith, who clearly saw the hand of God in all the circumstances of life. Rejoicing in all the blessings that had been conferred upon him, and ignoring the discouraging circumstances, he made preparations for the commencement of the long and arduous journey.

### **The Journey Begins**

The day appointed for the commencement of the journey at last arrived. It was the first day of the first month. In the city of Babylon, the returning exiles all gathered together for the purpose. A long and difficult journey stretched before them, and many gathered to see them go. Relatives and friends would realise that they were saying goodbye

perhaps for ever. Thus there would be many farewells; all the noise and confusion of last-minute preparations; all the pain and tenderness of partings that must have appeared quite final. Curiosity, excitement and tears would be mingled together, as the Jews, with their belongings, their animals, and the rich treasure that Ezra had gathered for use in the temple, were brought together at the appointed place.

At last all was ready. The aged and learned scribe, Ezra, well-known to the people and to the authorities of the city, took the lead and led the way out of the city of Babylon to commence a journey back to the Land of Promise.

It was like the story of Abram all over again, as his descendants turned their back on the city of idolatry and captivity, and looked hopefully towards Yahweh's land.

### **At Ahava**

But, as yet, Ezra had not taken a proper census of the people he was leading out of Babylon back to the land. He wanted to leave the city of captivity far behind him before he did that. They therefore left Babylon on the first day of the first month (Ezra 7:9), and slowly made their way in a westerly direction for nine days (cp. Ezra 7:9 with 8:15, 31) until they came to the river Ahava. Here Ezra called a stop in order to properly review the whole company who were undertaking this strenuous journey. They pitched their tents, and abode there three days, whilst their leader took a census of the people. It was then that he discovered that none of the Levites had elected to throw in their lot with his venture. This was very disappointing, especially in view of his mission, for many Levites were needed if he were to do what he was commissioned to accomplish. The Levites were qualified to teach the people,

#### **SOME PRAYERS AND PRAISES OF ZION THAT MAY HAVE ENCOURAGED EZRA AS HE COMMENCED HIS ARDUOUS JOURNEY**

*“Lead me, O Yahweh, in Thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make Thy way straight before my face” (Psa. 5:8). “O give thanks unto Yahweh, for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of Yahweh say so, whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy... And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation” (Psa. 107:1-7). “Cause me to hear Thy lovingkindness in the morning: for in Thee do I trust; cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto Thee. Deliver me, O Yahweh, from mine enemies: I flee unto Thee to hide me. Teach me to do Thy will; for Thou art my God: Thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness” (Psa. 143:8-12). See also Psalms 126 and 127.*

As the camp at Ahava would have resounded with some such songs of Zion before the journey was commenced, let us also gain inspiration from such a Source, and always make our future intentions a matter of prayer that Yahweh might guide and deliver us!

and it was basically for this purpose that Artaxerxes had decreed the return.

Ezra decided that this omission must be corrected. He dispatched some of his followers to a place called Casipia, where dwelt many Levites and Nethinim, and called upon Iddo, its chief, to help him in his need, by encouraging some of them to return to Jerusalem with him.

God blessed the appeal. A man of godly understanding attached himself to the cause of Ezra. His name was Sherebiah, which signifies: "*Yahweh Hath Made To Tremble*". He was one who trembled at the Word of Yahweh (Isa. 66:2), and doubtless recognised that Ezra was a man of God, and divinely guided in his mission. Through his efforts, an additional 38 Levites and 220 Nethinims attached themselves to the company of Ezra, making 1754 in all.\*

At last all was ready for the final move. Ezra proclaimed a fast at Ahava, and called upon all to afflict, or humble themselves, before God. He reminded them of the many difficulties on the long journey of over a sixteen hundred kilometres that faced them. There was not only the problem of supplying sufficient food as they journeyed, but there were many enemies who hated the newly established State of the Jews, and were only too willing to prevent its development. Moreover, there were bands of marauding Arabs, prepared to attack such a company as he headed, especially in view of the rich treasure the travellers carried with them.

Ezra therefore called upon his followers to place their confidence in God. At Ahava a very solemn ceremony was conducted as the people humbled themselves before God, seeking His guidance on their forward journey. Doubtless the learned scribe remembered the words of Proverbs 3:6, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."

That is exactly what Ezra did. He doubtless gained great inspiration to do so from incidents in the lives of great men who had gone before, and particularly from many of the Psalms, which are calculated to help believers in such moments, when the future seems dark and uncertain.

It was a very solemn company that engaged in this ardent service before it left Ahava. Ezra was a man of prayer, and recognised that acceptable prayer demands the preparation of the mind. Thus, before leading his people to God, he prepared them for the occasion. Ezra recorded the circumstances in a diary that he kept of the journey. He wrote: "So we fasted and besought our God for this; and He was entreated of us" (Ezra 8:23).

The valuable treasure that had been placed into his hands for use

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\* These probably represented heads of families, or males only, so that the total may have been three times this number.

in the temple was delivered into the charge of the chief priests and Levites, the tents were taken down, the possessions of the people were loaded on the animals, and again Ezra took the lead and led his people into the *Great Unknown*.

### **At Jerusalem**

Over four months later, the weary company of Jews arrived at Jerusalem (Ezra 7:8-9). It was a long and tiring journey, and perhaps the last trek had been the most difficult of all.

As the returning exiles descended south from the Euphrates to Jericho, and then commenced the ascent to Jerusalem, they would see evidences of the destruction wrought by Nebuchadnezzar over seventy years before. At Jericho, the road rises steeply to Jerusalem above. The scenery is harsh and forbidding. The track winds around gloomy, desolate hills which become more and more bare and stony. There is little animal or vegetable life, and in summer the sun beats down scorchingly on the white, arid slopes. A steep ascent leads to Bethany, after which the road twists around the Mount of Olives, and Jerusalem presents itself to the eyes of the weary traveller.

They had left in the Spring; they arrived in mid-Summer. Harshly the fierce sun beat down upon the company and reflected its heat from the barren white hills. The burning heat of July took its toll of the people, and three days rest in Jerusalem was required to recover from the wearying journey (Ezra 8:32). They were three days that were doubtless profitably employed in personal thanksgiving to God, that at last the difficult journey was over, and all was well.

Then followed a solemn conference with the elders in Jerusalem. Ezra explained his mission, displayed the remarkable decree he had secured from the king, and officially handed over the treasure brought from Babylon to those in charge of the temple.

A service of thanksgiving on the part of the returning exiles was conducted. In gratitude to Yahweh, the people desired to acknowledge the benefits they had received. This completed, they were officially received into the body of the nation in the Land, and "twelve bullocks for all Israel" (v. 35) were offered up to God, for the people identified themselves with the whole nation of Israel and not Judah only.\*

### **Conditions in the Land**

The commission that Ezra received from king Artaxerxes, called upon all nations south of the Euphrates to help the nation of Judah to establish itself with grants of money and wealth. Copies of

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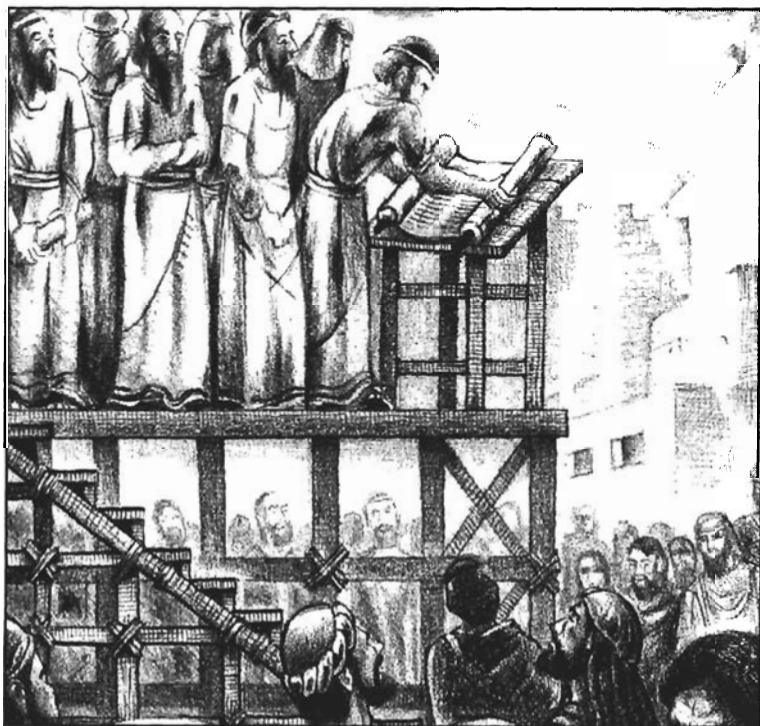
\* This identification was preserved in the days of Christ, in contradistinction to the false claims of such as the British-Israelites. Christ declared he was sent to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mat. 10:6; 15:24), and he limited his activities to Palestine.

these decrees had to be delivered by Ezra to the various authorities. There was a chief satrap of Syria to whom local governors were subject (Ezra 5:6), among whom was the governor of Judah. Zerubbabel had evidently died, and others been put in his place who had not been as faithful as he (Neh. 5:14-15). Through bad administration, a state of chaos ensued, and Ezra would soon have seen the extent of the work that faced him. He had the necessary authority to accomplish his task. His position was not so much that of governor, but more that of chief justice.

He was empowered to settle everything relating to the nation's religious life, and establish it by law. Thus in matters governed by the divine law, his authority was higher than that of the local governors in both Jerusalem (Ezra 10:8), and throughout the country (v. 14).

Ezra found that such wide-sweeping authority was necessary for the work before him. Such authority alone made his difficult task possible and workable.

He experienced very little opposition. His authority was admitted without question, and the other officials, both ecclesiastical and civil, worked under him, apparently without friction or jealousy (Ezra 9:1; 10:5, 14-16).



## Chapter Eight

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### THE REFORMATION BEGINS

**E**ZRA had been commissioned by Artaxerxes to establish Judah on the foundation of the Law, and to set in office men who were capable of teaching it (Ezra 7:25-26). He probably brought a copy of the Law back with him for this purpose. This is suggested by hints contained in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The Law is mentioned only once before the appearance of Ezra on the scene (Ezra 3:2), but twenty-eight times afterwards in the times of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The copy of the Law was probably given to the princes who had just returned, in order that they might study it, and, in turn, rule the land on its basis, by teaching it to the people (Ezra 8:36). Seized with the importance of their task, the princes studied the Law with care. They were dismayed to learn how far the people of Judah had drifted from its commands.

**A Problem Discovered** This was particularly the case in regard to the marriage laws. The Law of Moses called upon the people to maintain strict separation in regard to marriage; they were not permitted to enter into such union with foreigners who did not embrace the Covenants of Promise (Deut. 7:2-8).

But the people had not adhered to these important laws. Foreign marriages had become matters of everyday occurrence. Perhaps the returning exiles had not been accompanied by an adequate proportion of females, and therefore sought them from the inhabitants of the land. The Levites and priests, as well as the princes, were foremost in the transgression. These foreign wives, unlike Rahab or Ruth, retained their pagan beliefs, and became a polluting influence among the Jews. A terrible state had ensued. The holy seed became mingled with pagan worshippers; idolatry had become tolerated; superstitious practices were common.

A deputation of those princes who returned with Ezra called upon him to report upon the matter. "The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of the lands; yea, the hand of the princes and rulers has been chief in this trespass!"



These were the very nations specifically prohibited by the Law (Deut. 7), so that the action of the people was a direct violation of its precepts. And the fact that the princes and rulers were foremost in the transgression, set a bad example for the rest of the people.

It was a challenge that Ezra had to take up vigorously. He realised that his handling of this problem would set a precedence for the solving of any other breach of the Law.

**Solving The Problem** Ezra was deeply shocked at the news of these activities within the nation. He made no attempt to justify the action of the guilty persons involved. He did not seek to minimise the offence by reasoning that though they had married outside of Israel, they might influence their partners to embrace the covenant of God. He knew that God is best served when His laws are scrupulously obeyed, and that such a flagrant rejection of His precepts could only result in disaster to the nation if the people persisted in it.

He made public his grief. When the princes had completed their report, he rent his garments, tore at the hair of his head and beard, and sat down stunned at the enormity of the sin, pondering what would be the best to be done under the circumstances.

His excess of grief was contagious. Others heard of it, and being concerned for the welfare of the nation, assembled unto him to consider what should be done. Thus there were gathered unto him every one who “trembled at the words of the God of Israel because of the great transgression of those that had been carried away.” In stunned silence and for some hours they mourned together the sin of the nation.

At last the time of the evening sacrifice drew near. It was the time of prayer. Ezra aroused himself from his heaviness, and in the spirit of

**EZRA’S PRAYER (Ezra 9)**

This presents a model of effectual prayer-making. Consider the care taken by Ezra under the circumstances, and the preparation he gave to the matter. Notice particularly the following points:

- The Problem Considered .....vv. 1-2**
- The Mind Prepared .....vv. 3-4**
- The Humiliation Expressed .....vv. 5-6**
- The Sin Confessed .....v. 7**
- Yahweh’s Mercy Recalled .....vv. 8-9**
- Israel’s Negligence Reported .vv. 10-14**
- Israel’s Dependence on God .....v. 15**
- The Problems Shared .....ch. 10:1-2**

The above outline can provide the basis for our personal prayers, and can be amended to serve many subjects and requests.

the deepest humility he fell upon his knees, and spread out his hands to heaven, as though to seize hold of Yahweh (cp. Ezra 9:5 with Isa. 64:7), and poured out his heart in prayer on behalf of the people: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee, my God, for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens..."

He made mention of the great sin of the people, of the grace that had been poured upon the nation by God in permitting a remnant to escape, "to give us a nail in His holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage." God had been kind and merciful unto Israel, had caused the kings of Persia to help them, and provided them with a defence in the face of many enemies.

Yet the implicit commands of God had been violated, so that the nation stood before Him in all the uncleanness of its trespasses, with a worship and temple service which was unacceptable to Him (Ezra 9:15).

All this Ezra expressed in his prayer in words which he selected with the greatest care, and uttered with the most moving humility and depth of feeling.

**The Problem Shared** Perhaps there is no more compelling prayer in all Scripture than that which Ezra uttered on this occasion. His public petition so moved the people, as to cause them to see the folly and sin of their action, and decide to renounce this closest of all relationships, because it was opposed to the will of Yahweh. Only the most careful and solemn preparation on the part of their leader, only the most fervent and earnest of words and action, could have brought about this result.

Ezra's prayer was uttered with the greatest feeling. He was so stirred emotionally, that at its conclusion he burst out into loud and bitter weeping. And all the people wept as well, so that great lamentation was made, for a great company was gathered together.

Amid this general distress, a man by name of Shechaniah arose and addressed Ezra on behalf of the whole nation.

"We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land," he declared. "Yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. Arise! for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it!"

Shechaniah's words promised full support for the difficult and heart-breaking task that Ezra had to undertake. His exhortation stimulated the weeping scribe, and, leaping to his feet, he immediately

acted upon the suggestion. He called upon the chief priests, the Levites, and all the people, to swear that they should do according to this word.

And despite the sad consequences of their action, they swore to carry it out. The covenant had relation to those wives who persisted in their heathenish practices and worship, despite their marriage with Jews; it would not have applied to those who had embraced the covenant of God.

**The Problem Solved** Having thus secured the support of the leaders, Ezra decided to implement the matter without the slightest delay. He called for a general assembly of the people within three days. Messengers were sent throughout the land and commanded that the people should assemble in Jerusalem within the time specified. Any who hesitated to do so would have all his substance forfeited, and be excommunicated from the congregation (Ezra 10:8).

Meanwhile, Ezra went into the chamber of Johanan, the grandson of Joshua, who had succeeded to the position of high priest, to fast, mourn and pray before his God for the divine blessing of what was proposed.

Arrangements were made for the people to gather together on the twentieth day of the ninth month (Chisleu). It was a sad assembly that met together in the large court of the temple. The month answers to our November/December which is winter time in Jerusalem, so that the weather matched the gloomy spirit of the people. It was cold, wet and dismal, and the people, herded together for the purpose of correcting the fault into which they had fallen through false marriages, "trembled because of this matter, and because of the showers of rain" that drenched them (Ezra 10:9).

Ezra stood up before them, to sorrowfully explain the purpose of the gathering. It was a difficult task he had set himself, but he accepted it with courage and determination.

As the trembling people looked at the aged scribe, so full of zeal and courage for the things of God, so fiercely determined to implement the Law that had been committed into his hands, they realised that there was no other way but to break off the marriages into which they had entered. They realised that God's way is best. They could see that the state of anarchy and lawlessness that spread throughout the nation could only result ultimately in the complete overthrow of the Jewish State that had come into existence, as well as the divine worship that had been re-established at the expense of so much trouble and sacrifice.

But it is hard to break such tender associations. Proper arrangements had to be made for the wives who refused to embrace the hope



*"All the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which Yahweh had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law" (Neh. 8:1-3).*

of Israel, and had to be sent back to their own lands again. It would require time to make these arrangements, particularly in view of the inclement weather. It could not be done there and then as they stood in the pelting rain!

Thus, as Ezra's short speech came to an end, in which he made brief reference to their folly, and called upon them to enter into a covenant to separate themselves from the people of the land, and from wives who persisted in introducing the foreign worship of those lands,\* there came from the body of people gathered together a great cry: "As thou hast said, so must we do! But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is this a work of one day or two for we are many that have transgressed in this thing. Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all of them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us."

There were some who opposed this measure. Two men, by name of Jonathan and Jahaziah, led a protest against the covenant of Ezra.\*\* They were supported by some of the Levites who had been guilty in the matter. But they found no encouragement among the people. The protest was set aside, and a commission of enquiry set up.

The first sitting was set down for the first day of the month following. Ezra presided over those appointed, and with him were certain of the elders of the nation. Before them came those who were guilty in the matter, and they were called upon to separate from those wives who had introduced pagan worship into Israel. For three months the commission of enquiry sat, and then recorded its final report.

Four sons of Joshua the high priest who had returned with Zerubabel were among the guilty ones. Thirteen other priests, ten Levites, eighty-six laymen (many of high rank; cp. Ezra 9:1) were involved in the trespass (Ezra 10:18-43). All were required to give their hands that they would put away their wives. The four most exalted offenders

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\* This seems to be the implication of Ezra 10:10 (see mg.). The word "strange" signifies "foreign," and these wives were foreign in every sense, introducing their foreign worship into Israel (Ezra 9:1-2), thus "increasing the trespass of Israel" (Ezra 10:10). If they had embraced the hope of Israel they doubtless would have been acceptable as either Rahab or Ruth. But they evidently refused to do this, and persisted in their refusal in the face of Ezra's determination — hence the severe course taken.

\*\* Ezra 10:15 is rendered by Rotherham: "Made a stand against this" (see also the margin and the R.V.). There was some opposition to the reform, and the influence of such may have been responsible for the further decline in this direction which took place during the absence of Ezra, and which Nehemiah noted and corrected (Neh. 13:23-27).

were further required to make public acknowledgement of their transgression, by each offering a ram as a trespass offering (Ezra 10:19).

Some had had children by the wives they had taken, but no exemption was permitted on this account. Such marriages, not being based upon the Law of God, were deemed inadmissible. They, too, were required to put away their wives.\*

### **Was Ezra's Action Justified?**

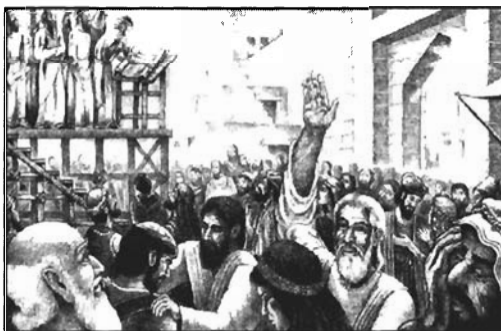
Ezra's action was extreme, but fully justified when all the conditions are brought to mind.

It put an end to the scandal for the time being, and demonstrated that God's law had to be elevated above every consideration.

The decision which he enforced so inflexibly must have borne harshly on some of the wives and children, who thus suffered through the folly of their husbands and fathers. This showed that every care should be taken in such decisions of life, lest we bring suffering on others.

The suffering involved in those times would probably not be as extreme as might be thought. The discarded wife would be received back into her family without incurring reproach or disgrace, and would doubtless receive a monetary compensation, or at least a return of dowry. The greatest loss would be emotional, the breaking up of family relationships. But Ezra would scarcely have felt himself bound to consider consequences. He knew the disastrous results that could accrue from such defiance of God's explicit commands. He had a plain duty to perform, and was determined to enforce the law at whatever the cost. He looked upon these lawless marriages as invalid, as no better than illicit connections. Those who make them, not those who break them, are alone responsible for the evils which result from those unions.

That was the case in Ezra's day, and the people, freely acknowledging the fact, concurred in the only possible arrangements whereby they could retrace their steps in undivided loyalty to God.



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\* This implies that the time covered in the Book of Ezra is much shorter than is generally conceded, for some of these guilty ones were among those who had returned with Zerubbabel, and would be in the normal dating over ninety years of age, when they took wives and had children!



**I**T was in the seventh year of Artaxerxes that Ezra left Babylon for Jerusalem (Ezra 7:9). He had been eight months in the land, and during that time, had arranged that the Law should form the basis of national existence.

The marriage reform had been the crowning act of his labors. It revealed how strictly the Law was to be enforced. The commission given him by the king was to go to the land of his forefathers, and “enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the Law of your God” (Ezra 7:14). That had been done, and the nation established upon a more solid basis. Now the time had arrived for him to return and report back to the king.

We are not told in the Bible that Ezra actually did this, but the implications are that he did. There is a break of thirteen years between the incident recorded in the last chapter of his book, and the next time he is referred to in Nehemiah 8 (cp. Neh. 1:1).

Assuming then, that Ezra returned to report to the king of Persia, and that the chronology of this time is as set out by Mr. Phillips in a previous chapter, the events recorded from the third chapter onwards in the Book of Esther took place during this interval of thirteen years.

They were difficult times, during which the enemies of the Jews threatened to overwhelm them, and when, in many parts of the provinces of Persia, the Jewish people had to “stand for their lives” (Esther 9:16). But it is a wonderful story, showing how the hand of Yahweh overshadowed the destiny of His



*people for good, and preserved them from evil.*

*These attacks must have resulted in distress in Judah and Jerusalem. The enemies of the Jews were more in evidence there than elsewhere, and may have taken the opportunity to attack them when the decree went out inviting them to do so (Esther 3:8-12), so that the "wall of Jerusalem was broken down, and the gates burned with fire" (Neh. 1:3).*

*God doubtless permitted their enemies this temporary triumph, for despite the covenant into which the people had solemnly entered, once the authority of Ezra was relaxed, many of the Jews reverted to their former marriages. Thus Nehemiah had to deal with this matter (Neh. 13:23-27), as Ezra had done earlier.*

*When that moment came, he called for the assistance of Ezra, and the two men perfected the work commenced by the faithful scribe during his first visit to the land.*

*But for thirteen long and difficult years nothing was heard of Ezra. During that same period of time, the dramatic events of the later portion of the book of Esther took place.*

## Chapter One

### THE KING'S LIFE THREATENED

**E**STHER sat upon the throne as queen; Mordecai occupied his humble position of service at the gate of the palace. It was a period of peace for the Persian empire, though it had not always been like that. The reign of Ahasuerus had been a difficult one. From the beginning, enemies had risen against him with determined attempts to end his life. But he succeeded in defeating them one by one.

But now, two of his most trusted servants conspired to assassinate him. They were Bigthana and Teresh, two of his chamberlains; members of the king's bodyguard who had charge of the threshold of the king's apartments. They guarded him when he slept, and thus had access to him at times when he was on his own.



They conspired to murder the king. By some means the plot became known to Mordecai as he sat at the gate of the palace. Quickly and secretly he passed the news to queen Esther. In turn, she informed the King in Mordecai's name, without revealing her relationship to Mordecai. A court of enquiry was immediately set up. It revealed that the two chamberlains were indeed guilty of the crime. They were publicly hanged, and the incident was recorded in the public archives, "written in the book of the Chronicles before the king" (Est. 2:23).

Nothing further was done at the time. The incident was closed to all those concerned. Yet this small incident was to play a most vital part in the preservation of the Jewish people. God was behind it, and, later on, it was evident that His providential guidance was at work in this incident.

Thus, in small matters, and in natural ways, are the ways of Providence worked out for the benefit of His people.

## THE BOOK OF ESTHER — AN ANALYSIS

Theme: *How the Invisible God Rules in the Kingdom of Men.*

**The Principle Exhibited:** *“We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.” “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”* (Rom. 8:28, 31).

*“For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God”* (2Cor. 4:15).

**The Plot:** Destruction threatens Jewry, but God guides events for the benefit of His people, and through His foreknowledge prepares for the eventuality which arises.

### The Crisis Anticipated

Vashti Deposed .....ch. 1  
Esther Elevated .....ch. 2  
Haman plots destruction .....ch. 3  
Mordecai pleads for relief...ch. 4  
Esther obtains favor .....ch. 5

### The Crisis Overruled

Mordecai honored .....ch. 6  
Haman executed .....ch. 7  
The Jews avenged.....ch. 8  
Feast of Purim instituted ..ch. 9  
Mordecai elevated .....ch. 10

The Book reveals that despite all reverses, the hope of Israel is worked out to a successful conclusion (see chps. 3:6; 4:14; 6:13;10:3), and that Providence guides the destiny of the nations.

The principal actors in the divine drama are five: **Ahasuerus**, the Persian monarch; **Vashti**, the deposed queen; **Haman**, the Jew hunter; **Mordecai**, the Jewish leader; and **Esther**, the Jewish girl who became a queen.

The background is set in the royal palace, the Persian Capital, and involves millions of Jews scattered throughout the world.

The book is rich in its typical and exhortatory lessons, and worthy of the closest study by all.

## Chapter Two

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### MORDECAI AROUSES THE HATRED OF HAMAN

**F**IVE years had passed since Esther's marriage to the Persian king, and since Ezra had been sent to Jerusalem with the remarkable commission to establish the nation on the basis of the Law of Moses. Now a new favorite had insinuated himself into the grace of the king. His name was Haman, and he was an Agagite, a descendant of the Amalekite kings (Num. 24:7; 1Sam. 15:8). The king had elevated him above all the princes of the realm, so that he sat in the palace with royal honor.

The king had further commanded that all his servants should revere Haman. Thus, when he entered the gate of the palace, the king's servants who were clustered there, bowed to the ground as in worship of an idol, and revered the mighty Haman as a god.

Haman loved this worship. Suddenly elevated to power, he delighted to see the adulation paid to him, delighted to walk haughtily into the palace with all the king's subjects bowing before him, to the ground.

But one man bowed not, nor did him reverence (Est. 3). It was Mordecai the Jew. Whereas the other servants humbly prostrated themselves to the dust, Mordecai remained standing. The Amalekites were cursed by the Law, which also commanded that only God is to be worshipped (Exod. 17:14, 16; Deut. 25:17-19; 1Sam. 15:3). And though to refuse the king's command brought him under the threat of royal disfavor, Mordecai's attitude was that of the apostles: "We ought to obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29).

Mordecai's attitude excited the interest of other servants. "Why do you transgress the king's commandment?" they asked.

Their question was made in envy, not of curiosity. Mordecai had already told them that he was a Jew, and therefore was not permitted by his law to bow down to flesh (Esther 3:4). But this did not please them. Why should they have to bow down before Haman if Mordecai the Jew did not have to do it? They argued with him day after day, and then, at last, reported the matter to Haman (v. 4).

Haman had not noticed that Mordecai did not bow down to him. Mordecai had not flouted his attitude before the authorities. He had quietly made his stand without any desire to bring it before the public gaze. And Haman was so lifted up in pride, that he had scarce given a glance to all the servants bowing deeply before him. With head held high, with haughty demeanor, he had stalked into the palace day after day, without noticing that the humble Jew did not revere him.

But when the other servants reported the matter to Haman, and told him that Mordecai was a Jew, the haughty Agagite considered the attitude of this mere servant.

It filled him with anger. He felt that it made him a laughing stock before all the other people. And he could see that this attitude did not spring from Mordecai as an individual, but because of his race. As he thought over the matter, Haman came to hate the Jews with a bitter hatred. He determined not only that Mordecai should die but every Jew with him.

He became a bitter, determined Jew-hater, dedicated to their complete destruction — and imagined that he had sufficient power to accomplish his purpose. He reasoned without God, however, and without the wisdom found in the Word of God, of which he was ignorant — for in Psalm 10:2, God has caused to be recorded: “The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor; let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined.”

Haman’s destiny illustrates the truth of those words.

### **Haman Seeks Destruction Of The Jews**

Haman was a superstitious Gentile, as well as a bitter Jew-hater. He decided to seek a “lucky day” to implement his scheme to destroy the Jews. He called his pagan priests before him, and they began to cast “*Pur*”, that is, “the lot” or “decision” before Haman to decide upon a day and month which would be deemed best to select for the destruction of the Jews.\*

The “lot” indicated that the thirteenth day of the twelfth month would be an appropriate and auspicious day for this special purpose, and, believing that the omens promised the success of his plan, Haman sought an audience with the king to place before him his proposal.

In due time this was granted. Haman found himself in the palace and before the king. Bowing low before Ahasuerus, Haman made his complaint and proposal: “There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king’s laws: therefore it is not for the king’s profit to suffer them,” he declared. “If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king’s treasuries.”

Haman’s accusation was a lie. The Jews did not refuse to “keep the king’s laws.” But the king did not know that. He probably did not even know to whom Haman was referring. He probably took it as an example of Haman’s good faith that he should report such a matter,

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\* This appears to be the significance of Esther 3:7.

## Typology and Character Sketch

### AHASUERUS — THE ALL POWERFUL

The story of Esther reveals Ahasuerus as aloof and austere, exercising a universal authority, advancing and deposing his subjects with autocratic powers. In the typology of the book he represents the status and authority of God, although in character he is but an Eastern monarch.

Consider the following points of identification. • He is set forth as a mighty king (Psa. 95:3), sitting on the throne of his great white palace (Psa. 47:8 — Shushan signifies "white"). • He exercises universal rule (Est. 1:1; Dan. 4:17), and enjoys unrivalled glory (Est. 1:4, 6; Exod. 24:10). Though his subjects are commanded to attend his banquet, there is no compulsion exercised as to the manner of their partaking (Est. 1:8; Exod. 24:7). • He is the husband of Vashti (Est. 1:9 — as Yahweh is represented as the husband of Israel; Isa. 54:5; Ezek. 16:8), whom he put away because of her insolence (Est. 1:21; cp. Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:1; Hos. 2:2), and replaced her with Esther (2Cor. 11:1-2). He has seven assistants (Est. 1:14; cp. Rev. 4:5) who are his assistants in the administration of the affairs of the kingdom.

As is appropriate to the type, Ahasuerus revealed a great sympathy for the Jewish people. He granted Mordecai the Jew a place of honor at the gate of his palace, and advanced the cause of his people when their existence was challenged by the evil scheming of Haman the Jew-hater.

As is also appropriate to the type, he promoted Haman, through whom trials came upon the Jewish people (Est. 3:1. See Rev. 13:7); he extended grace to Esther (Est. 5:2; Eph. 1:7; Heb. 1:8). He kept a *Book of Remembrance* (Est. 6:1) in which were recorded the worthy deeds of notable citizens, and this custom is used in the Bible to represent the remembrance of God regarding the worthy deeds of those who would serve Him (Mal. 3:16). So Mordecai was rewarded, Esther given great privileges and influence, and Haman ultimately deposed. Thus did God exercise absolute power over the lives of Jews and Gentiles.

The final picture sees all nations brought under the rule of Ahasuerus, with Israel saved, and Mordecai advanced to supreme authority (Est. 10:1-3) — a foreshadowing of the divine purpose.

Esther replaced Vashti as the bride of the king, even as the true ecclesia will replace natural Israel as the bride of the greater king. And, though that king will be the Lord Jesus, yet he is the manifestation of the Father, for his title, like that of Almighty God, will be: "**King of kings and Lord of lords**" (Rev. 19:16).

Thus the drama of the ages is vividly set forth in the dramatic story of this powerful monarch who stooped to help his Jewish bride and her despised people.

and even offer to guarantee a sum of money to be paid into the king's treasury. Such a payment, of course, would be recouped by Haman from the spoil he would gain from those whom he referred to as the king's enemies!

The king did not doubt the integrity and good faith of his servant. Taking the signet of authority from his hand, he gave it to Haman, thus empowering him to do as he thought best.

Rejoicing at his success, Haman hurried from the palace, and prepared the decree calling upon the destruction of the Jewish people. On the thirteenth day of the first month, he gathered the king's scribes together, and dictated a letter in the name of the king calling upon all people "to destroy, kill, and cause to perish" all the Jewish people in their vicinity, at the appointed day.

The letters were written and sent out by messengers (called "posts" in Est. 3:13) on horseback. Swiftly they were conveyed throughout the Persian Empire, commanding those in authority to carry out the awful proclamation. All people were told that they must be ready against the appointed day.

In Shushan the Palace, the king and Haman sat down to banquet, each satisfied with the transactions of the day, the king probably still ignorant of who were the people referred to by Haman in his accusation. But the city of Shushan was perplexed. And well the people might be, for this same king had previously issued a decree in favor of the Jews, permitting Ezra's return and reformation.\* Now the Jewish people were threatened with extinction by the terrible decree issued in the name of this same king.

### **Fear and Terror Among the Jews**

A great cry of lamentation arose unto God from the Jewish people scattered throughout the Persian Empire. At Jerusalem, in Babylon, throughout the then-known world, wherever there were Jews, the greatest distress was expressed as the people learned of the terrible decree. Emergency gatherings were called, the Jews met, clothed in sackcloth, in order to offer supplication before God. Periods of fasting, weeping and wailing were set aside as they called upon God to help them.

Thus a wail of despair arose throughout the empire, as the defenceless people awaited the dreaded day. But their enemies rejoiced. Joyfully they anticipated the time when they would be lawfully permitted to vent their hatred upon the Jewish people, and enrich themselves at their expense.

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\* This applies if we accept the suggestions made by Mr. Phillips that the Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther, and the Artaxerxes of Ezra's time, relate to the same king — *Darius Hystaspes*. The evidence strongly supports his claim.

Mordecai's lamentation was greater than that of anybody else. He felt that he was personally responsible for the vindictive action of Haman. Rushing from the gate of the palace he put upon himself the garb of mourning, and with ashes heaped upon his head, he went out into the midst of the city of Shushan, crying with a loud and bitter cry because of the miseries that it seemed he had brought upon his people.

He took his stand before the gate of the Palace (for none were permitted to enter therein dressed as he was), and awaited the opportunity to appeal to Esther. Clothed in sackcloth and ashes, he looked the very picture of misery.

### **Esther Learns of Mordecai's Grief**

Inside the palace, Esther knew nothing of the terrible decree, nor what was threatened against her people. But the picture of Mordecai, clothed in sackcloth and ashes, lying before the gate of the palace, drew the attention of all, and was soon reported to the Queen.

There was, however, one man in the palace whom she could trust: it was Hatach her personal chamberlain. She pleaded with him to find out the cause of Mordecai's mourning. From Mordecai he learned of all that had happened, and how Haman had offered the king a sum of money to destroy the Jews. Mordecai also gave Hatach a copy of the decree that had been issued, and told him to show it to Esther, and charge her to go in to the king, to make supplication and request before him for her people.

Thus Mordecai must have revealed the Queen's identity as a Jewess unto Hatach. The urgency of the matter, the drama of the situation,

### **Typology & Character Sketch**

#### **VASHTI — THE BEAUTIFUL, BUT STUBBORN, WIFE**

Vashti briefly holds the centre of the stage in the drama worked out in the *Story of Esther*, and then passes from view. She was beautiful in appearance, enjoyed a position of royal honor, but was insubordinate in character, refusing to reveal her beauty for the glory of the king. She was therefore divorced by the king and replaced by Esther.

In type she represents natural Israel. Israel is represented as the bride of the King, and was called upon to reveal such a beauty as would reflect to His honor, praise and glory. "But", declared the prophet, "they would not hear" (Jer. 13:11). They proved to be stubborn and insubordinate, refusing to hearken to the commands of Yahweh "their husband" (Isa. 54:5).

Thus natural Israel has been set aside, and her position taken by spiritual Israel: the true ecclesia of God.



was now obvious to the court officials. Hatach became the secret messenger between Esther and Mordecai. Thus, when Hatach brought to Esther the request of Mordecai that she should approach the king, she first conferred with him, before sending him back with a message warning him of the mortal danger into which such a request as he had made would place her: "All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king, into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days!"

**"You Must Risk  
Your Life"**

But the cause was greater than the individual. A whole nation was threatened and one person's life was nothing in comparison.

Mordecai insisted that Esther must show faith and courage, and go in unto the king even though it was at the risk of her life.

His stern, unyielding answer was taken back by Hatach: "Think not with yourself that you will escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if you altogether hold your peace at this time, *then shall relief and deliverance come to the Jews from another place; but you and your father's house shall be destroyed: and who knows whether you are to come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*"

Mordecai was thus a man of faith. He had complete confidence in God, and knew that He would not permit the destruction of the whole Jewish race. In a flash he realised the meaning of the remarkable events that had projected Esther into the position of prominence she held. His concern was with the nation which was greater than the individual, and the cause which was greater than the person.

**Esther's Faith  
and Courage**

Obedient to the commands of her cousin, Esther put her trust in God, and made ready to do as she was asked. But first she request-

ed that all the Jews should pray for the success of her approach to the king. To Mordecai she sent this answer: "Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish!"

Armed with this reply, Mordecai gathered all the Jews together and instituted the fast, whilst in the palace, Esther and her maidens did likewise. For three days preparation, fasting and prayer was made to God. And then, on the third day, Esther prepared to approach the king.

## Chapter Three

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### ESTHER BEFORE THE KING

**T**HE third day dawned. The period set aside by Esther for prayer and fasting had come to an end, and now the time arrived for her to approach the king, to plead for her people. She knew the danger in which she placed herself by so doing. Anybody who appeared before the king unbidden was put to death, unless the king, in clemency, extended to such the golden sceptre.

But would he do this for Esther? She had no cause to believe that he would. For over a month she had not been called to come before him, and it could be that she had completely fallen from grace. In which case, she would place herself in mortal danger.

Esther thought of this as she made careful preparation for the mission to which she had committed herself. She took off the sackcloth she had been wearing, and, replacing it with her royal apparel, made her way nervously to the royal chamber in the inner court of the king's palace.

This was a vast hall, at the far end of which was the elevated throne of the king. A flight of broad steps led to it, and upon it, in a blaze of glory, sat the despotic monarch, absolute Lord of all he surveyed.

Nervously, the graceful Esther made her way through the entrance of the hall and approached the king. From his vantage point upon his elevated throne, the king viewed with surprise this unbidden intrusion of his privacy. But his heart was touched at the sight of the graceful young Jewess who was shyly making her way towards him with downcast eyes. She presented such a contrast to his former wife, the vain Vashti, and to all the sophistication that the Persian monarch saw about him. She looked so artless, so lovely in her fresh young beauty, that the heart of the king went out to her and "she obtained favor in his sight" (Esther 5:2).

Yet she had defied court etiquette by thus entering the palace, and he realised that only a matter of the greatest urgency would drive her to such extreme action. He had an overwhelming desire to put her instantly at ease, and to that end as she came to the foot of his throne, he extended to her the golden sceptre of the empire. This was an act of grace and mercy. It meant that Esther was forgiven the unbidden intrusion of the palace, and that her life was saved. With great relief of mind she put forth her hand and touched the sceptre, thus accepting the mercy of the king, whilst doubtless, in her heart, she thanked God that her mission had been blessed to that extent.



*In the Royal Palace  
of King Ahasuerus*

## THE HIDDEN NAME OF GOD

In this book of 167 verses, the king is mentioned 192 times, his kingdom 26 times, his name 29 times, but Yahweh is not once named. Typically, the events point to the time when His face is hidden from His people (Deut. 31:16-18), though from the shadows He overlooks them for good. It is suggested that the **Divine Covenant Name**, guaranteeing the perpetuity of Israel, and proclaimed at the bush (Exod. 3:14), occurs five times in hidden form, as an acrostic within the narrative, suggesting the silent, hidden working of divine Providence in all the affairs of life, for "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep" (Psa. 121:3-4).

In this acrostic form, *Yahweh* occurs four times, and *Ehyeh* once in the following places: ch. 1:20; 5:4; 5:13; 7:7; 7:5. In the first two places it is formed by the initial letters of the words, in the second two, it is formed by the final letters, whilst the word *Ehyeh* ("I Will Be" — wrongly translated "I Am" — Exod. 3:14) occurs in the final place.

In the first and third places mentioned above, the letters spell the divine Name backwards, and the speakers are Gentiles unconscious of the fact that they are instruments in the working out of divine providence. For example, in Esther 5:13, Haman is represented as saying: "This availeth me nothing." In Hebrew the phrase is: "*zeH 'eynennW shoveH leY,*" and the letters **YHWH** (יהוה) form the divine Name of *Yahweh*. The second and fourth places quoted above, spell it forwards, and the speakers are Esther and the Spirit (the Narrator). Thus, in Est. 5:4, the queen says: "Let the king and Haman come this day," or in Hebrew: "*Yabo Hamalech Wehaman Hayyom,*" and, again, the **YHWH** form the name *Yahweh*.

Thus the divine Name is found hidden in the narrative, as though the Spirit would remind the reader that God is everywhere present, though it may not seem so to normal sight. The Invisible but Omnipotent Yahweh overlooks His own, though they may be unconscious of it, as He is also found in the book before us, though we must search closely for the evidence.

It is said that in some Hebrew Manuscripts of the Old Testament, the letters that form the divine Name in the various places mentioned above are emphasised in larger letter size in the book of Esther so that they stand out clearly to the reader of the text.

In addition to these hidden forms of the divine Name it is also found directly referred to in the names *Shimei* (signifying *Fame of Yahweh*), *Jair* (signifying *Yahweh Enlightens*), etc.

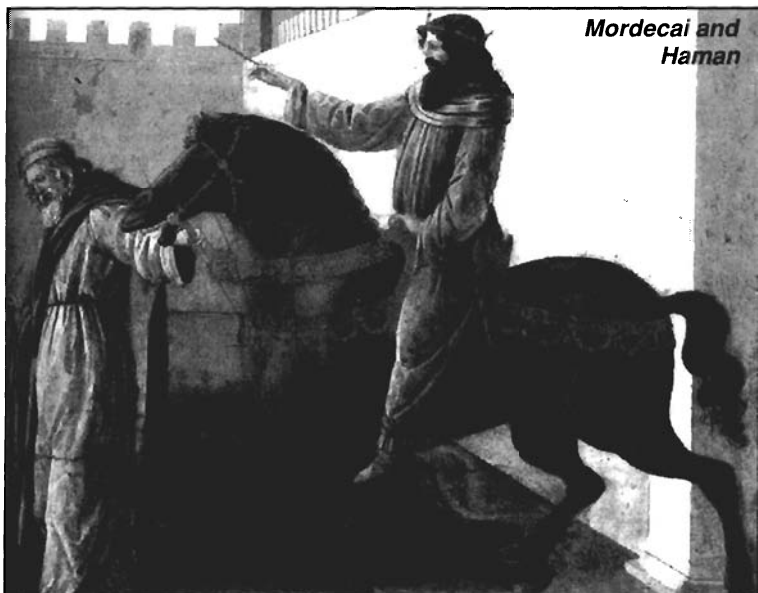
The king looked at the young queen standing humbly before him with tender kindness. "What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? It shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom," he declared.

But Esther was not yet ready to tell the king her mission. She had not merely prayed and fasted unto God, but had carefully planned the manner of her approach to the king. Haman had previously worked on the king by guile, insinuating that the Jews were out to destroy the empire, representing himself as a loyal servant who was prepared to lose a large sum of money to protect the king. Now Esther realised that she had to meet guile with prudence, and match cunning scheming with faith. She had to move carefully and prudently, had to first secure the fullest confidence and affection of the king. She felt it was not ripe to present her petition at that moment, and therefore, as a means of securing the co-operation of the king, she decided to first invite him to a banquet that she had prepared. She therefore answered the King: "If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him."

The king was only too willing to agree to this. "Cause Haman to make haste, that he may do as Esther has said," he commanded.

### **Esther's Banquet**

Thus the king and Haman came to the banquet prepared by Esther. Haman arrived little suspecting the plot that Esther was hatching. He came feeling that it was an honor to do so and believing that a mark of royal pleasure had



been expressed in his favor by the invitation he received.

So they feasted together: the king, the queen, and the prime minister. And as they did so, Esther awaited a propitious moment to press her petition; but none came.

At last the king became curious and impatient to learn what she desired. The banquet was drawing to an end; it was the time that wine was served. He had waited in vain for Esther to begin, and now he made the opening: "What is your petition? It shall be granted you! What is your request? It shall be performed to half of the kingdom!" he declared.

But Esther had an inward feeling that the time was not yet ripe to press her petition. For some reason she felt it best to delay the matter. So she temporised. She answered the king: "My petition and my request is: if I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition, and to perform my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do tomorrow as the king has said."

This was agreed upon, and the banquet came to an end.

### **Haman's Pride**

Haman left the queen's banquet very pleased with himself, and with life in general. His schemes of personal advancement were succeeding beyond his greatest expectations. It was obvious to him that the queen wanted to pay him a high honor, and he knew that he also enjoyed the greatest favor of the king. Pompously he left the palace for his own palatial home. On all sides men and women humbly bowed low before the great Haman. His head stretched higher in fleshly pride.

But there, in the gate of the palace, was the familiar figure of his hated enemy: the despised Jew, Mordecai. And Mordecai did not bow! Instead he stood staring contemptuously at Haman, refusing to acknowledge his glory or to move aside in an act of conciliation.

This ruined Haman's day. Inwardly he seethed with anger; but he constrained himself realising that it was but a short time, and Mordecai with all his hated race would be destroyed together. He hastened home and gathered his friends and family together that he might boast of



his success, and seek their advice as to what he should do regarding Mordecai. For Haman was a vain, jealous man. He enjoyed power, he loved to see people bowing down before him, but he hated to be defied.

So, with his family and friends gathered around him, he spoke of the glory of his power, the wealth of his family, the honor the king had paid him in promoting him above all his princes and servants. "Moreover," he told them, "Esther the queen let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared, but myself; and tomorrow I am again invited unto her together with the king. But this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."

As the friends and wife of Haman looked at the conceited and vindictive prime minister, they also came to hate Mordecai. They felt no pity for him or for his people. Haman's wife, Zeresh, was foremost in her bitterness. She fed the vindictive nature of Haman by revealing the greatest impatience against Mordecai. She urged him to exercise his authority by ordering a special death of humiliation and degradation for Mordecai that all the people might see and ponder the fate of those who oppose the great Haman. His friends advised: "Let a cross (*see margin*) be made fifty cubits high, and tomorrow speak unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go in merrily with the king unto the banquet".

This idea pleased Haman greatly. He rubbed his hands with glee as he thought of his hated enemy dangling helplessly upon the high gallows, a solemn warning to all people of the fate of those who opposed him.

Having decided upon this policy, Haman immediately ordered the huge cross to be constructed. His mind was relieved of the trifling but nagging problem, and he retired for the night, to sleep well in anticipation of dining again with the king and the queen on the morrow, and to ultimately have his revenge upon Mordecai.

### **A Sleepless Night Provides the Means for God to Work**

But in the palace the king could not sleep. He had a restless night, tossing and turning on his bed. We are not told the immediate cause of his sleeplessness, but obviously God was behind it. Providence was moving out of the shadows to the help of His people, and as an element to that end, something caused the king's sleep to "flee away" from him that night (Est. 6:1 mg.).

The preservation of Israel was bound up in this insignificant detail.

The king desired something to occupy his mind, and the *Book of the Records of Persia* was brought and read before him. Among other things, it recorded the service that Mordecai had rendered the throne

by reporting the conspiracy of Bigthana and Teresh against the king, and thereby saving his life.

"What honor and dignity has been done to Mordecai for this?" enquired the king.

"There is nothing done for him," was the reply.

The king determined, before falling asleep, that this omission should be rectified on the morrow.

The following day was to prove one of great significance to the various parties in this drama. Esther, Haman and the king were each anxious to put into effect the plans they had made the night before. Esther wanted to present her petition; the king wanted to reward Mordecai; Haman wanted permission to hang him.

Haman, particularly, had to act quickly. He had to gain the king's permission, arrange for the execution of his enemy, and present himself at Esther's banquet. Early in the morning he eagerly arose and hastened to the palace to petition the king.

The king heard of his arrival. "Who is in the court?" he asked his servants.

"It is Haman," was the answer.

The king was delighted. Here was the man best qualified to advise him how to reward Mordecai. He instructed that Haman should be brought before him, and before his minister could speak, the king had burst out with his request. "What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor?" he asked.

The unexpected question drove all thoughts of Mordecai from the mind of Haman. Here was the possibility of the greatest honor, for whom would the king delight to honor more than himself? So Haman excitedly reasoned, as he took time to think out the answer. He carefully thought about his own future and how he could personally benefit from such an honor, and then gave his reply: "For the man whom the king delighteth to honor, let the royal apparel which the king wears be brought, together with the horse upon which the king rides, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: and let this be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delights to honor, and bring him on horseback through the streets of the city, and proclaim before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor'."

This was a suggestion of the greatest daring and utmost presumption, in view of the fact that Haman thought that the king was referring to himself. It indicates that he was boldly aspiring to royal honors. He could see himself being paraded through the city, being seen as a man bearing royal approval, the object of admiring eyes, receiving the applause of the people. However, he was soon to experience the truth of Proverbs 29:23, "A man's pride shall bring him low; but





*Esther's Royal Banquet.*

*The Miserable Haman is Banished.*



honor shall uphold the humble in spirit.”

Haman’s pride was brought crashing to the dust by the king’s next statement. He listened astonished and with mortification as the monarch commanded: “Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as you have said, do so even to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king’s gate: let nothing fail of all that you have said.”\*

What humiliation for the haughty Haman! The people, already perplexed at the proclamation of the king against the Jewish people that had been engineered by Haman and sent out under the royal seal (Est. 3:15), would be utterly confused at the sight of Haman the “Jews’ enemy” (Est. 3:10), publicly honoring Mordecai who had openly shown his contempt for the Agagite (Est. 5:9). Haman would have refused the king’s command if he dared, but he knew that to do so would endanger his life. There was but one thing to do: swallow his pride, and honor Mordecai as directed.

Mordecai was thus clothed in royal garments, seated upon the royal horse, and led through the city by the humiliated Haman who went before, proclaiming: “This is done unto the man whom the king delights to honor.”

What dark, bitter thoughts must have flooded Haman’s mind as he was made to do this! How he must have cursed his enemy in his heart, as with hypocritical lips he voiced his honor. And what an amazing reversal for Mordecai! Lifted high upon the horse, he must have pondered the ways of Providence as he looked down upon the back of his enemy walking before him. He must have realised that God was working for the relief of His people, and that this constituted a token of ultimate deliverance.

Here was a wonderful answer to his prayers.

And as the people of Shushan witnessed the sudden elevation of Mordecai, they, too, must have pondered the significance of it all.

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\* It seems obvious from the king’s statement concerning “Mordecai the Jew,” that he did not realise that it was to the Jews that Haman was referring when he made his infamous suggestion that some subjects in his empire were opposed to the king and should be destroyed. Haman did not name the people against whom he laid his accusation (Est. 3:8). The king trusted him implicitly, and was confident that he was acting in the best interest of the crown. Haman was careful not to name the Jews, for they were held in high regard by the kings of Persia.

## ESTHER — THE DUTIFUL CHILD & BEAUTIFUL BRIDE

The character of Esther was such as to commend her to her contemporaries. She was noted for her: • **Beauty**: She was fair of form, and of good countenance (ch. 2:7). • **Filial Affection**: She obeyed her adopted father (ch. 2:7), even when she had left his house and was in a position to act independently of his authority, and when she was beyond his power to demand (ch. 2:20). • **Modesty**: Her beauty did not make her vain and foolish. She avoided all artificial arts to adorn herself to increase the effect of her beauty on others (ch. 2:15). Modesty is a lovely grace, which adds charm to the highest physical beauty. It makes a woman beautiful though she may lack physical attractiveness, but without it, all the beauty of face and figure only illustrates the truth of Proverbs 11:22, "As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion." Modesty conciliates and wins by its own gentle force, even as Esther won her way into the heart of the king and his ministers. An immodest assertion of one's self in any circumstances indicates either a want of moral sensitiveness, or a want of intellectual insight. A pure heart, a true self-knowledge, and the fear of God, are all and always modest. • **Discretion**: In her new and difficult position as queen, she never failed in prudence. This was not due merely to shrewd planning, but good training and becoming modesty. The very simplicity and artlessness of her conduct won her the favor of the king's servants (ch. 2:9), and finally the king himself. • **Integrity**: The sudden flush of prosperity and prominence left her unspoiled. Her dutifulness to her foster father remained as before (ch. 2:20). She was prepared to perish with her people in performing her duty.

Thus Esther was beautiful yet modest; courageous yet self-effacing; artless yet discreet; faithful yet tactful. In the narrative she is typical of the Bride of Christ, replacing Israel whose "Maker was her husband" (Isa. 54:5). Esther's name is expressive of this, for she was originally named **Hadassah** (*Myrtle*: Est. 2:7 — a name suggestive of Israel), but ultimately earned the new name of **Esther** (*Star*), even as the Bride of Christ takes on the name of her Groom.

As one of Christ's titles is that of the *Star* (Rev. 22:16), the Book of Esther illustrates in type the drama of Num. 24:17-20 which foretold: "There shall come a Star out of Jacob and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel... Amalek was the first of nations, but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever." Through the Star and the Sceptre, by the guidance of Mordecai, Haman the Agagite (the Amalekite) perished for ever.

## Chapter Four

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### HAMAN'S FOLLY REVEALED AND HIS END DETERMINED

**H**AVING done as the king had commanded in regard to Mordecai, Haman hurried back home, burdened with a sense of despondency and foreboding. He was depressed, worried and fearful at the turn of events, and ashamed to look anybody in the face. So he covered his head, as he hastened back home to confer with his family, his friends, and his advisers.

**Haman's Foreboding** He called a conference which met under the shadow of the huge cross that he had built for his enemy, and with his advisers assembled about him, he recounted to them the events of the day. He heard some wise but depressing words of warning from his wise men and Zeresh his wife. Jointly they declared: "If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom you have begun to fall, you shall not prevail against him, but shall surely fall before him."

They knew of the history of the Jews, how God had been with them and brought punishment upon those who persecuted them. Therefore their advice to Haman was to make his peace with his enemy who would otherwise prove too much for him.

But it was too late. Even while they were talking with him, the king's chamberlains called to bring Haman to the banquet that Esther had prepared. His day of opportunity was at an end.

**At the Second Banquet** So the king and Haman came to the banquet prepared by Esther the queen. It must have been held in the atmosphere of greatest tension. Esther awaited the best moment to present her petition. Haman was doubtless preoccupied with the remarkable events of the day. Only the king was relaxed, for he had accomplished his purpose, and was possibly in good humor.

Once again the king invited Esther to name her petition: "What is your petition, queen Esther? It shall be granted you! What is your request? It shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom."

This time Esther made her request. Humbly, yet earnestly, she spoke to the king: "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please you, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: for we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. If we had been sold as slaves, I would have said nothing, although the enemy could not compensate for the loss of so

many subjects!”

The king listened to this statement with astonishment; Haman in fear. Ahasuerus could not understand to what Esther was referring. He certainly had not understood the decree that Haman issued in his name in the way Esther expressed it. All that he knew of that decree was that it was issued against certain unspecified enemies of the State (Est. 3:8). Now Esther was claiming that it was dictated by matters of personal revenge against her and her people. The king still found it difficult to believe that she was referring to Haman, however, and doubtless thought that Esther was accusing somebody else of taking advantage of the decree for personal revenge.\*

“Who is he, and where is he, that has presumed in his heart to do such a thing?” he asked.

Esther replied with words of ill-omen for Haman that put the matter plainly beyond all doubt: “*The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!*”

Sternly the king looked at Haman who was stricken speechless before him, and whose guilt was obvious in the fear that he clearly showed on his face. The king now perceived that his favorite minister had gained an advantage over him and had placed him in a most difficult and awkward position. Not only had his foolish decree consigned to death large numbers of loyal subjects, but it had endangered his beautiful bride as well, towards whom he felt the greatest tenderness and love.

Disturbed and upset, recognising that he was partly responsible for the state of things that had developed, the king left the banqueting hall to ponder the problem.

**The Death of Haman** Haman was now desperate. He could see in the stern, angry countenance of the king as he left the hall, that his life was in jeopardy. He stood up to humbly plead with Esther that she intercede to save his life. But this was impossible. In his extremity, he at last threw himself forward on the couch where she was reclining, seeking, perhaps, to grasp her feet or garments, as is usual with suppliants in the east.

It was in this attitude that the angry king found him when he returned. Harshly he condemned the guilty minister, and instantly the royal attendants seized the one-time favorite, and covered his face to prepare him for death.

What form of punishment was fit for the crime of which Haman was guilty? One of the king’s chamberlains had a suggestion: “Behold, the cross fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Morde-

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\* The king’s words, in the Hebrew, express confused surprise. They have been translated as follows: “Who? He? This one? And where? This one? Hath he filled his heart to do thus?” (see also Young’s Literal translation).

cai, who had spoken good for the king, stands in his house!"

"Hang him thereon!" commanded the king. So Haman expired upon the very cross that he had prepared for Mordecai.

## THE BOOK OF ESTHER

Historically the book reveals the hidden ways of God; it shows Providence overlooking His people from the shadows, ensuring the ultimate triumph of the righteous.

Typically, it demonstrates the principle that the devil (*Haman*) will be crucified on the stake intended for Christ (*Mordecai*). When Christ hung from the cross, his enemies thought they had triumphed. Instead, he gained the victory (Heb. 13:20), and it was the devil (sinful human nature) that was destroyed through his sacrificial death (Heb. 2:14). Haman had prepared a cross for Mordecai, but perished on it himself.

*Prophetically* these circumstances foreshadow the final crisis when Israel shall finally be delivered from out of the time of Jacob's trouble, and Gog, the "Jews' enemy" will be destroyed.

*Parabolically*, it sets forth the purpose of God for the redemption of His people, and thus dramatises and condenses the history of Israel.

The five main characters in the drama, seem to be thus representative — *The Persian monarch*: of God; *Vashti*: of natural Israel; *Haman*: of the serpent's seed politically and individually; *Mordecai*: of the Lord Jesus; *Esther*: of spiritual Israel.

As Christ is both Star and Sceptre (Num. 24:17-20), so Esther embraced the name of Star (as the true ecclesia does that of Christ, and could only obtain access to the king by touching the golden sceptre (Est. 4:11). She was married to the king, thus foreshadowing the position of the Lamb's Bride, who replaces natural Israel, the original "wife" of Yahweh (Isa. 54:5).

Other types in this interesting book can be searched out as follows:

**ESTHER AS A TYPE** — Her genealogy, as set out in this book, is as follows (see Est. 2:5, 7, 15): Benjamin (*Son of my Right Hand*), Kish (*Power*), Shimei (*Fame of Yahweh*), Abihail (*Father of Might*), Esther (*Star*). A paraphrase of these names forms the following statement: "*The Son of My right hand manifested power, and, for the fame of Yahweh, revealed himself as a Father of Might to the Star.*"

Esther is a type of the true ecclesia. Her name was originally Hadassah, or *Myrtle* (Est. 2:7), which is a symbol of the true Israel (Isa. 55:13; 41:19; Neh. 8:15; Zech. 1:8, 10, 11). As Esther (*Star*) she is representative of the multitudinous Christ, having taken

upon herself the name of her spouse (Num. 24:17; 2Pet. 1:19; Gen. 22:17; Psa. 147:4; 1Cor. 15:41; Rev. 3:1).

She was orphaned (Est. 2:7) — the Bride of Christ is represented as having left mother and father (Eph. 5:31-32), is brought up by Mordecai (a type of Christ) as his own child (Est. 2:7). The ecclesia bears a similar relationship to Christ (Heb. 2:13); was beautiful in appearance (Est. 2:7; cp. Eph. 5:27); possessed a retinue of seven maidens (Est. 2:9, representative of the multitudinous Christ, Song 1:3; Rev. 1:20), was subjected to a process of purification for marriage (Est. 2:9; cp. 2Thes. 2:13), manifested pleasing characteristics and deportment (Est. 2:15; cp. 1Pet. 3:1-3), was taken into the royal house (Est. 2:16; cp. Jhn. 14:1-3); always acted under Mordecai's instructions (Est. 2:20; cp. Mat. 7:6), was called upon to sacrifice for the faith (Est. 4:16); after three days of humiliation and prayer, assumed royal apparel on the third day (Est. 5:1; cp. Hosea 6:2); at the royal banquet she found pleasure in the eyes of the king (Est. 5:6; cp. Rev. 19:7-8).

She was ultimately victorious over her enemies. She presided over the banquet of wine for Haman (Est. 7:1; cp. Jer. 25:27), which brought about his doom, and finally gained control of all his possessions (Est. 8:1; cp. Rev. 3:9). She interceded, and ultimately legislated for the relief of Israel (Est. 8:7-8; cp. Zech. 10:6).

Finally, jointly with Mordecai, she decreed the feast of rejoicing (Est. 9:32; cp. Rev. 19:9), which was adopted by the Jews throughout the empire who found great blessings in their efforts on their behalf.

**HAMAN AS A TYPE** — He represents the seed of the serpent in its various manifestations. He was granted power for a time (Est. 3:1; cp. Rev. 13:7); he was known as the Jews' enemy (Est. 3:6; cp. Dan. 7:21); he sought to destroy Mordecai (Est. 5:14; Dan. 8:11); he was forced to honor Mordecai (Est. 6:11; Zeph. 3:19-20); he was commanded to attend the banquet of wine (Est. 7:1; Jer. 25:27), and was afterwards hung on his own gallows (Est. 7:10; Heb. 2:14); his ten sons were slain after him (Est. 9:12, 14; Rev. 17:12-14). Haman thus typifies the flesh in several manifestations. He represented the seed of the serpent which sought to put Christ to death, but in so doing encompassed its own destruction (Acts 2:23-24); he also represented the flesh yet to be politically manifested in Gogue who will be destroyed after causing the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7; Ezek. 37; Deut. 4:30); he also foreshadowed the flesh ecclesiastically manifested in the Man of Sin of 2Thes. 2:4, 8, who is to be destroyed together with his ten sons, at Christ's coming (Rev. 17:12-14).

**MORDECAI AS A TYPE** — His genealogy is given as Benjamin (*Son of my Right Hand*), Kish (*Power*), Shimei (*Fame of Yahweh*), Jair (*Yahweh Enlightens*), Mordecai (*Dedicated to Mars, or Bitter Bruising*). A paraphrase of his genealogy provides the following sentence: "*The Son of My right hand manifested power, and for the fame of Yahweh, revealed himself as he whom Yahweh enlightens that he might dedicate himself to war, or bitter bruising.*"

He was fosterfather to Esther (Est. 2:7; cp. Isa. 53:10), showing anxious care for her welfare (Est. 2:11; cp. John 17:11, 15). He rendered such service to the king as to ensure his ultimate promotion (Est. 2:21-23; Est. 6; cp. Acts 2:22-24). He refused to bow to Haman (Est. 3:5) as Christ refused to bow to the flesh (John 14:30). He took upon himself the salvation of the people (Est. 4:1), instructing Esther how she should conduct herself in the face of danger (Est. 4:8-11), bringing her to the very brink of death because he knew it was the only way to life (Est. 4:16; cp. Rom. 6:1-3). He was figuratively brought to the cross by Haman (Est. 5:14), but delivered from it by the king (Est. 6), and elevated throughout the worldwide empire as the royal representative (Est. 10; cp. 1Tim. 6:15-16). Haman was ultimately forced to acknowledge his glory (Est. 6:11; cp. Mat. 23:39; 27:54; Acts 4:16) whilst he inherited the possessions of his enemy (Est. 8:2; cp. Psalms 2:8; Romans 11:26). He established a new feast of deliverance which was endorsed by all Israel (Est. 9:27; cp. Jer. 16:14-15), and thus assumed priestly functions. He also ruled with the king (Est. 10; cp. Rev. 19:16), so that he manifested the authority of a king-priest.

He thus stands in the narrative as a type of Christ.

### **HAMAN — THE JEWS' ENEMY**

His name means "*Well-disposed.*" Being perhaps of outstanding appearance so that he drew the admiration of the crowd (like Saul: 1Sam. 9:2), he probably appealed to the flesh. He had an innate passion for elevation (Est. 6:6-7). But the higher he rose, the more contemptuous and overbearing he became, and the more indifferent to the fate of those beneath him.

Mordecai, however, pricked the bubble of his pride when he refused to bow down to him, for the curse of Yahweh rested on the Amalekites (Exod. 17:14-16) and Haman was an Amalekite, a descendant of their kings (Num. 24:7; 1Sam. 15:8; see also Jose-



phus' history).

All the tragedy of Haman is condensed in the simple statement that he was "*the Jews' enemy*" (Est. 3:10; 7:6; 8:1; 9:10, 24). As such, he became the enemy of God. Haman, the vain and pompous courtier, the vulgar and foolish upstart, the cruel and unscrupulous prime minister, the villain of the plot, is still detested by the Jews, who see in him a type of the antisemites throughout the ages.

Haman was a complete man of the flesh: vindictive (Est. 3:6), vain (6:7), crafty (3:8), revengeful (3:6), boastful (5:11), wicked and unjust (3:8-9), small-minded so that little things irritated him (5:13). He was driven by intense self-interest (5:12) and immoderate ambition (6:7-8). In his intolerant vanity, he could not bear the slightest infringement of his rights, so that small matters soon assumed mountainous proportions.

Thus he was servile and cruel, using his power for disgraceful purposes. Suddenly and rapidly elevated to authority, the world appeared at his feet — but it was all short-lived, and the greater his elevation, the more calamitous and awful the headlong plunge. Haman's doom was as sudden as it was ironic. In power he is terrible; in decline he is pathetic. One day he vaunts himself; the next day he is impaled by his own stake.

He is the symbol of sin raging and beating upon the shore. But above its hoarse roaring, is heard the still, small Voice of the All-wise and Almighty Disposer of events: "*Hitherto shalt thou come and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed*" (see Psa. 37:1; 73:3; Prov. 24:1, 19). For a time he exercised great power under Ahasuerus, even as sin has been permitted to exercise great power in the earth, "to make war with the saints" (Rev. 13:7). He built a cross (rendered "gallows" but note the marginal comment), upon which he proposed to crucify Mordecai, but this cross became the means of his own destruction, and it destroyed him. In his bitter animosity towards the Jews, he foreshadows Gogue of the last days (the word *Agag* has been rendered *Gogue* in the Septuagint version of Num. 24:7; see Est. 3:1), for Gogue will represent sin in a political sense, and will be destroyed on the cross of his own making.

The downfall of all fleshly power will thus be as sudden and as precipitous as that of Haman, and will make the way for the elevation of the antitypical Mordecai (Christ), and the universal rule of God (see Esther 10).

## Chapter Five

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### THE WICKED DECREE OF HAMAN IS DEFEATED

**H**AMAN'S folly brought suffering upon all his family, for when a criminal was executed in those days, his goods immediately became the property of the crown. Thus the wealth of Haman passed into the hands of Ahasuerus, and he, in turn, gave it to Esther the queen.

Someone was also required to fill the position left vacant by the death of Haman. Esther spoke unto the king, and Mordecai was brought before him. Here, indeed, was one worthy to fill the position, for he had already saved the king's life, and thus could be thoroughly trusted. So Mordecai the Jew became Grand Vizier in the place of Haman, the Jews' enemy.

But the decree of Haman still remained, death still threatened the Jews throughout the empire, and Esther now set herself the task of defeating what was proposed.

Again she took her life in her hands to do so. It was strictly forbidden that any should appear sorrowful in the king's presence (Est. 4:2), but ignoring this law, Esther came again before the king, and falling down at his feet, she besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman that he had devised against the Jews. Distraught with grief she fell down at his feet weeping.

#### **Esther Seeks Relief for her People**

Once again the heart of the king was touched. The golden sceptre was again extended towards Esther, and, rising from the floor she stood before the king to make her petition. "If it pleases the king," she began, "and if I have found favor in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman which he wrote to destroy the Jews which are in all the king's provinces. For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? Or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?"

The king had the fullest sympathy for Esther by now, and would willingly have reversed the wicked decree of Haman if he could. But it was impossible; the laws of the Medes and Persians were unalterable (Dan. 6:8). He had already done what he could. He had given Esther the house of Haman. He had punished that wicked man with death because of his opposition to the Jews. He was prepared to do whatever he could to defeat the decree of Haman; but he could not reverse it.

He explained this to Esther, and then invited her to write as she liked, in his name, and seal her instructions with his seal, that it might have royal authority. For such “may no man reverse.”

### **Defeating the Decree of Haman**

Armed with this authority, Esther called for Mordecai and set before him the proposition of the king. Mordecai proved to be the man for the occasion. Though the decree of Haman could not be set aside, it could be defeated. It called upon faithful citizens to destroy the Jews in their midst in a terrible pogrom throughout the empire; but if permission was granted the Jews to defend themselves, and to slay those who attacked them, the evil decree of Haman could be neutralised.

Thus, in the authority of the king, Mordecai wrote a decree, granting permission for the Jews to defend themselves against any who should attack them, to slay and destroy in return, and to “take a spoil of them for a prey.” This second decree was sent out post-haste throughout all the realms of the king, including Shushan the palace.

So now two decrees were before the people: one that invited them to slay the Jews and take their possessions; the other that permitted the Jews to slay in turn and take the possessions of those who might attack them.

Wisdom lay in the direction of ignoring the first decree, and thus avoiding the evil of the second one.

What a relief for the Jewish people when the knowledge of this second decree was made known. It was like life from the dead for them. They now saw the hand of God in their affairs. They had concrete evidence of the power of prayer. They rejoiced with joy unspeakable that their service to God had been so openly rewarded. They had received light in the midst of darkness — gladness, joy, and honor in the place of unhappiness, misery, and disgrace (Est. 8:16), and they celebrated the occasion in appropriate fashion. Throughout the realm of the king, there was feasting and happiness. People recognised in this wonderful turn of fortune the hand of God with Israel, and “many of the people of the land became Jews”. Thoughtful Persians became proselytes to the faith and added their number to the Jews banded together for defence.

This was perhaps due to the influence of certain Jews. For example, Daniel doubtless had powerfully influenced some of the wise men of the realm; Ezra, Nehemiah, Mordecai and others may have also played a part in this conversion. There had obviously been a spirit of sympathy for the Jews among the Persians ever since the decree of Cyrus, and this had lasted for some time. Even Haman’s wise men had warned him: “If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom you have begun to fall, you shall not prevail against him, but

will surely fall before him" (Est. 6:13). Thus it was appreciated in some parts of Persia that Divine Providence overshadowed the fortunes of Israel.

### **The Struggle for Power**

The fateful day (the thirteenth day of the twelfth month) drew near. Throughout the empire of Persia, the Jews made preparation to defend themselves against their enemies; and those amongst the Persians who still intended to use the king's decree to gain the possessions of the Jews, did likewise.

Thus two hostile groups faced each other, though those who opposed the Jews were in the minority. For most citizens could see now that the Government was on the side of the Jews. Mordecai was in supreme power in Shushan, and the representatives of the government throughout the empire took their instructions from him and advocated that the people abstain from attacking the Jews.\*

As for Mordecai, he became greater and greater, not only with the king but also with the people. The king doubtless found him a skilful administrator and wise adviser, and drew him more and more into his counsels. This probably paved the way for such men as Nehemiah to come into greater prominence.

Thus, by the time the thirteenth day of the twelfth month dawned, the Jews were greatly respected by the people. Despite this, however, there still remained some who viewed them with bitter hatred, and decided to seize the opportunity to attack them. Thus on this terrible day, the Empire of Persia was convulsed by trouble. Civil war broke out on all sides. Despite all warnings, many rose against the Jews and had to be repulsed. In the city of Shushan, 500 of the Jews' enemies were destroyed, including the ten sons of Haman; in the provinces 75,000 lost their lives.

No matter how strong the opposition, success was with the Jewish people on that terrible day. They regretted the slaughter which was made necessary by the violent attacks of their enemies, so that although they defended themselves, they did not touch the spoil of those who opposed them, even though the king's decree permitted this to be done (Est. 9:10, 16).

It was a sad day for the Persian Empire, and yet, foolishly, the party of Haman had not learned its lesson. Resentment still ran rife throughout Shushan. There were undercurrents of intrigue and revolt, and though 500 had died through their folly on the thirteenth day, preparations were underfoot to renew the fight on the next day. Therefore Esther requested of the king that he permit the Jews to defend

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\* This is suggested by the Hebrew rendering of Est. 9:3. Rotherham renders the phrase "helped the Jews," as "extolling the Jews." The rulers probably advised the people to refrain from any form of violence or attack.

themselves on the fourteenth day as well, and that he arrange to have the ten sons of Haman hung upon gallows so that all might see the futility and foolishness of their actions (Est. 9: 13-15).

But even in spite of this terrible warning, the enemies of the Jews in Shushan made another concerted attempt to destroy them on the fourteenth day of the month, and a further 300 were slain in consequence.

That action finally crushed the resistance. The empire settled down to a state of peace, and Jewry was saved. Throughout the provinces the Jews gathered together on the fourteenth day of the month to thank God for the deliverance that had been granted them, to rejoice together because of the great assistance that had been given them, and to sacrifice before God. It was a day of gladness and feasting, a day of relief and release from the awful terror that had overshadowed them for so long. The people celebrated it by spontaneously rejoicing together. In the homes of Jews, animals were sacrificed in gratitude to God, and an excess of joy was experienced. As the families feasted on their own portion they also sent portions ("gifts") one to another, that all might be drawn together as one on this happy occasion.

### **The Feast of Purim Established**

Mordecai's standing was high, not only in the counsels of the king, but also among the Jews at home and abroad. They deeply respected him, and heeded his instructions. And, although he was not of the priestly tribe, he acted, not only in a civil capacity, but in spiritual guidance as well.

With the authority he now enjoyed, he sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of the king, calling upon them to annually set aside this period for a yearly festival of rejoicing, that they might never forget the God-given help that had been wonderfully granted them in a time of extreme trouble and impending evil. They were to celebrate it with days of feasting and of joy, on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the twelfth month (approximately February/March), as a memorial of the great deliverance that they had just experienced. Two days were appointed because of the additional day of civil war, trouble and slaughter that the Jews of Shushan had endured (Est. 9:13-14).

Mordecai's letters and decree were received everywhere with the greatest enthusiasm. The decree evidently obtained the endorsement of the high priest in Jerusalem, for even those Jews who had already returned to the land of the forefathers under Zerubbabel and Ezra agreed to do according to Mordecai's request, and annually keep these two days in the way required.

They called these days the *Days of Purim*, after the name of *Pur*,

or *Lot*, because the evil Haman had cast lots to discover the best day on which to carry out his wicked purpose (Est. 3:7); but God turned his counsel upon himself, and the day turned out to be a day of deliverance for Jewry and not of destruction.

Mordecai's request was endorsed by the queen. She had a fellow feeling for the rest of the Jews, for it had been at great risk of her life that she had played her part to defeat the schemes of Haman. She wrote a letter of confirmation of his decree, earnestly calling upon the Jews to follow the instructions of the prime minister, and this was also sent out with the letters of Mordecai.

**Subsequent Greatness of Ahasuerus and Mordecai** Mordecai proved to be a faithful minister to the Crown. Under his wise administration the power of Ahasuerus was extended in all directions. Distant lands were brought under his control, and a tribute was placed upon the countries of the empire, both far and near.

Mordecai was next to the king in honor and authority. The empire was at peace and happy. The king and the prime minister were beloved of the multitudes, whose good they sought to advance.

It was like a foretaste of the millennium when the Lord Jesus shall reign in the authority of the King of Heaven, and will be beloved of the people; when the nations will bring their tribute to Jerusalem (Isa 60:11, mg.) and peace shall spread abroad on every side.

This is the final picture presented to us of Mordecai (see Est. 10). What a contrast it is to his previous state, when, as a mourning Jew he sat despondently in Shushan, clothed in sackcloth and ashes, whilst Haman, pompous in power, schemed his death and that of his race!

A similar contrast will be seen when the Lord Jesus shall reign as king, and all mankind will applaud him. For, nearly two thousand years ago, men shouted for his death, and mocked at him as he hung upon the cross. They derided him, and believed that they had seen the last of him. But he rose from the grave to a glorious victory, which is yet to be manifested to all mankind when he rules triumphantly throughout the earth.

As the triumph of Mordecai made it possible for the Jews to gain the victory over their enemies and ascend from the valley of despair to the joy and happiness of a great triumph, so this will be the lot of all those who seek to serve God in truth through Jesus Christ now. Though they may suffer anxiety and trial, though they may often mourn, they will yet witness a great triumph and joy if they but prove faithful. The rejoicing of *Purim* will be theirs.

So this short, but moving little drama illustrating the divine purpose, ends with justice vindicated before all, and the righteous triumphant throughout the earth. It is what God will ultimately establish

when He steps out of the shadows to openly reveal His power and authority in the person of His Son, and to plainly manifest His providential guidance in the lives of all those whom He has drawn to Himself.

In that day, it will be seen that the drama of the Book of Esther has been re-enacted many thousands of times, in the private lives of those who have served God faithfully. It will also be seen, that the nation of Israel has likewise been “saved out of a time of trouble” (Jer. 30:7), in which an antitypical Haman (the Gogue of Ezekiel 38) will try to repeat his wicked intentions, only to learn that God “for His Name’s sake” (Ezek. 36:22) will curse him that curseth them.

The Book of Esther is a wonderful reminder that God is ever present to help, even though there appears for the moment no tangible evidence of His presence. Let us never lose our faith in Him, for ultimate deliverance is sure (Isa. 54:17).

### THE FEAST OF PURIM

Other festivals, such as those set forth in the law of Moses, were ordained by divine authority, but this one was by the authority of Mordecai and Esther. Yet its commemoration was undoubtedly sanctioned by God whose merciful interposition it records. The observance consists of a preliminary fast, of a sacred assembly in the synagogue when the *Megillah* (or Roll) of the Book of Esther is unfolded and solemnly read aloud; and of a repast at home, followed by rejoicing and the sending of presents. It is:

A REMINDER OF AN ERA OF CAPTIVITY — Commemorating the exile of Israel, a token of their sin and God’s displeasure, yet showing they had not been neglected nor forsaken, but in His mercy spared and recalled to the Land of Promise.

A MEMORIAL OF THE ENEMIES AND FRIENDS OF THE NATION — When Haman’s name is mentioned during the festival, the synagogue is filled with the noise of stamping and rattling, with shouts of “Cursed be Haman! May his name perish!” On the other hand, the names of Esther and Mordecai are greeted with gratitude and warmth.

A COMMEMORATION OF DIVINE DELIVERANCE — *Purim* signifies “lots” (Est. 3:7). It illustrates the truth of Proverbs 16:33, “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of Yahweh.” It points to divine grace which was shown to Jewry, and is a token of that extended to all mankind, which in Christ Jesus is “mighty to save.”

A FORESHADOWING OF THE DIVINE PURPOSE — It recalls the Jewish exile, and shows that God is present to save though no open manifestation of His power is seen. It shows that God not only can, but will deliver His people and calls upon the

godly to rejoice in anticipation of this fact, seeing in the past the shape of the future. It is of great significance that this new *Feast of Deliverance and Rejoicing* was established by a man who was not of the priestly order. In this it is like the Memorials established by Christ. It sets forth the divine drama of the ages demonstrating the ultimate victory of truth over error, the triumph of the purpose of God over the schemes of men, the establishment of righteousness over the seed of the serpent. All this is seen in the fast and feast of Purim celebrated against the background of the events recorded in Esther.

IT ILLUSTRATES THE GRACIOUSNESS OF YAHWEH — It shows that from the shadows Yahweh provides for the care of His people, and underlines such principles as are stated in the Psalms: "For His anger endureth but a moment; in His favor is life! weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psa. 30:5). "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy" (Psa. 126:5). And in the Prophets: "The ransomed of Yahweh shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isa. 35:10). "Hear the word of Yahweh, ye that tremble at His word... He shall appear to your joy, and they (thine enemies) shall be ashamed" (Isa. 66:5). And finally: "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of Yahweh, and their righteousness is of Me, saith Yahweh" (Isa. 54:17).





## **Character Sketch**

### **MORDECAI: MAN OF COURAGE, KINDNESS, FAITH AND PATIENCE**

From a state of servitude, Mordecai was elevated to a position where he executed supreme power. He became great in the earth, so that he was "next unto the king" (Esther 10:3). He knew how to be abased, and how to abound. He was patient when patience was necessary, but moved with lightning quickness when the turn of events warranted it. He was kind and tender to his beautiful young cousin, but unyielding in his demands upon her when the cause of his people was endangered. He was submissive to the decrees of the nation, but boldly defiant of Haman even at risk of his life. He had courage, kindness, faith and patience. He was:

**KIND AND GENEROUS** — When Esther lost her parents, his heart and home were opened to her (Est. 2:7). His affection was doubtless governed by his belief, for the Law demanded that he should do what he did for the helpless and destitute girl whom Providence brought under his care, but his love and help were extended without stint. Nor did they cease when she was wedded to the king. Mordecai still overlooked her care, and sought her good (Est. 2:11).

**DETERMINED AND RESOLUTE** — Kind and loving as he was, in time of danger he insisted that she risk her life for her people. He was inexorable as to that. As much as he loved his young cousin, he recognised that the cause was greater than self-preservation; the nation greater than the individual. Nor would he bow before Haman, though in so doing he might have secured escape from the danger. A principle was at stake, and therefore what was expedient for personal safety did not enter his considerations.

**FAITHFUL** — He saw a Divine Providence in his life, and had implicit faith in the destiny of his people (Est. 4:14). Why then, had he not returned back to the land with Zerubbabel? Probably his appointment at the palace prevented it, for special permission would have been required for one possessing such an honored position as he to leave. Why did he instruct Esther not to reveal her true identity? Because he wondered what was the purpose of Providence in the sudden elevation of his young foster-daughter. A selfish, faithless man would have revealed the close relationship that he had to the favored queen, and obtained some advancement of

position therefrom, but Mordecai had the faith and patience to await the purpose that God had in such a move.

**PATIENT** — This is one of the most difficult of all virtues to develop. We so often like to take matters into our own hands; we lack the faith to **WAIT** for God to move; we fret against delay.

Mordecai was not only faithful, but patient. He awaited events to reveal the meaning of Esther's elevation to power, and was quick to recognise their significance at the right time (Est. 4:14). Thus he sought for a Divine Providence in the events of his life, and was God-guided in his actions. He learned the lesson of waiting for God to reveal Himself, to move out of the shadows at His own time to manifest His Power.

Mordecai's final elevation to power found him occupying a position far higher than that of Haman. For he was not only "next to the king" (Est. 10), ruling with royal honors throughout the earth, but acting as priest as well. He instituted the *Feast of Purim*, and was obeyed as a priest by the people in the establishment of this religious exercise.

So the final picture presented of Mordecai is that of a king-priest ruling over a mighty world empire, to which peace has come. It is the picture of Christ in the millennium. From out of humiliation and trouble, Mordecai thus rose to grandeur and great glory.

## The Promised Restoration — The Time is at Hand!



*"In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of Yahweh by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, Yahweh God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build Him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of Yahweh God of Israel (he is the God), which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:1-3).*

