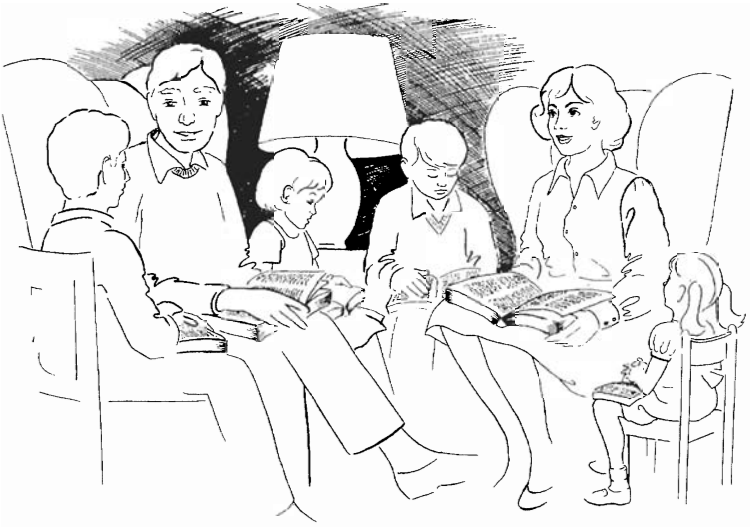

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The Story of the Bible

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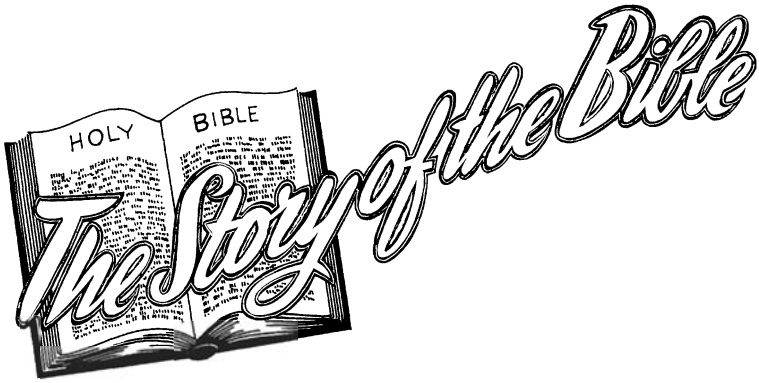
The Story of the Bible



A detailed exposition of the Bible discussed within the family circle.



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 of the greatest Book in all the world.



Israel's Golden Opportunity

THIS third volume of our *Story of the Bible* introduces us to the golden age of Israel's history; to the time when the kingdom was ruled by David and Solomon to the admiration of other nations. Unfortunately for Israel (though not for Gentiles — see Rom. 11:12-23) it did not retain this glory, but, turning aside from the way of Yahweh, it experienced distress. The previously united kingdom was divided, and because of constant alternating periods of apostasy, the record is one of sunshine and cloud, of victory and defeat, of faithful obedience and ungrateful wickedness.

National sin brought national disgrace and sadness. This erupted into civil war and ultimately captivity. The original glory was obscured in the smoke of destruction: Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed, and Israel taken captive by the Gentiles.

Nevertheless there were many men and women of outstanding faith during that period whose names are recorded in the Book of Life; and many incidents of great importance and outstanding interest. These all have a message for us. The apostle Paul wrote:

"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation (*trial*) taken you but such as is common to man, but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1Cor. 10:11-13).

Let us search out these examples and incidents that we may avoid the mistakes of some and emulate the faithful obedience of others. By so doing we will enjoy the commendation of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming, and enter a kingdom that will far exceed that of the past in majesty, glory, extent and duration.

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

— G. E. Mansfield, Editor.

We are introduced to David in the First Book of Samuel and are told of his early life in Bethlehem, then of his wanderings in the wilderness; but the account of his reign over Israel is recorded in the Second Book of Samuel; and is also given in the first Book of Chronicles.

Originally, the two books of Samuel formed one book. It is generally believed that the prophet Samuel wrote the first twenty-four chapters of the First Book that bears his name, and that the rest of the book, and the Second Book of Samuel was the work of the prophets Nathan and Gad (1 Chronicles 29:29-30).

The Second Book of Samuel tells the story of David's reign and covers a period of forty years, commencing when David began to reign at the age of thirty (2 Samuel 5:4). It can be divided into two parts: the first (covering chapters 1 to 12) recording his triumph as he came to the kingdom; firstly in Hebron over Judah (chapters 1 to 4), and then in Jerusalem over all Israel (chapters 5 to 12). The second portion (covering chapters 13 to 24) outlines his troubles. This, too, is divided into two parts, for chapters 13 to 18 record his family disgrace, whilst chapters 19 to 24 provide a record of Israel's national problems.

The theme of the book, therefore, shows how sin turns Triumph into Tribulation.

Why should the Bible record the reign of David in such detail? There are two main reasons. Firstly: he was the real founder of the monarchy, the great hero of the nation, the legislator, spiritual leader and poet of his people, the organiser of its Temple worship, and, above all, the one to whom Yahweh gave the third great covenant of promise. Secondly: his kingdom typed that which the Lord Jesus shall establish, for he shall build again the tabernacle of David "as in the days of old" (Amos 9:11). No wonder, therefore, that the description of his life and government occupies so large a place in the divine record. By tracing these things carefully, we can see the shadow of things to come when the Lord Jesus shall reign on earth upon the throne of David (Luke 1:32-33).

Chapter One

DAVID COMMENCES HIS REIGN

"I have a question to ask you," said Peter to his father as the family gathered in the book-lined room Mr. Phillips likes to call "his library", to consider the portion of the Bible set down for the day.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Phillips.

"Why should the Bible contain two records of David's life?"

"Does it do that?" asked Ann.

"Yes, it is recorded in the books of Samuel and also in the book of Chronicles," said Mr. Phillips.

"That is right,"said Peter. "Why should it do so?"

"One reason is given in Genesis 41:32," replied his father. "There we learn that Yahweh doubles a thing because of its importance. The life of David is important, and is therefore doubled in Scripture."

"That is a good wriggle out of a hard question," said Peter, with a grin. "But your answer is not good enough. If we accept what you say, then we would have to admit that the life of David was more important than that of Abraham or Moses, for they are not given twice!"

"That's true," agreed Ann. "What do you make of that, Daddy?"

"The life of David was more important than that of Abraham or of Moses to those for whom the books of Chronicles were first written," said Mr. Phillips with a smile.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Peter.

"The books of Chronicles were written after the Jews had returned from exile in Babylon," explained Mr. Phillips. "It is thought that Ezra was the author, and as we shall learn when we come to study his life, he led a group of people back from banishment in Babylon to the land of Israel. They returned to rebuild the State and set up again the true worship of Yahweh. Therefore it was very important to carefully link the regathering of the Jews that took place at that time with the history of the nation that had already occurred. The gap between the time they had been taken captive from the land of Israel, to when they had returned, had to be bridged, and the books of Chronicles do that".

"You are not very clear," complained Peter. "Why couldn't the returning Jews just read the books of Samuel? That would have linked them with their past history!"

"Peter's getting very difficult, Daddy, isn't he?" remarked Ann.

"No," replied Mr. Phillips. "I like you to question me, and if I do not explain any matter clearly, do not hesitate to continue to ask questions. You will not learn otherwise."

"Well, I have asked a question, and want a reply," said Peter, somewhat cheekily.

"The books of Samuel and Kings record the history of Israel from the standpoint of the Throne of David", explained Mr. Phillips. "As we read these books, we travel over a bridge that takes us from anarchy in the days of Samuel to the monarchy that was established when the kingdom was set up. However, when the Jews returned from Babylon, the throne of David was not re-established, but only the Temple worship. The importance of that worship had to be stressed and the Books of Chronicles do that. They repeat the history recorded in Samuel and Kings, but from the standpoint of the Temple worship. They provide the priestly outlook on history. The returning Jews were able to see that true worship brought national success and happiness. It encouraged them to establish their worship in the right way."

"Can you prove that?" asked Graeham, with a frown on his face as he pondered his father's statement.

"Yes," replied his father. "For example, the Books of Kings occupy three chapters in describing the secular events of Hezekiah's reign (chapters 18,19,20), but give only three verses to his religious reformation (2 Kings 18:4-6), whereas in Chronicles, three chapters are given to the reformation (2 Chron. 29,30,31), and only one chapter to secular events (Ch. 32). Chronicles gives events related to the Temple in great detail. We learn about its preservation, restoration, purpose of worship and so forth, and they emphasise how neglect of those things brought judgment on the nation. These accounts, therefore, acted as warnings to the returning Jews. They taught how vitally important it was to strive to do Yahweh's will rather than satisfy their own wants".

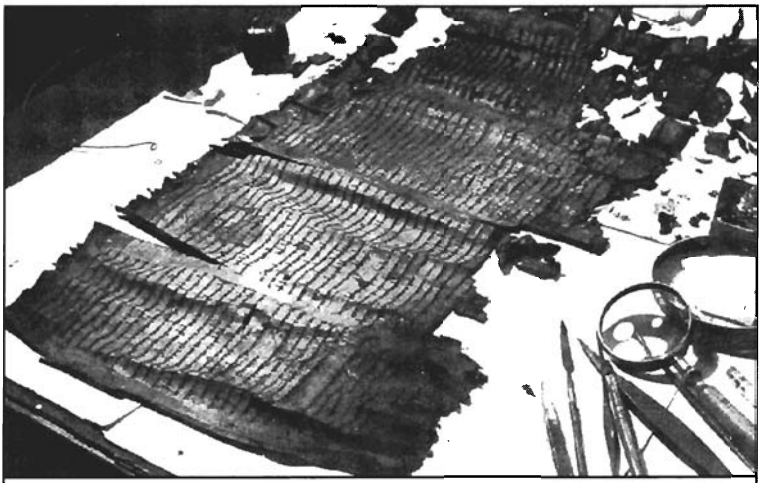
"Much of the books of Chronicles seem a waste to me!" said Peter, bluntly.

"No part of Scripture is a waste," answered Mr. Phillips.

"Well, take the early chapters of Chronicles", responded Peter, "what is the value of all these long genealogies?"

"They were most valuable to the people for whom they were recorded," answered Mr. Phillips. "Remember that Yahweh had promised that the Messiah would come through David, but in the year B.C. 610 Judah was taken into captivity by the Babylonians, and that included the family of David as well. There they remained for 70 years. The throne was overturned, families were uprooted, records were lost, the Temple was in ruins, and it seemed as though Israel's hopes were at an end. But the promises of Yahweh remained. He had declared that Messiah would come through the line of David (2Samuel 7), but had the family of David come to an end in the period of the exile? No, and the genealogies that trace the seed royal to the days of Ezra proved it. They give the sacred line through which the promises of God were kept alive for nearly 3,500 years. In reading them, faithful Israelites would realise that Yahweh had preserved His Word in spite of all the chaos and disruption that had taken place in

man's history. For, notwithstanding all the troubles that had fallen on Israel, the line of David was still preserved, and faithful Israelites saw in this the guarantee that the promise to David would be fulfilled (see Luke 1:32-33). Actually these genealogies are wonderfully interesting. They show how the true seed was preserved even though they were fewer in number, and weaker in power, than their adversaries. They illustrate how the hand of God was guiding the destinies of men and nations according to His plan. You should never denigrate any part of the Bible. Every word has a purpose, for the apostle Paul declared: 'all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable...' (2Tim. 3:16)". With these comments Mr. Phillips concluded his family discussions.



The ancient texts of the Bible were originally preserved on animal skins. Some recently discovered at Qumran are carefully pieced together and confirm the accuracy of our Bible, notwithstanding the many years which have elapsed since the record of David's life was first written.

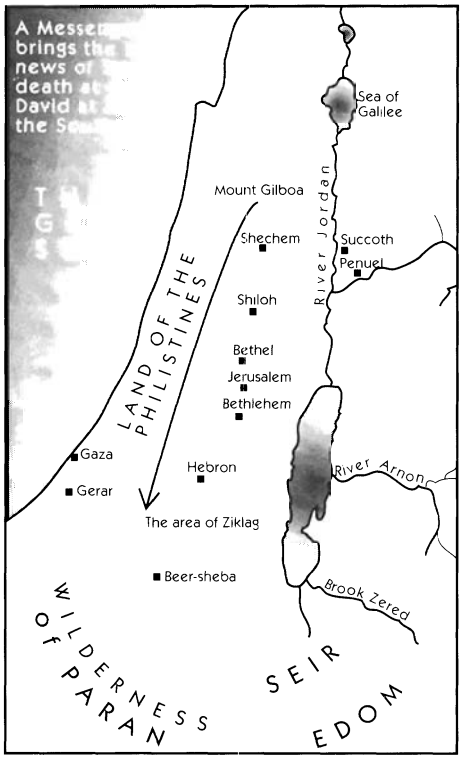
David Learns of Saul's Death (2Sam. 1)

We left David among the ruins of Ziklag, fresh from his victory against the Amalekites, having recovered the spoil they had stolen from him. He knew nothing of the defeat of Saul on Mt. Gilboa, and doubtless wondered at the outcome of the battle, and what his next move should be.

Suddenly the camp was thrown into a state of great excitement. A refugee from Saul's army had arrived, and demanded to see David.

He showed evidence of great distress. His clothes were torn; he had heaped dust upon his head as a symbol of his grief, to imply that the tragic news he had to tell had humbled him to the ground.

He was brought before David. As soon as he came into his pres-



ence, he bowed to the ground in respect, as unto a great king, and then told the sad news of Israel's defeat, and the death of Saul and Jonathan.

David was shocked at the tragedy. Though he had suffered much from the hands of Saul, he respected him as Yahweh's anointed; whilst, for Jonathan, he had a very deep love.

"How do you know they are dead?" David enquired.

"I was on Mount Gilboa during the battle," the young man replied, "and I saw Saul badly wounded and hard-pressed by the Philistines. The king also saw me, and asked me to kill him. He told me that he was on the point of death; 'a great giddiness is upon me,' he said (v. 9, R.V. and Sept.), 'and escape is impossible'. I could see that this was so. I therefore slew him, and taking the crown from off his head, and the bracelet from off his arm, I have brought them to you".

David was distressed. His mind reverted to the pleasant times he had once enjoyed in the company of these men, and his heart overflowed with love for his friend Jonathan. He tore his clothes in grief and mourning. As he pondered the tragic death of his friend, he was filled with anger at this young man who had dared to slay Yahweh's anointed King under any circumstances, and who would then rush to tell him as though he would rejoice at Saul's death. For David had, on a number of occasions previously when he had opportunity, refused to lift his hand to take Saul's life (1Sam. 24:6,10; 26:11,16,23).

The young man was a foreigner, and David was curious to know his nationality.

"I am an Amalekite", was the answer.

This added to David's anger. The Amalekites were known for their unceasing enmity towards Israel, and Yahweh had decreed their

extinction (see Deut. 25:19). Moreover it had been Amalekites who had attacked Ziklag, and upon whom David had recently exacted revenge. Possibly David did not pause to consider that it was very significant that an Amalekite should have taken the crown from off the head of Saul; but significant it was, because it was Saul's failure to destroy all the Amalekites that had lost for him the throne of Israel. He had kept Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and this had aroused God's anger and resulted in Saul's rejection by Yahweh as king (1Sam. 15:26).



But, in fact, the young man had lied to David, for the true account of what happened on Mount Gilboa is given in 1Samuel 31; but, of course, David did not know that. He only knew that a heathen had slain Israel's king and Yahweh's anointed, and such an action was deserving of death (Psa. 105:15; 2Sam. 4:10). In addition, David was insulted that an Amalekite should believe that he, David, would rejoice in such a tragedy in Israel. His own example was evidence of his consistent attitude. Even under extreme trial, knowing that Saul had desired to kill him, David had refused to lift up his hand against him when the king was in his power (1Sam. 24:6; 26:9). But this heathen had not hesitated to kill Saul, and had eagerly rushed to David, glorying in his action as though it were a triumph, expecting that he, too, would rejoice!

As David pondered this, his anger increased.

"Why were you not afraid to touch Yahweh's anointed?" he asked ominously. "You have committed a crime which can only be paid in blood. Your own mouth has pronounced your own doom!"

He commanded that the Amalekite be slain, and one of David's army carried out the terrible sentence.

David Mourns The Death of his Friend

The death of Jonathan was a sad blow to David. He had been a true friend to him in need; and now his voice was silenced, at least, until the resurrection. Like many of his tribe (1Chron. 8:40; 12:2; 2 Chron. 14:8), Jonathan had been particularly noted for his skill in the use of the bow — but now his ability would be displayed no more. He composed a Psalm for the occasion called *The Lamentation of the Bow*, in which he paid a very tender and striking tribute to Saul and Jonathan. It passes over the evil that Saul (when afflicted by the spirit of madness) had done to David, and

The Lamentation of the Bow

(2 Samuel 1:17-27)

Mourning for the defeat at Mt. Gilboa — vv. 19-21

The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places:
How are the mighty fallen!
Tell it not in Gath!
Publish it not in the streets of Askelon!
Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,
Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.
Ye mountains of Gilboa,
Let neither dew nor rain upon you be,
nor fields of offerings;
For there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away,
The shield of Saul as of one not anointed with oil!

Mourning the Two Fallen Leaders — vv. 22-23

From the blood of the slain,
From the fat of the mighty,
The bow of Jonathan turned not back,
And the sword of Saul returned not empty.
Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives,
And in their death they were not divided.
They were swifter than eagles,
They were stronger than lions.

The Enriched of Saul are Called to Mourn — vv. 24-25

Ye daughters of Israel! weep over Saul,
Who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights.
Who put ornaments of gold upon your apparel.
How are the mighty fallen in the midst of battle!

David's Personal Mourning for Jonathan — vv. 26-27

O Jonathan! thou wast slain in thine high places!
I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan!
Very pleasant hast thou been unto me;
Thy love to me was wonderful,
Passing the love of women.
How are the mighty fallen! and the weapons of war perished!

reverts to the earlier, happier days, when all Israel applauded the young, handsome and courageous king. It records David's reverence for Saul's position as Yahweh's anointed, of his tender affection for the selfless Jonathan, of his admiration for their bravery and skill in war.

As David's recollections hurry from point to point in the Psalm, his sorrow finds full expression. He commanded the children of Judah (the only tribe over which he then had commenced to reign) to learn the *Lamentation* in remembrance of Saul and Jonathan, and it was recorded in the *Book of Jasher* (the Upright), in which outstanding incidents in Israel's history were set down (see Josh. 10:13; Num. 21:14).*

King In Hebron (2 Sam. 2) With the death of Saul, all seemed ready for David to assume his royal position and authority as king. This had been promised him, and he had been anointed for it. However, David's experiences had taught him the lesson to which he gives expression in Psalm 37:5: "Commit your ways unto Yahweh; trust also in Him, and He will bring it to pass". In contrast to Saul, who had so often taken matters into his own hand, and had failed, he first sought counsel of Yahweh seeking guidance as to what he should do.

He was told to gather the leaders of the tribe of Judah, and set up his capital in Hebron.

Hebron was a most important town. Even its name is significant, for it means *Union;* and David desired to *unify* all the tribes into one great nation, so that instead of division and civil war, Israel should be united under one head.

He removed his headquarters from Ziklag to Hebron, about twenty miles (32 kms) south of Jerusalem. It is a lovely place, situated in one of the richest parts of the country, the uplands of which abounded in springs of water, and was famed for fruits, herbage, honey, vines, olives and grain. Hebron is one of the oldest cities of the world, being mentioned before Damascus (Genesis 13:18; Numbers 13:22). It is situated in a valley surrounded by hills, and yet it is in the elevated part of Judah, about two thousand eight hundred feet above sea level. It is in the valley from whence Abraham set out to rescue Lot (Gen. 14), and where later a sepulchre was obtained for the burial of Sarah; in which Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were also laid to rest. In nearby Eshcol, in the days of Moses, the spies cut the grapes they took back

* 2Samuel 1:18 reads: "He (David) bade them teach the children of Judah the use of the bow: behold it is written in the book of Jasher". The words "the use of" are in italics, indicating that comparable words do not appear in the original. They should be omitted here. What David taught his tribe was not the "use of the bow", but the Psalm of Mourning, or Lamentation called *Kesheth* or "The Bow". The Psalm was called *The Bow* because Saul and Jonathan were particularly noted for their skill in the use of that weapon.

to Israel to demonstrate the fertility of the Land of Promise (Numbers 13:22-23). Later, under Joshua, a section of this land was given to Caleb (one of the two faithful spies — Josh. 14:1-5; 15:3; 20:7). Finally, it was made a City of Refuge.

Therefore, historically and strategically, Hebron was a most important city in Judah, and well suited to be David's capital, at least for a time.

The leaders of Judah were pleased at the approach of David. They willingly anointed him as their king, and proclaimed their readiness to submit to him as his subjects. This was both important and significant. It was important, for it constituted the first step to David becoming king over all the nation; and it was significant for it typed the acceptance of Jesus Christ as king by the nation of Israel at his return. It will be the Jews already settled in the land (given the title of Judah in the prophecies — e.g., Zech. 8:13,15; 9:13; 10:3) who will first accept the Lord Jesus as King. The prophet Zechariah declares: "He shall save the tents of Judah first" (Zechariah 12:7). The people's acceptance of David as King in Hebron (*Union* or *Fellowship*) typically foreshadowed the future action of the Lord Jesus Christ as Messiah first over Judah. After this those Jews dispersed outside the land, prophetically styled "Israel", will be brought back under the guidance of Elijah (Mal. 4:5).

Both David and Solomon foreshadowed the Lord Jesus Christ, so that the combined incidents of those times are parabolic of the future. As David finally united the divided nation into one monarchy, so also will the Lord Jesus at his return (see Ezekiel 37:22); and as Solomon became a Prince of Peace, so also will the Lord Jesus (Isaiah 9:6).



Hebron: From where David ruled as King of Judah for seven and a half years before moving north to Jerusalem.

However, a type must not be confused with the reality: it is only a shadow or outline of the substance. The Lord Jesus is the substance, and these other imperfect men, who made mistakes, are but shadows, rough outlines of the true shape and detail of the coming glory.

Bible types are like that. It must not be imagined that because a man typifies the Lord, his every action is justified, for otherwise the shadow would become the substance! When we look at a shadow on the ground, we do not see the complete shape and detail of the object which casts the shadow, any more than we see in David, or in Solomon, or in the other characters of the Old Testament that typify the Lord Jesus, the glory of character, personality, and dignity that is revealed in him.

Civil War in Israel

David's object was now to unite the nation as one, and he sought the means of doing this. He recalled the courageous loyalty of the men of Jabesh-Gilead in the north, just east of the Jordan, who had rescued the bodies of Saul and Jonathan from the Philistines. He sent ambassadors to them commending them for their action, and offering to reward them for their deeds.

But his offer was not accepted. These men looked upon Saul as a hero, and did not take kindly to David, his enemy, becoming king. Instead, they welcomed Abner, the captain of Saul's army, who had brought with him Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, and set him up as king in Mahanaim, on the east of the Jordan.

Almost all Israel followed Ishbosheth at the time, and only Judah was with David. So now there were two kings in Israel, and two hostile armies, and the people trembled as to the outcome of this rivalry.

The Terrible Battle of Gibeon (2 Sam. 2:12-32)

Abner, in command of the army of the northern kingdom, led his forces towards Judah, and was met on the border with a similar force from Judah. The place was about five miles to the northwest of Jerusalem, where the important Pass of Bethhoron commences. This Pass commands the road south to Jerusalem, west to the valley of Aijalon, north of the territory of Benjamin. Each of the commanders knew that whatever army gained the Pass would have achieved a great advantage over his opponent.

Abner, at the head of the army, arrived at Gibeon, a town that dominated the Pass, only to find Joab, the nephew of David, also taking up his position there at the head of his army.

This meant war.

Gibeon is situated on a hill. Close to it, in a shallow valley, there is a fine fountain of water which flows into an underground reservoir, not far from which is an open reservoir that takes the overflow, called

"the pool" (v. 13).

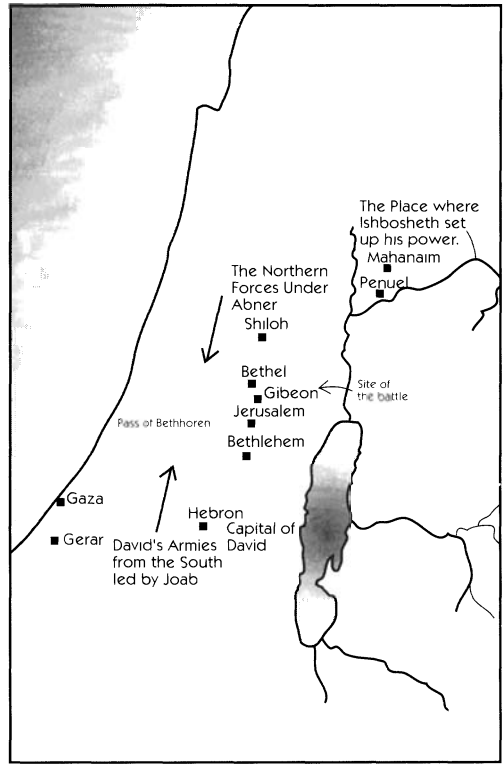
The two armies gathered on each side of this pool awaiting the signal to attack.

But first Abner dared Joab to select twelve champions to battle with twelve of his men.

Joab agreed.

Twelve young men of the forces of Abner, representing the twelve tribes of Israel, arose as champions of his army. Instantly, twelve of Joab's men did likewise. Grimly they advanced on each other, determined to fight to the finish. Each took hold of the head of his opponent, and wrestling with him, thrust his sword into his side, so that the whole twenty-four fell down together.

The waiting armies, looking on, well understood the grim significance of this battle. It symbolised to them what could happen through civil war. The nation could destroy itself. Its men could be "consumed one of another" (Gal. 5:15). Abner and Joab were both completely ruthless, and did not hesitate to send these young men to their death in a hopeless and terrible "play" (as they called it). The intentions of both were to strike fear into the hearts of their opponents by their determination to win at all costs. But neither succeeded. Each plunged his sword into his adversary, so that twenty-four brave men were killed by this senseless and wanton slaughter. It displayed the ruthlessness of both Joab and Abner. The fact that Joab was for David did not justify his violence. To be "for" a worthy cause does not necessarily mean one is worthy himself. A person's motives can be completely evil, even though he fights for a cause that is just.



They called the place of this skirmish *Helkath-hazzarim*, which means, "The Inheritance of the Mighty". And, indeed, the inheritance of those who are mighty in the deeds of the flesh, is a place among the dead!

The slaughter of these twenty-four champions was the signal for war. The two armies advanced on each other, and soon the pool of Gibeon was stained with blood. Fiercely the battle raged, but Abner's men were no match for those of David. Gradually they were driven back, and, as Joab pressed the attack, were soon in full retreat. They fled down the narrow, rocky pass that led to the shelter of the Jordan below. Among their number was Abner himself.

He was pursued by Asahel, brother of Joab, and nephew of David. Asahel was well-known for his valour in war and his fleetness in running. Swiftly he chased the fleeing and more experienced Abner and soon out-distanced his own men. He was now in a dangerous position. He was no match in battle for the experienced Abner, but on the other hand, Abner did not want to attack him, for he knew it would incur the bitter hostility of Joab, and perhaps David.

"Turn aside and chase someone else," he shouted to the young soldier, "I do not want to smite you to the ground".

But Asahel took no heed. Perhaps he thought Abner was afraid of him, and he was confident in his own ability. He continued to gain on



The Pass of Beth-horon

Abner, who now had no alternative but to fight. Abner was probably using the butt end of his spear to ward off Asahel. But this was also sharpened so that it could be stuck in the ground at night (compare 1Sam. 26:7). And now "with the hinder end of his spear," he drove it into the body of the oncoming young man, bringing his promising young life to an end. So died Asahel, a follower for whom David had anticipated great things (2Sam. 23:24).

Abner continued on his way; but meanwhile other soldiers of David's army came to the place where Asahel lay dead. They were struck dumb with grief at the sight of the dead body of their young leader and hero (2Sam. 2:23). Discouraged, they gave up the chase.

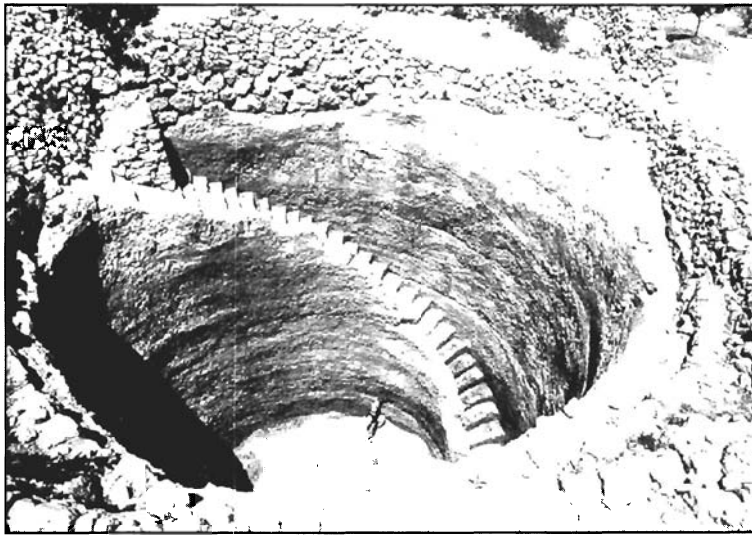
This respite gave Abner opportunity to rally his forces. He gathered his army about him at a hill called Ammah, which provided him some protection, and there he called to Joab for a truce.

"Shall the sword devour for ever?" he said. "If you continue to attack, you will only cause more bitterness in Israel. Call off your men".

Joab replied: "If you had not provoked us to battle this morning, we would not have fought" (v. 27).

David had probably commanded Joab to avoid a battle if possible. He was anxious to win all Israel to his side, and realised that strife would only widen the division between the tribes.

That night Abner retired to his headquarters beyond the Jordan, and Joab returned home to report to David, and, grief-stricken, to bury his brother Asahel. Of David's army, only 20 men had been slain; but of Abner's army, the dead numbered 360 men.



The Pool of Gibeon where Joab and Abner gathered for their terrible battle

Hatred In Israel

David reigned in Hebron seven years and six months (2Sam. 2:11). It was not a happy time for Israel. A state of hostility continued between the house of David and the house of Saul (2Sam. 3:1). But the house of David increased in strength, whilst that of Saul daily grew weaker.

It was not so much a time of constant fighting, as a war of attrition, and a state of continual tension. The armies did not come together in a pitched battle to decide the conflict once for all, but the whole nation experienced conditions of hostile, military antagonism. Little, irritating, mischievous, fretful engagements took place, in which there was no possibility of renown, but only the gradual wearing down of one side against the other.

David had set up his court in Hebron, and was well established as king over Judah. He increased the number of his wives, and to them sons were born. It was obvious that sooner or later he would become king over all Israel. The cause of Abner for the house of Saul was doomed.

Abner Seeks the Throne

On the other side of Jordan, Abner meditated how he might wrest the power from David. He was indispensable to the cause of the house of Saul, but he recognised that Ishbosheth lacked the necessary qualities of true leadership. So long as he remained king, there was little chance of extending his influence.

Abner decided that the best thing to do was to supersede Ishbosheth. But how could that be done? Saul had left a widow by name of Rizpah. If Abner married Rizpah, he would have a claim on the throne equal to that of Ishbosheth.

The plan was a clever one, and might have succeeded; but Ishbosheth heard of it. He openly accused Abner of treachery, and so incited the anger of Abner.

"Am I a dog's head, to be accused of doing such a thing as this?" he angrily asked Ishbosheth. He told him that if he was accused of treachery, he would leave his cause and side with David.

This frightened Ishbosheth. He was a weak man, and but a tool in the hands of Abner. He decided to say nothing more lest he arouse his anger further.

Abner Intrigues With David

Ishbosheth doubtless thought that he had appeased the anger of Abner. Little did he know that Abner was secretly intriguing with David. Abner sent messengers to Hebron suggesting that David enter into a league with him. David agreed to do this on one condition: that his wife Michal, Saul's daughter, should be returned to him. When

David had been driven from the court of Saul, Michal had been given in marriage to another man named Phaltiel. Now David rightly demanded that she be sent back to him.

This was necessary for two reasons. Firstly, Michal was David's wife, and it was not right that the wife of the king should belong to another man. Secondly, reasons of policy demanded this action. He could not leave a princess in the possession of a man who might, in her name, make claims to the throne. The divided state of Israel required that David strengthen his position wherever possible, and this necessitated that Michal return to him.

Abner was told of this, and he agreed to help David recover his wife. A formal demand was made by David to Ishbosheth to return Michal his wife to him, and Ishbosheth (not realising that Abner was secretly betraying him, and frightened by the growing power of David) agreed that this be done.

It was a very distressing thing for Phaltiel who had grown very fond of Michal. He was grieved at having to give her up, and followed her almost to the borders of Judah, heartbroken at his loss.

Meanwhile Abner continued his treachery. He called a meeting of Israel's elders, and reminding them of how they had secretly desired David as their king, and that Yahweh had actually anointed him as such, now he offered to unite them with him.

They agreed to this suggestion. He then called for the elders of Benjamin, many of whom were tired of the civil war in Israel, and made the same suggestion. Again he met with a ready response. They knew only too well, that if Abner deserted the cause of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul would not last long.

Thus armed, Abner went to Hebron to confirm the kingdom to David. He told the king that he would arrange for a meeting of all the principal men of the northern tribes, and that they would enter into a league with him.

Having arranged this, Abner made ready to leave.

But as he did so he met Joab returning with a band of David's soldiers. Joab was surprised to see the hated enemy of David. Hastening in to the king, Joab asked why he had let Abner go in peace. He angrily rejected David's explanation, and roughly retorted that Abner was only a spy, intent upon learning the weakness of Judah's defences, that he might attack Hebron.

The Murder of Abner

But David knew that was not the case. He realised that Abner genuinely desired peace. He was pleased that civil war in Israel was about to cease. He dismissed Joab saying that all would be well.

Angrily Joab made his way from the presence of the king. He bitterly hated Abner, particularly as he recalled the death of his brother Asahel. He remembered the long, angry years of war between the

house of Saul and the house of David. He was determined to have his revenge upon his enemy.

He sent messengers after Abner, requesting him to return to Hebron. Abner, thinking the king desired to speak with him privately, hastened back to the city. He met Joab at the gate. Giving no indication of his hatred for Abner, Joab took him aside, that he might speak to him quietly; and there, whilst Abner was off guard, Joab plunged his sword into his side, murdering him.

David was shocked at the terrible crime. "I and my kingdom are guiltless before Yahweh of this murder," he declared, "and Joab shall be punished by God for his sin".*

It was a foolish thing for Joab to have done. It threatened to undo all the work of David, and re-open once again the state of tension and civil war that had troubled Israel for so long. David feared that when the followers of Saul heard of this murder, they would lose any confidence in him, and so the breach would be widened. He therefore commanded Joab, and all those with him, to put on mourning, and to publicly attend the funeral of Abner. David arranged a state funeral for Abner at Hebron, for to be buried in the city of the king was considered a high honour (2 Chron. 24:16). At the graveside, David made great lamentation over Abner. "Abner; you died as a fool dies," he declared at the grave, "Your hands were not bound, nor your feet put into fetters: as a man falleth before wicked men, so you fell!"

The king fasted all that day, saying: "A prince and a powerful leader" has fallen this day in Israel. My kingdom is weakened through this action of Joab. But Yahweh will repay the doer of evil according to his wickedness".†

The action of the king pleased the people. They saw that he was sincere in his words and actions, and did not approve the vile murder.

David's Lamentation over Abner

The king declared that Abner had died "as a fool dieth". What David meant was that Abner had been completely tricked by Joab. He had died, expecting good from the one who slew him. His hands were not bound, nor his feet fettered (v. 34), so he could have defended himself, and being a man of war and familiar with the guiles and wiles of unscrupulous adversaries, he should have been on his guard. Instead he died as a simpleton.

But the expression was apt for Abner in another sense. In support-

* The A.V. reads: "Let there not fail from the house of Joab one that hath an issue, or that is a leper etc.....". But these same words can be translated, "There shall not fail, etc". David declared that Joab had acted in such merciless fury as to demand some retribution; he had put himself beyond the help of Yahweh, leaving himself open to the possibility of all manner of trouble and disasters which would come on his house.

† See v. 38. The words "great man" in the Hebrew signify a "powerful man", not a great man in the moral sense.

ing the house of Saul, he fought against Yahweh as well as David. He knew, full well, that David had been divinely appointed as king (see his own words in 2Sam. 3:9-10, 17-18), but he believed that he had the skill and influence to retard or advance the decree of heaven (see 2Sam. 3:9). He had done that which David had consistently condemned — lifted up his hand against Yahweh's anointed. A man who does that acts the part of a fool, and Abner brought judgment on his own head.

The public lamentation of David must have galled Joab exceedingly. All Israel heard the king rebuke him as a "Son of Iniquity" (2Samuel 3:34, margin). As Joab stood with other leaders of Israel around the open grave and heard this public rebuke, he must have felt keenly humiliated.

Murder of Ishbosheth (2 Samuel 4)

The death of Abner was a mortal blow to the hopes of the house of Saul. There was nobody capable of strongly leading the tribes against David. Ishbosheth had proved himself incapable, and the only other member of Saul's house was Mephibosheth. He was the infant son of Jonathan, but was lame in both feet through an accident that occurred as his nurse fled with him, when tidings had come of the defeat of Saul on Mt. Gilboa.

But though Ishbosheth (or *Man of Shame*, as his name means) was incapable of strongly leading a political or military force, his very presence prevented the peace in Israel. So long as he lived, party interests were served and friction remained. And people were tiring of this state of discord. They wanted ordered government in Israel, and more and more people, even among Ishbosheth's followers, realised that they could only obtain that from David.

Two of Ishbosheth's captains decided to take the law into their own hands, and rid the nation of his presence. Baanah and Rechab (2 Samuel 4:2) were Beerothites, one of the Gibeonite towns in Benjamin. Some problem resulted in them fleeing from their hometown, and whilst the Bible does not record the circumstances, they perhaps occurred during the lifetime of Saul. He had cruelly persecuted the Gibeonite towns (2 Samuel 21:2), and caused many to flee therefrom. These two captains may have been among the number, and if so, they doubtless would have been antagonistic towards the house of Saul.

They decided to murder Ishbosheth, and rid the country of his presence. They carefully made their plans.

It was the custom to allow soldiers a certain quantity of corn each day with other articles of provision, in addition to their normal pay. Each morning, at dawn, this corn was ground as needed, the captains fetching the wheat for the men under their charge. The storehouse was close to Ishbosheth's palace, and the two captains, having conspired

to murder their leader, now waited for an opportunity to put their plan into effect.

One day they did so. At midday when most people used to take a rest, they made their way to Ishbosheth's room. They expected him to be asleep. To their delight, they found that not only was he asleep, but the attendant at the door was also sleeping (see 2 Samuel 4:6, *Septuagint* version). To them this was a good omen. It gave them access into the bedroom of Ishbosheth where he was sleeping. Quickly they did their terrible deed. Slaying Ishbosheth, they cut off his head, and fled from the house.

Down to Hebron they went, carrying their terrible burden with them, to be ushered into the presence of King David. "Behold," they said to the king, "the head of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, your enemy who sought thy life: Yahweh hath avenged our Lord the king this day of Saul, and of his seed". These men were hypocrites. They mouthed the name of God, but for years they had been helping Ishbosheth against David.

Their wickedness angered David. He had no time for such treachery. They had committed a terrible crime, and he was incensed that they should imagine that he would find pleasure in it. Roughly, he spoke to them: "When one told me, saying, 'Behold, Saul is dead', thinking to have brought me good tidings, I took hold of him, and slew him — that was his reward" he sternly warned these two murderers. "How much more, when wicked men have slain an innocent person in his own house upon his own bed?"

David commanded his men to destroy these two wicked murderers. They cut off their hands and feet to teach all Israel that such wicked ways and deeds, as these men had committed, would not be tolerated; and then they hanged them over against a pool in Hebron. This was a public place, where people went to fetch water, so that all would witness this act of justice. It showed to Israel that David would deal impartially with all. He would not punish the followers of Saul unnecessarily; nor permit revenge to be taken on them. All the tribes could see that they could accept David as King without fear of retribution because they had once followed Saul.

A burial place of honour was appointed Ishbosheth. He, like Abner, was buried in Hebron.

David King Over All

David's actions made a great impression on all Israel. The house of Saul was now completely defeated. There was only one true king — David in Hebron. The northern tribes realised that they must accept him, or else suffer the consequences. The people were tired of the irritating state of friction and war that had existed for so long. They longed for peace, and for an orderly government.

Only one man could give them that.

He was in Hebron, and they had to make their way to him.

A deputation from the northern tribes was sent to the king in Hebron. It represented all the tribes that were once under Saul. They turned to him as one man, as all mankind shall ultimately seek the greater son of David and offer allegiance to him (Psalm 72:17).

They made their plea to David on a threefold basis:

1. He was their kinsman, and therefore qualified to redeem them, for he was "their bone and their flesh".

2. He was experienced and had proven his capability: he had "led out and brought in Israel".

3. He was divinely appointed, and therefore the right was his, for Yahweh had revealed that he should be king.

The language they used was very significant:

"You are he that led out and brought in Israel: and Yahweh said to you, You shall feed my people Israel, and be a captain over Israel" (2 Samuel 5:2).



This was according to the purpose of Yahweh: "He chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds: from following the ewes great with young He brought him to feed Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance" (Psalm 78:70-71).

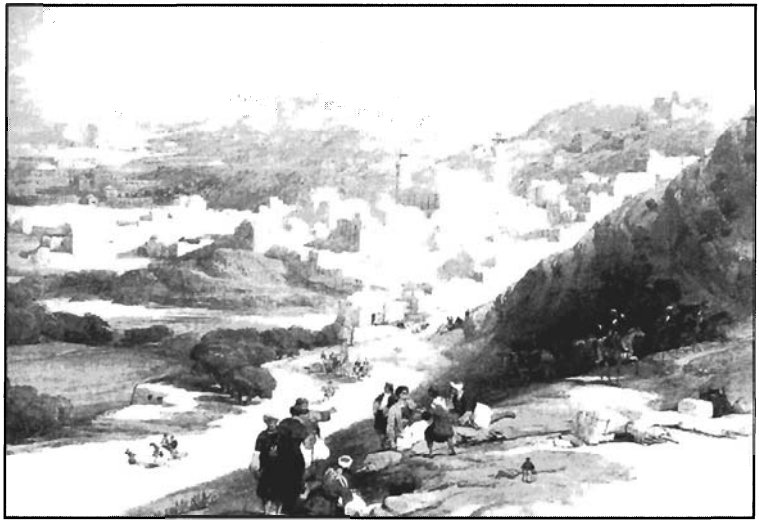
David the shepherd boy now became the shepherd king. The word "feed" in Hebrew is "shepherd", and it was the custom of shepherds in Israel to go before the sheep and lead them to pastures. David's work as a young lad when he had cared for the flock now stood him in good stead as king — it gave him a sense of responsibility and an understanding of what was required. He was as the Lord Jesus, "the good shepherd that cares for the sheep" (John 10). Those qualities are also expected of men and women who aspire to be kings of the

future (Rev. 5:9-10). They must learn to nourish and lead others. The apostle Paul used a similar word in Acts 20:28, exhorting the elders of Ephesus to "feed (*pasture, shepherd*) the ecclesia of God which He hath purchased with His own blood". Peter likewise urged: "feed (*shepherd*) the flock of God which is among you". Thus, to be an "example to the flock" (1Pet. 5:1-3) is to imitate the Good Shepherd, and to develop the attitude that commended David to his God.

The deputation represented all the northern tribes. They brought to David a record of the individual armies they commanded (1Chron. 12:23-40), as well as provisions for a feast (1Chron. 12:40). They then entered into a covenant with King David at Hebron, thus illustrating its name; for there the tribes were all *united*. For three days the representatives of the tribes remained in Hebron feasting with joy before their king.

A similar union will take place when the Lord Jesus returns. He will gather all Israel to him as one nation and they will enter into the bonds of the covenant (Ezek. 20:33-38) accepting him as king. There will be great rejoicing as all Israel responds to the wisdom and strength of the Lord Jesus Christ (Zech. 13:9; Rom. 11:26).

The appointment of David as King in Hebron brought to an end the state of anarchy in Israel that had existed to that time. Seven years had passed since he had been accepted by Judah, his own tribe, and now, at the age of thirty, his sufferings and trials were behind him. Honoured by all men, David was now ready to take up the reins of government.



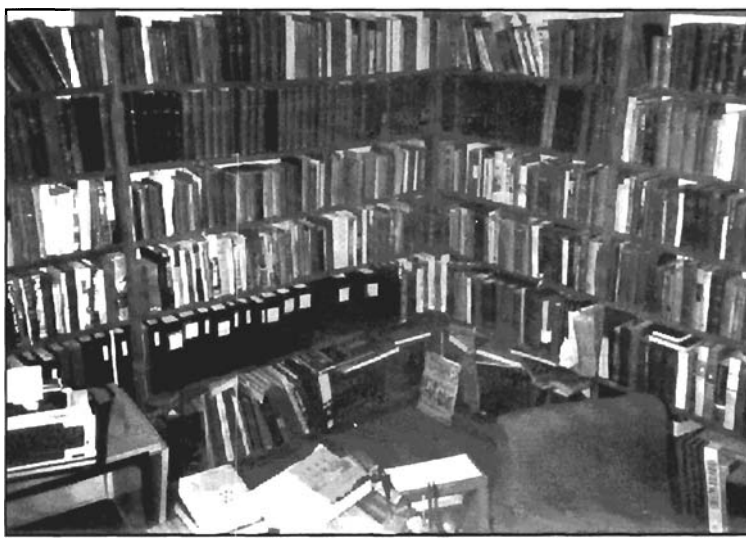
Hebron — where David established his first government. Sketched by David Roberts.

Chapter Two

DAVID'S TRIUMPH

The pride and joy of Mr. Phillips' heart (but the secret despair of his wife) is what he calls "his library". In the room that is put aside for that purpose, books of all kinds crowd the shelves that cover the walls, and sometimes untidily spill over on to the floor, as Mr. Phillips takes them down for reference, and forgets to put them back again. His glass-topped desk is usually cluttered with letters and papers, whilst typewriter, pens and inks present a picture of complete disorder. But somehow Mr. Phillips finds this confusion quite acceptable, and with steady purpose seems to accomplish quite an amount of work. In fact, on those occasions when Mrs. Phillips, in desperation, "tidies" up the room, he does not seem happy until it is back to its original state!

But there is a comfortable, homely atmosphere about this room that the family enjoys. It is there that you will usually find them gathered after the evening meal, to read from the Bible for a while, and discuss what they have read. Many a time, when bleak winter winds have roared from off the ocean that faces their home, the family has been quite untroubled by the noise and tumult outside, finding comfort and pleasure around the fire, discussing the wonderful truths contained in the Bible.



This photograph shows part of Mr. Phillips' study, with the shelves filled with books on Bible subjects. Notice his typewriter on the left, with the usual "disorder" that he found to be quite pleasant.

They were doing this recently. They had read 2Samuel 5, and when they had finished, Mr. Phillips asked the children if they had any questions.

"Yes," answered Graeham, the eldest of the four children. "You have told us many times that King David represents the Lord Jesus, and that his life is typical of Yahweh's purpose with Christ. In what way is this so?"

"If I were to give you all the details showing that David's life foreshadowed that of the Lord Jesus, you would be here until midnight," replied Mr. Phillips. "And then Joan would never get her homework done!"

"Can you just give us an outline then?" asked Graeham.

"That would be a good idea at this stage of our studies," replied his father. "It may be helpful if you write down what I am going to tell you, for this will assist you to understand better why some apparently unimportant incidents are recorded in the Bible. Take your notepads and pencils, and write down the following as I dictate it.

Head your notes —

David As A Type of Christ

1. He was first introduced to the nation when he defeated Goliath, a giant with whom Israel could not cope. *Jesus was introduced to the nation in defeating an even greater enemy than Goliath — See Heb. 2:14.*

2. In defeating Goliath, David made it possible for the Israelites to overthrow the Philistines. *Jesus, by his victory, made it possible for his followers to conquer sin and death.*

3. David was persecuted by the leaders and people of the nation he helped. *The Jewish leaders opposed and finally crucified their Messiah.*

4. David left Israel, to go into a "far country" where Saul could no longer seek him (1Samuel 27:4). There he awaited the time when he would be called to the kingdom. *The Lord Jesus has done likewise (see Luke 19:12).*

5. During his absence, David gathered around him followers who left all to serve him, and who later helped him to rule the kingdom (1Chron. 12:1). *Christ is doing likewise today (Acts 15:14; Rev. 5:9-10).*

6. David returned to Israel at a time of great trouble, when the nation had been invaded and its army defeated (1Samuel 31:1). *Jesus Christ will do likewise (Zechariah 14:3-5).*

7. David first saved his own tribe of Judah (2Samuel 2:1-4). *So*

will Christ (Zechariah 12:7).

8. David united all Israel under one head (2Samuel 5:1). *Christ will do likewise (Ezekiel 37:21-22).*

9. David freed Jerusalem from the enemy (2Samuel 5:6-7). *Christ will challenge and destroy Israel's foes (Joel 3:16; Psalm 110:1, 5-7).*

10. David extended his kingdom into an empire by bringing the surrounding nations into subjection to his rule (2Samuel chps. 8,10). The Lord will also demand dominion over the nations (Psalm 72:11; Isaiah 60:12).

11. David established the true worship in Jerusalem (2Samuel 6). *Christ will banish error and legislate for truth (Isaiah 2:2-4).*

12. David's victories paved the way for the peaceful reign of Solomon, and the Temple that he built. *The Lord will do likewise (Haggai 2:6-9).*

"Those twelve points provide in broad outline, incidents in the life of David that type the ministry of Christ," continued Mr. Phillips. "There are many other little incidents that we will fill in as we go along".

"I don't like to throw a spanner in the works," said Peter, who has a bad habit of sometimes lapsing into slang, "but I have a problem that does not seem to fit in with your idea, Dad!"

"What is it?" asked Mr. Phillips.

"You once told us that 2Samuel was divided into two parts, the first giving the glory of David's reign, and the second (from chapter 12 onwards) setting forth the great troubles that later came on him".

"That is so," agreed Mr. Phillips.

"Well, how do these troubles fit into the life of David as a type of Christ?" asked Peter triumphantly.

"That is true," agreed Graeham. "There is also the matter of David's great sin. Surely that does not fit in with the type of the Lord Jesus!"

"All David's troubles were due to his own folly, as we shall see when we come to consider that part of his life", answered Mr. Phillips. "But even in those unpleasant matters, David still appears as a type of Christ. As you should know, for we have discussed it often enough, the Bible speaks of Christ as an individual and as a community. The individual is the Lord Jesus himself, who did no sin; the community comprises his followers who, unfortunately, are only too conscious of sin. We shall see that, in a very wonderful and beautiful way, David types Christ both individually and multitudinously as the man and as the ecclesia. David sinned, and suffered, but was forgiven, and as such he foreshadowed those 'in Christ,' who similarly

acknowledge their folly and seek forgiveness".*

"That takes some sorting out," remarked Peter, "and I think we will suspend judgment on it for the moment".

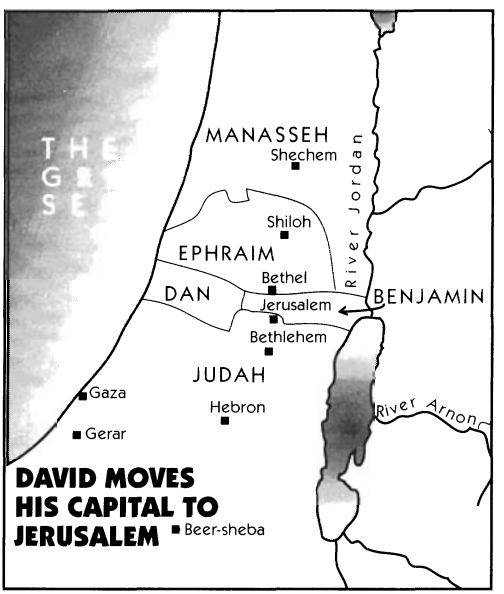
"Peter's language is improving," commented Ann, "he is getting quite classical. But now that he is silenced, perhaps I may be allowed to ask a question? In the chapter we read this evening, we learned how all the tribes came to Hebron in Judah (v. 1) where David had set up his capital, and they asked him to become their king. David agreed, but instead of retaining Hebron as his capital, we read that he chose Jerusalem. Why did he alter the place of his capital?"

"He was undoubtedly guided by Yahweh to do so," replied her father. "In the Law, God had said that He would select one city above all others 'to place His Name there' and to that place all the tribes should gather (Deut. 12:5). In his great song of victory, after the destruction of the hosts of the enemy Egyptians, Moses prophesied of the 'holy habitation' to which the tribes of Israel would be guided, and he described it as the 'mountain of thine inheritance' (Exod. 15:13,17). That place was now shown to be Jerusalem (see also Ezekiel 43:7). It was a wise choice as far as David was concerned".

"Why was that?" asked Ann.

"It was actually on the border of Judah and Benjamin," answered her father. "As there had been warfare between Benjamin and Judah until this time, the choice of Jerusalem as capital naturally helped to heal the breach. Furthermore, it was in a better position, being more central than Hebron".

"I don't suppose the people of Hebron would have been pleased at the change", remarked Graeham.



* In his mortality the Lord Jesus was completely identified with his people, for he bore their sins (Isa. 53:5-6) and was associated by nature with their condition (Heb. 2:14). Thus, the apostle Peter states that Jesus "in his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24). He teaches that it was in his nature that the same sin-prone tendencies were found. But whereas David succumbed to the temptations that arose from his nature, the Lord did not. He successfully challenged, and in his sacrifice, he finally destroyed those tendencies (Heb. 9:12).

"No, I suppose not", replied his father. "In fact, a little later, Hebron became the centre of revolt against David (2Samuel 15:9-10). This may have been encouraged by a feeling of jealousy through David removing the capital from there to Jerusalem".

"Jerusalem means *City of Peace*, I think," said Graeham.

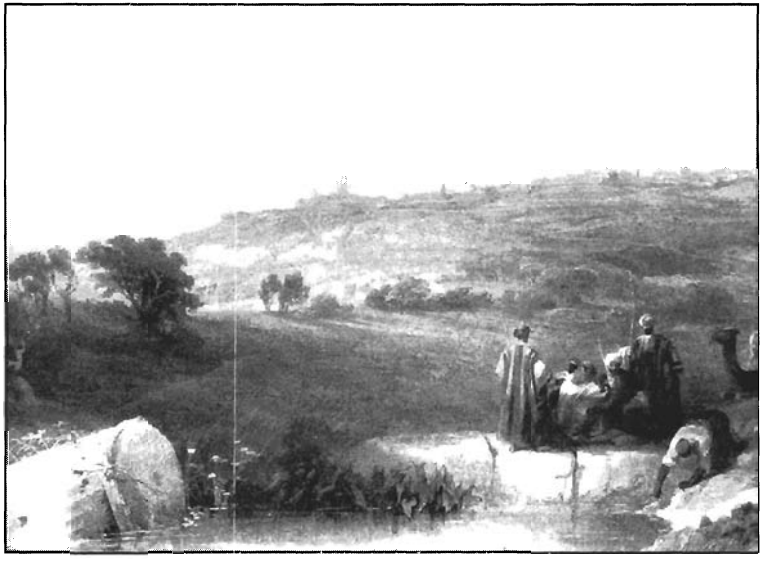
"Some give it as *City of Peace*", said Mr. Phillips, "and others say it means *Vision of Peace* or *Foundation of Peace*. There are many names given to Jerusalem in the Bible, and they are worth noting. Jeremiah says that when the Lord reigns there it will be called *Habitation of Justice*, and *Mountain of Holiness* (Jeremiah 31:23). Zechariah says it will be called, *City of Truth* (Zechariah 8:3). It is also called *Jebus* (1Chronicles 11:4-5), and *Salem* (Psalm 76:2). All these names are significant. Jebus means *Trodden under foot*, Jerusalem means *Foundation or Vision of Peace*, and Salem means *Peace*. In the past, the city has been trodden under foot, but nevertheless, the Foundations of Peace and the Vision of future glory are there. One day, when it becomes the *City of the Great King* (Matthew 5:35), it will find true peace and complete security.

"That is very good, Daddy," said Ann, who was busily taking notes.

"Yes, he is improving!" murmured Peter, to the indignation of his sister.

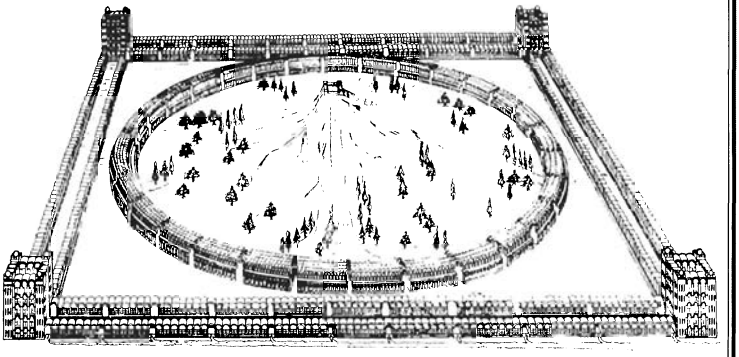
"It is a pity you don't improve a bit, Peter!" said Ann sharply.

"There is another interesting point," said Graeham thoughtfully. "Jerusalem was in the territory of Benjamin, and as Benjamin means



The city of Jerusalem sketched by David Roberts in the 1830's.

Jerusalem:
The Divine Programme



Its humiliation is limited until the time when it will become a city of glory — Luke 21:24 (note "until"); Micah 3:12; 4:1; Isaiah 49:15-16; 62:1,6,7,12.

Its future glory — Psalm 87:3; Isaiah 2:2-4; Jeremiah 3:17; 33:16; Ezekiel 43:7; Zechariah 14:11,16; Matthew 5:35.

Gentiles are to help rebuild her glory — Isa. 60:10.

Yahweh's law shall go forth therefrom — Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:2; Joel 3:16-17; Zech. 14:16.

It will be Christ's capital — Isaiah 24:23; Jeremiah 3:17; Matthew 5:35.

The glory of Yahweh will be manifested there — Psalm 68:16; 132:13-17; Ezekiel 43:1-7.

Jerusalem types Christ's followers (Gal. 4:26). Its history and destiny foreshadows what will happen to them. Like the city, their time of humiliation is limited. Today they are set apart for Yahweh's purpose; in the age to come they will proclaim the "everlasting gospel" to all the world, and manifest the divine glory in nature and status (Romans 5:1-2; 2Peter 1:4; Revelation 3:12).

The Son of My Right Hand, we can say that the 'foundations of peace' are subject to 'the Son of His right hand', the Lord Jesus".

"That is a good point, Graeham," said his father. "And here is another one. In Galatians 4:26, the apostle Paul, addressing Gentile believers, described Jerusalem as 'the mother of us all'. He was not speaking of the literal city, of course, but of the covenant of promise that is associated with Jerusalem, and which we will discuss another night. But his words show that all true believers must become connected with Jerusalem in some way. They must become true 'sons of Jerusalem'. There is a wonderful Psalm that speaks of this. Psalm 87:6 declares, 'Yahweh shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there'."

"What does that mean?"

"The same Psalm shows that some men are accounted sons of Babylon, of Tyre, or of Philistia. They are men of the flesh. But others look to Jerusalem, and the grand hope that is centred in that city, when the Lord Jesus shall reign therefrom over a world at peace (Isa. 24:23). Their hopes are in the glory that shall then be revealed in the earth, and so they are accounted as having 'been born there,' though they may never have seen the literal city. They are true Israelites, and their loyalty is for the things of Zion, that is, for the things of the Lord Jesus. Paul speaks of them as being 'Jews inwardly' (Rom. 2:29) because their heart and mind is constantly set upon the glory that will be seen when the great king appears".

"Jerusalem is a very important place," said Ann thoughtfully.

"There is no more important city in all the world," answered her father. "I had not intended to deal with the subject tonight, but as your questions have taken us to it, and whilst you have your pencils and notebooks out, jot down the following points regarding the city".

"All this has taken us a long way from our chapter tonight", continued Mr. Phillips, "but before we finish our discussion, are there any more questions you want to ask?"

"Yes, Daddy," said Joan. "We read in 2Samuel 5:8 that 'whoever climbed up the gutter to Jerusalem' would be the chief of David's army. That seems a strange thing to say. I can't understand it".

"I will try to explain it to you simply," replied her father. "The same story is also recorded in greater detail in 1Chronicles 11:4-9. When we link the two accounts together, we learn of an incident in the history of Jerusalem and David which we can call "The Great Courage of Joab".

The Bravery of Joab

"Joab was a nephew of David (2Sam. 2:18). He was about the same age as his uncle, who was the youngest of his family. He was a strong, ruthless, ambitious man of great courage, who sought to be

chief of David's army, and had already taken the lead in warfare (cp. 2Sam. 3:23), but had not yet been appointed Commander in Chief. He fervently wanted that position. When David was about to make Abner, the uncle of Saul, Commander of his army, Joab murdered him, giving as excuse that Abner had slain his brother in battle.

"Joab was no coward. In fact, he was a man of great courage, who feared nobody. Perhaps that was his greatest fault, for it seems as though he did not even fear Yahweh.

"Now he saw opportunity to become Commander in Chief of the army. When David was appointed king over all Israel, he commanded that the Jebusites, who then inhabited the upper city of Jerusalem, should surrender to him. But they refused. This upper city was a strongly fortified place, and behind its defences they felt completely safe. It was not only situated upon a high hill which David found almost impossible to storm, but the city itself was protected by huge walls and fortifications. The Jebusites laughed at David's demand to give up the city.

"'The most unskilled soldiers can defend this city!' they boasted. 'Why, if we manned the walls with the blind and the lame, they could prevent David coming here!'

"David heard this, and it made him angry. He knew that the city was easily defended, and that it would require a very determined, fearless man to enter therein. Viewing the fortifications, he saw that there was only one way to gain the city. The people obtained water from a long, underground tunnel that led from a spring-fed, hidden reservoir in the Kedron Valley to a small pool at the foot of the mountain above, upon which the city was built. The passage leading to it was cut in a series of steps that led from under the city to a perpendicular shaft some forty feet deep, up which the water was drawn by some container, as from a well.

"This was the only entrance to the city which David could utilise. It meant that someone would have to clamber up this shaft at risk of life, and guard the opening above so that others could follow. Who was brave enough to lead the way above? David promised a rich reward for whoever succeeded.

"'Whoever is prepared to lead the way into the city, by climbing up through the underground tunnel*, to smite the Jebusites shall be chief and captain,' he declared (2Samuel 5:8; 1Chronicles 11:6).

"Joab accepted the challenge. He was prepared to risk his life to achieve his ambition. He made careful preparations. It seems that

* In 2Sam. 5:8 we read: "Whosoever getteth up to the gutter..." *Tsinnor* (gutter) is translated "waterspouts" in Psa. 42:7, and evidently refers to a subterranean passage cut in the rock below Zion. Archaeologists have discovered such a shaft designed to provide water for the city. It descends from the surface by a series of stairways including a shaft forty feet in depth, up which water was drawn, and which provided a secret supply of water to the city. This deep shaft then turns in a horizontal direction, finally meeting up with the Kedron Valley.

THE founding editor of *Logos*, Mr. H. P. Mansfield, always enjoyed reading Mr. Phillips' explanations of Bible events, and submitted this article concerning the conquest of Jerusalem. *"David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David" (2 Samuel 5:7).*

The Location of the City of David

Most people imagine that the ancient walls of the old city of Jerusalem enclose the City of David, the Mount Zion of the Scriptures. For example, ask an Israeli (even some archaeologists) where Mount Zion is located, and he will point to an elevation within the walls of the city to its southwest.

But he is wrong. The city that David took, to which he gave his name, and which is entitled the *Stronghold of Zion* is outside the walls of the present city, to its southeast, immediately below the Temple area.

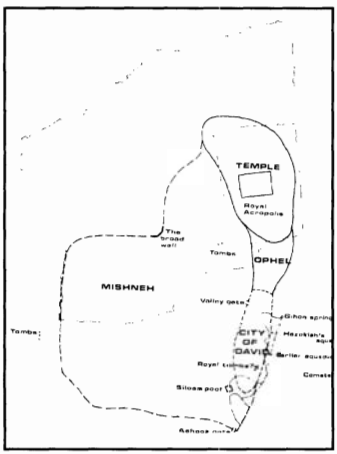
It was there that David, and after him Solomon, built their palaces. In the days of Solomon's glory when the magnificent Temple had been built upon Mount Moriah occupying the site of the present Mosque called the Dome of the Rock, a deep valley separated Mount Zion from the Temple Mount, and this was bridged by Solomon for the purpose of ceremonial entrance into the Temple when the King made his way there for worship.

It was to the City of David, and not the Temple Mount, that David conveyed the Ark, and provided a covering for it, until the Temple was built by Solomon and the Ark taken to its abiding place therein.

Ancient Jebus

For some hundreds of years after the Israelites occupied the land, the Jebusites continued to hold Jerusalem proper, the Stronghold of Zion. In those days, the valleys surrounding this strong point were much deeper and steeper than they are today, and David realised that a frontal attack would not succeed.

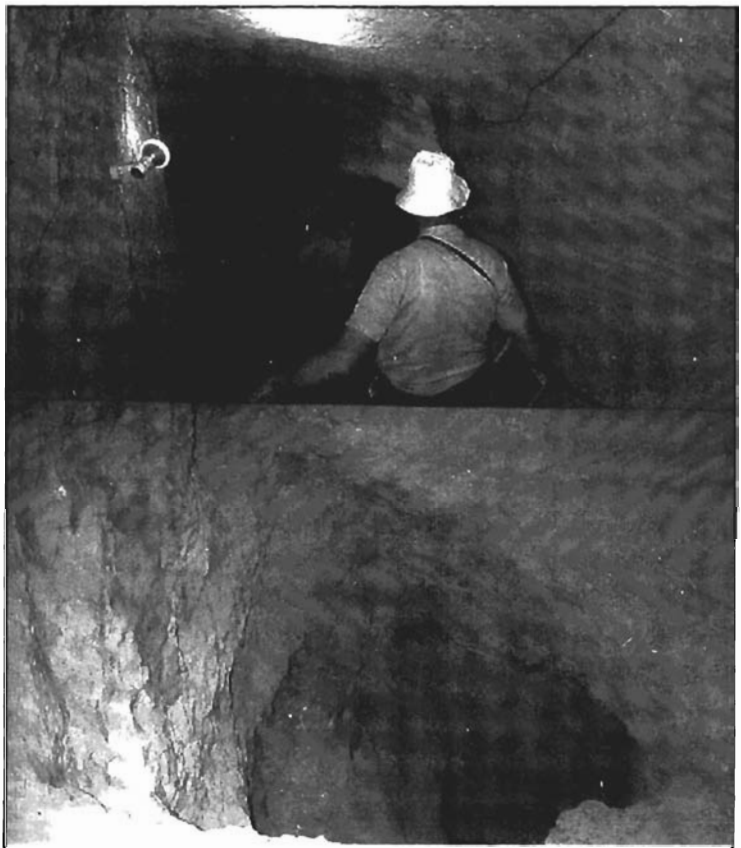
Yet it was an embarrassment and a disgrace that this fort should remain in the hands of the original Canaanites, and David determined to take it. His intentions were ridiculed by the Jebusite defenders. Confident of their strong fortifications, the difficulties of successfully storming such precipitous slopes as led to it, and the centuries of defiant occupation they had



Joab's "gutter" stored water conveyed from the Gihon to the northern sector of Jebus, later renamed the City of David, or Mount Zion. A sloping passage led from the city to the top of the "gutter" Joab must have climbed up the perpendicular well-like construction of the "gutter", then proceeded along the easily defended passage to the city itself. At that time, of course, the tunnel of Hezekiah taking the water from Gihon to Siloam had not been constructed though it is shown in the drawing. Solomon extended the walls of the city to enclose the Pool of Siloam. The taking of Jebus is one of the most important and significant battles recorded in the Bible: for it was used by David as his capital over the united Kingdom. A bridge connected the city with the Temple area in the days of Solomon.

enjoyed therein, they mocked at his intentions. He evidently had made it known that he wanted the city, but they had sent back an insulting message. They offered to man the defences with the blind and the lame, confident that they would be able to repel any attack.

However, there was another way by which the city could be breached. There was an underground secret "tunnel" that conveyed water from the spring Gihon to a kind of a well at the foot of the mount on which was the city Jebus. A vertical shaft allowed that water to be drawn up into the acropolis or city at the top. This shaft, called "the gutter" in 2 Sam. 5:8, is a large round perpendicular cutting about 40 feet or 10.5m high. It gives access to a sloping passage that led into the city, and down which citizens would walk to draw up water by buckets from beneath. If somebody were brave, intrepid and skilful enough to scale that tunnel, he could lead other warriors into the heart of the city and take it. Particularly, if its inhabitants were so confident of their defences that they were not concerned with manning them properly.



Exploring the shafts of Joab's gutter, now opened up as a tourist site. The top illustration shows the horizontal tunnel leading to the vertical shaft (bottom photo) up which Joab made his way.

And, doubtless, David with his main forces below, could provide a diversion to prevent the defenders considering that any such desperate attempt as using the waterchannel to enter the city would be made.

Joab's Bravery

"Water channel" is what the term "gutter" really signifies. The Hebrew is *tsinnor*; and it is rendered "waterspout" in Ps. 42:7. David discussed the strategy of taking the city with some of his leading supporters: "Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, he shall be chief and captain", he promised (2Sam. 5:8). Joab took up the challenge. Whatever we may think of his ruthlessness and lack of spiritual qualities, there is no doubting Joab's warlike ability and outstanding courage. To clamber up the "gutter" made him vulnerable to anybody, man, woman or child, who might at that moment have made their way there for the drawing of water. A stone aimed from above was all that would have been necessary to put him out of action and even terminate his life. But Joab was not one to avoid risks, and he succeeded in his venture to lead the way into the heart of the city.

To do so he had to push his way through the horizontal water channel from Gihon to the foot of the Mount at risk of drowning; then scale the 40 feet perpendicular shaft where a single stone dropped from above would bring certain death; then at the top move along the narrow passage which two or three men might hold against a hundred, and so make his way into the city. This was a desperate expedition but there was no alternative. And Joab did it. Perhaps the wily Joab received help from within the city. We are not told that he did; but there are indications to support the suggestion. Josephus says that Araunah the Jebusite from whom David acquired the site of the future Temple (2Sam. 24:19-25), was not slain by David in the siege because of the goodwill he bore the Hebrews; as well as a particular affinity and affection he had for the King himself. He is later found (2Sam. 24:18) in close proximity to Jerusalem on Mount Moriah and in circumstances of great prosperity. Was that the reward for his assistance to the Israelites on this occasion? We do not know, and it is but a suggestion which may be incorrect.

In any case, the risk still was great, but it was taken by Joab who was

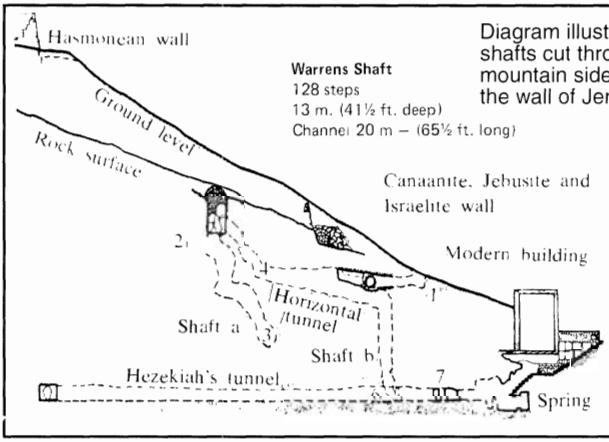


Diagram illustrating the shafts cut through the mountain side under the wall of Jerusalem.

suitably rewarded as a result. And the title of Zion, applied first to this portion of Jerusalem, was used afterwards synonymously for the whole city.

The "Gutter" Today

Most tourists to Jerusalem descend into the Kidron to view the opening of Hezekiah's tunnel close to the Spring of Gihon. It was built to convey the water from Gihon to Siloam at a time when Jerusalem was threatened by Sennacherib. The remains of the ancient Jebusite wall can be seen about 150ft (50m) above on the steep sides of the valley on the summit of which was the City of David. This wall was discovered by archaeologists in 1961, but almost a century before then, in 1897 Charles Warren, an Englishman who surveyed Jerusalem for the Palestine Exploration Fund, discovered a shaft, later identified with the "gutter" of Joab, descending from inside the walls through the rock beneath, and down towards the spring. This had been built by the Jebusites long before the tunnel had been dug by Hezekiah. They built a staircase down to a platform, which led into the horizontal semi-circular tunnel at a level about halfway down to the spring. At the end of the tunnel is another shaft going further down into the mountain. The bottom of this shaft ends in what was then a water-filled channel which connected to the Spring Gihon.

Until 1986, any desiring to inspect the "gutter" of Joab, had to climb the steep steps and make their difficult way over the rough terrain to its entrance. Today the Israelis have opened the site for tourists, so they can move along the pathway above leading to the "gutter" like the "blind and lame" of Jebus!!

This was the culmination of seven years intensive archaeological excavations under direction of Yigal Shilo of the Hebrew University. It is claimed to be one of the most difficult archaeological sites ever probed in the land. As an indication of its importance in ancient times, the expedition uncovered 25 strata of settlement above the Gihon spring dating back to the end of the fourth millennium BC.

Was such an ascent as recorded of Joab possible? H. Shanks in the book *The City Of David* records:

"To prove that it can be done, one of the staff members — a particularly hardy fellow of the Parker Mission, which explored the hill of Ophel in 1909-1911, did it. According to the report of their investigation, 'All Joab had to do before getting into the tunnel was to wait for a propitious moment... Some planks of wood properly arranged by the help of one or two plucky companions, were enough to hoist Joab to the top of the vertical chimney".

The surprise attack succeeded. The defenders were not expecting such redoubtable fighters as Joab and his companions. Moreover, recognising that David had discovered the source of their water supply, and could easily cut it off, probably added to their dismay, and led to their final surrender. Therefore this shaft is of significant importance and interest. It played a crucial role in David's conquest of Jerusalem. Once taken by him, the city was claimed as his alone. It was not part of any tribe's exclusive territory. With a stroke of political genius, he made it his new capital, and called it *The City of David.* There he reigned for thirty-three tumultuous years. For his defences, he apparently used the Jebusite wall, extending and strengthening it (2 Sam. 5:9). Not until Solomon's time did the city expand northward to part of the present walled city, and the Temple Mount.

David had friends within the city, and it could be that Joab got a message through to them to help him in his enterprise.

"But they could not help him in the most difficult part of the attempt. He had to swim or wade through the dark, underground reservoir that led to the shaft, and then scale this upright tunnel where a single rock dropped from above meant instant death. Then he had to penetrate into the fortress through a narrow passage which two or three men might hold against a hundred. It was a desperate plan, but there was no other, and Joab bravely attempted it.

"And he succeeded. The Jebusites did not imagine for a moment that anyone would try and take the city that way! It was apparently not guarded, and perhaps David's friends within the city saw to it that the place was deserted when Joab entered.

"What a shock for the Jebusites when they found Israelite warriors in their very midst! The city was taken, and its name was changed to the *Citadel* or *Fortress of David*. It is the place we read of frequently in the Bible as *Zion* (2Samuel 5:7), and it is destined to become the centre of Christ's reign on earth (Psalm 2:6; Isaiah 2:2-4).

"There is a very important lesson concerning Joab that we must not overlook," continued Mr. Phillips. "Though he showed great courage, he was not a spiritually-minded man, and at the end, he was put to death at the order of David, the man who here promoted him. This teaches that it is not sufficient to be brave, even in a good cause; we must also be true, faithful and spiritually alive to what God requires of us. Joab was brave when serving his own interests; we must be brave in serving God's interests and in doing His will. We must not seek immediate advantages, but those of the future. Joab had little thought of the future. Temporal, immediate promotion dominated his mind, and drove him to acts of ruthlessness and courage in which he spared neither himself nor his companions. Ultimately he failed, though often he gained his immediate objective".

"How do you know that David had friends within the city?" asked Graeham as his father paused in his story.

"We are not told in the Bible that he had such help," replied Mr. Phillips, "but there are indications that he did. Josephus, the Jewish historian, says that Ornan the Jebusite was a great follower of David. He is referred to in 2Samuel 24:18, living close to the city in circumstances of great prosperity long after the other Jebusites had been destroyed. Why should he have been saved from the general overthrow of the Jebusites? Josephus says that he was not slain in the siege because of the goodwill he bore towards the Hebrews. He could have helped Joab in his attempt to gain possession of the city; though we cannot, with certainty, say that he did. But in my opinion the indications supporting this are quite strong. In any case, because of the brave action of Joab, he was now Commander in chief of David's

army, and a very important man in Israel". With those comments the family concluded their discussion for the evening.

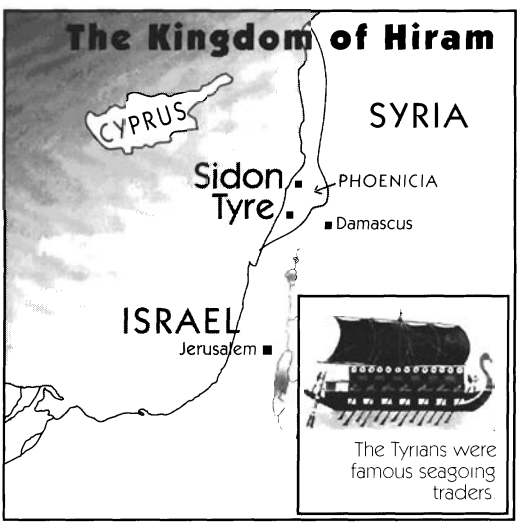
Help For David

The overthrow of the Jebusites was the first of the great conquests of David. He now had Israel united under him, and was in possession of the powerful fortress of Zion which became known as the "Citadel of David". With Joab and other officers of his realm to help him, David repaired the city, and strengthened its walls and fortifications (2Samuel 5:9; 1Chronicles 11:6-7). He proved to be a wise and just ruler, and gradually his fame extended into all parts of the then known world. It attracted the support, as well as the opposition, of other nations. In the north, on the coast of the Mediterranean, stood the strong city of Tyre, or "The Rock". The Tyrians were skilful mariners, and with their ships, they sailed the mighty oceans to very distant parts, trading with the natives of those lands. Hiram was king when David came to power, and as he preferred to trade with his neighbours rather than war with them, he sent ambassadors to the court at Jerusalem, to pay his respects to the new and powerful king.

The ambassadors found David in the midst of his building campaign for the new capital, and on behalf of their king, they offered their help. This was accepted, and from Tyre there were sent supplies of precious wood and other requirements, together with skilled workmen to assist in the labour.

Hiram's action was the beginning of many years of service that Tyre rendered to Israel. Hiram appears to have had a love for Yahweh's people (1Kings 5:1), and he later helped Solomon to build the Temple in Jerusalem.

There is an interesting parallel between the action of Hiram, and the service that Britain is destined to provide the Lord Jesus (the greater David, the "beloved") at his return. It is predicted that at that time "the ships of Tarshish" will be used in the service of Israel's King (Isaiah 60:10). Tarshish can be identified with both Tyre and Britain (Isaiah



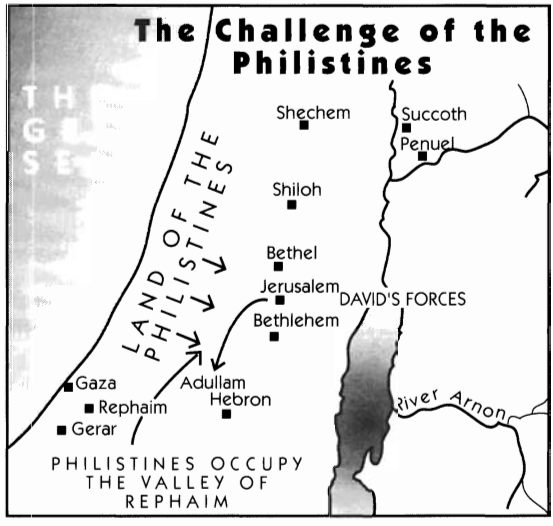
23:18). The help that Hiram rendered David and Solomon, therefore appears to foreshadow the help that the latter-day Tyre (Britain) will render the Lord Jesus when he shall have cleared Jerusalem of the enemy, and will set up his power in that ancient city.

David's position as king was now well established. Nobody dared lift a voice in opposition to him. As was the custom in those days, he multiplied the number of his wives, and in Jerusalem many more sons were born unto him. Though it was then the practice for kings to have several wives, it was not according to God's will (see Deut. 17:17; Matt. 19:4-8). Some of the sons of David's wives caused him great trouble later on, as we shall see.

David's Heroes (2Sam. 5:17-21; 1Chron. 14:8-17)

There was one nation that looked with dread at the rising power of David. On the south-western borders of Palestine, the Philistines viewed his elevation with dismay. They had everything to fear from the warrior-king who had already won so many encounters against them. They hated him and knew full well that he would crush them once he had gained sufficient power. They decided to act first. Recruiting all who were of a military age, they swarmed over the border, and marching to the very heart of Judah, occupied the land south of Jerusalem. This included the city of Bethlehem, the birthplace of David.

To meet the attack David moved his forces from the fortress of Zion, to where the Philistines had encamped. From the natural viewpoint, he was no match against the Philistines. They were noted for their powerful weapons of war, and, particularly, their dreaded iron chariots. David therefore made the cave Adullam (2Sam. 23:13) his temporary headquarters. He knew the country well for it was in this hold that he had hidden for a while when fleeing from Saul (2 Samuel 5:17).



However, as David had moved to the west of the Philistines so as to cut off any hope of a retreat by them, their army occupied a position between

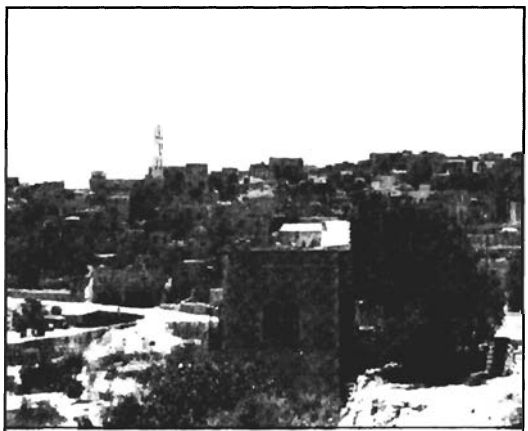
him and Bethlehem. They not only dominated the city, but set up headquarters in the Valley of Rephaim, or the *Valley of the Giants*, as the name signifies. This is a steep, broad valley, about three miles long, lying southwest of Jerusalem, halfway to Bethlehem.

David was deeply concerned for his home town. He wondered at the fate of its inhabitants. He hated to think of the enemies of Israel dominating it. One day he uttered his thoughts aloud. "Oh that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem!" he murmured.

Three of his chief captains heard his words. They were brave, faithful soldiers, who had a great love for their king. With pleasure they viewed his noble example of faith and bravery and were ready to die for his sake. They determined that they would fulfil his wish.

Without mentioning it to David, they quietly slipped away from the cave, and stealthily made their way to the Valley of the Giants. There, before them, was the enemy. Undaunted, they boldly made their way through the army of the Philistines without being noticed, and entered the city of Bethlehem. They calmly drew water from the well by the gate and hastened back to bring their precious gift to David.

This act of devotion greatly moved the king. He had not commanded these men to do this. It was a service of love they had rendered because of their deep affection for him. They had risked their lives to please him, holding him in veneration because he was Yahweh's Anointed. David could appreciate their feelings, for he had shown due respect for Saul, when he too, was Yahweh's Anointed. Nevertheless, David was humbled by such devotion. He felt himself unworthy of such a sacrifice. To demonstrate how he felt, he refused to drink it, and instead decided to give their offering to Yahweh. They had obtained the water at risk of their lives, so that it represented their blood, and as, under the Law, blood poured out symbolised a life dedicated, David ceremonially proceeded to pour out the water unto Yahweh. "It would be wrong for me to drink the blood of these men who have put their lives in such jeopardy", he declared, as he poured out the water as an oblation unto Yahweh. Thus Da-



The traditional well of Bethlehem situated behind the building in the foreground.

vid added humility and piety to the sacrificial bravery of his men.

What a wonderful lesson is presented in this account. These three captains put their lives in jeopardy because of their love for David. Their actions went beyond anything he had commanded them to do because they knew it would please him. Are we prepared to do the same for Christ our captain (Heb. 2:10)?

Their act of bravery stimulated David. Leaving the cave of Adullam, his warriors climbed the heights of the mountain overlooking the Valley of the Giants, from whence they could see the enemy below. Awaiting a moment when the Philistines were taken off guard, they suddenly attacked, and with the help of Yahweh, drove them away. The Philistines were soon in a state of utter confusion. They had no opportunity to effectively use their chariots, and soon their spirit was broken and their forces were in ignominious retreat.

The defeat of the Philistines was followed by a public acknowledgement by David that Yahweh was the Giver of victory. In their haste to escape, the Philistines had flung the images of their gods away, and these were now collected and publicly burnt in order to show the triumph of Yahweh over Dagon, the god of the Philistines. The hill overlooking the valley was called Baal-perazim, which means *The Lord of the Breaches,* in commemoration of the breach that Yahweh had made in the ranks of the enemy. The word "breach" is suggestive of the ease whereby the banks of a river are swept away by a flood of surging water. David likened his success to a flood of water breaking through the soft banks of a river. To him, the resounding victory of Israel over the Philistines was indicative of the strength of Yahweh! So great was it that it was remembered in Israel for hundreds of years (see Isaiah 28:21).

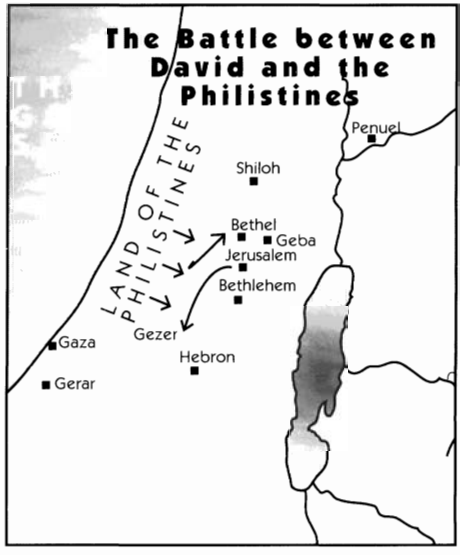


Valley of Rephaim

The Philistines Strike Again

The Philistines were now desperate. They knew full well that having attacked David, he would not rest content until he had completely overthrown their power. They decided that offence was better than defence. They would make another determined attempt to destroy Israel. With their iron chariots, and formidable weapons of war, they again invaded the land. Again they assembled in the Valley of the Giants. Once again David led forth his forces. Though he was king in Israel, he realised there was One greater than he. He ruled on behalf of Yahweh, for Yahweh was the real King and Captain of Israel's army (Psa. 103:19). Therefore, before attacking the Philistines, he sought the help of God in prayer. This is an excellent example for all who serve God. "Commit thy ways unto Yahweh, and He will direct thy path," is a sound maxim of wisdom. In all that we do, we need first to ask direction and help of Him Who is above all flesh, and can grant success or withhold it according to His wisdom. But having asked this help, according to His will, we must be ready to accept His decision as to whether our request should be granted or withheld. He knows best, and though we do not receive direct answers such as David did on this occasion, the hand of Yahweh can be just as effective in our lives. If we make a practice of seeking His help, we will feel His influence as a very real power indeed.

On this occasion, David was told to alter the strategy that he had used previously. Following the directions of Yahweh, he first attacked the Philistines, and when they counter-attacked, he pretended that he was beaten, and retreated towards a clump of trees on the northern side of the Valley (1Chronicles 14:14). This gave him some protection until there was heard as he awaited a sign from heaven, "the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees" (2Samuel 5:24). This was the sound of Heaven's army, the army of angels whose captain Joshua had seen as he was about to attack Jericho (Joshua 5:14), and who now came to the assistance of David.



These angels fought on Israel's behalf in a manner not told us in the Bible account. But it resulted in the complete defeat of the Philistines. They fled from

the ill-fated Valley of the Giants to Geba, about 10km. north of Jerusalem, with David in hot pursuit. Here, the Israelites caught up with the Philistines. A further battle occurred in which the enemy was again defeated. The remnant of their army fled down the steep, rocky pass of Beth-horon, towards the coastal plains of the Philistines, constantly harried by the attacking Israelites. For twenty miles (28 kms), all the way from Geba to Gezer (2Samuel 5:25), this continued. At Gezer (which means *A place cut off*) the Philistines tried to make another stand, but here they were completely "cut off". David won a final victory. The Philistines were subdued, and peace settled on the land.

Having delivered Jerusalem from the hand of the enemy, David was now able to turn his attention to the greatest ambition of his heart. This was to bring the Ark of the Covenant from its secluded place to where Yahweh desired it to be established in the midst of the people.

Tragic Attempt At Bringing the Ark to Zion

Under Saul, the worship of Yahweh had not been properly maintained in Israel. The Ark which had been taken from the Tabernacle in the days of Eli the priest, had never been returned to it. The two evil sons of Eli had tried to force Yahweh to give Israel the victory against the Philistines by carrying the Ark into battle. Instead, Yahweh allowed the Philistines to capture the Ark; and the Glory had departed from the people of God. The Ark was subsequently returned to Israel, but instead of being installed into its proper place in the Tabernacle, it was put aside in the house of Abinadab in Kirjath-Jearim, a city that belonged to the Gibeonites, Gentiles who had embraced the hope of Israel. On the other hand the Tabernacle was taken to Shiloh; then, when that place was attacked by the Philistines (Psa. 78:60-65) it was transferred to different locations. For some time it was at the town of Nob (1Samuel 21:1-6), but later it was at Gibeon (2Chronicles 1:3). For many years therefore, the Ark and the Tabernacle were separated.

Of course, Divine worship could not proceed properly in those circumstances. David decided that the time had come to reform it. He would bring the Ark to Jerusalem, and make the city the centre of Divine worship as well as the headquarters of his Kingdom.

As a wise leader, he invited others to work with him, delegating to them various labours. He could have commanded them to perform this work, but he knew that men work best when they are consulted in a matter, and their co-operation is secured. Accordingly, he "consulted" with the leaders of Israel asking for their help, and the help of the people under them (1Chronicles 13:1). This united the whole of Israel in a work of faith and love to the praise of Yahweh.

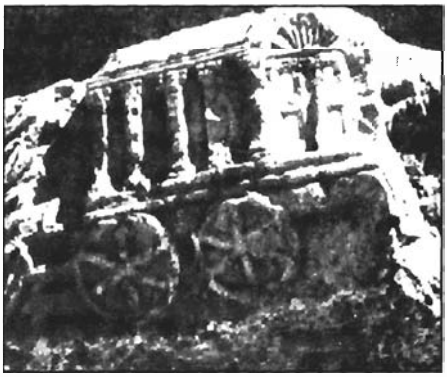
The whole nation willingly entered into the spirit of the venture,



Kirjath-Jearim, where the Ark of the Lord was kept for many years

and at the due time a great gathering of people assembled at the city of Kirjath-Jearim, to witness the procession. Special preparations had been made, including the construction of a new cart to be set apart for the exclusive purpose of carrying the Ark to Jerusalem. It had never been used for any other purpose, for the people desired to honour Yahweh to the utmost. Therefore they spared no expense in preparation of the cart and in the selection of particular animals to draw the Ark.

But we best honour Yahweh by finding out exactly what He wants, and following His instructions. It is not enough that a person might desire to serve Him, he must also seek out the way Yahweh requires that it should be done. But in this direction, Israel made a mistake. Yahweh had carefully set down in His Word what He wanted, but they neglected to seek out what it was. They were to pay dearly for their error.



An imaginary representation of the Ark brought by David to Jerusalem, in a carving from the fourth century AD., synagogue of Capernaum in Galilee

Meanwhile all was joy and gladness. Carefully the Ark was placed upon the cart. Two Levites, Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab (1Samuel 7:1; 2Samuel 6:3) were given the great honour of supervising its transport. Ahio led the animal, whilst Uzzah walked beside the cart. As it moved off, David and all the people sung the

special Psalms of praise that had been composed for the occasion. They were accompanied by all kinds of musical instruments.

So the Ark commenced its journey along the long, winding road that went from Kirjath-Jearim through the hills of Judea, moving up the steep slope leading to Jerusalem. For a while all went well. Then, as they were passing a well-known threshing floor, the oxen drawing the cart, hesitated. Somebody, perhaps Ahio, gave the beasts a prick with a goad, causing them to lurch forward*. The Ark on the cart was badly shaken, and Uzzah extended his hand to steady it. He touched the Ark, a thing which Yahweh had strictly forbidden, and a dreadful thing happened. The fire of Yahweh's anger was seen (2Samuel 6:7). Like a flash of lightning it struck down at Uzzah, instantly killing him. The people were horrified. The tragedy filled them with dismay. The great procession stopped in bewilderment. The music ceased. The joy and pleasure of the day was turned into fear and sorrow.

The most disappointed man of all was David.

"How will the Ark of Yahweh come to me?" he asked.

The Ark was put aside in the house of Obed-edom who lived not far from where Uzzah died, until a solution was found of what to do with the Ark.

The people returned home, to tell the sad story of Uzzah's death.

The Ark Brought to Jerusalem in Glory (2Samuel 6:12-23; 1Chronicles 15)

For three months the Ark remained in the house of Obed-edom, and during that time he prospered exceedingly. He experienced the sort of pleasure and blessings which come to those who keep close to the antitypical Ark, the Lord Jesus Christ. So David later said: "I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Psa. 37:25). Meanwhile, David could not rest content until the greatest desire of his heart was accomplished, and the Ark was brought to Jerusalem. He set aside a place for it and had a tent erected to house it. He hoped that later Yahweh might permit him to build a glorious temple and restore the form of worship as outlined in the Law.

For, long before David had come to the throne, Samuel the prophet had instructed him as to what he had to do to revive the worship of Yahweh when he became king (1Chronicles 9:22); and David, being a man of faith, was anxious to fulfil what he had been instructed to do.

But the tent he had erected in Jerusalem remained empty, because the attempt to bring the Ark into the capital had ended so tragically. Many sleepless nights passed as David thought long and anxiously upon the matter (Psalm 132:4). He soon discovered why the first

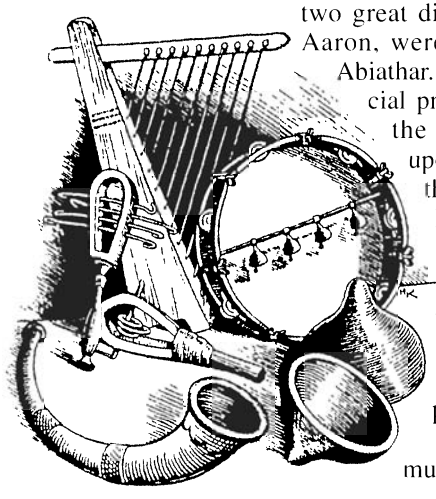
* The word *sha'mat* rendered "shook it" in 2Samuel 6:6, means "to strike" and signifies to urge a beast vehemently. Somebody had given the oxen a prick with the goad, causing them to suddenly lurch forward.

attempt had ended in failure. Moses had strictly commanded that whenever the Ark was to be moved, it had to be borne upon the shoulders of the Levites with special staves provided (Num. 4:10,15); and he had warned that they must not touch it on pain of death. It had been wrong to carry it on a cart, and wrong for Uzzah to touch it, no matter what the circumstances. Uzzah should have known this, for the ark had remained in his father's house a long time, and Abinadab should have carefully instructed his sons (1Sam. 7:1). Now his death was a warning to all Israel that God means what He says.

To steady the Ark when it seemed in danger may appear to be a good action, and we may wonder why God slew Uzzah for such an apparently trifling offence. After all, his intentions were good: he was trying to protect the Ark. But such incidents remind us, as they must have also reminded the Israelites, that God can look after His own, He does not need help. But we must obey His laws. It is not enough for us to desire to assist in the work of God. It can only be done effectively by strictly doing so according to His instructions and laws. He has revealed His will unto us, and we must seek it out, and follow it according to His instructions. David came to realise that. He later told the people: "Because we sought Him not after the due order, He made a breach upon us" (1Chronicles 15:13).

Having found out why things went wrong on the first occasion, David decided to again bring the Ark to Zion. He spoke of his intention to others. His enthusiasm for the work made them keen to help. Soon, throughout the realm, men were preparing for the occasion, and prayers were ascending that Yahweh might bless the attempt (Psalm 132:1-6). The whole nation was now united in this project.

Careful preparations were made. Priests and Levites assembled in family groups with their leaders to seek God's help. In charge of the two great divisions of the descendants of Aaron, were the two priests, Zadok and Abiathar. They were instructed that special preparations should be made for the great work they were called upon to do. "Sanctify yourselves, that you may bring up the Ark," David commanded them (1Chronicles 15:12).



On their behalf sacrifices were offered and their minds were prepared for the solemn and sacred duties they were to perform.

Some were appointed as musicians; others as doorkeepers;

others as singers. One Levite was given the special task of caring for the way in which the Ark was lifted up (1Chronicles 15:22 margin), others played cymbals, some blew on trumpets, all had their particular work to perform.

Choirs of singers, both male and female (1Chronicles 15:20-21)* were selected. Special Psalms (68, 87, 30, 132, etc.) were composed for the occasion.

At last all was ready. People gathered from all parts of the land, to witness the procession and ceremony. Those taking part were put in their special order. First came the chief Levites in charge of the musical arrangements. Then came the players on cymbals to mark the time (1Chronicles 15:19). They were followed by those playing stringed instruments (psalteries), then a female choir. Afterwards came the harpers, followed by the male choir (v. 21). Finally, at the rear, came the priests, sounding the festal trumpets used on such occasions.

Though all was ready, a feeling of uneasiness was felt by the great assembly, for they remembered their former failure. Was everything now all right? Would tragedy again spoil the attempt? Specially selected Levites lifted the Ark upon their shoulders by means of staves, as commanded by the Law, and took six steps forward to see if all was well (2Samuel 6:13).

Nothing untoward occurred! All was well!

It was plain that Yahweh took pleasure in this attempt. The procession was halted, so that, in gratitude and before all the people, the King offered his sacrifice (2Samuel 6:13). Then, another was offered for the nation (1Chronicles 15:26). Finally, amid the acclamation of the people, with cymbals loudly marking the time, and psalteries and harps providing the melody, the voices of the male and female choirs commenced singing the Psalms selected for the occasion. So the Ark was borne aloft along the long, winding valley road leading to Zion. As the procession proceeded, it was supervised by David dressed in priestly attire (1Chronicles 15:27). On that day, the greatest day in David's glorious history, he stood before the people, triumphant and successful, the great King-priest of the Kingdom of God.

Among the Psalms chanted on that day, was one that included the morning prayer of Moses: *"Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered; let them also that hate Him flee before Him"* (Psalm 68:1).

* Carefully consider the description of David's procession (1Chronicles 15:18-27). The word *Alamoth* v20. signifies "maidens", and relates to the female choir. The word *Sheminith* (v.21) signifies "the eighth" (see margin), and many have wondered at its meaning. Some Jewish commentators have suggested "a class of true Israelites" without explaining the meaning of "the eighth". The eighth had special relationship to the Abrahamic covenant, for Jews were circumcised on the eighth day as a token of the covenant. This male choir, therefore, could have comprised a selection of Israelites who were particularly noted for their faithfulness towards the covenant. The whole glorious occasion was prophetic of a more wonderful day, when the Lord Jesus, the antitypical Ark, will enter Jerusalem in triumph, accompanied by immortal singers and "harpers harping with their harps" (Revelation 14:1-2).

That Psalm indicated that the conveying of the Ark to Zion was comparable with its construction at Sinai, or the vindication of Yahweh's power in the victory of Deborah and Barak (Ps. 68:17). They saw representatives of all the tribes in the grand procession (Psalm 68:27). They heard with joy the glorious blending of music and voices by players and singers, with "the damsels playing timbrels" (v. 25). As the Ark neared the city, a different Psalm was sung: "*Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in*" (Psalm 24:7). The gates of Jerusalem, the city of David, swung open. The large procession entered, and now the joy of David was such that it could not be restrained. The singing, the playing, the shouting of the people, his own desire to testify his gratitude to Yahweh, stimulated his emotion to such an extent that he gave himself over completely, in an excess of excitement and joy, dancing and leaping before the Ark, leading it to the place he had prepared for it. The voices of the singers changed. Now they sang: "*Arise, O Yahweh into Thy rest; Thou and the Ark of Thy strength. Let Thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let Thy saints shout for joy*" (Psalm 132:5-9).

How true the words of Psalm 30 were at this moment! How David was moved by the circumstances, as the singers took up the refrain: "*Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing; Thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness*" *(v. 11).*

In the city itself, before the Ark, a Divine service was held. All Israel participated in the worship. Burnt offerings and peace offerings were performed so that all could partake of the sacrifices. David presided as priest, offering the sacrifices and blessing the people (1Chron. 16:2). He did this because of his privileged position, and doubtless with the permission of Yahweh. He was the type of the Lord Jesus, who is not only to be King, but also High Priest of his people. A glorious Psalm had been composed by David to be sung on that day, in order to proclaim to all the wonderful privileges granted them by Yahweh (see 1Chron 16:7-36). It called upon them to praise Yahweh and seek His face (vv. 8-11), to remember His wondrous works (vv. 12-14) to call to mind His covenant (vv. 15-18), to consider His care (vv. 23-27). It then turns to the future, declaring that the time will come when all mankind will praise Yahweh (vv. 23-27); when Israelite and Gentile will worship in His Temple at Jerusalem (vv. 28-30); when all nations will rejoice in His Kingdom on earth (vv. 31-33). It concludes by calling upon Israel to recognise and glory in His mercy and goodness (vv. 34-36).

This Psalm makes mention of some of the wonderful things God has done for His people. Yahweh is not a God Who is far off and unreal, but One whose tangible presence is seen in judgments that are revealed in the earth. Israel could look back over its long history, and

find therein many proofs of His existence. The people could consider the covenants of promise and rejoice in the privileges that they granted them. They could also look to the future in hope of a glory yet to be revealed.

At the end of the service, David gave gifts (2 Sam. 6:19) to all the people. Then, with his heart overflowing with joy and gratitude towards Yahweh, excited beyond measure by the events of the day and with the know-ledge that his greatest ambition had been fulfilled, he returned to his palace.

But every bright picture has its dark side. David found it on that day in his palace. As he entered its precincts in excitement and gratitude to Yahweh, he was met by the scornful looks of Michal, his wife, the daughter of Saul. Like her father, she was not spiritually inclined. She had contempt for David in his excess of joy. She despised him for the way he had danced excitedly before the Ark. She now reproached him with bitter, sarcastic words, ridiculing him for the way he had expressed his joy. David was greatly saddened by the attitude of Michal. His pleasure at the successful completion of his project of love for his God was demeaned by the cold, unthinking words of the one who should have shared his joys, hopes and labours. Always warm-hearted and enthusiastic, his anger now surged up, as he quite clearly recognised Michal for what she was. Her foolish, thoughtless attitude destroyed his love for her. He could no longer view her as his wife, and therefore set her aside as such. She never bore David any children, so the house of Saul was completely cut off from the throne (2Samuel 6:23).

Let us now recall what Mr. Phillips told his children, about the conveying of the Ark to Zion as being typical of a greater glory, when the Lord Jesus, as the great Ark of the covenant, in company with his glorified followers, will enter the city of Jerusalem in joy and gladness. On that occasion the new walls of the city will resound with songs of righteousness, and the people again will take up the refrain:

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and let the King of glory come in" (Psalm 24:9).

And the choir will echo around its valleys and hills:

"Blessed is he that cometh in the name of Yahweh" (Matthew 23:39).

Unfortunately, in that day of glory, there will also be some like Michal, who, having despised the holy things, will not be able to participate in the joy of that occasion (Luke 13:28). They will be rejected as the unfaithful Bride of the antitypical David.

Chapter Three

ROYAL PROMISES TO KING DAVID

A Most Important Chapter

"The chapter we have read tonight is one of the most important chapters in the Bible," remarked Mr. Phillips, after the family had finished reading 2Samuel 7.

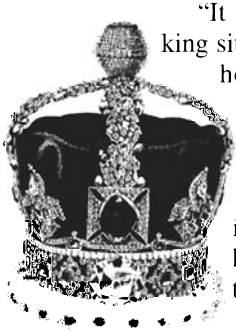
"Why is it more important than any other chapter?" asked Joan.

"Because this chapter contains the third of the three great covenants of promise," explained her father. "The first of these is given in Genesis Chapter Three, to those 'in Eve', and provides her 'seed' with the hope of LIFE. The second is found in Chapters Twelve, Thirteen and Twenty-two in which is recorded the promise to those 'in Abraham' of an eternal INHERITANCE. The third is recorded in the chapter we have just read, and it promises those 'in David' eternal royal AUTHORITY, and DIGNITY. Thus these three great covenants of promise offer man ETERNAL LIFE, an EARTHLY INHERITANCE, and a ROYAL AUTHORITY".

"What do you mean by being 'in Eve', 'in Abraham', and 'in David'?" asked Joan.

"The term means to be 'related' to such people," explained her father. "We are all 'in Adam', because we have all descended from him, but we are not all 'in Christ'. We can only become 'in Christ' by joining ourselves to him through baptism (Galatians 3:26). When 'in Christ', we become related to Abraham and David because he is related to them (Matthew 1:1). We therefore become members of a wonderful family of which God is the Father, Jesus Christ the elder brother, and men like Abraham, David, and a host of similar heroes of faith are the individual members thereof. It is a great honour to belong to such a family, and for that reason, I want you to properly understand the teaching of this chapter".

"Well, steam ahead, Dad!" exclaimed Peter, cheerfully, if a little irreverently to the indignation of the others.



"It commences," continued Mr. Phillips, "with the king sitting in the wonderful palace he had built for his honour. David was held in high esteem by his subjects, and was, perhaps, a little self-satisfied with his position. He was at rest from any enemies in Israel, though there remained plenty of such in the surrounding nations who were anxious to see his power weakened, and with whom he afterwards waged war. But in the meantime there was peace".

"Before you continue," interrupted Grae-

ham, "why do you say that David was self-satisfied?"

"I said *perhaps* he was a little self-satisfied," corrected his father. "And I think, verse one indicates that. David had built for himself an elegant palace and this verse indicates that whilst complacently enjoying its comfort he decided he would build a temple for Yahweh. There could have been an element of pride in his decision, but if so, it was soon removed. This is shown in the chapter we have read. There is a great contrast, you will notice, between verse one and verse eighteen. The first verse describes the King in glory, sitting in his own house; but the latter verse shows him humbled, and approaching Yahweh as a servant, as sitting before Him. Though David was a great man of spiritual virtue, he was also prone to weaknesses as we all are, and the Bible reveals a man's faults as well as his virtues. We need to remember that, and realise that Yahweh sees our faults very clearly -- better than we do ourselves".

"Nathan the prophet seems to have made a mistake as well," remarked Ann. "When David told him that he would like to build a temple for Yahweh in place of the Tabernacle of curtains in which the Ark dwelt, Nathan urged him to go ahead and do it. But later, Nathan had to tell the King that Yahweh would not permit it".

"Yes," agreed Mr. Phillips. "Nathan went to the King and said: 'Do all that is in thine heart' (v. 3). That is seldom good counsel to mortal man under any circumstances; and in this case, it proved to be wrong".

"David describes the Ark as dwelling between curtains," said Peter, "but I thought you told us that the Ark was in Zion, and the Tabernacle in Gibeon (2Chronicles 1:3)".

"That is so," replied Mr. Phillips, "but David had set up another 'tent' or 'tabernacle' in Zion (1Chronicles 16:1), and the Ark rested within that one".

"Oh, I see!"

"After David had made known his decision to Nathan and the prophet had urged him to do it, Yahweh appeared to Nathan in the night, and told him to instruct the King that he was not to build the Temple," continued Mr. Phillips. "Both David and Nathan knew that it had always been the intention of Yahweh to select a centre in Israel for the permanent establishment of His worship (Deuteronomy 12:5), for He had revealed to Samuel that the time was coming when the Tabernacle would be replaced by a glorious Temple, but as yet no direct command had been made for it to be built. Such instruction was necessary before anybody could take up so important a work as that! Therefore, although Yahweh had elevated David from a humble shepherd boy to a mighty ruler, and was prepared to do even greater things for him because of his great faith, He would not permit him to build the Temple".

"But why not?" asked Ann. "Why doesn't the Bible tell us?"

"It does," replied her father, "but not in this chapter. As I told you before, we have to bring all the accounts together to obtain the full picture of any incident in the Bible. In the case of this chapter, we must compare it with 1Chronicles 17 where the same promise is recorded, and also 1Chronicles 22:6-10, where David is reported as speaking concerning it. In this last place, David revealed why God would not permit him to build the Temple. He was told that he had 'shed blood abundantly, and had made great wars', and for that reason he was restrained from doing this great work. He was told, however, that a son would be born to him, whose name would be Solomon, to whom Yahweh would give 'peace and quietness', and that he would build the Temple".

"That does not seem a good reason to me why David should not build the Temple", said Graeham.

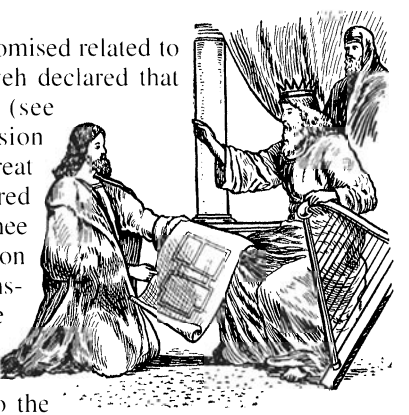
"Why not" asked his father.

"Well, we know that the Lord Jesus will build a great House of Prayer at his second coming, yet he will be a man of war, and much blood will be shed at Armageddon (Rev. 19:13)," replied Graeham.

"That is true," agreed his father. "But it is not as a man of war that the Lord will build the Temple. Wars will be waged, certainly, but they will be followed by a subsequent period of glorious peace (Hag. 2:9), and it will be as Prince of Peace that he will build the Temple (see Zechariah 6:12-13). The wars of David were the wars of Yahweh, and the king committed no sin in fighting them, but for David to have built the Temple would have destroyed the type, portrayed in the joint rule of himself and Solomon, and therefore he was not granted permission to do so. Can you see that?"

"Yes, I had not considered that before," said Graeham.

"I want you all to take notes on this chapter," continued Mr. Phillips, "for I want you to have a clear idea of what God promised David.



"The first thing David was promised related to his personal advancement. Yahweh declared that He 'will make his name great' (see verse 9). In the Authorised Version this reads: 'I *have made* thee a great name', but this should be rendered in the future tense, *'I will make* thee a great name'. The Revised Version of the Bible, and most other translations give this promise in the future tense. It is similar to the promise God made to Abraham (Gen. 12:2). It points forward to the

time when David will be raised from the dead, and will be honoured throughout the earth as a great man of faith and loyalty to God. Today, David is known more because of his faults rather than his elevation. This promise assured him of future greatness surpassing anything he then enjoyed. He may have imagined that he was great as he sat in his palace (v. 1), but events were soon to happen that would cause him to realise how weak he was. But the greatness which God has in store for David will deliver him from all weakness, and cause him to be honoured throughout the earth. We read in Isaiah 24:23 that 'the Lord shall reign in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem before his ancients gloriously'. Among those 'ancients' will be King David".

"Will you speak a little slower?" pleaded Peter, who was scribbling furiously in a very untidy hand.

"I am afraid you will have to keep up with me as best you can, Peter, for we have a lot to go through tonight," answered Mr. Phillips. "The next point is in verses 10-11. David was told:

'Moreover, I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more: neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more as beforetime, and as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused (this should be rendered, *I will cause*) thee to rest from all thine enemies."

"That is a most important statement," continued Mr. Phillips. "Notice that God told David that He will yet appoint a place for His people Israel. He used the future tense, even though Israel was then in a place of its own, and at rest from its enemies".

"Yes, I noticed that," remarked Graeham thoughtfully. "Why should Yahweh use such language that seems to be redundant?"

"Because He knew, and David also knew from his study of the law of Moses, that Israel would be driven from the land because of disobedience (see Deuteronomy 28:64; 29:22). He knew that Israel would be scattered among the nations, and that enemies would afflict them. But now David was given a wonderful promise that showed Israel is to be established in the land forever, in peace and quietness, and with no threat of invasion. Israel has never experienced such conditions as that in all its long history. Therefore the promise to David has not yet been fulfilled. It is because of this promise, and others like it in the Bible, that the Jews still remain a people in the earth, despite terrible persecution. Moreover, today they are returning to their land; and Israel has revived as a nation. That shows the time is at hand when this promise to David will be fulfilled. Some three hundred years later, the prophet Jeremiah spoke of this promise to David, and showed that Yahweh was determined that it will be fulfilled. He declared: 'I will cause their (Israel's) captivity to return, and have mercy on them' (see Jer. 33:20-26)".

"David, himself, mentions that," remarked Graeham. "In verse 24 he says, 'Thou (Yahweh) hast confirmed to Thyself Thy people Israel to be a people unto Thee for ever'!"

"He speaks in a similar way in verse 23", added Peter. "There David shows that Israel is different from all other nations: 'What one nation in the earth is like Thy people, even like Israel'."

"How will the promise be fulfilled?" asked Ann.

"When Jesus Christ returns, he will reveal himself unto the Jewish people as their Messiah," replied her father. "They will see the wounds in his hands (Zech. 13:6), and will then sorrowfully realise that they crucified their King 2000 years ago (Zech. 12:10). They will plead his forgiveness, and he will blot out their transgressions (Micah 7:19). Through Elijah (Mal. 4:5-6), the Lord will send for all Jews to return home, and they shall be brought back, to be taught the truth concerning Jesus Christ, and to submit to his rule (Jeremiah 30:11-20). Paul wrote that Christ 'will turn away ungodliness from Jacob' (Rom. 11:26). Jeremiah declared that Yahweh will teach the people His law, so that once more they will become 'His people', and will accept Him as their God (Jeremiah 31:33). The same prophet says that when that takes place, Yahweh 'will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more' (v. 34). Other references relating to the promise to David are found in Hosea 1:10-11, Amos 9:11; Zechariah 14:11, and elsewhere".

"Will all the Jews living at Christ's coming return to the land?" asked Ann.

"No, there will be found some among them who refuse to obey God, and they will be destroyed" (Ezekiel 20:37-38).

"Will the Jews then be made immortal?" asked Joan.

"No, only those who have been obedient to God in this life (whether Jew or Gentile) will be given immortality. All others will enter the kingdom as mortals (Isaiah 65:17-23; Zech. 14:16) in the hope of attaining unto immortality at the close of the thousand years' reign of Christ on earth (Revelation 5:9-10; 1Corinthians 15:24-28)".

"What else was David promised?" asked Peter, who was busily writing notes.

"I suppose we will have to hear all this given again by Peter at one of the Young Folks' Meetings!" quipped Ann, with a mischievous look at her brother.

"It would make an excellent subject", commented her father. "There is a lot more in it than we can possibly cover in one night. The next thing promised to David affects us, for he was promised a family".

"But he already had a family!" exclaimed Ann.

"Yes, but this was a particular kind of a family".

"I have not noticed that," said Graeham. "Where is it promised?"

"In verse 11," replied Mr. Phillips. "David had said that he would build a house for Yahweh, but Yahweh now replies by telling David He will make him a house! In the Bible, the word 'house' is often used in the sense of a family establishment. For example, in Isaiah 22:21-24, we read of the 'house of Judah', the 'house of David', 'his father's house'. The reference speaks of the 'key' that will open the door to the house. Such houses are not made of bricks and mortar, but of 'living stones'. In this wonderful promise, therefore, Yahweh told David that He was going to build him such a house. He is doing that by inviting men and women to embrace the hope set before David as their hope, and by being baptised 'into Jesus Christ', the son of David (Matt. 1:1), so becoming part of his spiritual family. The invitation of God to mankind is: 'Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David' (Isaiah 55:3). All who accept the teaching of God, and do His will, by being baptised into His Son, become members of the 'house of David', and for them a glorious destiny is assured in the day when David also shall be resurrected to glory. In that day, declared Zechariah, the 'house of David shall be as God, as the angel of Yahweh' (see Zech. 12:8).

"David must have been pleased with such a wonderful promise as that," remarked Ann, thoughtfully.

"There is much more to the promise than what we have just considered," replied her father. "I am expounding this chapter carefully, because I want you to absorb its teaching. It is more important that I should give each one of you an understanding of these things than anything else in the world. So let us continue. Having promised David a great name, a multitudinous seed, and a glorious future for his nation, Yahweh now promised that from him would come the King of the future age. In 2Samuel 7:12-14, He told David that, after his death God would set up one of his descendants to be king. This glorious Seed or Son will build a house for the name of Yahweh, and the throne of his Kingdom will last forever. 'I will be his Father,' declared Yahweh, and 'he shall be My Son'. The Lord Jesus is the one here promised. When his mother was told she would have a son, the angels declared: '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 forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end' (Luke 1:31,33). The Lord Jesus is both son of David and Son of God. He is yet to reign as king upon the throne of David for ever. As a basis for that destiny, the Jews of today, are returning to the land of Israel, and restoring the nation. When Jesus Christ returns, as he will (Acts 1:11; 3:19-25), he will restore full glory and greatness to Israel, and extend his power from Jerusalem over all the earth. Jerusalem will be called the 'Throne of

Yahweh,' and will become the centre of his government (Jeremiah 3:17-18)."

"Will David be there?" asked Joan.

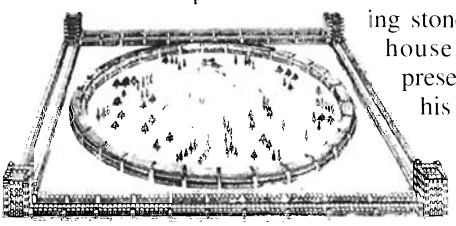
"Certainly," replied Mr. Phillips. "Yahweh told him so in verse 16 of the chapter we read this evening. He declared: 'Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever *before thee:* thy throne shall be established for ever'. The statement 'before thee' means 'in David's sight'. Notice that it is used in verse 15 in that way. Now as David had been told that the seed promised, who would sit on his throne forever, would be born after his death (v. 12), clearly, David must be raised from the dead in order to 'see' these things fulfilled. And that is how David understood the promise. In Psalm 49:15, he said: 'God shall redeem my soul from the power of the grave', and in Psalm 71:20,21 he declared: 'Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shall quicken me again (i.e. bring me to life), and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth. Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side'."

"It is wonderful how beautifully the Bible connects everything together," remarked Graeham, as his father paused.

"That is the true beauty of this marvellous Book," replied his father.

"What does God mean, when He declared that 'he shall build a house for My name'?" asked Peter.

"It refers to a twofold work of the Lord Jesus", replied his father. "He is, today, building a 'house' of living stones for the glory of Yahweh. This is referred to in Acts 15:14, where Peter says that God is taking out of the Gentiles a people for His name". The Apostle made reference to this spiritual 'house' when he described believers as 'living stones, built up into a spiritual house' (1Pet. 2:5). That is the present work of the Lord, and at his coming that house will be completed and perfected. But in addition to that, the Lord Jesus will build in Jerusalem a glorious 'house of prayer for all nations' (Isa. 56:7). From this house there will issue forth laws and instructions for all mankind (Isaiah 2:2-4). Worshippers from all parts of the world will assemble at Jerusalem for the purpose of joining in the Divine service (Zech. 14:16). In the closing chapters of Ezekiel's prophecy (chs. 40 to 48), details of the wonderful building to be erected are outlined. Hundreds of references are made to it throughout the Bible, and the greatest desire of King David was that he would one day behold its beauty, and be associated with its worship (Psalm 27:4). This 'House of Prayer for all nations' will unite all mankind in one glorious worship; it will bring them all



before God in truth, so that no longer will men squabble over what is right or wrong. All this was promised David in this wonderful chapter".

"I do not doubt what you say regarding this chapter," said Graeham to his father, "but there is one thing that has always been a difficulty with me. 1Chronicles 22:9-10 says that the promise of God was fulfilled in Solomon. How can you say that it applies to Jesus Christ?"

"The promises applied to Solomon only as a type", explained his father. "It is true that similar words are spoken of Solomon, and that he is described as a son of God, but he was son by selection, not by fact, as is the Lord Jesus. David understood that. In 1Chronicles 28:5-6, he said: 'Of all my sons (for Yahweh hath given me many sons), He hath *chosen* Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of Yahweh over Israel'. Jesus is Son of God by birth, for God is his Father. Moreover, all that David was promised in 2Samuel 7 was to take place *after his death* (v. 12), whereas Solomon ascended the throne during the lifetime of his father".

"There is another point also", added Peter. "The son promised to David was to reign forever (1Chronicles 17:14) . Solomon did not fulfil those words".

"The most conclusive argument of all," said Mr. Phillips, "is the fact that centuries after the death of both David and Solomon, reference is made to this promise as something yet to be fulfilled (cp. Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15-17; Isaiah 9:7; Mark 11:10; Acts 15:15,16; Revelation 3:7, etc.). The birth of the Lord was said to be in partial fulfilment of it (Luke 1:69-70). Moreover, in Hebrews 1:5 the very words of 2Samuel 7:14 are quoted by Paul and applied to Christ. Finally, Peter, in preaching the gospel, taught that David himself recognised that the promise related to the resurrection and glory of Christ (Acts 2:30-34)".

"What is meant by verse fourteen?" asked Graeham. "It reads: 'If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men'."

"As these words stand in the Authorised Version, they imply that if Christ committed iniquity, he would have been brought permanently under the power of death," replied his father. "If he had sinned, he would not have been raised from the dead, and therefore could not have acted as Saviour of the world. There are, however, better renderings of this verse. Adam Clarke has translated the verse: 'In his suffering for iniquity, I shall chasten him with the rod of (due to) men, and with the stripes of (due to) the children of Adam'. If we accept this translation,* it means that the Lord Jesus would be brought under

* The expression "commit iniquity" is from the Hebrew *avah*, "to do amiss", "to bow down", "to commit iniquity". But in *niphal*, or passive, as here, it denotes something done to one, therefore to cause one to bow down, to suffer iniquity, and so forth, confirming the translations of Adam Clarke and John Thomas quoted above.

the power of death through the nature he possessed, which, indeed, was the case. 'He suffered death' to save men. In *Eureka*, John Thomas has translated this verse: 'Whom, in his being caused to bow down, I will chasten him with a sceptre of men, and with stripes from the sons of Adam' (vol. 2, page 28). This translation emphasises the means whereby he would be afflicted. You can link this thought with the wonderful words of Isaiah 53. But I think that we have done sufficient study for this evening. I will just recapitulate what David was promised. He was promised:

1. A great name in the future at the time of his resurrection (v. 9).

2. That Israel will enjoy a glorious future, and will be re-established in the land, never again to be removed therefrom (v. 10).

3. A glorious multitudinous seed (or house) to assist in governing the nations (v.11).

4. An everlasting throne and kingdom associated with his rule (v. 12).

5. A descendant who would be both Son of God, and son of David. He will provide the means of redemption from sin and death, for all who come unto him, and will reign forever upon David's throne (v. 16; 1Chron. 17:14).

6. A personal resurrection from the grave to life eternal (v. 16).

"Let us bear in mind that Yahweh, through His mercy, has made it possible for each one of us to share this wonderful future (Isa. 55:3).

"However, that is enough for tonight. The hour is late. Both Ann and Joan need some beauty sleep; your mother has work to do and so have I. So off with you all".

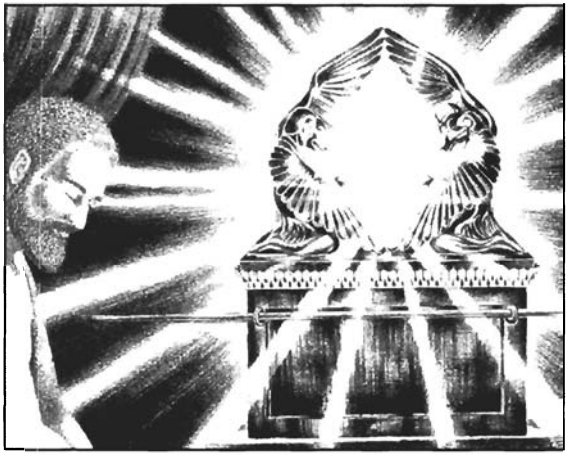
How David Viewed the Promise

The wonderful promise of God made a profound impression upon David. He was deeply humbled by the honor paid him. He had come from an obscure family of Bethlehem. Saul often had used the term "son of Jesse" in relation to David in contempt. But now the shepherd boy was not only king, but the promised forefather of the future Saviour and King of the world. David's kingdom, throne, and glory, will one day be acknowledged by all; and he, himself, will be there to witness it.

In view of this wonderful promise, and in humbleness of mind, David made his way before the Ark in Zion, to pour out his heart in thanksgiving unto his gracious heavenly Father. "Who am I," David prayed, "and what is my house, that all this glory should be paid to me. This may seem nothing in Thy sight, O Yahweh, but Thou hast spoken of Thy servant's house for a great while to come" (2 Sam. 7:18,19).

David linked this promise with the one that had been given to Eve in the garden of Eden. He declared: "This is the teaching of the

Adam"*. Words failed him as he contemplated the honour that was paid both him and Israel. He realised that he was not worthy of it. 'For Thy word's sake, and according to Thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make Thy servant know them' (2Sam. 7:21).



The hope of the promise was ever on David's lips. He composed glorious hymns of praise that were sung in the service of Yahweh, and which referred to the covenant that had been made with him. He spake of the certainty of its fulfilment. Yahweh had confirmed His promise with an oath, declaring He would not break His Word, nor alter His promise (Psalm 89:35). The king sang of how God had promised that His seed would sit upon the throne of glory in Jerusalem (Psalm 132:11), of the majesty of His reign (Psalm 72), the glory of His service (Psalm 99).

Among his last words were expressions speaking of the character of this coming great King. He will be just, ruling in the fear of God. He will be as the light of the morning, driving away the darkness of night, bringing the brilliance of his rule and teaching to all mankind. He likened the commencement of Christ's future reign as a "morning without clouds," and the condition of the people like "the tender grass" springing up fresh and green, through the influence of rain and sunshine.

As he considered the members of his family, he realised that there was none like the one who had been promised, so he looked forward to the future, when the Messiah will be revealed. "Although my house be not so with God; yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire," although, at that time, David could see no visible evidence of its fulfilment (2Samuel 23:1-5).

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* This is the literal rendering of the words translated: "Is this the manner of man?" (2Samuel 7:19). David recognised that the Son promised him was "the seed of the woman" that was prophesied in Eden.

Chapter Four

DAVID'S KINGDOM BECOMES AN EMPIRE

Having established his power in Jerusalem and driven out his enemies from within the Land of Israel, David set about bringing some security to the nation. This was extremely important, for it was surrounded by powerful enemies, and, at any time, its neighbors could threaten the kingdom, and destroy David's influence. Those enemies looked with fear and hatred on the rising power of Zion, and David knew that he would have no rest until they were under his power. He therefore gathered his forces together, and in seven great campaigns defeated all surrounding enemies.

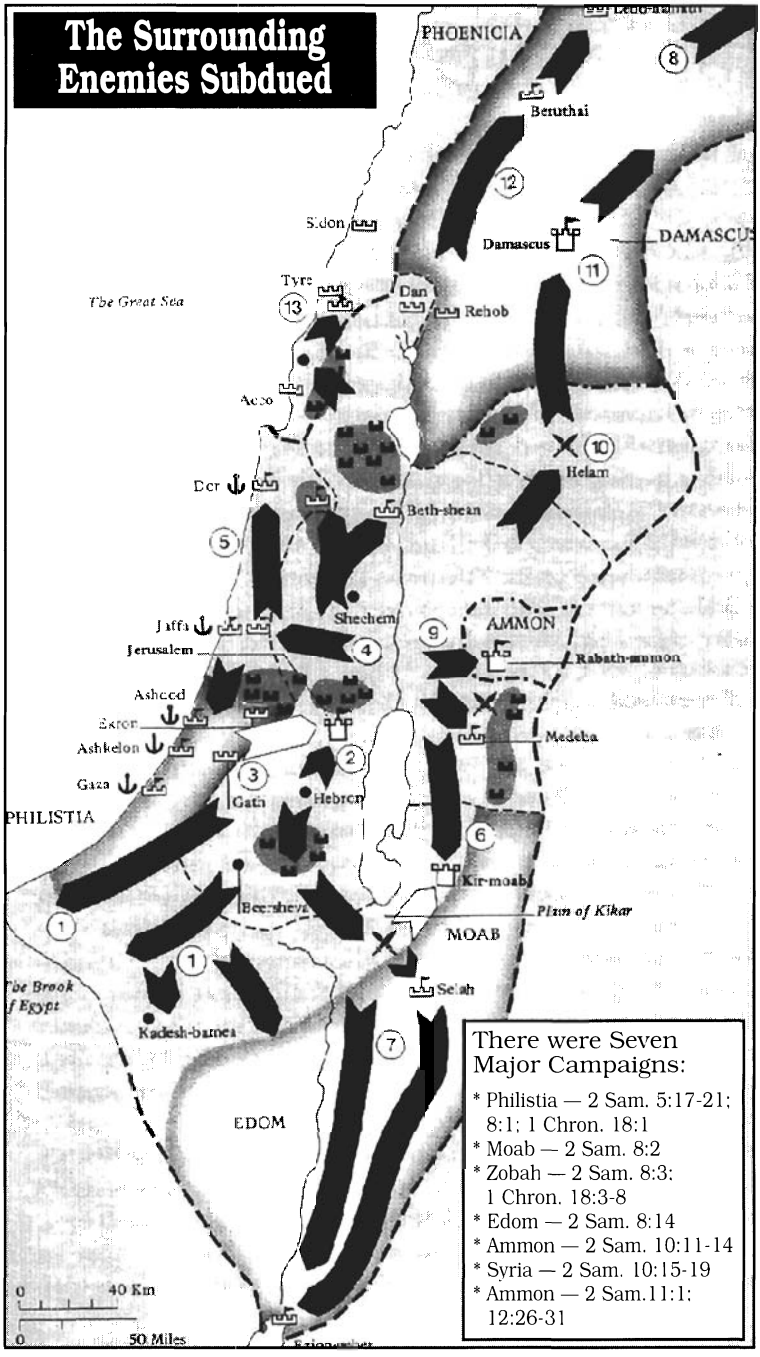
In this, David foreshadowed what the Lord Jesus will do when he returns to establish his kingdom on earth. For, as David was elevated first by his own people at Hebron, and then at Jerusalem over all the tribes, so Christ will be honored by his saints at Sinai before he assumes the throne at Jerusalem over all the world. Such prophecies as Zechariah 9:13-15, Micah 4:13; 7:16, clearly reveal that Christ will use the restored nation of Israel to subdue the Gentile powers, and Revelation 10:3 indicates that this will be done in seven great campaigns. John, who penned the Revelation, heard seven thunders, symbolising the wars which will occur after Christ returns. John was told to "seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not" (v. 4). Therefore we do not know the exact details of those events by which Christ will subdue all nations to himself (Isa. 60:12) after he has established his power in Jerusalem, although references to them are found throughout the Bible. However, it will be only after these campaigns have been undertaken that the world will submit to the king in Zion, and recognise him as the Monarch of all the earth.

1st Campaign: Philistia is Invaded (2Sam. 8:1; 1Chron. 18:1)

David had driven the Philistines from out of the territory of Israel, but in their own country on the Mediterranean seacoast they remained a powerful people, ready to attack Israel when the opportunity arose. David decided to conquer them, and invaded the land of Philistia to lay siege to its capital city of Gath in the southwest (1Chron. 18:1). This important battle opened the way to the whole country.

In 2Sam.8:1 Gath is called Metheg-ammah, which means "The bridle of the mother city" (RV mg). Its name indicates its importance, and, as "a bridle", was a city that controlled the destiny of the whole country. This verse can be rendered: "David subjected the metropolis of the Philistines to himself."

With the powerful Philistines defeated, David returned home to Jerusalem in triumph. The first campaign was successful!


The Surrounding Enemies Subdued
PHOENICIA
Beruthai
Sidon
Damascus
DAMASCUS
Tyre
The Great Sea
Dan
Rehob
Acco
Helam
Dor
Beth-shean
Jaffa
Shechem
AMMON
Jerusalem
Rabath-ammon
Asheod
Ekron
Medeba
Ashkelon
Gaza
Gath
Hebron
PHILISTIA
Kir-moab
Beersheva
Plain of Kikar
MOAB
The Brook of Egypt
Selah
Kadesh-barnea
EDOM
0 40 Km
0 50 Miles
There were Seven Major Campaigns:
* Philistia — 2 Sam. 5:17-21; 8:1; 1 Chron. 18:1
* Moab — 2 Sam. 8:2
* Zobah — 2 Sam. 8:3; 1 Chron. 18:3-8
* Edom — 2 Sam. 8:14
* Ammon — 2 Sam. 10:11-14
* Syria — 2 Sam. 10:15-19
* Ammon — 2 Sam.11:1; 12:26-31

2nd Campaign: Moab Overthrown (2Sam. 8:2; 1Chron. 18:2)

East of the land of Israel was the country of Moab. David had been on friendly terms with the Moabites. His great-grandmother Ruth, was a Moabitess, and when Saul had pursued David to destroy him, David sent his aged parents to Moab for shelter and protection (1Sam. 22:3-4). David was always one to show kindness to those who were kind to him (cp. 2Sam. 10:2), so the king of Moab must have done something very wrong to David, inciting him to attack the nation in the manner he now did. The Jews say that the king of Moab slew the parents of David, but the Bible is silent about this.

Whatever it was that caused David to turn in anger upon the Moabites, he was determined to do the unpleasant work thoroughly. He "measured them a line". This is a figurative expression meaning that he carefully planned the expedition, deciding beforehand what he would do (cp. Hab. 3:6). He determined to "cast them down to the ground". What "them" refers to we are not told, but it must have been the defences and strongholds of Moab. David decided he would destroy all the fortresses of Moab, and leave the country without any proper protection, so that the people would always remain servants to Israel.

He gathered his army together to inflict an overwhelming defeat on the army of Moab. The Bible says that he "measured with two lines to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive". In this, he planned to attack the Moabites in such a way, that at least two parts of their army would be destroyed. Zechariah 13:8 indicates that Christ will do likewise to those of the Jewish nation who reject him. Though Jews, they act as Moabites, and thus will be destroyed in the ensuing battle of Armageddon.

In due course, David's army marched from Jerusalem down the steep and winding valley that led to the pass which would take them towards Moab: a march of about 70 kilometres. The Moabites also massed their forces, but were thoroughly defeated. The Jewish historian, Josephus, says that two parts of the army were destroyed, just as David had planned. He broke down their fortresses, and compelled the whole nation to pay tribute.

3rd Campaign: Zobah Defeated (2Sam. 8:3-8; 1Chron. 18:3-8; 1Kings 11:23-25)

The enemies on the southwest and east of Israel had thus been crushed, and David now turned to the north. All the surrounding nations realised that the new king of Israel was a vigorous monarch who was determined to maintain and extend the power of Israel. They were like those of Jericho in the days of Joshua, who saw the developing strength of God's people, and were in fear: "as soon as we had

heard these things," said Rahab to the Israelite spies, "our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for Yahweh your God, He is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Josh. 2:11). Now, the same dismay was felt in the ranks of David's enemies.

In the north was the powerful nation of Syria, and their champion was a ruler called Hadadezer, whose capital was the fortress of Zobah, north of Damascus. This was actually part of the territory that God had promised Abraham He would give to Israel.

David decided that he would invade the north "to establish his dominion" (1Chron. 18:3), to the border (2Sam. 8:3) of the land promised to his forefather.

This brought him against the powerful monarch of the north. Hadadezer (whose name means *His glory is established*) was chief of a confederacy of nations under him (2Sam. 10:19), and he led a very large force comprising infantry, cavalry and chariots.

But he was no match for the faithful courage of David, who put his trust in a greater Power than chariots and horses. Protected by the unseen army of heaven, David went forth to win a resounding victory, taking captive a large number of chariots, horsemen and infantry. He smashed most of the chariots, but reserved a hundred to take back to Jerusalem, probably for victory celebrations. One can imagine how the people would chant the words of Psalm 20:6-9 as they saw this parade of fleshly power displayed in Jerusalem:

"Now know I that Yahweh saveth His Anointed;
He will hear him from His holy heaven,
With mighty victories from His right hand.
Some trust in chariots, and some in horses;
But we will remember the name of Yahweh our God.
They are brought down and fallen;
But we are risen, and stand upright.
Save, Yahweh: let the king hear us when we call".

But these victory celebrations occurred some time later. Meanwhile, David found himself in great trouble. Whilst still engaged in combat with Hadadezer, he was attacked by another powerful enemy. The Syrians of Damascus, south of Zobah, the headquarters of Hadadezer, came to help their northern ally. They encircled the forces of David, attacking them at the rear and cutting off their means of retreat.

But that was not the only difficulty facing David. News came from the land of Israel that the powerful and warlike Edomites, on the south of Palestine, had invaded the country (see Psa. 60). David's situation was now desperate. In the north he was surrounded by powerful enemies; in the south, the land of Judah was under attack. If he did not repel the Edomites, his victory in the north was useless. But, heavily engaged in warfare as he was, he could not retreat. It was a critical

moment, but he acted with courage and dispatch. He promptly sent a contingent under Joab who, by forced marches, discovered the Edomites south of the Dead Sea; and against them had a wonderful victory.*

Though his forces were weakened by the need to send a contingent to protect the southern border of Israel, David also had a resounding victory in the north. The Syrians were defeated, and David placed garrisons of his soldiers throughout the land, compelling the Syrians to become his servants.

Congratulations from the King of Hamath

This notable victory by David is one of the few incidents of Israelitish history that is mentioned in books outside the Bible. Nicolaus of Damascus, a historian of those ancient times, recorded the wonderful success of the king of Jerusalem. Congratulations also came from Toi, the king of Hamath, which was not far distant from Damascus. Toi sent his son, Joram, to bring a valuable present of gold, silver and brass for David.

David was pleased with this present, for his great desire was to provide for a temple in Jerusalem to the honor of Yahweh. He knew that he was not to build it, but he wanted to help as much as possible. Such a present as this was one way of achieving his desire. He stored the precious metals so that they might be dedicated for that purpose (2Sam. 8:11). Wherever David went, whenever he was victorious, he demanded that the wealth of the nations should be delivered up to him, for use in the Temple. In this, as in so many other ways, David typed the Lord Jesus, who will do likewise (see Hag. 2:8-9; Isa. 60:11 mg.).

4th Campaign: Edom Overwhelmed (2Sam. 8:14; 1 Chron. 18:11-13)

After defeating the Syrians in the north, David rapidly moved south to assist Joab in his battle with the Edomites. He heard news of Joab's remarkable victory at the Valley of Salt, close to the Dead Sea, where he had overthrown 20,000 Edomites, and David decided to make it complete by invading their territory. He marched his army into the land of

* There are some apparent contradictions in the various accounts of these incidents. In 2Sam. 8:13 it speaks of the "Syrians" being overthrown instead of the Edomites, but in the Hebrew the two names are similar. "Edom" in Hebrew is written only in consonants and appears as "Dm" (*daleth mem*) and "Syria" appears as "Rm" (*resh mem*) — the Hebrew letters *daleth* and *resh* are so much alike that they are easily confused. Further, in 2Sam. 8:13 it mentions 18,000 slain, whereas in the title of Psalm 60 it records 20,000 — but here again the letters in Hebrew which designate these two figures are so similar that a mistake in transcribing them could easily occur. Finally, in 1Chron.18:12 Abishai is said to have led the forces of David, but in Psa.60 title and 1Kings 11:16 reference is made to Joab. A force was evidently despatched under Joab, who was commander-in-chief, and who supervised the whole campaign, but the actual attack was made by Abishai under command of his superior. Thus these apparent discrepancies are reconciled.

Edom, until he came to the powerful fortress of Petra. Petra was a most extraordinary city. It was carved out of the red sandstone cliffs which abound in that part of the country. In some of the most unique scenery roads wound around the huge, jutting cliffs; whilst the rock-faces displayed a myriad of colors as the sun's rays beat down upon them. Petra was enclosed within a huge "fence" of rock-hills, and could only be entered along a narrow ravine, some two kilometres



Petra (sometimes called Sela, Isa.16:1, or Selah, 2Kgs. 14:7) is the rock-hewn stronghold capital of Edom. It is mentioned several times as "the rock" (which is the meaning of its name): Jud. 1:36; Isa. 42:11; Jer. 48:28, 49:16; Oba. 3. It is also called Bozrah (Isa. 34:5-6; 63:1-5; Jer. 48:24; 49:13,22; Amos 1:12). The ancients called it "Bozrah of the Rock." Today it is referred to as "the silent city of the forgotten past", and "the rose-red city, half as old as time." It lies halfway between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba. It exerts a magic spell upon the minds of men who know it. It has over 1,000 temples, cut into the rock of the great cliffs that surround the whole city. Its high places, courts, libation basins, and altars where the ancients worshipped, and its amazing color of all shades of red, are extremely fascinating. For centuries Petra was a rich caravan city where merchandise of many nations was brought in by the travelling caravans and taken out to all parts of the earth. Goods were brought in for storage in Petra and re-routed to Arabia, Africa, India and other lands. The city was so important in later years, that the Romans made two roads to tap its wealth. When Rome fell, Petra's doom was sealed, and the city was abandoned except for a few desert tribesmen. It passed unnoticed by the civilised world for more than 1,000 years. In 1812, John Lewis Burckhardt, disguised as a Bedouin sheik, rediscovered it and returned to tell of its mysteries. It had then become sacred to the Arabs and danger menaced any foreigner who approached it. This area is the central place which will be reserved for the protection of the fleeing Jews from Israel as they seek to escape from the power of Russia in the last days (Mic. 2:12; Isa. 16:4). Thus, the influence of the Lord Jesus will be felt in Petra, as was the power of David in former times.

long, which etched its way between steep cliffs of red rock. A small force of soldiers could easily defend this city against a large army — and therefore, when David's army stopped outside the area there was some hesitation as to whether they should risk going along the narrow valley in order to lay siege to the city. This hesitation is expressed in Psalm 60 which celebrated Israel's victories against the Syrians and Edomites: "Who will bring me into the strong city (*Petra*)? Who will lead me into Edom?" (v.9). The Psalm shows that Israel, led by David, put their trust and confidence in Yahweh at this time. They had seen His power manifested in the resounding victories already achieved — and now, with courage and faith, the army marched into and along the deep valley that led into the city. In an amazing episode the city was taken, and Edom was conquered.

5th Campaign: Ammon Repulsed (2Samuel 10:1-14)

Meanwhile, the king of Ammon, whose country was directly to the east of Judah, died, and his son, Hanun, ascended to the throne. David had experienced great kindness from the late king, and was favorably inclined towards his son. But his thoughtfulness was not repaid. Hanun's servants incited him against David, and insulted his messengers who had taken a message of consolation from David. It was a terrible act of folly by the Ammonites to so treat, with such indignity the ambassadors of Israel, who came with a message of peace.

The insult sparked off antagonism between Ammon and Israel. The Ammonites gathered allies, knowing that their action meant war. Fearing invasion, David rapidly gathered his army and sent them eastwards with Joab, whilst he remained to complete the recruiting.

The forces gathered at Medeba, called "the gate" (2Sam. 10:8), just south of Ammon. In the battle that ensued Joab had a partial success, but the final defeat of Ammon was delayed until later.

6th Campaign: Syria Repulsed (2Samuel 10:15-19)

The Syrians from the north, had come to help the Ammonites in their challenge to Joab's army. They put themselves in the field around about the city in order to defeat the Israelites through a clever pincer movement by the opposing armies. Joab recognised the danger, and immediately divided his forces, giving the responsibility to attack the Ammonites to his brother Abishai, whilst Joab himself turned to face the oncoming Syrians from the north.

They were certainly powerful armies that now faced the courageous Joab. The king of Syria was a monarch known as Hadarezer, who controlled a number of allied powers (2Sam. 10:19). He determined to overthrow the hold that David had on the country, and came down with "all his bands" with him. It is possible that this revolt and attack

by such a huge confederacy of armies* gave rise to the Second Psalm (although the full import of this song is prophetic of Christ):

"Why do the nations rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, Against Yahweh, and His anointed, saying, Let us burst their bonds asunder! Let us cast away their cords from us".

This tremendous battle will be repeated in the days to come. Ezekiel speaks of a great northern confederacy of powers that will come against the people of Israel. Though the Syrians no longer exist, their attitude will be seen in the opposition of the Russian power (see Ezekiel 38), which will gather together a huge force of associated powers in order to establish its interests in the Middle East (v. 8). But it will be signally defeated by the divine power then vested in Jesus Christ (the greater David) and his chosen saints (vv. 18-23). That great battle of the future will be the prelude to the establishment of the kingdom of Jesus Christ throughout the earth, when peace and security will finally be experienced by everyone.

Meanwhile Joab had given wise counsel to his brother: "Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God, and Yahweh do that which seemeth Him good" (2Sam. 10:12). This was excellent advice. Take courage; act like men; fight for your family; fight for your possessions; have faith. When this is done, God's blessing will rest upon any endeavour. And this was seen as Joab pressed northwards against the Syrians. The enemy was completely overwhelmed and David's authority was supreme in the north.

Abishai, the lesser commander, followed Joab's advice, and he enjoyed a great victory against the Ammonites. The enemies of David in east and north were soundly defeated, and "they made peace with Israel, and served them. So the Syrians feared to help the children of Ammon any more" (v. 19).

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* Critics of the Bible use the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles as a hunting ground for discrepancies. Chronicles records the same incidents as do these other books, but from a different standpoint. Critics point to the so-called "mistakes", and the reader will find it profitable to mark his Bible with the explanations given. For example, in 2Samuel 10:18 we read that 700 chariots were taken, and 40,000 horsemen destroyed. But in 1Chronicles 19:18 it says that 7,000 chariots were taken and 40,000 footmen destroyed. What is the explanation of this apparent discrepancy? In Hebrew, numbers are shown by the letters of the alphabet, and not by numbers as in the English language. The letter for 7,000 is *zain*, which is shown in most Bibles just above Psalm 119:49; the letter for 700 is *nun* (see above Psalm 119:105). If the bottom part of the letter *nun* was indistinct (as it could easily be), or if the letter *zain* was improperly formed at the bottom, it would be quite easy for a scribe to mistake the two letters. That apparently occurred. How many chariots were captured? We do not know for sure, but in view of the large number employed in this battle, we are inclined to the opinion that the 7,000 of Chronicles is the correct number.

But what about the 40,000 who were slain? Were they "horsemen" as per 2Samuel 10:18, or "footmen" as per 1Chronicles 19:18? We believe that both accounts are correct. In those days armies had a kind of auxiliary troops that were sometimes mounted on horses, but that also served as foot-soldiers. They could thus be either counted as horsemen or footmen, and both accounts are correct.

7th Campaign: Ammon Surrounded (2Samuel 11:1)

There were still some sections of the Ammonite challenge to David which remained. David knew that he would never have peace in his kingdom whilst this challenge continued. He sent Joab once again across the Jordan river, to exert his power and influence against this enemy.

This time the project was successful. Joab's armies pressed heavily right up to the capital itself, and Rabbah was surrounded. The city succumbed, and the crown was taken from the enemy king's head, and brought to David.

Now the final of the seven great campaigns had been completed, and "so David and all the people returned unto Jerusalem" (2Sam. 12:31). His empire was at peace from all its neighbors, and typically represented the future, more glorious, kingdom of Jesus Christ, when "he shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness *(like the Ammonites)* shall bow before him; and his enemies *(like the Syrians)* shall lick the dust... yea, all kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him" (Psalm 72:8-11).

Unfortunately, however, whilst the contest with the Ammonites was being engaged over a period of years, David found himself in a personal combat — and one in which he succumbed. It was the battle against temptation, at a time when the king should have been busy supporting his forces on the field of combat. It proved to be a sad failure in contrast to all the tremendous battles in which his forces were so successful. But it reminds us that we do not have the power to completely overcome sin ourselves, and we must always rest upon the strength that is available from God.

But of these unfortunate circumstances that befell the great king during the days of the Ammonite conflict, we must await until we come to 2Samuel, chapter 11.

Peaceful Pursuits

Though David vigorously engaged in war against the enemies of Israel, he did not overlook his people. He provided for their welfare. He "executed judgment and justice to all" (2Sam. 8:15). He organized his kingdom so that there was proper provision for the needs of all. David was a man of great energy and determination, and, in the midst of all his battles, he did not lose sight of matters of State.

Unlike Saul, he determined that the people should be properly instructed in their religious duties; he was diligent in all the requirements of God; he organised the priests and Levites so that they could judge the cause of the people and teach them wisdom. He gave his own sons important work to do that impressed them with a sense of responsibility.

In all the organisation of his kingdom, David was a pattern of the work that will yet be undertaken by the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter declared that Christ will return to "build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down, to build again the ruins thereof, and to set it up" (Acts 15:16). It will be re-established "as in the days of old" (Amos 9:11), and in so many ways, the kingdom of the Age to Come will be a perfection of that which was first revealed in the days of David.

David's Kindness David's conquests were not yet completed, although sufficient had been accomplished to show that the kingdom was now well established. At this time his thoughts went back to something he had for many years desired to do. He wanted to extend a kindness on behalf of his friend Jonathan — for they had often discussed together the fact of his royal destiny and both had entered into a covenant that each would care for the family of the other.

Jonathan was dead, but David longed to fulfil his promise made to his friend. A search was made throughout the land to see if there were any remaining members of Jonathan's family.

There was a servant of Saul by the name of Ziba, who had been freed. Ziba was now a prosperous farmer with slaves of his own. He was called before the king and asked whether he knew if any of Jonathan's sons were still living. Ziba told David that there was one — a young man named Mephibosheth, who, unfortunately, was lame in both feet. He was only a little boy of five years old when the news of Saul's defeat and death on Mt. Gilboa was received, and, in fear of what might happen, his nurse had quickly taken him up and fled. But in her haste, she had fallen with Mephibosheth, so that he sustained injuries in his legs, and was now unable to walk. His nurse had escaped across the Jordan to the land of Gilead, and, in the house of a wealthy Gileadite named Machir, Mephibosheth had found refuge.

David was delighted to hear that Jonathan still had a son alive. Though burdened with the cares of a State at war, and aware of rebellious forces that threatened to rise up against him, David still found time to think of his friends, and to assist the son of Jonathan. He did this knowing that Mephibosheth could not respond in kind, because he dearly loved Jonathan and felt bound to fulfil his word.

Mephibosheth was called before the king. He was a quiet, uncomplaining young man who was too shy to press his claims to royalty on anybody. Perhaps he was crushed by the disaster to his family, and by his own disability. But David looked kindly on him, and, restoring to him all the lands of Saul, he invited him to eat at his table any time Mephibosheth desired to do so. He realised that the lame, timid young man could not properly conduct the farms of Saul, and therefore

ordered that Ziba, with his numerous sons and slaves, should do it for him.

Mephibosheth was greatly impressed by David's action. "I cannot be of any use to you," he said to the king, "why then should you show kindness to me?" But in this king there was a quality rarely seen in monarchs, for David was "a man after God's own heart," and desired to honor his God in all that he did. His kindness for Mephibosheth was not with an ulterior design, nor with a desire for personal advantage, but as an act of lovingkindness for the family of his friend, Jonathan. The lame young man was taken to Jerusalem, where he had a house, and was able to often dine in the palace of David.

This lovely incident in the life of the great warrior-king reveals a most attractive side of David's character. He was a man of war, but wars were forced on him — he did not seek them. When he was roused, he fought with bravery and skill, but in the midst of all the worry and tumult of such times, he thought of his friends, and acted in accordance with his promise.

He had told his Ministers of State that he desired to show "the kindness of God" to any of Jonathan's family (2Sam. 9:3). What sort of kindness is that? It is a degree of kindness exceeding anything of which a person may be deserving. God is known for such kindness (Matt. 5:44-46), and has promised to extend it to us. In this kind action David types the Lord Jesus, who is yet to perfectly fulfil the actions of David. As David brought Mephibosheth out of obscurity to make him an elevated friend of the king, and to restore him to prosperity and happiness, so the Lord Jesus will do likewise for his friends. On his elevation to royal authority, Christ will invite them to "eat bread at his table" (cp. v .7 with Luke 22:30; Rev. 3:20).



Preparing bread for the royal table.

Chapter Five

DAVID ORGANISES HIS KINGDOM

The Phillips' family had completed the reading of 2Samuel 12, and were discussing the events recorded. However, as is often the case when Mr. Phillips commences to explain a matter, they had drifted from the original subject. He drew the attention of the family to the great abundance that David obtained from the conquests of the nations around about, as is indicated in verses 30-31. Mr. Phillips remarked that when the Lord Jesus returns, he will rebuild the Tabernacle "as in the days of old" (Amos 9:11), and pointed out that the kingdom under David and Solomon foreshadowed that to be set up by Jesus Christ.

"All that David did was in preparation for the kingdom of peace which was set up by his son, Solomon," said Mr. Phillips, "so that it is better if we delay considering this aspect of the matter until we talk about the glory of the kingdom established by Solomon."

"In what way did David prepare for the reign of Solomon?" asked Graeham.

"He brought a great deal of order to the kingdom," replied his father. "Joab was captain of the army. He gained this position by the great bravery he showed at the taking of Jebus. Under him there were a number of valiant soldiers, who had proved themselves to be men of courage in difficult circumstances. They helped David to organise the kingdom so that it was welded together in strength (1Chron. 11:10). They were divided into the captain-general, a first three, a second three, and then the remainder, called "the thirty"*. These were the outstanding warriors of David's realm, and possibly formed a kind of bodyguard to the king. Of course, in David himself they had a wonderful example. He inspired his men with great courage. They were prepared to fight against great odds on his behalf, even endangering their own lives, and this sometimes when the rest of the army fled in fear (cp 1Chron. 11:13). They are 'a great example to us'."

"In what way do you mean?" asked Peter.

"We are called upon to follow a greater leader than David," explained his father. "In following the Lord Jesus, courage is necessary! We must never allow difficulties to stop us, and even though

* When the catalogue of heroes 1Chron.11, and 2Sam. 23 is added up, it will be found that there were more than thirty. This can be accounted for by the death of some and their replacement by others. However, the Hebrew word *sheloshim* which is rendered "thirty", could define a particular office in David's army. A similar word is used to define Pharaoh's captains in Exod. 14:7, so that in David's realm, the *sheloshim* could relate to those warriors who had particularly distinguished themselves, and who, in consequence, were set over the rest of the 600 men who followed David in his exile (1Sam. 27:2), and who, in turn, were set over the rest of Israel.

others might turn back, we must go steadily forward. We are called upon to 'fight the good fight of faith', and we must show similar courage to those champions of David's army."

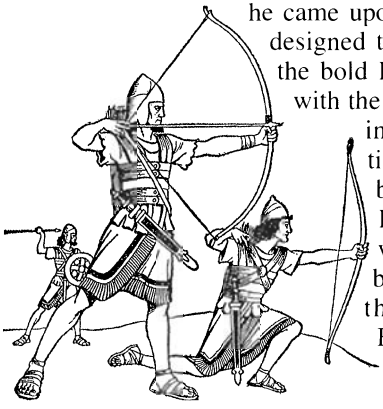
"What did they do?" asked Joan.

"A list of their exploits is given in 2Sam. 23, and 1Chron. 11," answered Mr. Phillips, turning up the first passage in his well marked Bible. "One man, called Jashobeam, was set upon by 800 men (2Sam. 23:8; 1Chron. 11:11), but, selecting a place where he could defend himself without them attacking at one time, he overthrew three hundred of them, and received great renown.

"Another man, named Eleazar, was with David and part of the Israelitish army at a place called Pas-dammin, or *The Field of Blood.* Suddenly they were attacked by a party of Philistines, and the men of Israel, taken off guard, fled for safety. But not Eleazar and David! Defending themselves in a field of barley, they beat off the Philistines and won a great victory. Because of this Eleazar was promoted to be one of the chief officers over the thirty (1Chron. 11:12-13).

"A similar incident occurred on another occasion. The Philistines were hiding in a field of lentils, and suddenly attacked the Israelites, causing them to flee. But Shammah, one of David's followers, stood his ground. He valiantly defended himself against the Philistines. The odds seemed hopeless. But, again, Yahweh gave victory to this hero of faith.

"There were others also who did valiantly. We have already considered the three men who broke through the army of the Philistines, and brought David water from the well of Benjamin. They, too, were promoted in David's army. Abishai, Joab's brother, a man of great courage, was appointed over others for his deeds of valour. Benaiah, a Levite, was placed over David's bodyguard (1Chron. 11:22; 2Sam. 8:18) for his notable deeds. He slew two champions of Moab, men of outstanding strength and fighting ability who were feared by their adversaries. On another occasion, one snowy day, he came upon a lion in a pit, or shallow well designed to hold water. Without hesitation, the bold Benaiah went down and grappled with the lion and destroyed it. He also met in personal combat a giant Egyptian, nearly three metres high, who battled with a huge spear against Benaiah. Benaiah had only a staff with which to fight this Egyptian, but, full of courage, he boldly tore the spear from the hand of the Egyptian and slew him with his own weapon.



"Other men were noted for simi-

lar brave deeds. David did not overlook any of them. They were all rewarded for their acts of courage. In that, he was like the Lord Jesus, who never overlooks acts of faith and courage done in his name, but will, in due time, suitably reward those who serve him. All who have done well will attain unto the kingdom of God, but some will be given greater positions than others. So Paul, in speaking of the resurrection, says that 'one star differs from another in glory' (1Cor. 15:41).

"In addition to organising the kingdom for his own reign," said Mr. Phillips, "David also laid the foundation for that to be established by Solomon. He made his sons princes, and gave them responsible duties to do. He established the priests and Levites into 24 orders, and arranged for their various duties. Some were appointed to be musicians, others were made singers, others were given duties of teaching, others became doorkeepers or porters".

"I don't intend to explain all the details of this until we come to consider the full glory of the kingdom under Solomon," continued Mr. Phillips. "In all this order, however, there was a prefiguring of Christ's kingdom. For example, there were twelve princes set over the whole kingdom of David, and there will be twelve princes ruling Israel when Christ reigns on earth (1Kings 4:7; Matt. 19:28). Again, as David organised the priests and Levites into twenty-four orders of authority to conduct the musical and religious services of the Temple, so the book of Revelation speaks of 'the 24 elders' (Christ's followers) who will officiate as king-priests in the kingdom (Rev. 5:9-10), and who are often pictured as singing songs of glory before their Lord (Rev. 14:1). Furthermore, David divided his kingdom into twelve divisions, quite apart from the tribal inheritance, and from the last chapter of Ezekiel's prophecy we learn that the Lord Jesus will do likewise.

"But these things are better discussed later, when we consider the kingdom under Solomon.

"There is a part that confuses me", said Graeham, as his father paused. "It was in our Sunday School lessons which I found difficult to grasp. In 2Sam. 8:17 we read that Zadok and Ahimelech were priests, but later we learn that Zadok and Abiathar were priests (2Sam. 15:24). Was there more than one high priest in the days of David?"

"No", replied Mr. Phillips, "Abiathar was the high priest, and Ahimelech and Zadok acted as his assistants, as did the sons of Eli when he was high priest (see 1Sam. 1:3). In the days of David, the Tabernacle was at Gibeon (2Chron. 1:3), whilst the ark was in Zion (1Chron. 15:29). Priests were therefore required in both places. Zadok was made priest in Gibeon, and Ahimelech was priest in Zion, but Abiathar was over both. These two men, Zadok and Ahimelech, represented the two great families of the house of Aaron, the families of

Eleazar and Ithamar. Eli, you will remember, was of the family of Ithamar, but God had declared that he would take the honor from the family of Ithamar and give it to one of Eleazar's family. Zadok was the man destined to become high priest in the place of Abiathar, and in the events we are now considering, we find him gradually coming to power. It was not until the days of Solomon, however, that he was appointed high priest".

"I suppose David was sad when he was told he could not build the Temple", said Joan.

"Yes, he would have loved to have built it", replied her father. "But though he was not permitted to do so, he did the next best thing, and made every preparation for it. David needed no urging in order to work for God. He found his greatest delight in such service. In that regard, he is an example to us all. Most of us find it difficult to give any time to the things of God, but not so David. Though he was not permitted to build the Temple, he was given the plans of it (1Chron. 28:11-15), and set about to gather the materials required. The gold, silver and precious metals of the nations he conquered were stored up for Solomon's use when he came to do the building (1Chron. 18:7-11), and everything possible was done by the king to further the work of his son. Towards the close of his life he was able to say to Solomon: 'In my poverty (mg) I have prepared for the house of Yahweh a hundred thousand talents of silver, and brass, iron, timber and stone without number' (1Chron. 22:14)."

"That must have cost plenty!" exclaimed Peter, reaching for his pen to do a few computations.

"Yes", replied his father, "It has been estimated that this amount of gold would cost £507,588,125, whilst the silver would represent something like £353,591,666. That would be a total of £861,169,791".*

"That is a lot of money!" exclaimed Joan.

Peter put away his pen. "How could David say that he saved this 'in his poverty'?" he asked.

"What he meant was that money — no matter how great in man's estimation — represented nothing in comparison with the greatness of the work of building a temple for Yahweh. In comparison with the magnificence of the task, David's wealth was but poverty, and that is what he meant. Anything we give to God is nothing in comparison with what God has given us. In fact, everything we have comes from Him, and therefore anything we give is His anyway! Thus, 'in our poverty' we can only give back to God what He has first supplied to us." With these comments Mr. Phillips asked the children to carefully read 2 Samuel 11 in preparation for the events described in our next chapter.

* This discussion took place in 1954. The cost of this precious metal would be greatly increased in comparison with today's values.

Chapter Six

DAVID'S SIN

2Samuel 11 tells of a sad and terrible moment in the life of this great man, when he grievously sinned before God and the people. It is a story we hate to tell, and concerning which we would prefer to remain silent. But though we might speak it in whispers, it is a story that must be told, because of the great warning it presents for all who would be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Who can rest confident in his own strength when he sees a man of the greatness of David fall? Who can ever despair of divine mercy when he sees such sin as his forgiven? In pleading the forgiveness of Yahweh, David declared: "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto Thee in a time when Thou mayest be found" (Psa. 32:6). David was told that his sin would "give great occasion to the enemies of Yahweh to blaspheme" (2Sam. 12:14). Those words have proven true, for ever since then, men have blasphemed the Truth because of what the king did in a moment of weakness, thoughtlessness and folly. It shows how careful we must be that we do not cause those holy things with which we are associated to be evil spoken against.

At the same time let us remember that the circumstances of David's personal tragedy are not recorded in the Scriptures for idle curiosity, nor for conjecture upon why David acted as he did. He might have justified his actions with Bathsheba until, when Nathan the prophet talked with him, he plainly saw his sin.

Therefore the record is not recorded for people to gloat over David's transgression, but to realise that if such a great and faithful servant of God can fall from His standard of behaviour how easy might we lesser people reveal similar frailty in the circumstances of life.

Praise And Condemnation

The 2nd book of Samuel is divided into two parts. The first portion to chapter 10, tells of David's greatness and triumph as he valiantly worked to establish Yahweh's law throughout the land. The second portion records his personal disgrace and the troubles that came upon him in consequence.

In chapter 10 we see him admired by all the people. He was their national hero, king, musician, poet and prophet. He had "gained much fame" by his conquest of the Edomites (ch. 8:13). He had conquered his enemies, united the nation, widened its influence, revived and directed the divine worship, arranged and extended the service of the Temple in anticipation of the time when it would be built. He stood before the people as civil ruler and head of God's kingdom — the great upholder of the worship and service of God. His psalms were

sung in the daily praise and thanksgiving services of the people. He was outstanding and upstanding in the esteem of all his subjects.

But in chapter 11 the picture is changed.

The great king David was found to be human after all. He became guilty of the most terrible sins. He shocked the whole nation then, and mankind since, by the extent of his folly. His example shows that the strongest among us must be on his guard constantly, as Paul warns: "Therefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1Cor. 10:12).

A Moment of Disaster

The crime occurred at a time of great national excitement. The nation of Ammon, that had badly insulted the ambassadors of David, remained the only foreign power to be subdued. A great army had been gathered under Joab to invade the country and besiege Rabbah, its capital, in order to complete its overthrow. Even David's personal servants, his bodyguard (2Sam. 11:1) had been recruited for the purpose of war, and the Ark had also been carried to the battle to encourage the troops and to seek the divine blessing upon the campaign (v. 11).

The combat had continued for some time with the Syrian power from the north intervening in the fray — as we discussed earlier, when outlining the Seven Campaigns of David.

But for some reason, David remained at home for the time being, and it was during this time of comparative idleness, when most of his companions were absent fighting Yahweh's battles, that David fell into error. There is a lesson in this for us. So long as we remain active in the things of God, there is less opportunity for us to fall into bad ways; but idle hands usually find evil work to do. If we fill our minds and our leisure hours with profitable thoughts and actions, there will be no place for these thoughts and ways that are wrong. Jesus spoke of this in his parable: Matt. 12:43-45 — if a man who has cleaned his mind of evil, fails to fill the vacuum with positive thoughts and wisdom about the ways of God, he is in danger of being assaulted with a greater temptation than formerly. Then "the last state of that man is worse than the first". That is why, on another occasion Jesus commanded: "occupy till I come" (Lk. 19:13).

So David rested at home, whilst Joab led the army of Israel into battle. The king's palace, like most of the homes of the Holy Land, was built with a flat roof, upon which David sometimes walked to enjoy the cool breeze that usually springs up of a late afternoon in that country.

One evening, whilst doing this, he saw a very beautiful woman in an adjoining courtyard. He developed a great affection for her, and desire to have her for his wife. But, alas, she was married to another man — one of the greatest soldiers of his realm: Uriah, a Hittite, who had embraced the Jewish hope.



David should have put from him any thoughts of seeking this woman (whose name was Bathsheba) to be his wife, but instead of doing so, he continued to think of her. Finally, idleness, luxury and covetousness led to the terrible sin of adultery.

The penalty for this sin was death. Under the Law of Moses there were certain offences that could not be atoned and for which the law made no provision for forgiveness. Some of these are listed in Lev. 20, and include adultery (v. 10). Thus the Law was unable to justify those who committed this sin — it was a matter that only Yahweh could determine. David recognised this, but instead of throwing himself openly and humbly upon God, he tried to hide his iniquity. Even the most faithful cannot do this with impunity, for sin must be revealed, condemned and forgiven (cp. 1Jn. 1:9-10).

The Fearful Power of Sin

David feared that his action might become known to others, and occasion the death of both Bathsheba and himself. He therefore devised a scheme to avoid the consequences of their folly. He sent word to Joab at the battlefront to send Uriah back home. David hoped that his complicity with Bathsheba might be covered up — but he forgot that though he might deceive the people, he could not deceive God! Everything is known to the Almighty, and it is only by uncovering sin to Him and pleading forgiveness, that it can be covered and the penalty for wrongdoing can be minimised. But so long as David tried to conceal his fault, he was led from one sin to another. Life is like that. How often is it, that one lie spoken in the beginning needs a dozen or more to cover it up! How frequently does one sinful act lead on to many others. David found this to be so.

When Uriah returned home, David sought his friendship: he

talked with him about the war, how it was progressing, what Uriah thought about the strategy. Then he sent him back to Joab with a letter, in which David ordered Joab to put Uriah in the most dangerous place, and then, when the enemy attacked, to desert him that he might be slain. David thought that by this means he might be able to avoid the consequences of his foolish involvement with Uriah's wife.

Joab was just the type of man to put this terrible, treacherous deed into operation. He followed the instructions of David and arranged the murder of Uriah. Thus, when the messenger returned to report to David the result of the war, the king was forced to add hypocrisy to his other sins of adultery and murder!

It is a terrible story, but one typical of those times. It is a story that must be told, because by it we understand better the terrible nature of sin. Since the sin of David was committed against a fellow human-being, we can better understand the injustice and evil of his actions. We can sympathise with Uriah. We are astonished at such a man as the king committing such mean and despicable acts. But we might look more tolerantly upon sins committed against God because we are constantly sinning in so many ways ourselves, and we like to excuse such things. We prefer to forget that many people sin in just the same way as David, but they are able to hide it from their fellowmen, and think that they avoid its consequences. David committed adultery; so do many secretly (Matt. 5:28). He committed murder; so do others in their heart (1Jn. 3:15). In his sin, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life dominated the king (cp. 1Jn. 2:16), and these three avenues of evil often control us, though we may not sin in the same way as did David. Yet how evil must our ways appear in the sight of God! David's fall is recorded to show us how hideous is sin in all its forms in the sight of Yahweh.

Many condemn David, and certainly no one can excuse his conduct on this occasion. But in spite of it, David is called a "man after God's own heart" (Acts 13:22), and we shall see that he very courageously and faithfully tried to make restitution for all the evil he did. David's life must be viewed as a whole, and not by this one incident. His general uprightness, warm heartedness, his ardent spiritual service, his virile faith and obedience must all be brought into consideration. In his transgression he acted entirely out of character, and was truly repentant. A general may lose a battle, and yet win a campaign. David did that in a moral sense, and we will later consider the great lengths he went to find forgiveness.

Lessons to be Learned

There are many things to learn from this folly of David. Firstly, there is the remarkable honesty and faithfulness of the Bible record. It makes no attempt to excuse Israel's greatest and godly king; it does

not avoid the failure of this notable national hero. His action is set clearly forth in all its stark evil.

Secondly, consider the severe punishment heaped upon him. All Israel was aware of the king's folly. All the world knows what happened. When David stands again in life at the resurrection, with all those who have read of his weakness, he will know of the wide effect of his action. Everyone knows about it! This evil brought in its train years of suffering and tears. His family experienced many forms of evil, even murder. He, himself, went through the bitterness of civil war and exile — the son he dearly loved became the main figure in a revolt against his rule. The very spot where the sin was conceived became the site of his disgrace (cp. 2Sam. 11:2 with ch. 16:22). Bathsheba's child died; David lost the services and wisdom of his friend, Ahithophel; he found himself in the power of the unscrupulous Joab; and he who ruined the family life of Uriah, found his own family a ruin. And the punishment is not yet finished! At the resurrection, David, Uriah and Bathsheba will be brought face to face again, and the final restitution and reconciliation will be made.

David brought all this terrible punishment upon himself because he was thoughtless for a moment. How such a record teaches us to be most careful, and not to allow our feelings to become swayed by circumstances.

Thirdly, notice how David became more and more involved. If only he had recognized that the way of escape was in confessing the sin and pleading forgiveness (James 5:16; 1Jn. 1:9). But lust, pride and the desire to cover his sin from men, led him step by step to greater wickedness, until it seemed to the tortured mind of the king that there was no way out but in the murder of Uriah. And so the dreadful act was committed.

How David afterwards regretted all that he had done. The pattern of his remaining years was set on a background of tragedy because of the dark and awful deeds of this moment.

David is Severely Rebuked

Uriah had been slain. After a period of mourning for the death of her husband, Bathsheba married David. Several months went by, and in due course a baby boy was born to them. It seemed as though David and Bathsheba would ride out the storm that had threatened to burst over their heads — as though David had acted wisely in getting rid of his captain, Uriah.

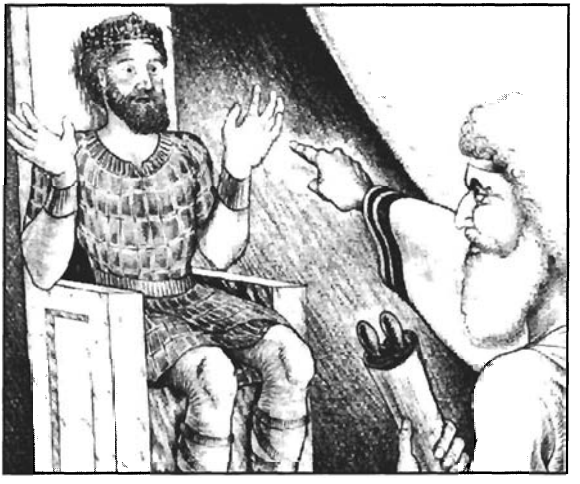
But one day, as the king rested in his palace, the prophet Nathan demanded to see him.

The king was always pleased to receive his great friend, and welcomed Nathan into his presence, little realising the purpose for such a visit. Nathan declared that he sought a judgment from the king!

"There are two men in the city", he told the king, "one of them rich, and the other poor. The rich man has many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing except one little lamb which he had bought and cared for every day. It was to him as a pet, growing up with his family, and he looked after it tenderly. But a traveller came to the house of the rich man, to rest from his journey. The rich man did not want to take a sheep, or a goat, from his flocks even though they were very great — but he took the poor man's lamb which was the delight of his eyes, and killed it for the traveller to eat!"

David listened carefully to the story. The generosity of his nature and his sense of justice were stirred as he listened to the pathetic story. He felt angry at the meanness of the rich man and his indifference to the feelings of the poor. He felt that such a man was so lacking in feeling as to be worthy of death (cp 2Sam. 12:5, margin), but the Law did not prescribe death for such a crime. It only demanded that the guilty party be made to pay fourfold for what he had stolen (Exod. 22:1).

"Such a man is worthy of death", declared David angrily to Nathan, "he shall pay fully according to the Law. He shall restore the lamb fourfold, because of what he did, and because he had no pity!"



Sorrowfully, Nathan looked at the king, and then exclaimed: "Thou art the man!"

David was transfixed by the words of the prophet. He had passed judgment on himself! Because he felt such a loathing for the mean action of the rich man in the parable, he realised how others must look upon his own conduct. But what of Yahweh: He Who is of such pure eyes, that He cannot look upon sin, how must He view David's action! David was horrified as, for the first time, he realised the full enormity of what he had done.

He listened with terror to the words of the prophet: "You have now despised the commandments of Yahweh", Nathan declared. "You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword of Ammon, and have taken his wife to be your wife. Therefore the sword shall never depart

from your house. Out of your own house will evil arise against you. You have tried to cover up this sin, but Yahweh is determined that it will be openly revealed before all Israel!"

The prophet paused, and for the moment there was a deep silence as David looked at his evil actions from the standpoint of Yahweh. How he loathed himself for what he had done! What could he do to justify himself? Nothing! He could only lament his own folly and wickedness. As the king thought on this, he heard the voice of Nathan revealing the full extent of his selfishness and evil, reminding him how good God had been to him — how He had raised David from shepherd boy to ruler, had given him riches and honor, wives and family. But now the prophet told David that the king had "despised the commandment of Yahweh" (2Sam. 12:9) and was worthy of death (Num. 15:31).

What a terrible indictment to this man whose love for his God was beyond dispute; whose heart "was like that of God Himself".

"Thus saith Yahweh", declared Nathan, "I will raise up enemies against you of your own house. What you did secretly, I will cause to be done against you publicly before all Israel!"

David did not try to justify himself. He could see the full measure of his guilt. "I have sinned against Yahweh," was all he could say.

Nathan replied: "Yahweh has put away your sin, that you will not die. However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of Yahweh to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall die."

Nathan abruptly left the Palace of David to return home. The king now saw that sin must be paid for, and how widespread is the trouble it brings. As he thought upon his folly, he began to see how vile were the actions he had committed. He learned the lesson we all must learn, that sin is wickedness, and must not be excused away at all. He felt the urgent need of being cleansed from the evil actions he had done. He gave himself over to fasting, and all night lay down upon the floor of his palace, praying for forgiveness, and for the life of the child. This continued for seven days during which time the child grew steadily worse, and finally died.

Two Beautiful Psalms Born out of Sorrow

It was while David lay prostrate on the floor of his palace all night, beseeching the forgiveness of Yahweh, that he composed what is one of the most beautiful of all Psalms: No. 51. It appeals to us because, like David, we recognise our shortcomings. In fact, David, in this incident, typifies the multitudinous Body of Christ in need of forgiveness.

Paul quotes this Psalm in Romans 3:4, and it is one we can use ourselves. David's sorrow is deep. He makes public his need for

divine help that others might be taught (v.13). He urges people to seek the Divine mercy as a covering for sin.

Psalm 51 opens with a prayer of forgiveness (vv. 1-2), it continues by making full confession of sin (vv. 3-5), it expresses David's tearful requests for Divine help (vv. 6-12), it makes certain vows that David promises to keep (vv. 13-15), it speaks of the offering he will make (vv. 16-17), and finally expresses his desire for the honour of Yahweh's Name (vv. 18-19).

The Psalm shows what a great man David really was. He promised that if God forgave his sin, then he would "teach transgressors the way of righteousness; and sinners would be converted (v. 13). David was true to his promise. He not only composed this Psalm which speaks of his great need of forgiveness, but he delivered it to the "chief musician" for public use. Thus this great king and conqueror humbled himself before the people. He was not above permitting such a Psalm to be publicly sung, even though it revealed the enormity of his wickedness, that Yahweh might be elevated, that His truth might be set before men, and that sinners might be taught that there is a possibility of salvation if they but seek it (see 1Jhn. 1:9; Matt. 12:31). Most men would try to hide their sin, especially if they had the power to do so as did David, particularly if they were held in such high esteem as he. The fact that he did not, but openly and frankly acknowledged his wrong, and sought every way to make good what he had done, shows that he was indeed a great man.

Psalm 51 should be linked with Psalm 32. The former pleads for forgiveness, the latter expresses David's thanks for the forgiveness that was granted him. In it he makes reference to the doubts and fears that had worried him prior to the time when Nathan rebuked him. He thanks Yahweh for His goodness, and says, that as men come to understand this they will turn unto Him in their sorrow (v. 6). In the Psalm he speaks first of the happy or blessed state of those who are forgiven (vv. 1-2), he makes reference to the sorrow brought by sin (vv. 3-4), he refers to the comfort obtained in confessing sin to God (v. 5), the reward of righteousness (vv. 6-7), the guidance that can be expected from God (vv. 8-9), and finally the glorious hope of the upright (vv. 10-11).

We might ask, how could Yahweh remain just, and yet extend mercy to David for such terrible sins? The question is an important one, and the answer is meaningful. The King had built up for himself a storehouse of mercy by his merciful acts towards others, and he could now draw upon that reservoir of mercy in time of need. David could throw himself upon the grace of God because in previous days when Saul had pursued him, and attempted to murder him, David had forgiven him, had refused to retaliate though Saul was then in his power. David always acknowledged the purpose of God in the affairs

of life, and would take no action against Saul because he was in the position of being Yahweh's anointed.

Now in his need, David turned to Yahweh, and because of the King's forgiving attitude towards others, God now forgave him.

How important that we should be merciful to others. We never know when we might be in need of mercy ourselves (Matt. 5:7).

It is a very serious thing to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" — unless we are prepared to really forgive evil actions done to us.

Let the wonderful lesson of David guide us.

Death of David's Son

Meanwhile, the long fast of David continued. For seven days he lay prostrate upon the ground, hoping that he might save the little boy. But daily the child grew worse. David was asking what was impossible for God to grant. He knows what is best for us all, and in all incidents of sadness and mourning, we cannot call in question His wisdom, for He can see the end from the beginning.

On the seventh day the child died. The servants of David, seeing his great grief at the sickness of his son, were frightened to tell him that his son had passed away. They thought the king would be completely overcome with grief. They whispered together, wondering how they could break the news to him.

But David saw their action, and knew what it meant.

"Is the child dead?" he asked them.

"He is dead," they sadly replied.

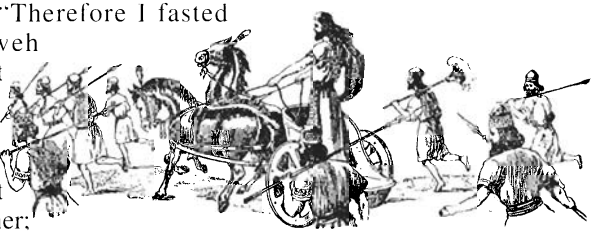
Then David did what was to them a remarkable thing. He quietly got up from the floor, washed and anointed himself, changed his clothing, and worshipped Yahweh (2Sam. 12:20). By doing this, David showed to all men that he did not blame God for the death of his son, nor call in question the justness of the punishment. On the contrary, he showed to all that God is just and righteous in all His ways.

But his servants could not understand David.

"When the child was sick, you fasted and wept," they said to him. "But when it died, you arose and ate."

He explained why he acted in that way.

"There was hope while the child was alive that God might save it," he said. "Therefore I fasted before Yahweh and besought Him to help me. But now that he is dead, I cannot help him further;



I cannot bring him back to me again". David thus showed that he was prepared to accept the chastening of the Lord.

Final Defeat of Ammon (2Sam. 12:26-31)

During all these months, whilst David experienced the sorrow that comes from sin, the war against Ammon continued. It was a long and bitter struggle. Joab had besieged the enemy in their capital city of Rabbah (2Sam. 11:1) which was divided into an upper and lower city. The city was well supplied with water, for there was a spring in the lower part of the city, which was therefore called "The City of Waters" (2Sam. 12:27).

But at last, after a twelve months' siege, the lower city was taken, and all Israel and Ammon knew that it was only a matter of time before the whole country would be in the hands of the Israelites.

Joab sent for David to come and lead the forces in their last assault, that the impending victory might be honoured with his presence. The city was taken, and a huge crown of gold that was on the head of the god Molech, which was worshipped by the Ammonites, was taken by David. He put it on his head, indicating that the country was now under his domination, and then he took it to Jerusalem, as a symbol that Yahweh had the victory over the pagan god Molech.* There were tremendous riches stored up in this city, all of which David took and stored for the use of the Temple when it should be built by Solomon. The people of the city were taken captive and brought before David, on a paved area where he sat in state and pronounced judgment upon them. He remembered the indignity with which the Ammonites had treated the ambassadors he had sent to their king,§ and he now punished them by giving them over to slavery. They were consigned to work with saws, and other instruments as David directed.

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* The AV says that David "took their king's crown from off his head" (2Sam.12:30), but the Septuagint translates the passage as "Molchom their king," identifying their king with Molech their God (cp. Jer. 49:1,3; Amos 1:1,15; Zeph. 1:5). The Hebrew word for "king" is similar for "Molech," a worship particularly evil in Yahweh's eyes (cp. 2Kings 23:10). David desecrated this god, taking the huge golden crown back to Jerusalem as a token of victory.

§ 2Sam. 12:31 says that David put the captives "under saws and under harrows of iron," and "made them pass through the brick kiln." His action, as expressed in this verse, has been subjected to much criticism as indicating great cruelty. But the Hebrew particle "beth" (rendered "under") when used with a tool or weapon, signifies "to" or "with" as in the following places: Jer. 46:22; Ezek. 26:9; Psa. 74:6. David did not put them "under saws" but "to saws"; he set them to work. As to the "brick kilns" he is supposed to make them "pass through", there are no such places in the Land. All bricks were burnt by the heat of the sun. The Hebrew word *Malben* occurs only here and in Jer. 43:9 and Nah. 3:14, where it should be rendered "pavement, paved area". Archaeologists have found such places in the ancient cities of the land. They were used as places of judgment. David sat on a pavement of brickwork, or a paved area. The captives passed before him, and he appointed them their various duties. They became the foreign workmen of 1Chron. 22:2,15. The Ammonites were more severely punished than other nations because of their treatment of David's ambassadors (2Sam. 10:4).

Chapter Seven

DAVID'S FAMILY TROUBLE

Absalom's Rebellion (2Sam. 13–18; Psalms 3–4)

"From now on," commented Mr. Phillips as the family gathered around to discuss the circumstances that surrounded king David, "we read of the developing troubles of David's life. He was worried by family as well as national problems. Three sons caused him particular concern. They were Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah."

"It is always the sons that give the most trouble!" exclaimed Ann.

"Not in this house!" argued Peter.

"I do not think it matters whether it is sons or daughters," commented Mr. Phillips with a smile. "Both can be a concern unless they are guided by the Word of God, and, unfortunately these sons of David cared little for God's Word."

"Absalom was the worst, I think," said Ann.

"That is true," answered her father. "Absalom was a very handsome man, greatly praised for his beauty. He was of royal descent from both his father and mother, for his grandfather on his mother's side, was the king of Geshur (2Sam. 3:3). His name means *Father of Peace*, but he proved to be just the opposite for David. He was greatly praised throughout Israel for his beauty, and became very vain in consequence. Each year, with great ceremony, his long, thick hair was cut and weighed, and the weight was published throughout Israel, that men might wonder at the beauty of this young man."

"He was quite a dandy!" remarked Ann.

"He had a sister, also noted for her great beauty. Her name was Tamar, which means 'Palm'. The palm tree is noted for its stateliness, dignity and beauty, and Tamar was a very beautiful woman. Absalom was very fond of his sister, and when he had a daughter born to him, he called her Tamar after his sister, for she, too, inherited the good looks of her father and auntie (2Sam. 14:27). Absalom's sister was not only noted for her good looks, but also for her skill at baking certain cakes.

"But Amnon, the half-brother of Tamar, became infatuated by her beauty. He was David's eldest son, and heir to the throne. David was very fond of him, and spoiled him by refusing him nothing. Amnon thus grew up to be a rather selfish man, who used to sulk and fret if he were denied anything. Urged on by the evil counsel of his cousin Jonadab, Amnon made love to Tamar, and when she repulsed him, he insulted her and evilly treated her.

"This made David very angry with Amnon. He could see that his evil action could lead to great trouble. But Amnon was heir to the

throne, and in time David forgave him. Absalom did not do so however. He came to hate and detest his brother, and secretly planned to punish him. He carefully hid the hatred that smouldered within him, and patiently awaited the opportunity of revenge. Two years went by, and then Absalom had his chance. It was the time of shearing, and as was usual, Absalom, who had a large sheep farm, celebrated the shearing with a grand feast. He invited his father and brothers to attend it. David could not, and asked to be excused, but all the king's sons went to the function.

"After two years of waiting for revenge, Absalom's hatred for his half-brother continued to smolder in his heart, until he determined that he would murder him.

"Carefully he made his preparations. He commanded his servants that at a given signal, when all were eating at the table, they were to attack and slay Amnon.

"Do not be frightened," he told them. "I have commanded you to do this thing, and will protect you."

"The king's sons gathered at the table of feasting, and soon the place was noisy with laughter.

"But the servants of Absalom did not laugh. Silently and ominously they watched the merry-making, awaiting the signal to do the dreadful deed to which they had been committed.

"At last it came. To the horror of the sons of David, the servants of Absalom suddenly attacked Amnon, and slew him. The feasting was plunged into confusion and terror. Absalom's brothers imagined it was a plot to destroy them all. In fear and panic they rushed from the house of murder.

"The terrible news quickly spread, and like most bad reports became worse the further it went. In Jerusalem, it was reported that all the king's sons had been murdered. David was horrified at the news. He tore his garments, prostrated himself to the ground, and gave himself over to sorrow. It was the beginning of woes that were now to affect David; it was part of the terrible punishment he was to bear for the terrible sin of which he was guilty. But Jonadab — the one really responsible for the tragedy and who seems to have been a proper mischief-maker (cp. 2Sam. 14:3-5) — told David that the report was false, that only Amnon was dead, and that Absalom had been plotting the murder of his brother for two years.

"Sure enough, a little while later, the king's sons returned from the feast to report the terrible tragedy that so deeply affected the whole family. It plunged the household of David into mourning. Each member felt the deep disgrace brought upon it by the folly of Amnon and the violent ruthlessness of Absalom.

"As for Absalom, he fled for refuge to the king of Geshur, his grandfather on his mother's side.

"Thus David was bereft of both his eldest sons. He was very fond of Absalom, and though he was very angry and disappointed at the way he had acted, he realised that Amnon was greatly to blame also. As time went by he became reconciled to the death of Amnon and longed to see the handsome Absalom again. Little did he realise the terrible shame and trouble Absalom was yet destined to bring upon the house of David.



"This is a very terrible and sad incident in David's life," said Mr. Phillips as he concluded the story, "but it is one that has to be told. David had sinned greatly. As we have seen from our past studies, sin always brings suffering in its train. David found it to be so, and so shall we all, if we wander from the way of righteousness and peace. David's own folly was a bad example to his sons, and they played upon it. How he must have regretted his foolish mistake now that he was experiencing its fruit in the circumstances of his own family.

"Meanwhile, there was born unto David and Bathsheba further children, one of whom they called Solomon (meaning 'peaceable'). This little boy had two names, for he was also called Jedidiah, which means "Beloved of Yahweh". Upon this little boy, David's hopes now rested. But of that we must speak later", Mr. Phillips said as the family concluded their discussion for the evening.

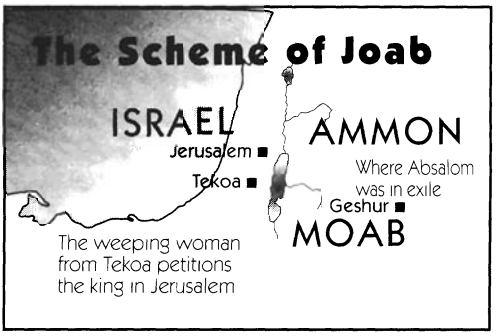
Joab Pleads the Cause of Absalom

Three years passed away with Absalom in exile. David's mourning for Amnon long ceased, and the continued exile of his dearly loved son, Absalom, saddened him.

Joab saw that David desired to bring Absalom back from exile, but that he lacked an excuse to do so. He thought out a scheme by which he could help the king and his son. Not far distant, in the town of Tekoah, there lived a woman known for her wisdom. She was just the one to help Joab. Sending for her, he told her to disguise herself as a mourner, and go before the king with a plea for help. Joab then told her what she must say when she met the king.

Thus, one day, the king was confronted by a woman in deep mourning. She looked very forlorn and sorrowful, and he could see

that she had been weeping.



"What ails you?" asked the king.

"I am in great trouble," came the reply. "I am a widow with two sons. Unfortunately they bitterly quarrelled, and one slew the other. Now the whole family wants to punish my remaining son, they want to kill him because he slew his brother. But if that happens, I will have no family left. My state will be worse than ever! I will suffer more keenly than anyone!"

As the king heard this story of woe, and saw the marks of tears and mourning on the sad, downcast face before him, the kindness of his heart was touched. He could see the sense of her appeal. What was the use of killing the remaining son! As king in Israel he could prevent it, for it was part of his duty to give judgment on Yahweh's behalf in such matters. The king felt that he knew how a merciful, heavenly Father would desire him to act in such a case.

"Go to your house in comfort", he said gently to the widow. "I will give charge concerning you."

How grateful the woman seemed for such kindness!

"My lord, O king," she said, "restore to me my son, and I will bear the punishment that should be inflicted on him."

But the king accepted full responsibility for his judgment.

"Whoever says anything to you, bring him to me, and I will deal with him," he said. "In the name of Yahweh, your son shall not be harmed."

The woman, of course, had only pretended all this so as to advance the cause of Absalom. The time had now come for her to reveal the true reason for her appeal, and she knew she had to be very tactful in the matter. Humbly she turned to the king.

"There is one thing more I would ask of you," she said quietly.

"What is it?" asked the king, little dreaming of what she would say.

"Seeing you are prepared to forgive my son," said the woman, "why do you not forgive your son, Absalom! The people of God do not want him to remain in exile. If you are prepared to forgive my son when his relations want to punish him, why do you not recall your banished son home, seeing the people do not want him punished."

With wise and earnest words she pleaded with the king. She reminded him that the opportunity to do good is limited to the length of our lives. When life ends, we are like "water spilt on the ground which cannot be gathered up again" (2Sam. 14:14). If God devises

means for forgiveness for sins, why should not the king do so for his son!

"Do not think that I am alone in this," she said to the king. "I appear before you in the name of the people. Surely you will listen to this plea, even as you were prepared to forgive my son. A wise decision on your part will be for rest" (v.17 marg.).

Thoughtfully the king looked at the humble woman before him. As he listened to her wise words, and pondered their meaning, he could see that she did not speak them for herself. He knew there was someone else at the back of it all. He knew who it was — Joab, the ruthless Commander-in-chief of his army.

"Is not the hand of Joab with you in all this?" he suddenly demanded of the woman.

She acknowledged that it was so.

"Go back and tell him that I am prepared to do this thing; tell Absalom he may return home," said the king.

When Joab was told of this decision, he went to Geshur, and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem.

But David was angry with the way it had been deceitfully brought about.

"Tell him to return to his own house," he ordered. "Let him not see my face."

So Absalom returned to his house at Jerusalem, but was not acknowledged by the king. The woman had told the king that Absalom's return would be "for rest", but David was soon to find out that this was not so. A period of the greatest trouble was about to open for him.

Absalom Demands to see the King

The handsome and conceited Absalom was back in Jerusalem, but he was far from pleased. He did not like the way his father ignored him. The people could see that he was still in disgrace. And that did not please this young man. He looked upon himself as a great prince before whom the people should bow.

Absalom was a typical man of the flesh. He sought power by any means, no matter how ruthless. He was selfish in the extreme. Above all, he gloried in his personal beauty. He had long, thick hair, which he allowed to grow until it hung in thick tresses down his back. The Scriptures speak of long hair on a man as a sign of shame (1Cor. 11:14), except when it was let grow for some purpose, like the Nazarite vow (Num. 6:5). But such a vow was far from the thoughts of Absalom, as he allowed his hair to grow.

He became well-known throughout the land for his rich clothing, his handsome appearance, and his long hair. He was vain and conceited, but not very happy. Three sons had been born to him, but had died

(2Sam. 14:27; 18:18), and the only child he had was a very beautiful daughter whom he called Tamar, after her aunt (v. 27).

Two years went by in this way. Absalom continued to live in Jerusalem, but the king still refused to see him. At last Absalom could bear it no longer. He called for Joab to help him. But Joab felt that he had done enough for the young man, and did not come. Absalom decided to teach Joab a lesson. He had a farm close to one owned by Joab. Instead of sending for Joab again, he commanded his servants to set Joab's field alight. Joab found that the fruits of twelve months' labour were destroyed in a moment, as the fierce flames roared through the fields, and the smoke billowed high in the sky.

Angrily he stormed to the house of Absalom.

"Why did your servants set fire to my field?" he fiercely demanded.

But he received a very haughty reply from the young man who looked upon himself as crown prince.

"When I command you to come, you must learn to do as you are told," Joab was instructed. And then Absalom told Joab what he wanted: "What is the use of me coming here," he said. "I might as well have stayed in Geshur rather than live here in disgrace as I am doing. I demand the right to see the king again. If he still thinks I am worthy of punishment, let him kill me."

Joab looked at the handsome and angry young prince before him. He had met his match. He could see in Absalom, one as ruthless as himself. Already his crops were a smoking ruin, and that showed that Absalom was prepared to do anything to get his way. Quickly Joab turned from the house, and approached David. He pleaded with the king to meet his son again. And, finally, David gave way. Joab was allowed to bring Absalom to the palace. What a "reconciliation" that was. The hard, ruthless Absalom, who had murdered his brother, who had burned down the field of Joab and made that hard man do his will, who gloried in his conceit and his good looks, bowed before his father, apparently humbled. But David's love overflowed for his son. He was glad to see him, glad to have him back in the palace, and overjoyed, he took him in his arms, and they kissed one another.

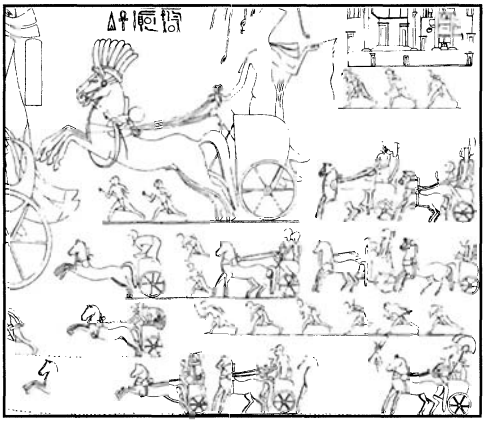
Absalom kissed his father, but the kiss was like that of Judas Iscariot. There was no love in his heart for his father. Secretly he was meditating how he might get his revenge on him for the exile he had suffered. He decided to wrest the kingdom from David.

Absalom Schemes to Supplant his Father

Absalom was the eldest surviving son of David, and under normal conditions would be heir to the throne, but Absalom doubted whether that honour would ever be his unless he grasped it. David had already been told that his youngest son

Solomon would be king in Israel (1Chron. 22:9). Perhaps Absalom knew of this.

So Absalom schemed how he might grasp the Kingdom. He was not afraid of the baby Solomon if he could but get his hands upon the throne. He began to make preparations, appearing before the people as a prince royal. He imported chariots and horses, and employed 50 men to run before him as he travelled through the streets of the cities. The appearance of the lordly and handsome Absalom, in royal dignity, preceded by 50 runners, travelling slowly in a chariot so that all could admire him, and he could receive the cheers and plaudits of the crowd, became a familiar sight in Israel. The people came to love the young prince. He was so handsome in appearance, with his long, flowing hair, so pleasant in his manners, that he won their hearts. When any of the commoners came to visit him, and humbly bowed before him, Absalom would stop him doing so, and raising him up would kiss him as though he were a friend (2Sam. 15:5). Absalom was very free and easy with kisses, which perhaps was one reason why Solomon later wrote: "The kisses of an enemy are deceitful, but the wounds of a friend are health." In fact, in all his actions, Absalom typifies a man of the flesh. He developed his body but not his mind; he stood for physical perfection and beauty, but was full of moral wickedness and iniquity; he sought his own pleasure, and his own will in everything.



Such men are treacherous and are to be avoided. Absalom was treacherous, even to his father. The trouble and sorrow that David had experienced about this time worried him so much that he became very ill. He makes reference to this in the Psalms (cp. Psa. 41:3,4), and apparently some of his duties fell into neglect as a result. It was part of his duty, as king, to act as judge in Israel. For this purpose, each day he would take his seat at the gate of the city, where anybody was able to approach him, to ask judgment in any matter. But the sickness of David forced him to shorten this work. He could not get through the number of cases that awaited judgment, so that there was a delay before a person could bring his complaint before the king.

This was just the opportunity Absalom was seeking. He rose up early each morning, to stand at the place of judgment. When any

approached with a case, he warmly welcomed them, and professed that he was very interested in their welfare. Gravely he would listen to their complaints, and tell them that they had justice on their side. "If only I were made judge in Israel," he would sigh, "then every man would have his right."

That was what every man loved to hear, and Absalom's popularity increased. The Bible says that he "stole" the hearts of the men of Israel (2Sam. 15:6). This word is very descriptive, for to "steal" is to be guilty of dishonest dealing.

Absalom felt that his scheme was going ahead very nicely. Next he sought out all David's enemies. Every good man will have enemies who are ready to plot against him, and David had those who were anxious to hurt him. Absalom gathered these people about him, ready for the time when he would grasp the Kingdom. The sickness of his father pleased him. He hoped that he would die. He visited him, pretending that he was very sorry, because of his illness, and saying how he wished the king would soon recover. Actually he was delighted to see him so ill (Psa. 41:6). Full of glee he told his friends that the king would soon die, and they plotted and conspired to grasp power when that would happen (vv.7-8). These evil friends of Absalom commenced a whispering campaign against David. They told everybody that "Yahweh has deserted the king because of his wickedness" (Psa. 3:2), and that Israel could soon expect a new king.

But David did not die of his sickness. Absalom began to lose heart. He had no love for his father, and desired his death.

"When shall he die and his name perish?" he muttered to himself (Ps.41:5).

He thought the sickness of his father a good opportunity of grasping the kingdom. He decided to act before David was fully recovered.

Absalom Proclaims Himself King

One day Absalom came to his father with a request. "When I was in Geshur," he said, "I promised Yahweh that if I were ever restored again to Jerusalem, I would offer sacrifices to Him in Hebron. I ask, therefore, that you grant me permission to now do so."

David was only too willing to help his son in such matters.

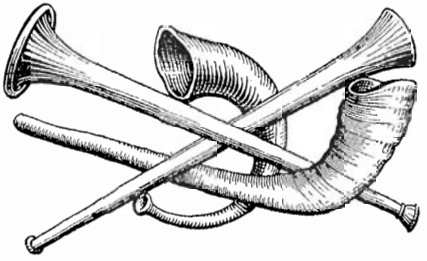
"Go in peace," he answered. Little did he realise that there was black treachery in the heart of Absalom; that he had determined to seize this opportunity to drive his father from the throne. Spies were sent throughout all the tribes of Israel.

"As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then make a public proclamation in every city that Absalom reigns in Hebron," he instructed them.

With a retinue of 200 men, Absalom left Jerusalem. These men did not realise what the young prince was scheming (2Sam.15:11).

They were, perhaps, loyal supporters of David, whose absence from the capital helped the cause of Absalom.

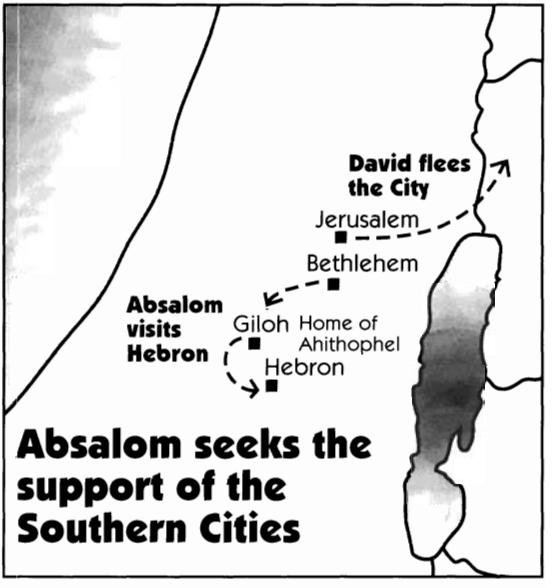
In due course, Absalom arrived at Hebron at the head of the 200 men. The handsome young prince made a very impressive parade as he entered the city. The people imagined that the 200 officers with him were part of his following. Because the city of Hebron was jealous of Jerusalem ever since David had transferred the capital to that city, Absalom found some among the leaders in Hebron who readily accepted him, and agreed to help him.



There was also another reason why Absalom visited Hebron. It was close to the town of Giloh, and at Giloh there lived Ahithophel, the most noted of David's advisers, a man esteemed throughout Israel for his wisdom. He had such a reputation, that his advice was looked upon by many unthinking people as equal to the Word of God (2Sam. 16:23).

Ahithophel had been a great friend of David, and had assisted him in many ways. But he had come to secretly hate the king. He was the grandfather of Bathsheba (cp. 2 Sam. 11:3 with ch. 23:34-39), and was probably incensed at the public disgrace that David had brought on his family, and the terrible murder of Uriah.

Absalom knew of his hatred for David, and thought that he could use Ahithophel in his scheme to grasp the kingdom. He knew that if men heard that this wise counsellor was on his side they would more readily support him.



Ahithophel gladly received Absalom, and promised to help. He was dominated by a feeling of re-

venge against David, and wanted to hurt him. Thus, in spite of all his wisdom, Ahithophel acted foolishly. If Yahweh is prepared to forgive, so also should man. Ahithophel was not prepared to do this. Instead he nursed his resentment against David, until the desire for revenge became a burning passion with him. This led him to break the Law (Deut. 32:35), and curse Yahweh's anointed — an action which David had refused to do in regard to Saul (1Sam. 24:10).

Ahithophel's name means "Brother of Folly", and his actions show that he lived up to his name, despite his reputation for wisdom.

It is always important to bear in mind that the "wisdom of this world is foolishness with God," and that true wisdom is found in the "fear of Yahweh" (Prov. 1:7), that is, in seeking His will and doing it. The wisdom of man can oft-times blind us to God's ways. That is what Paul meant when he wrote: "The world by wisdom knew not God" (1Cor. 1:21). Worldly wisdom can blind us to such things as faith and righteousness. It teaches us to see the source of true satisfaction in the attainment of all that this life can offer; it tells us to revenge ourselves, to "look after number one"! Ahithophel did that, and is known to us as the *Brother of Folly*. True satisfaction comes from doing the will of God, by sacrificing for others, and helping one another — and mainly, from doing all these things because it pleases Yahweh that we do so (see Heb. 11:26).

Meanwhile, Ahithophel thought the time of revenge had come. Gladly he followed the messengers of Absalom to Hebron, and there, before the people, sacrifices were offered, and Absalom was proclaimed king. When the people saw the 200 followers that had come with Absalom out of Jerusalem, and the great Ahithophel standing with the young prince, they believed that power was on the side of Absalom, and applauded the new king.

Messengers were despatched throughout the land, and in all the cities the news was received that Absalom had raised the standard of revolt in Hebron. The trumpets were blown, and as the people hastened together, they heard the proclamation that the young, handsome, popular Absalom had been made king in Hebron. They did not stop to reason whether this was the will of Yahweh or not, but like most crowds, were carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment. They cheered for Absalom because they liked him — as they followed Saul years before — and did not worry to find out whether what they did was right in Yahweh's eyes. The Bible declares "the people increased continually with Absalom" (2Sam. 15:12).

The Sick King Hears the News

Back in Jerusalem, the sad news came to the ailing king that his beloved son had cruelly revolted against him. David was broken-hearted at the news. He felt crushed by all the troubles that were

falling on him. He now saw Absalom for what he really was: "a deceitful and malicious man" (Psa. 43:1).

But David was sick (Psa. 41:3-8), and felt unable to engage in war. Besides, he did not want to bring fresh miseries upon the people. He felt that this was part of the price he had to pay for his own wickedness, and was prepared to humbly submit to what was required of him. He felt he could not bear much more trouble. "Oh that I had wings like a dove!" he said to himself, "for then I would fly away, and be at rest; I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness" (Psa. 55:6).

Reports were coming in to the capital from all parts of the land, showing how widespread and powerful was the revolt. All Israel was turning to Absalom. The king felt thoroughly depressed. On every hand his enemies were increasing (Psa. 3:1). Some, making reference to the murder of Uriah, said: "There is no help for him in God" (Psa. 3:2). It was freely predicted that the revolt must succeed.



But David still had some who loyally supported him. There were about 600 veterans who had been with him since his wilderness wanderings; there was also his own personal bodyguard; there was the ruthless and skilful Joab, and many others. Moreover, he was in the powerful fortress of Zion, and he could have defied Absalom from that city. But sick in mind and body, the king could not sustain such an effort. To think that his son, of all people, should lead the revolt against him was a disgrace he could not face. He decided to leave the issue with God, and leave the city. He did not want any further bloodshed at that time (2Sam. 15:14), and gave the order to retreat.

David's Flight from the City*

Hastily the information was passed on to the friends of David that the king was going to leave the city. Many decided to go with him. They met at a place called Beth-hammerhah, or the Far House, a place just outside Jerusalem (2Sam. 15:17). Quite a company was gathered together. Among them were the Philistines whom David had made into his personal bodyguard,† there were also the 600 men who had been with him when he was an exile from Saul in Gath (1Sam. 30:14; 2Sam. 15:18); and, in addition to these, his own followers, David was deeply affected to find a Philistine called Ittai, ready to throw in his lot with him, and follow the king into exile. Ittai had only recently come among the Israelites, and had apparently accepted the worship of Yahweh. He was renowned in war, and had with him a considerable following, and later he was made captain of part of David's forces (Ch. 18:2).

However, David did not want to impose upon his kindness.

"You have only recently come into the land," he said to Ittai, "and it is not right that I should be the cause of you being driven from it. Return to Jerusalem, and may Yahweh reward you as you have been kind to me" (vv. 19-20).

But Ittai refused to do this. He admired the courage of the king, and was determined to help him.

So the company of refugees following David, descended down the valley and crossed the brook Kidron. As the people saw the king was intent upon flight, a loud wail of grief burst from them, which echoed down the valley they were crossing, so that it seemed that "all the country wept" (v. 23).

Shortly after this David was overtaken by another procession which came hurrying out of Jerusalem. Abiathar and Zadok, with all the Levites, and carrying the Ark of the Covenant, hastened to throw in their lot also with the king. They had decided that when Absalom reached the capital, he would find the symbol of Yahweh's presence gone from its precincts.

The loyalty of the priests was a great comfort to David, but he had too much reverence for Yahweh to risk the Ark in his own personal peril: he knew that Yahweh would restore him to the kingdom if it were His will. Meanwhile, he was prepared to bear with whatever

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* The Bible tells in detail of two sad processions from the city of Jerusalem. The first is that of King David. There is no day so minutely described in the O.T. as this one. The second is that of King Jesus when, rejected by the people, he was led away to be crucified. These were both sorrowful days, and the keen student will find many interesting comparisons between them both.

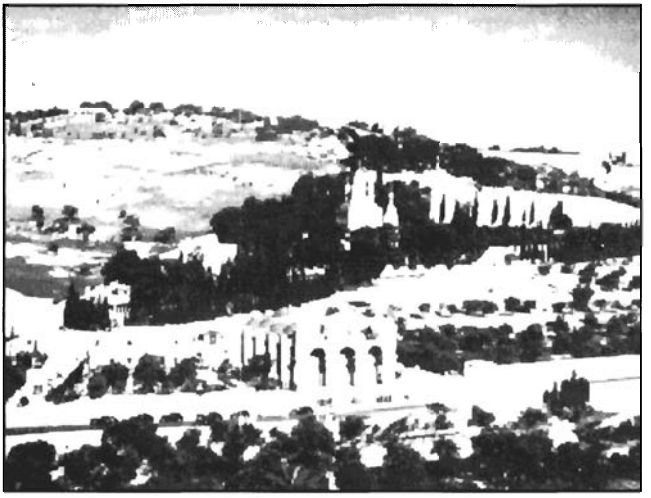
† The Cherethites and Pelethites were apparently Philistines who had entered the service of David, probably as mercenaries. The Philistines originated from Crete, which in ancient Hebrew was spelt the same as "Cherethi"(see Zeph. 2:5; Ezek. 25:16). The Jewish Targum has rendered these words as "the archers and the slingers." It could be that this was the particular function of this portion of David's troops.

God permitted to happen. He was surprised that the priests did not know better than to bring the Ark from its resting place for such a purpose.

"Are you not a seer!" he said to Zadok, in rebuke, as much as to say, "You should have known better!"

He told the priests to return to the city, and take with them their two young sons, Ahimaaz and Jonathan. He would retreat to the wilderness by the Jordan, and when news came, the priests were to send it by the hands of these two boys.

The priests and Levites returned to the city, and David continued his retreat. He ascended the rising by the Mount of Olives, with his prominent followers, mourning with him at the disgrace that had come upon them.



Mount of Olives

As they did so, a messenger came running from the city, to tell David the latest news.

"Ahithophel has joined in the rebellion!" he called to the king.

This was bad news indeed. David knew the skill of Ahithophel. It showed how strong was the revolt. Ahithophel was his "own familiar friend, in whom he trusted" (Psa. 41:9), he was David's guide and personal acquaintance, and the king had treated him as an equal (Psa. 55:13). Not only his relations, but also his friends, were now turning against David. There was only One who could help him now. David's confidence was still in God. "O Yahweh", he prayed, "turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness!"

The Mount of Olives was a favourite resort of David's, as it was that of the Lord Jesus many years later. There, apparently, David used to retire (2Sam. 15:32) to meditate upon the things of God, and overlook the city called by his name.

And now, as they passed this spot that he loved so much, and which held for him many pleasant memories of communion with God, the first ray of hope was felt by the king. Another friend hastened up to join his company. It was a man called Hushai, known as the King's friend (1Chron. 27:33). He had heard the news too late to join David earlier, but as soon as he learned of the revolt, he had hastened off to meet up with the king. He came with all the marks of grief on him: with clothes rent, to indicate openly his grief; with dust on his head, to indicate that he felt humbled to the ground by the circumstances.

David was pleased to see him. It showed that not all his friends had deserted him. Hushai was no warrior, but a discreet counsellor. He was one of the few who could, perhaps, defeat the counsel of the renowned Ahithophel, for Hushai was a master of diplomacy and political stratagem. As David greeted his friend, he suddenly thought of a plan.

"If you come with me you will only be a burden," he said to Hushai, "but if you return to the city, and offer to serve under Absalom, you may be able to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel. Zadok and Abiathar the priests will help you, and their sons will be able to bring me news of your success." Hushai agreed to do as the king suggested, and hastened to return to the city.

A little further on, another company met David. It was commanded by Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, whom David had earlier helped. He had two asses laden with goods for David and his men.

"Where is Mephibosheth?" asked David.

"He remained at Jerusalem, hoping that this trouble might be the means of him being made king," was the answer. Ziba lied in saying this, but the king did not know it at the time. He was angry at the supposed ingratitude of Mephibosheth.

"You can have all that I gave unto Mephibosheth," he said to Ziba.

That pleased Ziba well, and he returned to his possessions.

The Cursing of Shimei (2Sam. 16)

About one and a half miles on from the Mount of Olives there was a town in Benjamin named Bahurim. One of its principal citizens was a man named Shimei (meaning "Famous One"). He was a relative of Saul, and bitterly hated David for all the troubles that had come on the house of Saul.

From a rising above the valley, he watched the mournful procession below with deep satisfaction. He was glad to see David humbled. Full of spite, he wanted to add to David's troubles. From the hill above he cursed the king in the hearing of all the people. "Begone, begone, you murderer!" he shouted. "Go, you man of evil and worthlessness."

He cast stones at David, as the Law commanded Israelites to do to those condemned to death for adultery (Deut. 22:24). Every action he did, every word he shouted, was designed to disgrace the king before his people.

"You murderer!" he shouted. "Yahweh has paid you back for all you have done to the house of Saul. He has given the kingdom to your own son to pay you out for your wicked deeds."

The Israelites below looked up at the Benjamite as he kept pace with the procession, dancing with rage on the hill above, shouting abuse at the king, as he showered dust and stones upon the refugees beneath him.

It was too much for the hot-tempered Abishai, the nephew of David. All his pent-up distress burst forth in an answering stream of abuse and insult on Shimei. He mocked at Shimei as a dead dog, implying that the house of Saul had no hope of the kingdom at all. "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?" he said wrathfully. "I will go over and cut off his head."

But David would not let him. His troubles had taught him the lesson of humility. He saw the cursing of Shimei as further punishment from Yahweh because of his great sin, and was prepared to submit. He therefore restrained Abishai. "Behold," he said, "my own son seeks my life, how much more reason has this Benjamite to reproach me. Let him alone. Yahweh has permitted him to curse me, and if I bear with this trial in a way pleasing to Him, He may reward me for it" (v. 12)

Quietly and patiently the king went on his way, whilst on the hill above (2Sam. 16:13) Shimei wore himself out, running up and down along the procession, throwing stones and dirt at the people, shouting abuse and curses as he did so.

But at last he was left behind. The people marched all that day, and late into the night until they came to the banks of the Jordan. There the asses of Ziba were unladen, and the people refreshed themselves (v. 14). Night had long since fallen, and, tired out, the camp was soon fast asleep, with the sentries keeping watch.

Early next morning, possibly before the sun was up, the sentries heard the noise of men running. Soon afterwards, the two sons of the priests, excitedly burst into the camp with news from the capital. Sleep was instantly forgotten. Excitedly the men crowded around to hear what had occurred. The news they received was most encouraging. It showed that Yahweh had not deserted the king. His heart was filled with thanksgiving and praise as he realised this. He composed Psalm 3 in commemoration of the occasion. In it he speaks of how many had said there was "no help for him in God," but how Yahweh had been his shield and defence; how he had constantly prayed unto the Father and had been heard; how he had slept and awakened to find

that Yahweh had helped him. Now he was full of confidence, for he knew that he could draw upon God for help. "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people that have set themselves against me round about," he declared (Psa. 3:6).

In David's submission to Shimei's cursing, we have a wonderful example of patience and faith. In his adversity, David shows himself as really great. He is courageous yet humble, faithful yet patient, and prepared to submit to the ordeal brought upon him as Divine affliction, the full meaning of which he would know later on, and for which he was prepared to wait.

In David's flight from the capital, we have an example of the sad change that can come over human affairs, and a fearful proof of their instability. Here was the greatest king who ever lived, a sincere follower of God, a profound politician, an able general, the hero and deliverer of his people, now rejected and set aside by a fickle public which preferred a vain and worthless upstart. This incident foreshadowed the foolish choice of the Jews who selected the murderer Barabbas in place of their true king, the Lord Jesus Christ (John 18:40). Such incidents teach us never to fear the opinion of men, but to ever seek the respect of God.

Help for David was not long in coming.



The city of Jerusalem from which the lonely king fled for safety.

Chapter Eight

ABSALOM CHALLENGES HIS FATHER'S RULE

Absalom's Triumph (2 Samuel 16 and 17) Jerusalem hummed with excitement. Shortly after David had hurriedly fled from its precincts, the handsome and popular Absalom had entered it in triumph. With him were his supporters, men who hoped to be given positions of high authority. Greatest of them all was the noted and aged counsellor Ahithophel. Throughout all Israel, the cities had resounded with the proclamation that Absalom was king. It seemed that nothing could prevent the revolt being an outstanding success.

One thing surprised Absalom. He found Hushai, known far and wide as David's friend, now apparently among his ardent supporters.

Bowing low before the rebel king, Hushai greeted him with the words: "May the king live!" But Absalom was suspicious of Hushai. He knew the great bond of friendship and love that existed between him and his father.

"Is this the way you repay the kindness of your friend?" he sternly asked in return. "Why did you not follow your friend into exile?"

Hushai was ready with a reply: "Whoever Yahweh, and this people, and all the men of Israel choose, his will I be, and with him will I abide," he answered.

These words have a double meaning. Whom had Yahweh and the people of Israel chosen, but David the rightful king? "Should I not serve in the presence of David's son? As I have served in thy father's presence, so will I be in thy presence."

This, again, was an evasive statement. Hushai had served Yahweh by trying to build up the power of David, and his words could mean that he would also serve in the presence of Absalom to the same end. In Absalom's court he was a spy, determined to be true to the instructions that David had given him, as he met him fleeing from the city.

Absalom, however, was ignorant of all that, and allowed Hushai to remain among his followers.

Absalom's Court Assembles Meanwhile, there was important work to be done. Absalom gathered all his advisers together that they might decide upon the next move. Hushai was present, together with other leaders of the revolution. Chief among them all was the celebrated Ahithophel. It was to him they all looked for advice.

He was as the Voice of God in their midst (2Sam. 16:23), so high-

ly did men esteem his wisdom.

As Hushai looked around the gathering and saw how the people deferred to Ahithophel, he wondered how he could overthrow the counsel of so formidable an antagonist. There was but only one way he could succeed — through the help of God, Who could be reached by prayer.

For Ahithophel, once the friend of David, now bitterly hated him. He was determined to destroy him, and his first advice caused Absalom to so commit himself in the sight of David and the nation, that there would be no possibility of the young prince turning back. He advised him to publicly take possession of the household of David, and thus show his full intention to control the kingdom in its entirety. In following this piece of worldly wisdom, Absalom fulfilled the prophecy of Nathan (2Sam. 12:11). Ahithophel had won the first round against Hushai.

Hushai Defeats the Counsel of Ahithophel

Ahithophel knew well the fighting qualities of David. He knew that there would be no security for Absalom so long as David remained alive; but he also realised that if Absalom was killed in battle, the revolution would fail.

Thus, when Absalom's Council-of-War met to consider the next move, the issue could be simply stated. It was this: David must be destroyed — Absalom must be preserved alive.

How could this dual purpose be achieved?

Ahithophel had a plan. He believed that they should strike at David immediately, before he had opportunity to gain support. Instead of Absalom jeopardising his life in battle, Ahithophel would lead the army in the field.

"Let me choose out 12,000 men, and I will arise and pursue after David tonight," he counselled Absalom. "I will come on him when he is weary and weak, and will fill him and his followers with fear. They will scatter from him, and I will smite the king only, and then unite all the people under you."

It was excellent advice. There was no danger to Absalom, for he would remain at home; there was no danger to the Revolution, for if Ahithophel failed, Absalom remained to carry on the fight.

Ahithophel's counsel was applauded by Absalom and all the leaders with him.

But there was one who did not applaud — Hushai, David's friend.

He was called before the rebel king, and told what Ahithophel had advised.

"What is your opinion of this advice?" he was asked.

Hushai thought carefully, and then, as the leaders looked at him, suspecting treachery, he slowly replied: "The counsel of Ahithophel is

not good. You know your father and the men with him. You know how angry they are at this moment, like a bear robbed of her whelps, fierce and determined to fight whatever the cost. Your father, Absalom, is experienced in war. He is not going to be taken in the way Ahithophel imagines. Do you think he will carelessly lodge with the people? He will be carefully hidden in some place, anticipating such an attack as you are suggesting, planning to ambush your army. Instead of Ahithophel gaining the victory, it will be David's victory, and you know full well that if your army is defeated, all Israel will again turn to him, and you will be left without support."

As Hushai spake these words, a chill of fear came over Absalom. He knew the fighting qualities of his father; he knew of the exploits of those heroes with him. Certainly such a formidable group of fighters would not be taken easily. The more he thought upon the words of Hushai, the more he believed them. Others in the council room were murmuring in agreement, and the enthusiasm they had previously felt for Ahithophel's suggestion quickly melted.

Thus encouraged, Hushai continued: "I counsel that you gather a large army of all the tribes, and go to battle in your own person. Wait until you can gather a force large enough to crush your father. We will all go with you. Quietly and unexpectedly, like dew falling upon the ground, we will come upon him, and suddenly attacking him, will destroy him completely. If he has taken refuge in a city, our army will be large enough to destroy both it and him. Then all Israel will see that you are a leader to be followed and feared".

There is always comfort in numbers, particularly when one is a little frightened at the work before him. Absalom and his followers feared the fighting prowess of David, and were doubtful whether Ahithophel's plan would succeed. They dismissed Hushai whilst they discussed the two plans at length.

A Warning Sent to David

Outside the council room, Hushai acted quickly. He sought out the two priests, Zadok and Abiathar, and told them of the two plans that had been submitted to Absalom.

"Send quickly," he said, "and tell David to immediately pass over the Jordan, for he is in great danger."

A servant girl, in the employ of the priests, was sent to the place where Jonathan and Ahimaaz were hiding, awaiting a message for David, and they were soon on their way.

They were almost caught. A young boy saw them, and told the friends of Absalom. Soon there were soldiers in pursuit. The two spies rushed down the valley that led away from Jerusalem, past the Mount of Olives, and down towards Bahurim where Shimei had come out to curse David. Though this was in the territory of Benjamin, and

Types of Men found in every Age

BEWARE OF SUCH AS THESE !

David attracted many heroes to his cause as brave and faithful men ever will. These men exhibited many worthy qualities we should follow — such as the self-sacrificing love of Jonathan, the faithful service of Zadok, the courage of Benaiah, the loyalty of Hushai, the kindness of Barzillai, the faith of Nathan. But there was — there always is — the darker side of the picture. There were evil men associated with David, men who beguiled their fellows and led them astray. They exist in every age, and we need beware of them. Here are some of them!

ABSALOM — The unscrupulous seeker of power. The man who prevails by handsome appearance and pleasant manners which hide from view his true intentions. The man who, by use of a mischievous tongue, silently worms himself into the affections of unthinking people, undermining the influence and betraying the confidence of those who trust him. Beware of such!

AHITHOPHEL — The man who permits the desire of revenge to dominate him until it turns his undoubted ability to ways of evil and wickedness. A clever but dangerous man using his power and influence to antagonistic and destructive ends. Beware of such!

SHIMEI — The vindictive man who permits his loyalty to a cause to blind him to greater issues. The coward, ready to condemn and abuse when power is on his side, but to fawn and cringe when danger really threatens. Beware of such!

ZIBA — The man who "sits on the fence" but won't get down to help either side. He supplies David with provisions but does not go with him. He maligns his master, working to the end that whoever won, Ziba would not lose. Beware of such!

SHEBA — The man who feeds on trouble. The destroyer of unity in Israel, using popular catchcries to advance his own interest. Beware of such!

THE NAMELESS MULTITUDE — Swayed this way and that; first with David, then with Absalom, then with David, then with Sheba, then with Adonijah, then with Solomon. Moved by emotion and not by reason, swayed by popular opinion and not by the Word of God. "The meanest man may pull down a wall, set fire to a palace, or whisper a slander about the king. The remarkable thing is that whilst society realises this it is ready to lend an ear to every wicked speaker who arises, insisting upon the old and detestable argument that although the report may not be wholly and literally true, there must be some foundation in it." DON'T FOLLOW A MULTITUDE TO DO MISCHIEF.

though its inhabitants were not very friendly towards David, there were friends who would help them. One of these had a well in the courtyard of his home. The two spies hid in the well, ground corn was spread over the mouth of it to hide it, and when the pursuing soldiers came along, they were directed down a path where the two spies had not gone. Thus they escaped, to later burst in upon the camp of David with their news. When David heard their story, and learned of their narrow escape, he realised that Yahweh had not deserted him. He passed over Jordan to the safety of Mahanaim.

Ahithophel Commits Suicide

Back in Absalom's court, men were applauding the counsel of Hushai. They were busy discussing how to put it into effect, and Ahithophel was forgotten. David's nephew Amasa* was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the army and was instructed to raise the force to attack David.

Ahithophel knew that his plan was best; he knew that if Absalom delayed to attack his father, the cause was doomed. Delay was just what David wanted; it would give him an opportunity to obtain sufficient support to overthrow the revolt.

Ahithophel could see that he was not going to have his revenge. He felt bitter and frustrated by his failure. It was the final measure of disgrace his house received. There was now nothing for him to live for; he knew what his fate would be if David again came to power. In abject remorse and hopelessness, he decided to end his life. He left the court of Absalom, and returning to his own home town, he committed suicide by hanging himself.

So ended the life of this man who refused to forgive David, and pursued a course of hatred and revenge. He hated David, Yahweh's Anointed (Christ), and sought to betray him. He thus was a type of Judas Iscariot who also betrayed Yahweh's Christ, and who likewise, in bitterness of remorse at his terrible deed, committed suicide by hanging himself.

By the irony of fate, David later regained power by using similar strategy to that which Ahithophel had recommended to Absalom!

Civil War in Israel

In Mahanaim, east of the Jordan, David received help from the King of Ammon, and from wealthy chieftains of Gilead. They supplied David and his followers with provisions, whilst David set up his

* His name means "a burden". He proved a burden both to Absalom and to David. He did not greatly assist the cause of his cousin, Absalom, and after the defeat of the revolution, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief by David in the place of Joab, only to reveal complete incompetence (2Sam. 19:13). He was ultimately murdered by the unscrupulous Joab who could not bear to see anybody in the position that he claimed as his own (Ch. 20:4-13).

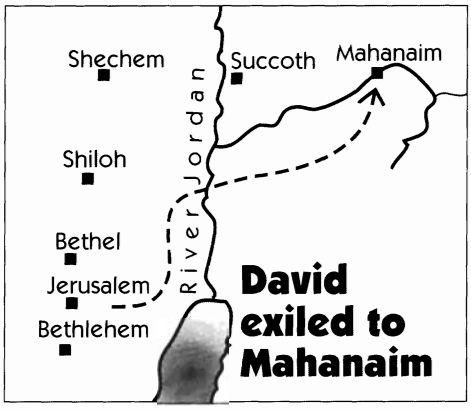
headquarters in the town itself.

From a historical point of view, Mahanaim was a fit place for such a purpose. It was to this very place that Jacob had come in fear of his brother Esau, there to receive the vision of the camp of angels which would fight on his behalf, and to be comforted and strengthened by the angel with whom he wrestled all night (Gen. 32:2). David could have found a parallel with Jacob's experience in his own case.

It was in Mahanaim that the standard of revolt had been raised by Ishbosheth, the last of Saul's house to rule (2Sam. 2:8), so that David's disgrace was now paraded in the very place which had been the last outpost of Saul's waning power. But as the people of those parts had proved so loyal to Saul (cp. 1Sam. 31:11-13), they now proved loyal to David.

David's followers had been increased by others who sought him out in exile, so that now he commanded an army of some 4,000 men *(according to Josephus)* over whom he placed captains of various rank. Chief over these were Joab, Abishai and the foreigner Ittai who had followed the king into exile (ch.18:2). David, himself, desired to lead the army, but he was persuaded to remain at home. Thus the advice of Ahithophel to Absalom was followed by David.

Soon the news was received that Absalom, at the head of a large force, was marching against his father in Mahanaim. The time of battle was at hand, and the sick king reviewed his troops outside the city walls.



Mahanaim (Heb. *mahanayim*, "two camps" or "two hosts"), an important old Testament city, which lay somewhere east of the Jordan River and north of the Jabbok, and to which Jacob returned, en route to Penuel, when he saw an army, or encampment of angels there, beside his own (Gen. 32:1-2). Located on the border dividing the inheritances of the tribes of Gad and half-Manasseh, it was allotted to Gad and set aside as one of the Levitical cities for those Levites who were of the clan of Merari (Josh. 21:34-38). It was at Mahanaim that Ish-bosheth, the surviving son of King Saul, was made king, albeit temporarily, by Abner (2 Sam. 2:8), and it was presumably here that he was assassinated by Rechab and Baanah. Also, it was to Mahanaim that King David retreated, and where his troops were provisioned, while in flight from his son Absalom (2 Sam. 17:24-27). David's son and successor, King Solomon, made Mahanaim the capital of his seventh commissariat district, under the administration of Ahinadab (1 Kings 4:14).

As they passed before him, his heart went out to his erring son, whom he loved despite all the trouble he had given him. As a warrior, David knew that Absalom had lost the initiative in the war, and that he was opposed to experienced leaders in Joab, Abishai and Ittai against whom he would have little hope. In the hearing of all the people, he pleaded for the life of his son.

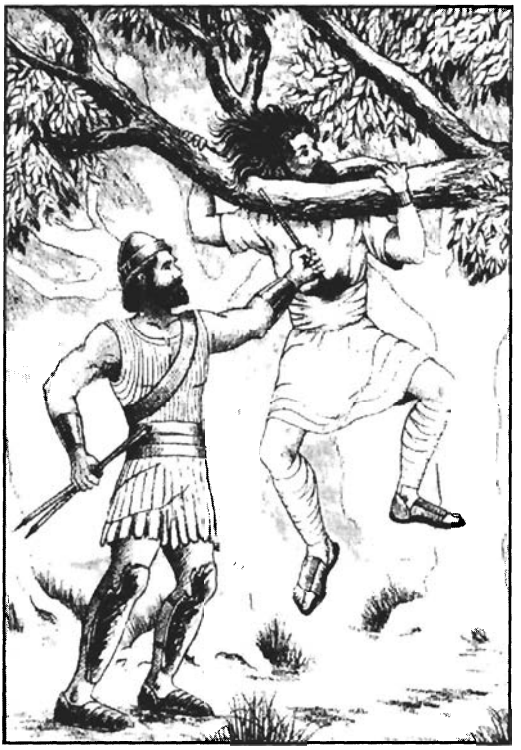
"Deal gently for my sake with the young man, Absalom," he told the captains.

The Battle The armies met at a place called the Wood of Ephraim‡. Joab found himself opposed by the huge army that Absalom had gathered together. He was outnumbered, but there was a vital difference between the two forces. Joab's army was determined to defend and restore the authority of David at all costs; Absalom's army had been recruited for the purpose of fighting a cause in which it was not much interested. Joab's army was made up of volunteers; Absalom's army was composed of conscripts. Joab's army was really interested in the cause for which it fought, but Absalom's army was not.

With courage and skill Joab led his forces in a frontal attack against the army led by Absalom. Fiercely, the smaller army attacked, and soon the forces of Absalom were in retreat. The retreat soon became a rout. They broke their ranks, and scattered far and wide before their attackers. In panic they sought refuge in the Wood, but found to their dismay that it was such a hopeless tangle of undergrowth, of prickly oak and thorny coppice that "the wood devoured more that day than the sword" (2Sam. 18:8). Absalom's army was overwhelmed, and with this one resounding defeat, the rebellion was at an end.

Death of Absalom Bitterly disappointed at the failure of his forces, Absalom fled to save his own life. As a symbol of his rank, he rode upon a mule, which he now drove furiously to escape from the soldiers of Joab who desired his death above all else. He did not look where he was going, but possibly turning around to see if he were followed, or watching on each side for fear of ambush, he rode under the thick boughs of a large oak. The twisted

‡ The "Wood of Ephraim" is unknown today. It is thought by some to have been the place where the Ephraimites were defeated by Jephthah (Jud. 12:4-6). The armies were at this time east of the Jordan, whereas the territory of Ephraim was west of the Jordan. The word "wood" is *yaar* in Hebrew, and describes a certain kind of wood. One traveller has described them thus: "These yaars are not pleasant open forests, for the ground is too rocky for that. Rocks are piled in horrid confusion, and covered with prickly oak and other thorny coppice which confound the unhappy traveller who gets entangled among them... Nothing is more difficult than these stony, thorny 'yaars', and I can readily believe that such a 'wood' would devour more of a routed army than the sword of the victors." (*The Land and the Book*).



branches, or some low forked bough of the tree, caught him by the neck or by the loops of his long, thick hair which was once his pride, but now became his noose.

This rebellious son of his father was about to experience the fate of all those who act thus towards their parents (see Prov. 20:20; 30:11, 17).

One of the greatest commands of the Bible is to "honour father and mother". Absalom had mocked at such advice, but now was about to experience the fate of all such. He hung helplessly from the tree, dazed and confused, and was there found by a soldier of David.

Excitedly, the man rushed to Joab with the news that Absalom was held captive in the oak. "Why did you not kill him?" demanded Joab. "If you had done so I would have rewarded you."

"I would not do that, no matter how great your reward," answered the soldier. "Did not the king instruct you not to hurt Absalom? If I had slain him, I would have been false to my own interests, for you would have been the very first to have gone to the king, and charged me with murdering his son."

The soldier knew how unscrupulous Joab was.

But Joab had no time to waste on such talk.

"Get out of my way! Don't waste my time!" he replied (cp. 2Sam. 18:14).

He took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, whilst at the same time the men of his bodyguard cut down the rebel king with their swords.

This ended the battle. The death of Absalom was all that was required. Joab blew the trumpet to call the people together. The war was over.



The traditional memorial of Absalom. Absalom's Tomb is located just outside the eastern wall of Jerusalem.

The Bible concludes its record of the death of Absalom on a sad and pathetic note — but one that is a warning to all who might imitate his ways.

The soldiers of Joab took the body of the handsome and beloved son of David, and throwing it in a pit in the wood, buried it under a great heap of stones. This was a criminal's grave, such as was given to Achan the Troubler of Israel (Josh. 7:26).

It became a custom of people when passing by this spot to add to the heap of stones, which thus became the memorial of Absalom. Thus men cursed his memory.

Yet in his lifetime men flattered this foolish son of David, and gloried in his beauty. These external things however, hid a life of sadness. His sons died leaving him no heir, and in order to keep alive his name, and in honour of himself, Absalom built a pillar in the King's Dale, not far from Jerusalem. It was called "Absalom's Hand" (2 Sam. 18:18)*. The hand is a symbol of power and victory. But what empty power and hollow victory this monument in the King's Dale, and the lonely grave of stones in the Wood of Ephraim, expressed!

Absalom was king for a few months; he caused over 20,000 deaths and widespread sorrow and misery; he died cursed by friend and foe alike; he was an embarrassment to his father and left no son to carry on his name (2Sam. 18:17-18). Yet what great opportunities he really had as far as the purpose of God and his eternal future were concerned! He gave all this away for a moment's passing glory.

So Absalom passed from history.

Victory is turned into Mourning

In Mahanaim, David anxiously awaited news of the battle. He feared for his son more than for himself. He blamed all his trouble upon himself, seeing it as punishment for the terrible sins he had committed. Willingly he would have laid down his own life to save Absalom, for in spite of all that his son had done, he loved him very dearly.

* The word "place" in the A.V. is "hand" in Hebrew. The same word occurs in 1Sam.15:12 in regard to Saul's monument. It could have been shaped like a huge hand.

Meanwhile, at the field of battle and victory, Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, who had earlier acted as messenger for David, asked permission of Joab to convey to the king the good tidings of victory.

But Joab refused.

"You shall not bear tidings today," he said, "because the king's son is dead."

He saw a foreigner in his army, an Ethiopian,‡ and called upon him to run to Mahanaim with the news of the day. Off sped the Ethiopian to do Joab's bidding.

Again Ahimaaz pleaded to be permitted also take news to the king. He wanted to spare David's feelings, and he knew that the other runner, being a foreigner, would not feel for the king as he would, but would bluntly tell him that Absalom was dead. This time Joab allowed Ahimaaz to go, for he was sure that he could not gain on the Ethiopian.

But Ahimaaz was a splendid runner, and besides, he knew the country better than the Ethiopian. He selected a different route (2Sam. 18:23), and made such excellent time that he soon passed the other runner.

From the watchtower above the gate where David sat awaiting news, the watchman looked to see a solitary man running towards the city.

This was a good omen. A single runner indicated good tidings, whereas if many men were running, it would indicate that the army was in retreat. As the runner approached the city, the watchman could tell by his unusual gait that it was Ahimaaz. When the king heard that, he was delighted.

"He is a good man," he declared, "and will bring good tidings!"

Ahimaaz reached the city, and saw the king sitting in the gateway.

"Peace be to you!" he called in greeting.

And, then, overcome with emotion, he bowed low to the ground. This was both in honour to the king, and in reverence of Yahweh. A great victory had been won. Yahweh had been good to David and to his cause, and in words of praise and thanksgiving, Ahimaaz now ascribed the victory not to the arms of the men of Israel, but to the God whom they worshipped.

Ahimaaz was both a good and a wise man. In the prayer of thanksgiving recorded in 2Sam. 18:28, he sought to direct David's attention to the blessings received from heaven. The more we do this, and "count our blessings," giving our hearts in praise and thanksgiving to Yahweh, the better prepared are we to accept any such blows as Ahimaaz knew David was about to receive. That, no doubt, was his pur-

‡ The word "Cushi" in the A.V. signifies "The Ethiopian" and should be rendered as a common noun. His name is not given, and he was doubtless picked by Joab at random from amongst his foreign soldiers to bluntly tell the king that Absalom was dead.

pose in desiring to run to the king at such a time. He wanted to soften the news of Absalom's death in a way he felt the king would understand.

But then came the anxious question.

"Is the young man Absalom safe?"

"I saw a great tumult," answered Ahimaaz, "but I knew not what it was."

The watchman now reported that a second runner could be seen approaching, and soon the Ethiopian came before the king, with his news of victory.

Again the pathetic question was asked: "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

But this time, the thoughtless, bitterly-cruel answer came: "The enemies of my Lord the King, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as as that young man!"

It was the death-knell of the king's hope at that time.

He blamed himself for the tragedies that were now crowding in upon his life.

Heartbroken at this further sorrow, he hastened from the public place between the gates, to the shelter of the chamber above, where he could hide his grief, and where he broke down in bitter sobs of anguish.

"O my son Absalom, my son! My son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee! O Absalom, my son, my son!"

The whole city was plunged into sorrow as the people heard of the grief-stricken king.

Victory had been turned into mourning.

Joab Reprimands the King

The arrival of Joab at the city brought an end to the sorrowing of the king, and rightly so. Ruthlessly the Commander-in-Chief of the army forced his way into the presence of David, and demanded that the king immediately put aside his grief and welcome the victorious army home. He threatened to seize the throne himself if David failed to do so.

The king could see the sense of this advice, and did as he was requested. He sat in the public place between the gates of the city, and reviewed the troops as they came back from the war.

The king was sick at this time, which was possibly the reason why he gave way so completely to grief. Joab was quite correct in his action. Though sorrow is right in its place, it can degenerate into selfishness. Though mourning at such times is proper, it must be contained within limits. Despite all tragedies — both large and small — life must continue on. The business of life is bigger than one hour of its duration, no matter how terribly filled with tragedy that hour might

be. Life has its duties, its needs, its battles — and all this must be continued in spite of what might happen to one individual.

David learned that lesson, and so also must we.

David's Return David's success caused strife throughout Israel (2Sam. 19:9). The people turned on their leaders who had sided with Absalom. Others who had supported the revolt now sought out David again.

"Absalom whom we anointed is dead," they said, "now let us bring back David."

How fickle is the attitude of crowds! How foolish it is to put confidence in flesh! "Absalom is dead!" The benefits received, and triumphs enjoyed yesterday are forgotten today. Personal popularity can ebb and flow like the tide of the sea. We can be praised today and rejected tomorrow.

David had been through it all.

No wonder he wrote:

"Put not your trust in princes,
Nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.
His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth;
In that very day his thoughts perish.
Happy is he who hath the Strength of Jacob for his help,
Whose hope is in Yahweh his God" (Psa. 146:3-5).

David had reached the stage where the opinion of man did not matter. Humbled by adversity, crushed by grief, oppressed by a sense of personal unworthiness, he realised that the opinion of One alone mattered — Yahweh, whom he revered.

David meets his Enemies The king was generous in victory. He showed by action that nobody need fear his return to power, nobody would be punished for participation in the revolt. To that end, he promoted Amasa (Absalom's captain) to position of Commander-in-Chief in place of Joab.

Joab was thus reduced in rank because of his disobedience to the king. He was consumed by jealousy towards Amasa, and waited his opportunity for revenge.

Meanwhile, the king returned in triumph. Along the route that led from Mahanaim to the Jordan, people everywhere applauded him. At the crossing of the Jordan a huge crowd awaited him, and in great style he was conducted over the river by a Royal Barge that had been prepared for the occasion (v.18).

Foremost among the great crowd to welcome him was Shimei, the prominent and wealthy Benjamite, who had so vilely and openly cursed the king, casting stones, dirt and insult at David and his followers when they had fled the city of Jerusalem.

Now he was in abject fear of his life. At the head of 1,000 followers (for he was a powerful prince of Benjamin) he awaited the king, trembling as to his fate. He fell down before the king confessing that he had done wrong, pleading to be forgiven.

It was too much for the hot-tempered Abishai standing nearby:

"Shall not Shimei be put to death for cursing Yahweh's Anointed?" he demanded.

But David replied: "There shall no man be put to death this day in Israel!"

Next to meet David were Ziba and Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, whom David had helped. Ziba had accused Mephibosheth of looking upon the revolt as an opportunity to obtain the kingdom, and David, in anger, had given all the possessions of Mephibosheth to his servant.

But now Mephibosheth presented himself before the king. He looked miserable and unkept. His clothes were unwashed, his nails were unpared, his long hair hung unshorn, his beard was untrimmed, his lame feet were untended, and he appeared in the deepest mourning.

David looked in surprise at his appearance.

"Why did you not go with me into exile?" he asked Mephibosheth.

"I wanted to," came the answer. "I told my servant to prepare me an ass to ride thereon because I am lame. But my servant deceived me and slandered my name before you. But you are as an angel of God, and will be able to see through any deceit. I was in a hopeless position before you helped me: but you raised me up to sit at your table. I have no right to ask anything of you, nor do I do it at this time."

"Do not speak any further," replied the king. "I will restore to you your lands that I previously gave to your servant Ziba.*

Among those who had conducted the king from Mahanaim to Jordan, was Barzillai, the aged and wealthy chieftain of Gilead, who had acted so kindly to David when he had fled to Mahanaim.

The time had come for him to bid David farewell, and return to his own land.

But a great friendship had developed between the king and the chieftain during the few months stay of David in Gilead. Now that he was restored to power, David desired to honour him.

"Come and live with me in Jerusalem," he invited.

But Barzillai refused.

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* This seems to be the true meaning of 2Sam. 19:29. In Ch. 9:10, David had granted certain lands to Mephibosheth which he commandeed Ziba to share-farm for him, yielding portion (probably half) of the produce to Mephibosheth. Later Ziba maligned his master before David, and was given all the land (Ch.16:1-4). On Mephibosheth's explanation, however, this was countermanded, and Ziba reduced to half, or to his former state of servitude.

"I am over 80 years of age, and have little desire apart from rest," he said. "My ears are dull of hearing, I have lost the taste for rich food, there is nothing more that I desire but quietness. I will only be a burden to you. Let my servant Chimham go with you, and do unto him as you desire."

The two friends embraced each other and parted. Barzillai returned to his fields in Gilead, and David to the palace in Jerusalem. With David went Chimham, the son of Barzillai (cp. 1Kings 2:7). David looked after him in Jerusalem, for he was ever ready to help a friend, and Chimham settled in the vicinity of Jerusalem (Jer. 41:17).

The people of Judah enthusiastically conducted the king back to Jerusalem, but there were many in the northern tribes who were very half-hearted at the restoration of David. The revolt of Absalom had caused a rift among the tribes, that lived on after his death (cp. 2Sam. 19:9,40). The men of the northern tribes were jealous of Judah; they accused the leaders of Judah of acting without their knowledge.

"We have ten parts in the king, and we have more right in David than you," they declared. "Why did you not seek our advice in regard to bringing the king back."

Fierce and angry words were thus spoken at a time when petty jealousy should have been put away, and the whole nation united in joy and thanksgiving that it had been delivered out of civil war.



The Brook Kidron down which David fled from Absalom to the Mount of Olives on the left — and across which he returned in triumph.

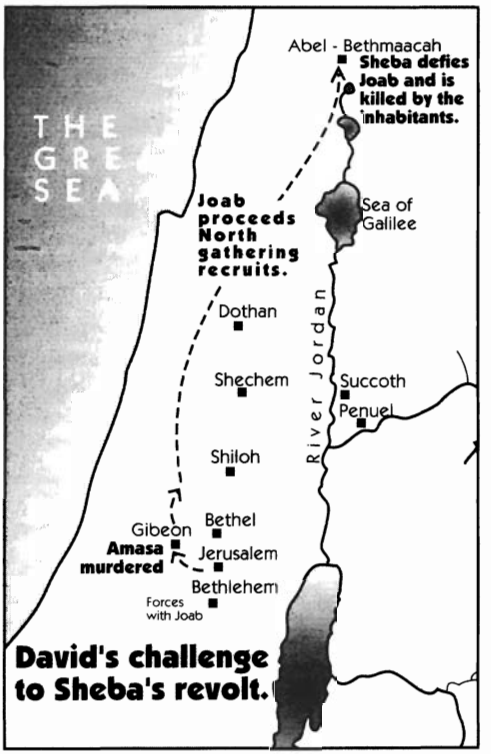
Further Revolution (2Sam. 20) Dissatisfaction still smouldered among the men of the northern tribes. It only needed a leader to arise to cause it to burst into flame. And the leader was already present in Sheba, a Benjamite, a man of Saul's own tribe. He is called in Scripture "a man of Belial" (or

worthlessness), so that he has a double parentage — a natural and a spiritual one. Spiritually, he was a man of worthlessness, of Belial.

But he was well-known and popular with the multitude. And the effect of his presence at the Jordan, as the king returned from exile, was immense. People saw him, and knew him for what he represented — revolt against King David. He had doubtless spoken against the king to the people, and now heard on every side expressions that showed they were divided in their allegiance to David. He decided that the moment was ripe to raise the standard of revolt, before the king had properly established himself again in power.

Thus it was, at the great gathering at Gilgal by the Jordan, when the people were gathered together to welcome the king from his exile, that Sheba, from the midst of the multitude, blew his trumpet, and raised the cry of revolt, "To your tents O Israel! We have no part in David!"

The harsh voice of revolt divided the nation in two. It solidly united Judah and welded them to their king, but the rest of the tribes followed Sheba. The fickle multitude, gathered to honour the king, now transferred their allegiance to this new rebel. Men are like that; they are ever ready to "follow a multitude to do evil" (Exod. 23:2). They have little or no originality of their own. They would never begin revolts or commence movements. But they are ever ready to follow others in ways of evil and wrongdoing. They are followers, imitators, echoes, and not voices. They are persons who go by the bulk and not detail, who are important only because of the vote and not because of any real advantage they confer to a movement. They are therefore only of consequence in proportion to their numbers, having no independent spirit of their own when taken one by one.



How important it is that we step out of the ranks of such a multi-

tude as that, and with independence of spirit, learn to hearken to the Voice of God. How important that we should refuse to follow a multitude to do evil, and, whatever the sacrifice it entails, resolutely determine to do God's will.

David returned to Jerusalem determined to crush this revolt.

He called Amasa, the newly appointed Commander-in-Chief before him, and told him to immediately, within three days, call the men of Judah together in order to attack Sheba before he became properly organised.

This was Amasa's opportunity. He could show that he was the man for the position. But Amasa was inefficient. Time went by and nothing was done.

David became alarmed. He knew if Sheba was given much further time the revolution would become serious. He called Abishai, and told him to gather what forces he could and immediately attack Sheba.

Abishai called together David's bodyguard, and the standing army that was always ready for battle, and together with Joab his brother, marched forth to invade the territory of the north.

They approached the town of Gibeon, where they met Amasa hurrying to meet up with them. It was an opportunity Joab desired. He looked upon the rank of Commander-in-Chief as his alone, and was determined that no one else would exercise it. He had won it by the ruthless exercise of courage in battle, and defended it by assassination when Abner had been appointed to the position, and now was prepared to again use murder in order to hold it.

He disguised his intentions however. He went to greet Amasa as though as to welcome him, but then pretended to stumble, so that his sword fell out (2Sam. 20:8). This gave him the opportunity of picking it up, so that he marched towards his unsuspecting cousin with sword in hand, to embrace him with one hand, and to plunge the sword into him with the other — so that the blood of Amasa spurted over Joab (cp. 1Kings 2:5) as he continued to hold the dying man in his treacherous embrace. They left Amasa dead on the roadside with a sentry to instruct any soldiers who might gather at this appointed place, to follow on after Joab. But the terrible sight of Amasa, wallowing in blood on the highway, stopped many from doing so. They stood around and refused to follow after Joab, until the sentry had removed the body of Amasa, and covered it from view.

Meanwhile, Joab hastened through the territory of the northern tribes, seeking the army of Sheba. He found some places still sympathetic to David, and from them gained recruits. He hurried on to the northern part of Israel, to a place called "Abel of Bethmaacah, or The Meadow near the House of Depression". This was a strongly fortified place with very powerful natural defences. It was located on the bor-

der of the tribes of Dan and Naphtali. It stood on an oblong mound of natural rock that rises abruptly from the plain beneath. Before it was a deep trench and towering high above this were the massive walls.

Inside this important town (for it was the metropolis, or mother city, of the district) Sheba defied Joab.

Joab ruthlessly set about the task before him. He was surrounded on all sides by enemies, and knew that he had to bring the war to a speedy end. He set his army to work, to quickly raise up an embankment against the city, to enable battering rams to be thrust against it.

Inside the city, the people were fearful. They were angry with Sheba for taking refuge in their midst. They knew the ruthless reputation of Joab only too well, and feared for their future should he gain possession of the city. But among its population was a woman known for her wisdom. She undertook to negotiate with Joab, and courageously took her place at the top of the walls, calling to Joab to come and speak with her.

When Joab came, she reminded him of what the Law of Moses demanded in time of war. It required that the attacking army should ask peace of the city before beginning the attack (Deut. 20:10,11). This Joab had not done. The woman claimed that Sheba had only been given shelter because the people of the city believed that Joab would first ask the conditions of peace.

She said: "They plainly said in the beginning, surely they (i.e. Joab) will ask peace of Abel, and so end the matter. I am among a group that is peaceable and faithful in Israel; yet you seek to destroy a city, even a mother city in Israel. In doing this you will destroy the inheritance of Yahweh" (see 2Sam. 20:18-19 marg.).

By this she meant that the destruction of such a powerful fort, so far in the north, would lay the land open to any invader. Abel protected the northern parts of Israel, and if destroyed would weaken the whole land.

Joab could see the point, and agreed with the woman.

"I do not want to break down your city," he called in reply, "but a man by the name of Sheba has rebelled against the king, even David. Deliver him unto me and I will leave your city."

The woman agreed to do as suggested. She went to the people calling upon them to agree to the request of Joab. The people could see the peril they were in and agreed. They slew Sheba, and cutting off his head they threw it over the wall to Joab.

The revolt was at an end. Joab returned in triumph to Jerusalem, Commander-in-Chief of the army once more.

This was the last revolt against the authority of king David. He was undisputed king throughout the land, and with the rulers and princes of his realm exercised his power throughout Israel.

But other troubles soon faced David.

The death of Sheba brought an end to the spirit of revolt that stirred the nation through the insurrection of Absalom. But David's troubles did not cease. A series of national disasters — famine, war, pestilence — now commenced. The first of these is recorded in 2Samuel 21. The terrible record of violence and vengeance there uncovered, also reveals an important lesson which we, today, should heed. Join the family circle at the seaside home of Mr. Phillips as the details of this chapter are discussed.

Chapter One

RECOGNITION OF ISRAEL'S FAILURES

How Israel Was Taught that Zeal Is Not Enough

"What a terrible chapter!" remarked Ann as she finished reading aloud the last verses of 2Samuel 21. "It is really a most interesting one," answered Mr. Phillips with a smile.

"I cannot find much interest in it," replied Ann.

"That is because you cannot quite understand what it is all about," said her father.

"I could not understand it at all, " remarked Joan.

"Well, what about Dad explaining how 'dramatic' it is?" suggested Peter in an attempt to score off his father.

"It is a dramatic chapter," said Mr. Phillips, "and it opens with a powerful lesson, as we shall see. For three years, Israel suffered the terrible results of famine. Rain was withheld; crops failed; food became scarce; the people languished.

"Through Abiathar the high priest, David enquired as to the cause of the famine. He realised that the gifts of sunshine and rain come from God (Mat. 5:45), and that sometimes these are withheld when He has need to punish His people (Lev. 26:12,21,26).

"David was told that the nation suffered because of a terrible massacre of the Gibeonites by the house of Saul many years earlier. This terrible slaughter (which is not recorded in the Bible) had not been atoned for, and now the nation had to pay because of it."

"That does not seem fair to me," interrupted Peter. "Why should Israel have to pay for something that Saul had done?"

"Because Saul had done it in his capacity as king," explained his father. "The nation had demanded a king, and Saul was the man of their choice. You remember, Samuel had warned the people that they would be responsible for the evils that the king whom they so anxiously desired, would bring upon them."

"Who were the Gibeonites?" asked Graeham.

"They were the original inhabitants of the land, Gentiles who had obtained a treaty with Israel by false pretences when Joshua led the people into Palestine," replied his father. "God looks upon agreements as very solemn undertakings, and though this one had been obtained by trickery, it still had to be kept (see Psa. 25:14; Eccl. 5:2-6). But when Saul became king, he did not do so. Instead, he murdered many of the Gibeonites, and drove them from their city. Saul's ancestors dwelt at Gibeon (1Chron. 8:29-33; 9:35-39), and this could have been the cause of hostility between the house of Saul and the original inhabitants. In any case, no one in Israel had protested at the cruelty of the king, and now the nation had to suffer punishment

because it condoned what had been done."

"Is that the 'important lesson' you said, the chapter contained?" asked Peter.

"No," replied his father. "The important lesson is found in the fact that what Saul did on that occasion, he did it 'in his zeal' for the cause of Israel (v.2). This teaches the very important lesson that zeal is not enough. We sometimes see good, earnest, zealous people giving their time, energy, and money to a cause that will not profit them. They have zeal, but not knowledge; Saul was keen to extend the cause of Israel, but he went about it the wrong way. In that, he was like Israel in the days of Paul who 'had a zeal of God but not according to knowledge' (Rom. 10:2). Saul's action shows that we can do evil in a good cause and, in so doing, injure the very cause we seek to serve. That is the lesson of this chapter. If Saul had sought God's guidance in this matter, he would have avoided much evil and suffering."

"It does not seem right that Saul's house should be punished for something he did," said Graeham thoughtfully.

"It is important to always remember that things we do can injure others as well as ourselves," commented his father. "A parent can bring shame and suffering upon his family by his folly, and children can bring sorrow and disgrace to their parents. Therefore, we need to be careful in whatever we do, lest we hurt others as well as ourselves. In the case of Saul's house, however, we learn that it was as guilty as he in this matter. His sons had helped in the murder, and were now punished for what they had done."

"The punishment was very cruel all the same," said Ann.

"Yahweh was not responsible for that," replied her father. "Unfortunately, David did not find out whether He agreed with the punishment that was inflicted. David promised the Gibeonites that he would do whatever they required in payment for their sufferings. They sought vengeance. Money or goods would not satisfy them. 'Let seven of Saul's sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them in Saul's town of Gibeah,' they replied.

"David had promised, and dared not disobey. Seven sons of Saul were delivered unto the Gibeonites, and they were put to death. Their bodies were left hanging in the open fields not far from Gibeah until the much needed rains began to fall and the drought had broken.

"It was the beginning of barley harvest when this took place (v.9)," continued Mr. Phillips, "that is, towards the end of March when the hot season commences in the land of Israel. In spite of the blazing sun of that hot climate, one poor, heartbroken mother, Rizpah, refused to seek the comfort of shelter. Clothed in sackcloth, she remained in the open, keeping guard over the bodies of her sons, in spite of the harsh heat of the sun. But at last the rains came, and the bodies were removed.

"David was told of the action of Rizpah. He had not sought guidance as to whether Yahweh desired this punishment, but had merely carried out what the Gibeonites required. Now he could see that it could bring trouble. It could cause a riot among the Benjamites when they saw these men of their own tribe so cruelly treated. David decided to do something that would show he did not bear any personal ill-will against the family of Saul. He brought the bones of Saul and Jonathan from Jabesh-Gilead, where they had been buried, and, with great honour, he buried them in the sepulchre of Kish, the father of Saul."



Rizpah

Chapter Two

DIVINE PUNISHMENTS UPON KINGS AND PEOPLE

David Nearly Slain in Battle

Trouble now arose from a different direction. The Philistines believed that the time was ripe to reassert their power. They had heard of the revolt of Absalom and Sheba, and the terrible famine that had brought Israel low, and thought they would be able to break the yoke that David had placed upon them. They decided to invade the land.

They had a champion to lead their army, Ishbi-benob, a huge, powerfully built warrior. Clad in special armour and weapons, he was given but one duty to do, to seek out and destroy David.

The armies met in battle, and the giant sought out the king to slay him. Courageously David made ready to do battle with his formidable adversary. But years of trouble were now taking their toll of the ageing king, and he had no longer the ability to fight as he once could. He found that he was no match for the powerful Philistine, and would have been slain but for the intervention of his nephew, Abishai. Abishai saw the danger, and rushed to the aid of his king. Thrusting himself between David and the giant*, he drove the latter back and succeeded in killing him.

David's danger was a shock to his troops. They did not want to lose him as a leader. They forced him to agree to no longer go out to battle. From then on Joab completely took over leading the army.

Again the Philistines invaded the land. They appointed another powerful warrior as champion of the army. His name was Saph (or Sippai — 1Chron. 20:4). One of David's renowned warriors, an officer of his army called Sibbechai (1Chron. 11:29) boldly challenged the giant to combat and, defeating him, again brought victory to Israel.

By now the Philistines were desperate. They had antagonised Israel and feared reprisals. Once more they recruited an army and invaded the land. This time they took with them another champion called Lahmi, the brother of Goliath. But another of David's heroes stood forward to challenge the champion. This time it was Elhanan, a man of whom we know nothing more than that his courage was rewarded with victory as he battled with the giant.

David decided to teach the Philistines a lesson. He called upon Joab to invade their land. An army was gathered together and marched against the strongly fortified city of Gath, one of the main

* The word "succoured" (2Sam. 21:17) is from the Hebrew "azar", and signifies "to surround, protect". Abishai interposed himself between David and the giant, and succeeded in defeating the latter.

cities of the Philistines. They were met by the defenders, who had at their head a man of tremendous stature, noted for having six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot.

Protected by the powerful fortress of Gath, this warrior defied the invading Israelites. He challenged any Israelite to personal combat. Jonathan, a nephew of David, accepted the challenge of battle, and defeated the powerful Gentile.

Jonathan was the son of Shammah, David's brother (1Sam.16:9). Jonathan's name means "Yahweh hath given", and Shammah means "desolation." But from now on this hero was known as Jonathan the son of Shimea (1Chron. 20:7), for Shimea means "fame". Thus, the two names combined signify "Yahweh hath given fame."

And He will indeed give fame to all those who battle courageously, in faith, for the cause of Christ during his absence, as these men did when David had to stay at home. Down the ages there have been many wonderful heroes of faith whose exploits have not been recorded, but who have stood for the Truth in the face of powerful opposition, trusting in God for the victory. One day they shall be raised from the dead to receive their reward, and then it shall truly be said: "Yahweh hath given fame".

Pestilence Strikes at Israel (2Sam. 24; 1Chron. 21)

We come now to the last of David's national troubles, to the record of a terrible pestilence that plagued Israel, bringing death to thousands of families, plunging the whole nation into mourning.

It is an incident in the Bible that few people have understood, and over which many scholars have puzzled.

It began with David numbering the people of Israel. In doing this, he was moved by wrong motives, and Yahweh rebuked him, giving him the choice of three punishments — three years of famine, three months' military defeat, or three days' pestilence. David chose the last; but so awful was the result that at the end of three days some 70,000 people had succumbed to the terrible scourge.

Why should the people be thus punished if David was to blame?

Why should the punishment be so terrible?

Who is the "satan" referred to in this incident (1Chron. 21:1)?

Graeham Phillips pondered these matters as he studied 1Chronicles 21, and sought out his father for an answer.

"Why should Israel suffer on this occasion?" he asked. "Was not David alone responsible? Why, even Joab rebuked him and warned him of his folly (v.3)!"

"That is true", answered Mr. Phillips. "Both David and Israel were punished at the same time. David was punished in that he saw the people suffer so much, and Israel was punished because Yahweh was

angry with the nation" (see 2Sam. 24:1).

"What made Him angry?"

"We are not told, but there must have been a very good reason why He should be angry with the people, and the cause could have been the nation's rejection of its true king — the man that Yahweh had appointed to be over them. When the nation followed Absalom and Sheba in revolt against David who was Yahweh's Anointed King, or Christ (for "Christ" means '*Anointed*'), it virtually rejected Yahweh and His appointments, and was deserving of punishment. Those who died in the plague were probably those who were directly responsible for the revolt."

"The punishment was a terrible one," commented Graeham.

"That is true," replied his father. "It serves to show how great was the sin committed. Men stand aghast at great punishments, but who trembles at great sins! We are all sensitive when the flesh suffers, but not so much when Yahweh is mocked or His truth derided. Punishment reveals the true measure of sin, and is really beneficial. If there were no punishment men would not be held in check. If you carefully read the chapter you are studying, you will find that great benefit came out of this suffering. It awoke in both David and Israel a realisation that they had sinned, and opportunity was given them of making restitution and obtaining forgiveness. But if they had not been punished, their sins would have gone on from bad to worse and would have ended in both the king and the people being completely rejected by God."

"Why should David want to number the people?"

"From Joab's comments and David's own words (see 2Sam. 24:10), his sin was a sin of the heart. He numbered the people on his return from the rebellion of Absalom to see what support he might expect from the nation. His motive was wrong. He should not have relied upon numbers, but upon Yahweh. The only time that a census in Israel was permitted was when Yahweh commanded it (Num. 1:2; 26:2). At such a time every person in Israel had to pay a ransom to impress them with the fact that true strength does not depend upon flesh, but upon God's help. If such a ransom were not paid, God threatened to smite the nation with a plague, as He did on this occasion (Exod. 30:11-12). David took no heed of these instructions, and so sinned."

"It says in 1Chronicles 21:1 that 'Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.' What does that mean?"

"The word 'satan' merely means 'an adversary'. It indicates one who is opposed to another either for good or ill. There have been good enemies and wicked enemies. For example, in Numbers 22:21, 32 ("to withstand": *to be a satan*), the angel who opposed Balaam is called an 'adversary' but the word in the Hebrew is the same as is rendered 'Satan' in 1Chronicles 21:1".

"Do you think that the satan was an angel?"

"It was God working through an angel, perhaps the same one who opposed Balaam."

"How do you know that?"

"In 2Samuel 24:1, where the same account is given, we read that 'Yahweh moved David' to number Israel. If you carefully read the two accounts, you will find that the satan of Chronicles is 'the Lord' of Samuel. In other words, God was adverse to Israel at this time (possibly because the nation had rejected David), and so He moved David to number Israel."

"If God moved David to do it, why should David be blamed?"

"God did not move him in the sense of forcing him to do this thing, but by permitting the development of a state of things in Israel that led David to act as he did. He had just been re-established on the throne again, he had experienced the invasion of enemies, he himself had almost been slain in battle. These things may have caused fear in the heart of David, and moved him to see how strong the nation really was. Thus, these things, which were of God, caused David to number the people in opposition to the divine commandments. He was provoked to do it by circumstances that were God-controlled."

"There are a couple of other questions I would like to ask on this chapter," continued Graeham. "In 2Samuel 24:9, the number of people is given as 800,000 valiant men of Israel and 500,000 of Judah, but in Chronicles we read the number as 1,100,000 men of Israel and 470,000 men of Judah. These figures must be wrong somewhere."

"Not necessarily. In Samuel we read that the 800,000 men were of a special kind, they were 'valiant' men, or veterans, and formed only part of the army. In Chronicles, the number is given from a different standpoint. As to the men of Judah, a lesser number is given in Chronicles because it did not include some (see v. 6) who were possibly included in the larger number in Samuel."

"There is a difference also in the money paid by David to Ornan. Can that be reconciled in the same way?"

"Yes", replied Mr. Phillips. "In 1Chronicles 21:25 we read that David paid 600 shekels of gold for 'the place', but in 2Sam. 24:24, the money he paid is given as only 50 shekels of silver. There is considerable difference between these two sums, and it has been thought that the one contradicts the other. But when we look closer into the record, we find that the large sum was paid for 'the place', that is, the whole site of the future temple (notice 1Chron. 22:1), whereas in Samuel, the smaller price was only for the threshing floor where later was built an altar, and for the oxen that provided the sacrifice."

"One last difficulty," said Graeham. "In 2Samuel 24:13 it speaks of seven years of famine, but in Chronicles we read of only three. Which number is correct?"

"The three is correct. Some versions of the Bible, like the Septuagint in the bookcase over there, have 'three' in both places, showing that originally this was the case. Evidently a mistake occurred in copying 2Samuel 24:13 at some time, and seven was written instead of three. That was easily done, for the Hebrew letters that indicated these two numbers, if badly formed, could easily be confused the one for the other." So Mr. Phillips concluded his comments, as the family read of the sad time that affected the King and the people.

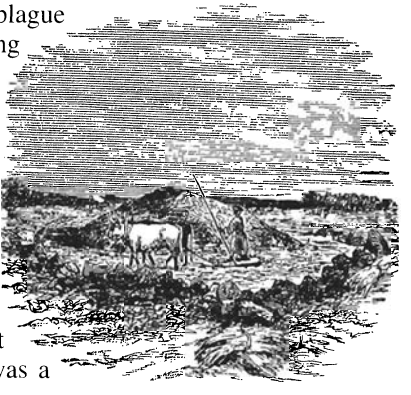
Plague Sweeps Through Israel

Over nine months were occupied by Joab and his assistants in taking the census ordered by the king (2Sam. 24:8). He started east of the Jordan, at a place called Aroer, and travelling first north, then to the west, and finally south, he encompassed the whole land. The place of where he commenced was significantly named, for Aroer means "ruin", and the king's action at this time brought ruin to many people.

The work was never properly finished. It was interrupted by stern words of rebuke from Yahweh. The prophet Gad was sent to David telling him of the folly of his ways. He set before the troubled king three forms of punishment and invited him to make his choice. He could have three years of famine, three months of military defeat, or three days of pestilence.

David was dismayed at the message of the prophet. He now recognised his foolish mistake. He blamed himself for it all, not then realising that punishment was also due to Israel. If the people were to suffer, he wanted to share their troubles. If he chose the first punishment, his own position and wealth would have protected him from famine — he would be the last to suffer. The second punishment would not affect him either, for now he no longer went out with the army. But pestilence is no respecter of persons. It can strike at the king as well as at the peasant; it can destroy both the wealthy and the poor.

David chose the third punishment.



For three days the dreaded plague swept through the land, encircling Jerusalem with death and mourning, causing the whole nation to be prostrated with grief (2Sam. 24:15). On the third day, the Angel of Death took his stand, in threatening aspect, before the capital itself. He was seen hovering over the city, with a drawn sword in his hand, pointing directly at Jerusalem (1Chron. 21:16). It was a

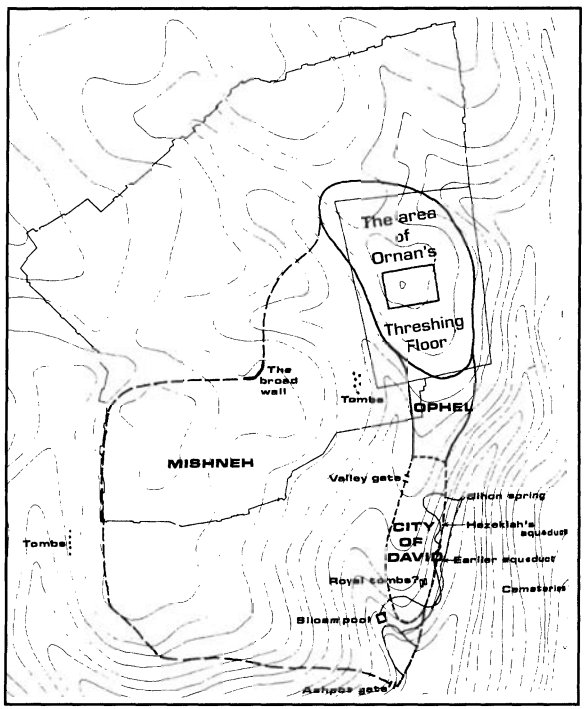
fearful moment, and the king pleaded for divine mercy. Consumed with grief and sorrow, humbled by the knowledge of his sin, and clothed in sackcloth, the garb of mourning and woe, the king, with the princes of his realm, prostrated himself before Yahweh, pleading forgiveness, interceding for his people:

"It is I who numbered the people! It is I who have sinned!" prayed the heartbroken king. "Let your hand be heavy upon me and my house. But these sheep! What have they done?"

Yahweh is not unjust. The "sheep" as David called the people, had sinned as much, if not more, than the king, though he did not realise it at the time. But Yahweh is also merciful; the time of punishment was up; and Gad was commanded to tell David to set up an altar in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, and offer the necessary sacrifices.

David's Altar Ornan possessed a large stretch of country on Mt. Moriah, close to Zion. It was here that Abraham had offered Isaac (Gen. 22:1-3), and, later, the Temple of Solomon was built (1Chron. 22:1).

At the time when the Angel of Death appeared above Jerusalem, Ornan and his sons were threshing wheat on a large slab of stone. The appearance of the angel startled them. They sought to hide themselves from the vengeance they thought must surely strike against the city.



They were disturbed from their hiding place by the coming of the grief-stricken king. Urgently he pressed Ornan to sell him the place of the threshing floor that an altar might be built and the plague

stayed. There was another altar at Gibeon, but the Angel of Death stood with drawn sword between Jerusalem and Gibeon, and David was afraid to go there (v.29,30).

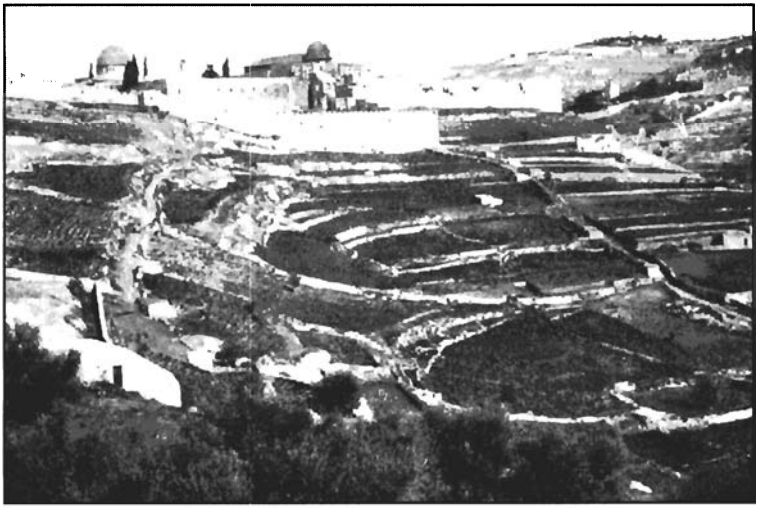
Ornan was just as frightened as the king. He, too, feared what the Angel of Death might do. What is the good of great wealth or worldly possessions in the face of such a crisis? "Take it all for nothing!" said Ornan to the king. "Do what you like with it! Use my oxen also for the burnt offering, the wood of my threshing instruments to kindle the fire, my wheat for the meal offering."

"I will not take it for nothing," answered the king. "I will pay the full price for it. I will not offer to Yahweh that which costs me nothing!"

Quickly the king and his ministers prepared the site for the altar. The wood and the slain oxen were laid upon it. Then, as they stood about it, fire flashed down from heaven to consume the wood and the sacrifice. Yahweh had answered the plea of David; the plague was stayed.

A solemn lesson had been taught the people. They had turned from Yahweh's Anointed (or Christ) and that brought death. A solemn lesson had been taught the king. He had rested upon mere numbers as the foundation of his strength, and to thus rely upon flesh is to court death.

But out of this lesson there came a glorious hope. It was revealed to David that the ground he had purchased from the Jebusite was to be the site of the future Temple, the building of which was all his desire (1Chron. 22:1), and he was also told that Solomon his son would erect the Temple that he was not permitted to build (1Chron. 22:9,10).



Stronghold of Zion — Site of Solomon's Temple on Mount Moriah.

Chapter Three

THE FINAL GLORY OF DAVID

We have followed this great hero of faith in all the vicissitudes of life. We have seen him honoured as a hero by the nation, fleeing as a fugitive before Saul, victorious in war, monarch of a united Israel, conqueror of the Gentiles round about. We have seen him also in sin and suffering, in adversity and defeat. Like all humans, his life is a blending of folly and fame, and we must not allow the one to blind us to the other. But in old age, David is able to put his folly behind him. He is a greater man for all his experiences, and one thing now dominates all his energy; preparing for the Temple his son must build. There is a wonderful lesson in the attitude of David. He was told he must not build the Temple, but that did not deter him from preparing for it. If such instructions were given us, we would most likely refuse to have anything to do with that which is to reflect to another's glory. Not so David. The Temple became all his desire (Psa. 27:4; 132); and now, in old age, he gives his time completely to it. Though he must not build it, he goes as far as he possibly can to helping it. He can hardly keep his hands from doing the actual work. He stores up gold and silver for it; he worries his friend Hiram, the King of Tyre, to prepare the choicest timber for it; he presses his friends to give their wealth towards it; he obtains the plans from God. Above all, as he saw the development of his young son, Solomon, David constantly dinned into his ears exhortations and instructions how he must go about the work. What a profitable manner in which to spend old age — what joy these preparations must have finally given David after his worries and trials were over.

Preparations for the Temple

David had been told he must not build the Temple (2Samuel 7), but he was permitted to make preparations for it. He was given the divine plans and specifications of the building. Like the Tabernacle, these came from God (1Chron. 28:11-19). The spirit of God rested on the king, and caused him to design that which his son later built (v.19).

What a privilege this was to David. We can imagine how he would ponder over these plans, how he would mentally visualize the completed building, how his enthusiasm would grow as he made preparations for it. He carefully arranged and supervised the important details of the work before his son.

He set men to work preparing stones, storing iron and brass, gold and silver, for later use in the building; he asked his friend, Hiram, the king of Tyre, to assist with supplying cedar wood from Lebanon in



the north. Thus a great amount of material was gathered together (1Chron. 22:1-5).

What a wonderful example is this. We speak of the Temple as Solomon's Temple. The son of David receives the praise, and the work of David is largely overlooked. But David did not mind. He was not peeved because another was to receive the glory of building the Temple. He did not say, 'If I cannot do all, I will do nothing.' In his enthusiasm he went as far as he could.

Solomon was but a young man in his teens at the time. As the material for the Temple grew, David called for him, to instruct him in his work. He told him how he had been anxious to build the Temple, but had not been granted permission to do so. Yahweh had revealed unto him, that his work was to subdue the enemies of Israel, to prepare for the peaceful reign of his son Solomon who would build the House of Prayer for Israel. He now admonished Solomon to seek the knowledge and wisdom that comes only from God, to exercise faith and courage, to take heed to the commandments and laws that had been given to Moses, for in so doing he would make a success of life.

"In my poverty", he told Solomon, "I have prepared for the House of Yahweh an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a million talents

of silver,* and other material without count. I have arranged for ample workmen to do the work. I must leave it to you to add to all this, and complete this wonderful project. Do not hesitate. Let Yahweh be with you and prosper the work" (1Chron. 22:14).

He called all the princes of his realm together to his palace, and there, before Solomon, he gave them a solemn charge to help his son.

"Set your heart to this work", he told them. "Give your mind and strength entirely to it."

Solomon listened to all that his father told him, and carefully pondered over the work set before him.

Solomon Made King (1Chron. 23:1; 1Kings 1)

The last years of David's life were troubled by long bouts of sickness (Psalm 41). The tiring worries and trials he had faced had undermined his health. They had prematurely aged him. Though only about 69 years of age (cp. 2Sam. 5:5 with 1Kings 2:11), he looked "old and stricken in years" (1Kings 1:1). In that, he was like the Lord Jesus, who though only about 30 years of age, looked at least 50 (cp. Isa. 52:14 with John 8:57).

At one stage, the king became desperately sick, and it was feared that he might die. The atmosphere of the palace became charged with tension. Who was to succeed him? Yahweh had declared it would be Solomon, and David had sworn to Bathsheba that her son would rule (1Kings 1:13).

But there were others who wanted the position.

With the death of Absalom, Adonijah became the eldest of David's sons. The right of kingship was his. At that time David had not openly revealed that Solomon would be king by Divine appointment, though it must have been obvious to all that Solomon was being specially tutored for a very high position.

Suspicion and conspiracy became the order of the day in the Palace of David.

David had denied Adonijah nothing. In his abounding love for his children, David had spoiled his sons (cp. 2Sam. 13:21,39). In this he was cruel though he imagined himself kind. Poor eyesight, crooked

* According to one authority, the total value of the silver and gold stored by David amounted to 861,791 English Pounds (as in 1965). Parkhurst, however, suggests the Arabic version of this verse should be followed, which reads "Gold a thousand talents and silver a thousand talents," indicating that metal in 1000s of talents had to be stored without specifying the amount given. Another authority points out that the Babylonian talent was much lower than the Jewish talent, and the Syriac talent a fifth only of the Babylonian, and as Chronicles was written after the return from Babylon a much smaller figure could be determined. Whatever figure is suggested, however, a huge sum is indicated, which David gathered "in his poverty". By that the king meant that in view of the importance of the work, all the gold in the world was as nothing. The riches of the Gentiles were gathered to beautify the House of Glory, as the wealth of Egypt earlier contributed to the Tabernacle.

limbs are often seen as the results of neglect in childhood. But it is not so clearly recognised that criminal ways often come from neglecting the moral care of children. Parents see the cause of the former. How often are doctors forced to say: "We could have done something if you had come earlier!" But they are not so ready to accept blame for neglecting to strictly discipline their children. Yet how often do parents later pay for such neglect!

Adonijah is a case in point. Thoroughly spoiled by his father who had "not displeased him at any time" (1Kings 1:6), he did not return any love to David, nor had he much reverence for God.

Adonijah decided that he would be king.

He exalted himself, disregarding the lessons of history and Scripture, that he who exalts himself shall be abased (Prov. 16:18; 18:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14).

Like Absalom, Adonijah was a handsome man, and popular in Jerusalem. He imitated the methods of Absalom, by hiring chariots and horsemen with 50 men to run before him.

Adonijah became a familiar figure in Jerusalem, assuming all the glory and status of heir to the throne.

He gained the support of Joab, the Commander-in-Chief of the army, and Abiathar the high priest. These two men feared that they would be deposed if Solomon came to power. Joab was in disgrace with David, and was sure to be superseded by another king, unless he was able to gain a hold over that king. Abiathar had probably seen with feelings of envy how that his rival Zadok was coming more and more into prominence.

They joined in conspiracy with Adonijah to grasp power whilst the king was so sick.



En-rogel, outside of Jerusalem.

Just outside Jerusalem, on the southern side of the city, at the junction of the valleys Kidron and Hinnom, there was a large stone called En-rogel — *the Well of the Spies*. It was there that Jonathan and Ahimaaz hid at the time of Absalom's revolt, awaiting news to take to David. It

was a convenient place for Adonijah to present himself before the people as king. It had a plenteous supply of water, and was a pleasant part of Jerusalem, where the people used to gather, particularly on festive occasions.

To this place the conspirators went, there to begin the revolt by offering sacrifices and conducting a royal feast. The people saw the royal company gathered: the High Priest, the Commander-in-Chief of the army, the sons of the king. They heard congratulations heaped on Adonijah as king, and doubtless, before they realised the full significance of it all, found themselves joining with expressions of joy at the elevation of the handsome and popular eldest son of David.

They did not realise that David had not sanctioned it at all.

Counter Measures Taken Against the Revolt

News of Adonijah's action quickly spread through the city. It came to the ears of Nathan the prophet. He realised that something had to be done, and that immediately, if the purpose of Yahweh that Solomon should rule, was to be fulfilled. Quickly he sent for Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, and, warning her of the seriousness of the revolt, and the danger to her and her son, advised her to ask David to intercede.

Bathsheba needed no urging. Immediately she presented herself at the palace and requested an audience with the king. Bowing low before the sick king, who was confined to his bed, she told him what was happening.

"You swore that Solomon would be king," she said, "but Adonijah has seized power and is setting himself before all as king. He has made a public feast for the people, and has the support of Abiathar and Joab. The eyes of all Israel are on you, O King, to see what you shall do, and who shall reign after you. If you do not do something to stop Adonijah, my life and the life of Solomon my son will be in danger."

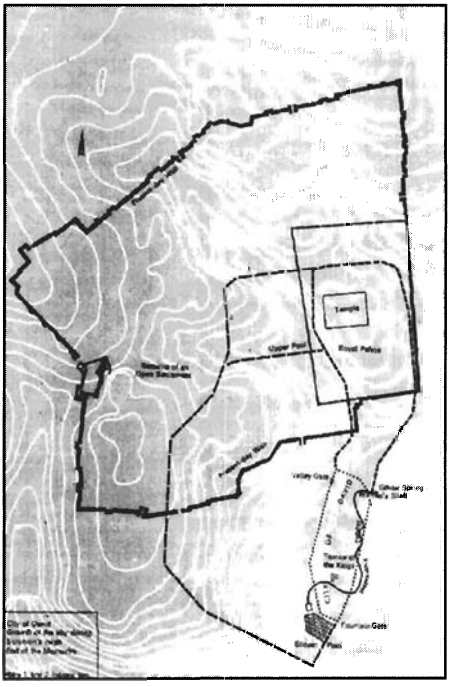
As she spoke these words, Nathan was announced. He came to support the words of Bathsheba. Both knew with what affection the king looked upon Adonijah, and feared lest this should blind him from doing his duty. Nathan confirmed all that Bathsheba had said, and urged David to act quickly lest the revolt get out of hand.

The sick king roused himself from his bed. He told Bathsheba that he had sworn that Solomon should be king and he would fulfil his word. He called for Zadok the priest, for Nathan the prophet, and for Benaiah, a prominent and valiant soldier who commanded the king's own bodyguard, and commanded that they should cause Solomon to ride in state through the streets of Jerusalem upon the king's own mule, and, conducting him to Gihon close to where Adonijah was celebrating, they should anoint him king before all the people, and then

cause him to sit upon the throne in the palace.

To ride upon the king's mule was considered a high honour. To do so without the king's permission was punishable with death. It was the ceremonial way of conducting the new king to his position. That is why, when the Lord Jesus rode into Jerusalem riding upon an ass, the people recognised it as a kingly action and shouted: "Hosannah to the son of David!" (Matt. 21:9).

Zadok, Nathan, and Benaiah, together with the bodyguard of soldiers, did as David commanded them. Riding on the royal mule, surrounded with high officials and the king's own troops, Solomon was conducted in state through the city to Gihon. This was just outside the city walls on the western side, not far from En-Rogel, where Adonijah and his friends were feasting. A great crowd had gathered at the unusual sight of Solomon on the king's mule and, forming a procession, it had followed him to Gihon. There the people witnessed the appointment of Solomon as joint ruler with his father. In accordance with the custom of the times, he was anointed with oil and proclaimed king. The appointment was accompanied by the loud sounding of a trumpet and the congratulations of the people shouting, "May the king live long!" As Solomon returned to the city to sit upon the throne of David, he was followed by the people playing music and rejoicing at the glory bestowed upon him.



The noise at Gihon disturbed the revelry of Adonijah and his followers at En-rogel. The martial sound of the trumpet fell upon the experienced ear of the warrior Joab. He instantly knew that something was wrong, and as he started up from his seat to enquire as to the cause, Jonathan, the son of Abiathar the priest, burst in upon the company with the news that the conspiracy had been discovered, that Solomon had been anointed king, and that the whole city was rejoicing at the appointment!

Feasting and gladness turned to dismay and fear at En-rogel. The guests

whom Adonijah had invited to witness his triumph, now fled from his presence, lest it should be considered that they supported his plot. Adonijah found himself deserted. He trembled as to his fate. He knew how he would have treated Solomon if he had gained power, and could only think that Solomon would seek his death. He had only one place of refuge. Fleeing from En-rogel to Gibeon, he sought refuge in the Tabernacle, by taking hold of the horns of the altar.

No one dared touch anybody who did this unless they had sound grounds for so doing (Exod. 29:37). To touch the altar was like an appeal to Divine mercy. And from the horns of the altar Adonijah pleaded for his life.

"Let king Solomon swear unto me today that he will not slay his servant with the sword!" he cried.

To Gibeon Solomon sent a reply: —

"If Adonijah will show himself a worthy man, there shall not an hair of him fall to the ground; but if wickedness be found in him, he shall die."

His life was spared, but he was sent in disgrace to Jerusalem.

Thus the man who said, "I will be king" was forced to acknowledge Solomon as king and himself but a slave, or servant, of the brother he envied and opposed.

David and Solomon as Joint Kings

Thus, Solomon became king during the lifetime of his father. He has two names in Scripture. He was called *Solomon* by his father, but he was named *Yadidiah* by Yahweh (2Samuel 12:25). Solomon means "peace", and Yadidiah means "the Beloved of Yahweh". When the two names are combined they signify "The Beloved of Yahweh at Peace." In David we see the Beloved of Yahweh at war, and in Solomon we see him in peace.

A little over one thousand years after Solomon came to the throne, a man was baptised in the River Jordan, and when he ascended out of



THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS

The two books of Kings originally formed one book in the Bible, but were divided when the Old Testament was translated into Greek (called the Septuagint Version) about the third century before Christ.

The author is unknown, but it is thought by many to have been the prophet Jeremiah, for the style of writing is considered to be very much like his.

If Jeremiah were the author, he selected his material under divine guidance from available records, to which frequent reference is made (cp. 1 Kings 11:41; 14:19, 29; 15:7, 23, 31; 16:5, 14, 27). From a comparison of 2 Kings 18, 19, 20 with Isaiah chaps. 36-39 it seems that he drew from Isaiah's account of the history of the times.

The author takes this record to the Babylonish captivity, and writes as one who was living when the Temple was still standing (1 Kings 8:8), yet who witnessed its overthrow (2 Kings 17:23; 25:27).

This corresponds exactly to the experiences of Jeremiah.

1 Kings can be divided into two parts, thus:

1. **The Glorious 40 year Reign of Solomon (Chaps. 1-11).**
   Solomon's Accession and Early Acts — Chps. 1-4.
   Solomon's Temple and Palace Built — Chps. 5-8.
   Solomon's Fame and Glory — Chps. 9-10.
   Solomon's Decline and Death — Chps. 11:1-43.
2. **The First 80 years of the Divided Kingdom (Chaps.12-22).**
   Accession of Rehoboam: National Division — Ch. 12:1-33.
   Judah's Kings: Rehoboam to Jehoshaphat — Chps. 13-22.
   Israel's Kings: Jeroboam to Ahaziah — Chps. 13-22.
   Ministry of Elijah the Prophet — Chps. 17-22.

Lesson of the Two Books of Kings

They show how Disobedience brought Disruption and Disgrace. They reveal how Division weakened the influence and Destroyed the peace of Israel, bringing the nation ultimately to ruin.

They close with —	They open with —
Jerusalem glorious and powerful	*Jerusalem destroyed.*
The Temple built	*The Temple burnt.*
Israel united and powerful	*Israel divided and dispersed.*
The nation at the height of glory	*The nation in the depth of tragedy.*

They show that the glory of the Kingdom of God in the past was a fading glory in contrast with the everlasting glory of the coming Kingdom of God on earth.

the water, a Voice from heaven declared: "This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17 — Greek).

Together, David and Solomon typified this greater Son who, by war and peace, is yet to reveal the glory of his Father in the earth.

David must have pondered the remarkable fact that events had forced him to raise Solomon to kingship before his death, because the wonderful promise that God made to him of a great King and Redeemer of mankind who will build the Temple, clearly stated that he would not be set up until after the death of the king (2Sam. 7:12).

The elevation of Solomon before David's death showed that whilst he typified the future glory of David's greater son (Luke 1:32-33), he was not the fulfilment of the promise.

Meanwhile, the two reigns of David and Solomon were merged as one; there was a gradual change from a state of war and conquest to one of peace and prosperity.

David's Last Acts

Solomon was able to relieve his father of the more difficult duties of governing the nation. With these responsibilities lifted from the shoulders of the sick and ageing king, his health improved. He occupied his leisure time in a wonderful service to Israel, by reorganising the worship of the nation and the duties of the priests and Levites.

The Psalms that he had composed during his lifetime were carefully arranged for public service in the Temple.

From 1Chronicles 9:22 we learn that apparently Samuel, before his death, had indicated to David certain changes that should be made in Divine appointments, and the King now brought these into being. A royal command brought all the princes of Israel together with the priests and Levites to consider the matter (1Chron. 23:2).

First of all, a count was taken of the Levites, and they were found to number 38,000. These were divided into 24,000 overseers, over whom there were established 24 elders, 6,000 officers and judges, 4,000 porters, and 4,000 musicians (1Chron. 23:4-5).

David Plans For the Future Temple and Services of Worship

Next, he altered the age at which Levites were to commence their duties. The building of the Temple that would be achieved under Solomon and the more established and regulated worship of Yahweh throughout the land, would require a greater number to do the work. At first, the Levites were appointed to work from 30 years and over (v. 3), but now, by royal decree, the age commenced at 20 years and upwards (v. 24). They acted as assistants to the priests. The would prepare the shewbread, stand every morning and evening before the great brazen altar in the Temple as the sacrifice was offered, singing appropriate

Psalms, assisted the priests in preparing the sacrifices (vv. 28-31).

David then turned his attention to the priests. They also, were of the tribe of Levi, but descendants only of the house of Aaron. Aaron had four sons, but two of them died leaving no children. From the other two there were 24 elders in the days of David, sixteen of the house of Eleazar and eight of the house of Ithamar. The king arranged them into twenty-four orders or courses, each of which served a week in turn commencing on a Sabbath (2Chron. 23:4-8; 2Kings 11:7). We read of these courses in the New Testament, for the father of John the Baptist was "of the course of Abia" (Luke 1:5), which was the eighth course (1Chron. 24:10).

The duties of the priests were many. They wore a special dress made of white linen with a girdle of the same, embroidered with blue, purple, and scarlet (Exod. 28:40, 42; 29:7-9). These garments were supplied to the priests (Ezra 2:69), and were probably stored in the chambers of the Temple. The priests attended the fire on the altar, killed and offered the sacrifices, acted as mediators between God and the people, attended the lamps in the Holy Place, arranged the shew-bread upon the tables, offered up prayers for the people, judged them in certain matters (Num. 18).

Thirteen cities were given to them, and these became centres of learning and judgment. The priests acted as judges in minor civil matters (2Chron. 19:8-10), and they expounded the law to the people (2Chron. 17:8-9).

The priests were also active in time of war. They sounded the trumpets calling the people together (Num. 10:9), and exhorted the people to faith and courage (Deut. 20:1-4).

Both Levites and priests were supported by the offerings and the payments of tithes of the people.

Thus, throughout Israel there was distributed a teaching community (Mal. 2:7) maintained by the people, who, by the fact that they had to pay in material things for the spiritual blessings they received, were shown the value of God's way.

Musicians for the Temple

Among the Levites there were men skilled in music, such as Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, who were prominent in the days of David. The king arranged that their skills should be profitably exercised (see 1Chron. 25). They were not engaged to sing or play merely because they could produce a pleasant sound, but for the very important work of leading the people in worship and praise. A special word is used to describe their art. They were told to "*prophesy* with harps, psalteries, and cymbals."

The blending of music and voice around the glorious songs of Zion, pleasantly prepared the minds of the people for the stimulating

and exalting worship of Yahweh. Some Psalms are historic, recording His great acts of the past; some Psalms are exhortatory, making mention of how men should conduct themselves in His service; some Psalms are full of hope pointing to the great future He has decreed for the earth. All of them spake to the people to "edification and exhortation and comfort" (which constitutes true prophecy, 1Cor. 14:3).

These singers and players were also divided into twenty-four orders (1Chron. 25:31), and here David introduced a beautiful feature. He arranged that many should be in family groups, so that many of the singers and instrument players were "under the hands of their fathers" (vv. 2, 3, 4, 6). Thus, family groups were joined together to produce glorious harmony in the service of Yahweh. The father educated his sons in the music and led them in the playing. The sons were in subjection to their fathers, and played or sung under their direction. This union produced a beautiful melody of sound which suitably led the people to Divine worship.

The chief singers were called "seers" (2Chron. 29:30; 35:15; 1Chron. 25:5). Their ministrations helped men like David to concentrate their minds more completely on eternal things, and thus "see" the future more vividly in thought (cp. 2Kings 3:15).

Even the names of the heads of the twenty-four orders of musicians make a song. Take the sons of Heman as an example (1Chron. 25:4). The meaning of the names of the last seven sons form the following prayer:

Be gracious unto me, O Yahweh;
Be gracious unto me!
Thou art my Strength;
Thou hast magnified and exalted help for him that sat in distress;
Thou hast given visions abundantly.

This remarkable combination of names has caused some to suggest that they are not genuine. What it does show is that Heman, in naming his sons, did so with the set purpose of glorifying Yahweh, as many parents have frequently done since.

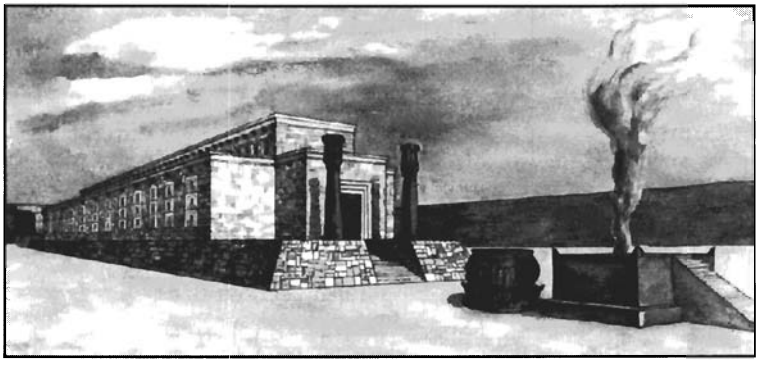
A similar Psalm is expressed if the names of the elders of the 24 courses, from Joseph (1Chron. 25:9) to Romamti-ezer (v.31) are similarly combined. Then we have the following expressions of praise:

May He increase!
Yahweh is Great!
He is mindful of the place of treading down,
And has delivered the upright towards
Him from out of trouble.
Yahweh has saved them;
He has granted them His gift;
He has made them famous through His might.
Yahweh has regarded me!

Return, O El !
Bestow thy gift !
From the heights Yahweh has been gracious to those in distress.
Be gracious to me.
I have said, Thou art my Strength!
Thou hast given and magnified Thy visions;
Thou hast manifested Thy help.

What a glorious moment it must have been in the Temple worship when it was later set up, and the time came to sing the morning praises. As the early sun streamed down from the east the musicians assembled. Heman took his place in the centre (1Chron. 6:33-38), Asaph stood on the right (vv. 39-43), Ethan on the left (vv. 44-47). With them were those appointed to this service. They stood in front of the large brazen Altar, separating it from the court of Israel. As the priests assembled to prepare the morning sacrifice, and as people gathered outside to witness it and give themselves to prayer, the splendid strains of Zion's songs were heard, accompanied by instruments on compositions that David had prepared. How stimulating this must have been to the worshippers; how they would have been induced to lift hearts and minds to the Giver of every good and perfect gift, praising Him for His gracious goodness unto the sons of men.

This beautiful picture of the past is to be repeated in the future when immortalised singers in their twenty-four orders will sing wondrous songs, even more meaningful, glorious, and universal in their effect (Rev. 5:9-14).



Chapter Four

LAST ACTS OF DAVID

We come now to the last months of David's life. Much remained to be done. Friends had to be rewarded, the nation had to be encouraged to build the Temple, Solomon had to be warned of enemies in the midst of the nation, other duties had to be completed.

Though very ill at this time, the ailing king roused himself to complete these necessary tasks.

King David Rewards His Friends

David knew that his end was near. But he also knew that he still had much to do, and as day followed day, he busied himself in completing as much as he could. He had received from God the plans of the Temple that Solomon was to build; he had arranged the order of worship based upon that laid down by Moses and which was to be conducted by the Priests and Levites; he had provided gatekeepers for the Temple, treasurers to look after its wealth, judges and teachers to care for its laws and instructions; he had divided the whole nation into twelve divisions over which he placed twelve princes.

Several chapters of the Bible (1Chronicles 23-29) describe the tremendous work accomplished by the sick king during the last months of his life. To many people, these chapters make dull reading, but they show us how David set out to "redeem the time", and when the significance of these last acts of David is understood, they are of great importance. He was anxious to leave everything in such order that the reign of Solomon might be peaceful, and he might devote all his energy to building the Temple. To that end, David placed into positions of responsibility, men who had proved their worth in his service. They were made the officers and princes of his realm, to be looked up to and obeyed by the common people.

In this he foreshadowed the work of the Lord Jesus. When Christ returns to set up again "the tabernacle of David" (Acts 15:16), he will also elevate men and women who have already proved their worth in his service. He has promised: "He that overcometh, to him I will give power over the nations" (Rev. 2:26). One such, who is destined to be thus rewarded, wrote to his friend: "If we now suffer with him, we shall also then reign with him" (2Tim.2:12). Thus, as we read of the work of David, we see foreshadowed the work of Christ.

A list of some of the men David raised to positions of authority is given in 1Chronicles 27:25-34. Some are nowhere else mentioned in the Bible. All we know of them is that David raised them to power on that occasion. We might think that there is no purpose in recording

such names, but it does illustrate a very important principle. It shows that David rewarded his friends, not because they were well-known to their fellows, but because they had learned to do small tasks well and faithfully.

Jesus Christ will do likewise.

If we learn to properly do small things for him today, he will reward us greatly tomorrow. "Because thou hast been faithful in *a very little,* have thou authority over ten cities," will be his words of commendation (Luke 19:17).

In the list, mentioned above, which many people find dull and unimportant to read, we learn that an Arabian was put over the king's camels (v. 30). Why? Because he knew how to handle them. A Hagarite was placed over the flocks (v. 31). Why? Because they were shepherds and this man would be skilled in this work. Thus each appointment David made was according to merit: the officer was given the work for which he was best qualified. Mere favoritism found no place in his considerations. David encouraged men of worth, and placed them in power so that the public service might be efficiently conducted.

Christ will follow the same procedure. Isaiah 32:1-5 speaks of the great changes to the earth by his laws and appointments. We read: "The vile person shall no more be called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful." Today, men are often flattered, because they are in positions of authority, or have much wealth. Christ, like David, will not deal in flattery or favoritism. Each person, in his service, must show that he is qualified to work for Christ in the kingdom he will establish.

We must show today, by faithful, humble service, that we are worthy of such honour. Then he will suitably reward us at his coming.

David's Farewell Speech (1Chron. 28-29)

At last, all the work that David could do for the reign of Solomon and the building of the Temple was finished. But one thing had to be done. Solomon and the elders and princes of the nation must be encouraged and stimulated to the work.

David arranged for a great gathering of specially selected men to represent the people.* They comprised the rulers and princes of the

* The reigns of David and Solomon abound in wonderful parables and types of the coming glorious Kingdom of Christ. An example is given in this record of 1Chron. 28. The word used to describe the specially selected leaders whom David addressed, is the Hebrew equivalent of the word *Ecclesia* (v. 8; Ch. 29:1 "assembly", in Hebrew *gahal*). In addressing this "ecclesia", David describes them as his brethren (v. 2), even as Christ is "not ashamed" to call the members of his ecclesia "brethren" (Heb. 2:11). David describes his kingdom as the Kingdom of God (1Chron. 28:5). In the type, he represents Christ, the princes represent the Ecclesia, the common people represent national Israel. The basis upon which David's throne was established was that of divine choice (vv. 4-5), and that is the basis also upon which the rule of Christ will be established — See Psa. 65:4; 89:3,19; 106:5; Matt. 12:18; 20:16; 22:14; Luke 23:35; 1Cor. 1:27; Eph. 1:4; 2Tim. 2:4; James 2:5; 1Pet. 2:4; Rev. 17:14.

nation. Chief among them was his son Solomon. When they were gathered before him, the sick king rose to his feet to address them for the last time. He called them "his brethren" (v. 2); he reminded them how his greatest desire was to build the Temple of Yahweh, but he had not been permitted to do so because of the warlike times in which he lived. Nevertheless, Yahweh had chosen him to be king, Judah had been chosen as the royal tribe, Solomon had been chosen to "sit upon the throne of the Kingdom of Yahweh over Israel" (v. 5). He therefore exhorted the people to "keep and seek the commandments of Yahweh" by obeying his son.

The king then turned to his son Solomon. Before all the people he gave him a solemn charge.

"Solomon my son," he said to him tenderly, "know* thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind, for Yahweh searcheth all hearts, and understands your motives and your thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found of you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off for ever. Take heed! Yahweh hath chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary; be strong and do it!"

In the sight of all the people gathered together, David then handed over to his son all the plans of the temple and its furniture, that he had received from Yahweh.

"Be strong, take heart, and do this great work," he told Solomon in the hearing of the people. "Never be daunted nor dismayed, for Yahweh your God, who is also my God, is with you; He will never fail you, nor forsake you until you have finished all the work for the service of His house. Here are the courses of the Priests and Levites ready for all the service of the Temple! You will find willing, expert workmen ready to help you, besides which all the princes and people of the nation are yours to command."

The king then turned from his son to the leaders of the nation assembled before him.

"Solomon my son, whom alone God has chosen, is young and inexperienced; and the work is great, for the palace is not for man but Yahweh," he said. "Now I have prepared with all my might for the Temple, gold and silver, brass, iron, onyx stones, and precious stones of all kinds. Above all the public money that I collected during my reign, I have given also my private fortune to this work. Now who is willing to add to this by giving his portion this day to Yahweh?"

The people, gathered together on this solemn occasion, were greatly impressed by the words and liberal action of the king whom they loved so dearly. As they saw him give his private money to the work of Yahweh, they were moved to do likewise. They "offered will-

* To "know" in the sense that David used the term to Solomon, is to "know intimately" or personally. See John 17:3 and contrast with 1 Sam. 2:12).

ingly" (1Chron. 29:6) so that a large amount of gold, silver and precious stones was added to that gathered by David.

Great excitement swept through the crowd as the people witnessed these acts of generosity. Israel felt the pleasure of giving, the joy of willingly sacrificing something of value for a good cause. And David, too, rejoiced. As he saw the liberality of the princes, he realised that a spirit was moving the nation that would bring about the attainment of his dearest hope — the building of the Temple. It was a happy day for the nation, because it was welded together as one in the divine service. "The people rejoiced because with perfect (*i.e. sincere*) heart they offered willingly to Yahweh" (1Chron. 29:9). That is the purest and best form of joy.

David's Public Prayer of Thanksgiving (1Chron. 29)

David's heart overflowed with a thankfulness and joy which he found quite beyond the power of speech to express. He turned in public prayer unto Yahweh. The beautiful words that he uttered on that occasion (vv. 10-19) are very similar to the words used by Christ in what is known as the *Lord's Prayer*. He made reference to Yahweh as "our Father" (v.10); he praised God for His greatness, power, glory, and majesty; he hallowed His name (v.13); he prayed that Solomon might have a perfect heart; he made mention of how all blessings flow from on high, of man's need for the protecting Hand of God, for "our days on the earth are as a shadow, with no hope", apart from Yahweh; he spake of what a joy it was for him to see the people offer so willingly, and he asked that they should never lose their enthusiasm of that day, nor forget what they owed to Yahweh, nor fail in their determination to seek, serve, and sacrifice for His cause (v.18).

It is a wonderful prayer that the King offered, and the people were much impressed by it.

After it was completed, he turned back to the congregation and called upon each member to personally give his heart unto God. Stimulated by the action and the prayer of the King, the whole assembly gave itself over to the pure joy of divine worship. A quietness settled over the crowd as each one bowed his head in prayer. The vast audience was silent and still. But in the heart of each person a prayer was offered, and each one experienced the exaltation of mental communion with Yahweh, which private and personal prayer alone can give.

The people dispersed, greatly impressed with the words and service of the king. Next day they assembled again, to celebrate with joy, the dedication of their service to Yahweh, and to confirm Solomon as king. It was a day of great activity and gladness. A thousand bullocks, a thousand rams, a thousand lambs were offered in sacrifice. Portion of these was consumed by fire on the altar, portion was eaten by the

Priests and people in a sacrificial meal. Thus they had communion with God, and with each other.

Solomon was again presented to the people; this time accompanied by Zadok the priest. Both were then anointed to their high positions — Solomon as king, Zadok as high priest. This was the second time Solomon was anointed king, for he had been previously anointed to joint-rulership at the time Adonijah had rebelled. After the ceremony was over, the officers and rulers of the realm came to Solomon to give their allegiance to him. Even Adonijah came to bow before him in company with his brethren (v. 24).

Thus "Solomon sat on the throne of Yahweh as king, instead of David his father, and prospered; and all Israel obeyed him" (v. 23). The peaceful reign of the Kingdom of God on earth was about to begin.

Private Instructions for Solomon (1Kings 2)

There was work of a more unpleasant nature that David had to do before his death. There were judgments that had to be executed, warnings and instructions that had to be issued. The dying king called Solomon before him that he might tell him what must be done.

"You must be strong and show yourself a man," he counselled his son. "You must strictly keep the way of Yahweh, doing all things according to His laws. If you do that He will look after you, and you will prosper in all your ways."

Having thus warned his son, David gave him instructions concerning three prominent men of his realm.

"You know what Joab did to me, and how he murdered Abner and Amasa", continued David. "Joab shed the blood of war in peace. He deceived and stabbed these men. Do to Joab according to your wisdom, but he must be punished. You must not let his hoar head go down to the grave in peace".

Joab must die for the evil that he did. Joab was the ruthless soldier, who had let nothing stand in his way to power, who had murdered and slain in order to be captain, who had disobeyed David, and risen in revolt against Solomon. Therefore his hour of judgment must come. It had been a long time coming, and as Solomon later wrote, "because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the heart of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccles. 8:11). But now this ruthless seeker of power, this man who had "lived by the sword", was condemned to feel the weight of judgment, and "die by the sword" (Matt. 26:52).

It was important that he should. So long as he escaped justice, people might imagine that the king agreed with his actions, and might be led to do likewise. A public scandal would have been committed if

Joab were allowed to go unpunished. It would have been morally wrong. Thus David insisted that Solomon execute justice. Probably his own shortcomings prevented him moving against Joab, but as representative of Yahweh in the nation, it was important that Solomon should do so.

The peace of his realm could only be properly established on the basis of righteousness (Heb. 7:2; Jas. 3:18), and that righteousness was to be seen in the removal of sin and evil. What Solomon was to do typically, the Lord Jesus Christ will do perfectly (Psa. 96:13; Isa. 11:5).

But though some might be punished, others were to be exalted.

Amongst those was a man of a different character that David told Solomon he must reward. He was Barzillai, the chieftain who had been so kind to David when he fled across the Jordan from Absalom. David was just as anxious that he should be cared for, as he was that Joab should be punished.

"Be kind to the family of Barzillai", he told Solomon. "Let them be among the guests at your table, for they fed me when I fled from your brother Absalom."

Finally, there was Shimei, the man who had bitterly cursed David as he fled from Jerusalem, but who had later humbled himself before the king, and abjectly pleaded for his life. David had forgiven him, but he knew that he was a guilty and a dangerous man, and he warned Solomon of him.

"You have with you Shimei who cursed me with a grievous curse in the day that I went to Mahanaim," he told Solomon. "I sware to him by Yahweh, saying, I will not put you to death with the sword. He was worthy of death at that time, and you are a wise man and will know how to handle him, but I have forgiven him for what he did to me, and I do not want you to slay him on my account".*

Last Words of David

David's work was completed, his race had been run. During the last months of his life, the King's mind roved over the past, living again the victories and the trials through which he had passed. He remembered the day of triumph, when as a bright-faced boy he challenged the formidable Goliath in the sight of the massed armies of

* The A.V. reads differently from the above, but evidently incorrectly. The Hebrew negative particle *"lo"* translated "not" in the clause "hold him not guiltless" should be repeated in the following clause "his hoar head bring (not) thou down to the grave with blood", even though it is not directly expressed in the Hebrew. Examples of this are found in the following places: 1Sam. 2:3; Ps.1:5; 9:18; 38:1, etc. David warned Solomon against Shimei, advising him not to look upon him as an innocent man even though he had been forgiven, but to treat him as he deserved to be treated. He was not to slay him for what he did to David, however, but to treat him on his merits. That is how Solomon understood the instructions, as is evident from the way he carried them out. Shimei earned the death sentence by flouting Solomon's commands, not because he cursed David.

Philistia and Israel; he recalled the anxious moments when he fled from the wrath of Saul; he pondered again the times of victory and defeat, of joy and sadness, of triumph and failure, through which he had gone. There were incidents in which he could glory, there were actions of which he was ashamed.

But throughout the tangled skein of his life he could detect a pattern. He now could see how Yahweh had been guiding him, helping him, disciplining him.

And the King gave expression to this in a Psalm of great beauty. It is twice recorded in the Bible: in 2Samuel 22, and Psalm 18.

Possibly it was originally composed at the time when David desired to build the Temple, but instead was given the wonderful covenant (cp. 2Sam. 7:1, with 2Sam. 22:1); for whilst it speaks of past triumphs (2Sam. 22:39-42), it also speaks of battles yet to be won in Yahweh's name (2Sam. 22:4), and of foreign powers that would be forced to submit (vv. 45-46).

But if first written then, it now commanded David's attention once more. In it he expressed his thanksgiving to Yahweh for the way in which he had been preserved out of all his trials and dangers, and for the great hope which moved him at this time. In it, the warrior-king saw in Yahweh his real Weapons of war and Source of defence (vv. 2-4). He recalled moments of crisis when he had sought God's help (vv. 5-7), when his prayer had been answered (vv. 8-16), and he had found deliverance (vv. 17-20). He spoke of how he had sought to obey Yahweh (vv. 21-24), and because of that had found help (vv. 25-27). He gave all the credit of victory to God (vv. 28-30), showing that it was He Who had really conquered the enemy (vv. 34-42), He Who had extended David's power both at home and abroad (vv. 43-45). Therefore the King now poured out his heart in thanksgiving for all the blessings he had received (vv. 46-50).

This Psalm is more than a song of thanksgiving, however. It is prophetic of Christ. In Hebrews 2:13, Paul applies it to the Lord (cp. 2Sam. 22:3), and David evidently understood it that way also, for he concluded with the following words:

Great deliverance giveth He to His king;
And sheweth mercy to His Christ,
To David, and to his seed for evermore.

In studying Psalm 18 in its prophetic aspect, we suggest the following headings:

The Source of Christ's strength — vv. 1-3;
His trials — vv. 4-6;
His resurrection and the wonders following it, including the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70 (cp. Matt. 27:45-54; 28:2-4; 24:6-8; Luke 21:33; Acts 2:19-21) — vv. 7-18;
Divine approval of the Lord Jesus — vv. 19-24;

The calling out of a people for the Lord — vv. 25-28;
World conquest — vv. 29-45;
Universal worship in the Age to Come — vv. 46-50.

David died in the sure and certain hope of a resurrection from the dead to life eternal. He expressed this in another wonderful Psalm (Psa. 71:9, 17-20):

Cast me not off in the time of old age;
Forsake me not when my strength faileth
O God, Thou has taught me from my youth;
And hitherto have I declared Thy wondrous works.
Now also when I am old and grey-headed,
O God, forsake me not;
Until I have shewed Thy strength unto this generation,
And Thy power to every one that is to come...
Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles,
Shalt quicken me again,
And shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth.
Thou shalt increase my greatness,
And comfort me on every side (vv.17-20).

On another occasion he wrote (Psalm 27:4,13):

One thing I have desired of Yahweh, that will I seek after;
That I may dwell in the House of Yahweh
all the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of Yahweh, and to inquire
in His Temple.
I had fainted, unless I had believed to see
the goodness of Yahweh, in the land of the living.

David's Epitaph All the hopes and desires of David during the last days of his life were concentrated in a Psalm which is called in Scripture "The Last Words of David." It is recorded in 2Samuel 23:1-7, and is of such significance and beauty as to warrant the closest attention. No matter how young or old one is, pleasure and profit can be gained by meditating upon the wonderful hope of this great hero of faith expressed in these his "last words."

Now these be the last words of David.
David the son of Jesse,
The warrior enthroned,
Said concerning the Christ of the God of Jacob,
He who constitutes the pleasant theme of Israel's Psalms:
The Spirit of Yahweh spake by me,
And His Word was in my tongue.
The God of Israel said,
The Rock of Israel spake to me:

There shall be a Ruler over mankind,
A Just One ruling in the fear of God.
And as the brightness of morning he shall arise,
The Sun of an unclouded dawn,
Shining forth after rain,
Upon tender grass out of the earth.
For is not my house thus with God?
For He hath made with me an everlasting covenant,
Ordered in all things and sure;
For this is all my salvation, and all my desire,
For shall He not cause it to prosper?
But the sons of Belial (worthlessness) *shall be*
as thorns thrust away,
Because they cannot be taken with hands;
But the man that shall touch them
must be filled with iron and the shaft of a spear,
And they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place.

This rendering is a little different from the Authorised Version, but it is in accordance with the original Hebrew.

In it, David shows that the great theme of the Psalms was the divine purpose in the Lord Jesus Christ. He looked forward to the time when the great Messiah would come to be Ruler over mankind, ruling in the fear of God, dispelling the darkness of ignorance and sin by the clear shining of his teaching, bringing mankind the benefits of his glorious reign on earth.

These "last words of David" also express the confidence of the King that his house would attain unto the glory promised, because Yahweh had made with him an "everlasting covenant" that provided for every need, the fulfilment of which is sure. That covenant expressed all David's salvation and desire.

But the King also knew that his greater son, the Lord Jesus, the Ruler referred to in his Psalm, had to go through pain and suffering in order to inherit the glory. The "sons of Belial" *(worthlessness)* would pierce him with iron and the shaft of a spear.

The soldiers did that to the Lord Jesus Christ as he hung helpless from the cross outside the city of Jerusalem.

David also prophesied that "they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place."

His words are true. Jerusalem, the city of Christ's humiliation, is destined to become the city of his power. It will be at Jerusalem that the nations will be gathered (the representatives of those who pierced Christ 1900 years ago) to be destroyed by the mighty power he will then wield (Zech. 14:1-5,9).

The Psalms are filled with the wonderful theme of Israel's Messiah, the Lord Jesus. They show in detail all the main events of his life,

even his death upon the cross. In Psalm 22, David predicted that his enemies would "pierce his hands and his feet" (v.16).

In these "last words," however, David looked beyond the pain and sorrow, to the coming glory and triumph of his greater son. As the sick king lay upon the deathbed, he forgot his own triumphs and successes, and looked to those of a greater than he. With his mind filled with the coming glory of Christ's reign on earth, to which he shall attain by a resurrection from the grave, David, at last, closed his eyes in the sleep of death.

He died in hope of the resurrection, so that his life's story is not yet ended. The past is but a brief pilgrimage to the future for such as he, who live in hope of the certainty of God's glorious kingdom (cp. 2Cor. 4:17).

"So David died" (1Kings 2:10). We cannot leave this great hero of faith, without meditating for a brief moment on his passing. How short is a lifetime in the long record of history — but how crowded it is with incidents and personal experience. What opportunities, triumphs, failures, crimes, ambitions, desires, hidden actions, open incidents are compressed within the short period of a single life! For a moment the energy of life bursts forth — and then it is covered in the darkness of the grave. How wise to pray: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Psalm 90:12). How true are the words of Scripture: "What is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (James 4:14).

Josephus says that David died at the age of 70. He was buried in the city of David (1Kings 2:10). His sepulchre long remained, even until the days of the Apostles (Neh. 3:16; Acts 2:29). It is said that Solomon buried vast treasure therein, some of which was later taken by Hyrcanus, a ruler of Judea, and the rest by Herod the Great, who broke open the sepulchre to obtain it. Finally, the tomb of David was lost when the Jews were driven from Palestine and scattered into all parts of the world by the Romans. When they won back part of Jerusalem in 1948, however, they claimed to have found the tomb of David, which today can be seen on Mt. Zion. Whether it is, in fact, David's tomb, however, only time can tell.

So this great man passed to his rest, awaiting the resurrection. David was by birth a peasant, by upbringing a shepherd, in youth a hero, by Divine choice a king, in manhood a monarch, in old age an example, and is yet to be one of the respected men of the earth, when his greater son, the Lord Jesus, builds again the house of David (Acts 15:16), and reigns upon "the throne of his father David forever" (Luke 1:32-33), as universal monarch of the world.

The Golden Age of Israel's History

The wars of David made possible the peaceful reign of Solomon. Israel was not merely united as one, but had been forged into one of the most powerful empires of the day. Solomon extended its influence. He exercised a monopoly on world trade, he was fabulously wealthy, and he excelled in wisdom.

In his reign, Israel reached the pinnacle of its glory. It was the envy and the ideal of the surrounding nations, and today archaeologists stand in amazement at the remarkable evidences they have uncovered of the truth of the Bible narrative.

There are wonderful lessons to be learnt of the reign of Solomon, of his wisdom and his folly, of opportunities that were neglected and a glory that faded.

There are wonderful types to be considered in the reign of Solomon, pointing forward to the greatness of Christ's reign on earth. For, as the wars of David foreshadow the judgments that will fall upon the nations at Christ's coming, so the peace of Solomon foreshadows the conditions that will finally be set up. Notice particularly that the Kingdom of Israel at this time is styled the "Kingdom of God" (1Chron. 29:23; 28:5). This teaches that the Kingdom of God has once existed upon the earth, and that it has a history, like all other kingdoms. Learn, too, that the Lord Jesus is to restore the greatness of that Kingdom which once existed on earth (see Luke 1:32-33; Acts 1:6, 15:16). He likened himself to Solomon (Mat. 12:42), and contrasted Solomon's material glory to the glory that Yahweh alone can give (Luke 12:27).

The Bible record concerning Solomon is contained in the books of Kings, 2Chronicles, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon, all of which should be studied by the earnest student to find the background of his reign.

Chapter One

SOLOMON COMMENCES A REIGN OF GLORY

The Wisdom of Solomon (1Kings 3; 2Chron. 1)

Mr. and Mrs. Phillips, together with their four children: Graeham, Peter, Ann, and Joan, had just completed the reading of 1Kings 3, and now the children were ready to plague their suffering and patient father with questions.

On his part, he was only too ready to receive them, having a habit of launching into long explanations, sometimes to the irritation of the children who feel that he wanders from the point, and of Mrs. Phillips, who realises that bedtime sometimes becomes long delayed as a result.

"I like this chapter," began Joan. "It is lovely how Solomon was able to tell who was the true mother when the two women came before him, and how he restored the little baby to the right one. How startled the people must have been when they saw how easily Solomon solved the problem!"

"Solomon seemed to have gained his wisdom the easy way," commented Peter who likes to search out difficult questions for his father. "All he had to do was to pray for it, and it was given him."

"It was not quite as easy as all that," answered Mr. Phillips. "It is true that Solomon prayed for wisdom, and Yahweh blessed him with an understanding heart, but he still had to work to obtain that wisdom."

"How do you mean?" asked Peter.

"Solomon himself answers that question!" answered his father with a smile.

"Where does he do that?" asked Ann, her face lighting up with interest.

"In Ecclesiastes 1:13," replied Mr. Phillips. "Joan can look it up for us and read it."

Joan soon found the place and read: "I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven."

"The writer of that book is Solomon," explained Mr. Phillips, "and the words Joan read, show that whilst God blessed him with an understanding heart, he still had to work to obtain wisdom. That is an important lesson we must learn in all walks of life. God will not help us unless we are prepared to help ourselves."

"Will God bless us with wisdom if we ask for it?" asked Ann.

"Yes," replied Mr. Phillips. "In fact, He has invited us to do so."

"Where has He done that?"asked Graeham.

"In James 1:5," replied his father. "There we read: 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally... and it shall be given him.' But we must remember that we must not only pray for it, but also work for it. Yahweh has given us His Book, the Bible, and whilst we need to pray for help, if we do not seek by our own efforts to obtain His wisdom, all the prayers in the world will avail nothing. On the other hand, you will not gain the greatest benefit from Bible study unless you approach it prayerfully. It is always good to open the Book with a prayer in your heart."

"Why did Solomon commence his reign by going to Gibeon?" asked Graeham who was studying 1Kings 3.

"We learn from 2Chronicles 1:3 that the Tabernacle was at Gibeon, for it had not, at that time, been brought to Jerusalem. As David his father had died, and he was now sole ruler, Solomon called for a gathering of the people before the Tabernacle, that he might dedicate the Kingdom to Yahweh. A vast assembly was brought together, and 1,000 sacrifices were offered. Solemnly, before all the princes and captains of his realm, the king humbly bowed before the God of Israel, vowing to rule according to His precepts. It was a wonderful occasion for young Solomon who was then only about 18 or 20 years of age.

"He retired to rest that night, with his mind excited by the events of the day, and as he was sleeping, God appeared to him in a dream, and asked him what gift he would like to have bestowed on him. 'Thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father', replied Solomon in his dream, 'and I am but young and inexperienced. Giveme an understanding heart to judge Thy people, that I may discern between good and bad.'

"Yahweh was pleased with this request," continued Mr. Phillips. "He promised Solomon that in addition to wisdom, He would give him both riches and honour. Furthermore, He promised him that if he followed the example of his father David, he would receive long life as well.

"Next day Solomon returned to Jerusalem where the Ark had been set up in the days of David. Here again, he called the people together, to celebrate the beginning of his sole reign by a great ceremonial feast in which all the people took part."

"Did Solomon receive all that Yahweh promised him?" asked Joan as her father paused.

"He received the wisdom, riches and honour, but he did not receive the long life," answered her father.

"Why was this?" asked Ann.

"Because he did not fulfil the conditions. He was promised long life only if he walked according to the example of David. Solomon

did not do that, and so did not receive the promise. He died quite young, for though he reigned over Israel for 40 years, he ascended the throne in his late teens, and must have died when he was about 59 years of age (1Kings 11:42).

"A short but merry reign!" murmured Peter.

"It was a happy reign only so long as he remained obedient," replied his father. "As we shall see, when he strayed from God's way, his troubles commenced. Meanwhile, it is interesting to notice Solomon's words regarding wisdom in Proverbs 3:13-18. He seems to make reference to the promise of Yahweh, for he wrote: 'Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour.' Solomon received the latter, but not the former."

"Solomon showed his great wisdom when the two mothers came before him each claiming the live baby, as we read in the Bible tonight," remarked Ann.

"Yes," answered her father. "A great responsibility rested on Solomon. He was very young to be king, and doubtless there were many in Israel who wondered how the young son of David would conduct the affairs of state. It was a critical moment for the new king. He knew that there were enemies ready to seize the power of the throne if they could.

"Solomon, like David and all the kings of Israel, was not only the ruler of the people, but also acted as judge. His subjects had the right to appeal to him in any case of dispute. Such matters were conducted in public, with other people listening to the claims, ready to applaud or condemn the decisions given. One day, there came before the young king two women, both claiming a baby. Each had given birth to a child, but, unfortunately, during the night, one of the babies had died. Now both claimed the living one, and they came before Solomon asking him to judge in the matter.

"Each pressed her claim.

" 'The baby is mine!' declared one woman angrily to the other. 'You stole it from me whilst I was sleeping! When I awoke in the morning and took up the baby next to me, I found it was dead! But when I looked at it, I knew it was not mine! You have stolen my baby!'

"But the other woman just as violently denied having done so.

" 'It is not true,' she answered hotly. 'You overlaid your baby during the night, and now want to take mine from me!'

"Both appealed to the king who silently and thoughtfully was listening to the argument. When he did not immediately reply, they again turned on each other with hot and bitter words, both claiming the living boy as her own.

"How could the king make a true decision in such a case?

"The attendants in the court, and the people gathered out of

curiosity to hear such cases, wondered how the young man would solve such a difficult question.

"But with his God-given wisdom, the king soon came to a simple and yet profound decision.

" 'You both appear to be right,' he said to the two quarrelling women. 'That being the case, there is but one thing I can do.'

" 'Bring me a sword!' he demanded.

"Quietness settled on the place of judgment, as the wondering people awaited what the king was going to do. The two women looked at the king fearfully, afraid. What was the need of a sword in such a case! But at last it was brought, and offered to the king.

" 'Take the sword, and divide the living child in two,' commanded the king to his attendant. 'Give half to this woman and half to that!'

" 'Do not do that!' screamed one of the women as the attendant lifted up his sword. 'Let her have it! Do not kill it!'

" 'What do you think I should do?' asked Solomon of the other woman as the attendant waited with sword uplifted.

" 'Let it die', she answered sullenly.

"By this test Solomon knew instantly who was the true mother. It was, of course, the one who wanted the baby to live. 'Give the living baby to her,' he commanded the attendant, as all the court wondered at the wisdom in one so young.

"The young king came through his first test well. All Israel applauded his wisdom. They saw that the king was exceptionally keen in judgment and understanding."

"Solomon was certainly very wise in handling that case," said Peter with admiration, as his father paused.

"Yes," agreed his father. "There has been only one wiser than



Solomon, and that is the Lord Jesus. He declared: 'The queen of the south... came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here' (Mat. 12:42). Unfortunately, the people refused to heed the wisdom of this 'greater than Solomon', because he was not clad in royal garments, nor surrounded with wealth and fleshly glory."

"Solomon's wisdom is referred to in 1Kings 4:29," remarked Graeham. "The passage reads, 'God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the seashore'."

"They are very expressive words," said Mr. Phillips. 'Wisdom,' means the the knowledge of a certain matter; 'Understanding' is the application of wisdom; 'Largeness of heart' is the capacity to grasp matters; 'As the sand of the sea shore' speaks of the extent and depth of knowledge. 'God gave' Solomon all this in the sense that He provided him with the opportunity to attain unto this wisdom, but Solomon had to cultivate it. As I mentioned earlier, he had to do something himself to obtain it. In the Book of Proverbs, he mentions how both his father (Prov. 4:3-4) and his mother (Prov. 31:1) taught him wise counsel. Solomon was obedient to his parents' advice, and thus, at an early age, learned the value of wisdom. That is one reason why he made such a wise choice at Gibeon. The study of the Bible greatly helped Solomon, as it will certainly help us."

"How do you know he studied the Bible?" asked Peter.

"The Law of Moses demanded that when kings were established over Israel, their first duty was to write for themselves a copy of the Law in a book, and to constantly read therefrom (Deut. 17:18-20). They could not borrow a copy from their father's library — although there certainly would have been such copies. But they had to produce their own, because it would mean that they would better remember and understand it, if they had to write their own copy. God promised that if this were done, and the commandments of the Law followed, then the heart of the king would be preserved from conceit, and the foundations of a long reign would be laid down. I am sure that David would have impressed Solomon with the need to follow this instruction, and write for himself a copy of the Law that he might study it. Unfortunately, Solomon eventually drifted from this wise counsel."

"Why should the Bible contrast the wisdom of Solomon with the wisdom of Egypt and of the east?" asked Peter.

"The Bible states that Solomon was 'wiser than the children of the east country and of Egypt' because those places were noted for wisdom in those times," replied his father. "Moses was skilled in all the wisdom of Egypt (Acts 7:22), and 'wise men from the east' came to Jerusalem at the birth of the Lord to enquire regarding him (Mat. 2:1). Solomon was wiser than the men of Egypt or the East. He was wiser,

too, than any in Israel, some of whom are named in the chapter we have just read (cp. v.31). In Israel, at that time, there was a class of people called 'The Wise' who stood as teachers of the people. Reference is made to them in Proverbs 1:6; 22:17; Eccles. 12:11; Isa. 29:14; Jer. 18:18; Dan. 1:4. Solomon's age was a most enlightened one, founded on wisdom, in which wise men abounded. But above them all was the King — wiser than all men. In this there is a foreshadowing of Christ's reign, concerning which the prophet declares: 'Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation; the fear of Yahweh is his treasure' (Isa. 33:6).

"The chapter we read says that Solomon spake 3,000 proverbs, and wrote 1,005 songs," remarked Graeham.

"Some of those are recorded in the Books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon," said Mr. Phillips. "Many of them have not been preserved. Solomon not only spake proverbs, or parables, like the Lord Jesus, but he also searched out information concerning trees and animals. He was a scientist as well as a moralist, and was a keen observer of life in all its ways. The Book of Proverbs shows how he founded lessons on things familiar to his day. He contrasted the silver and gold which he made common in his day with that which is of greater value — wisdom (Prov. 1:9; 3:14; 8:10-11; 10:20; 16:16). He wrote of the duties and powers of kings (Prov. 14:28; 16:10-15; 25:2-7). He based lessons on human nature (Prov. 6:12-13; 11:15,26; 12:27). He used his knowledge of animal life to point to morals for human behaviour (Prov. 6:6; 30:24,28). He not only spake of trees and animals, as you read from 1Kings 4 this evening, but also collected them, importing into the country rare plants and strange animals and birds which he let roam in the parks and gardens he caused to be made (Eccles. 2:5)."

"It is a pity we cannot learn what Solomon wrote concerning the trees and animals," said Ann.

"They are not recorded because they are unnecessary for Yahweh's purpose," explained her father. "Such knowledge as that can be obtained by anybody through keen observation, but the things that Yahweh has caused to be written in His Book, have relation to His revelation to man. They are matters which cannot be found out by normal observation, but must be revealed to us. They have been revealed in His book, the Bible, and we can rival the wisdom of Solomon by prayerfully taking heed to what God has caused to be written therein."

Chapter 2

THE PEACE AND GLORY OF SOLOMON'S REIGN

Days of Glory and Peace

The Phillips' family had completed reading 1Kings 4, which tells of the extent and glory of Solomon's kingdom. They had read of how the king appointed an inner council of seven helpers and advisers, including the high priest, the Captain of the army, secretaries and an historian, to assist him administer the kingdom (vv. 1-6); of the twelve officers whom he set over the tribes, and who were responsible for providing month by month provisions for the king's use (vv. 7-19); of the vast amount of food used daily in his court and palace, and which indicates the large number of attendants he had, and the numerous visitors that flocked to Jerusalem from all over the world (vv. 22-23); of his great standing army shown by the large numbers of horses and chariots which were placed in different cities (vv. 26-28); of the happy condition of the people of Israel, living secure from invasion and oppression, numerous and at peace, none daring to make them afraid — the foremost nation of the day (vv. 20-25).

It was a time of peace, prosperity, glory and luxury for the people of Israel. Never before had they experienced such times, never again will they do so UNTIL the Lord Jesus returns to "restore again the Kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6).

It was the facts of the greater kingdom of Jesus Christ that Mr. Phillips tried to impress upon his family as they read together the verses of this exciting chapter of the Bible. "You must remember that Israel constituted the Kingdom of God on earth (1Chron. 28:5; 29:25; 2Chron. 13:8)," said Mr. Phillips, commenting upon the chapter they had just read. "Solomon, like David, was a type of Jesus Christ; but whereas David foreshadowed Christ pouring out judgments upon the nations, Solomon foreshadowed him as Prince of Peace. Chapters like the one we have read this evening show how real is the Kingdom that is to be set up on earth by Christ (Dan. 2:44; Rev. 11:15; Zech. 14:9). The glory of Solomon's reign foreshadows that wonderful time when wars shall cease, when men shall live in peace and Jerusalem shall be the centre of Divine government and wisdom (Isa. 2:2-4)."

"The Kingdom of God has a history then," said Peter.

"Yes," replied his father. "That is an important fact concerning the Kingdom of God that we must bear in mind. It appears strange to many people that Yahweh should have a kingdom on earth; but His kingdom is like any other kingdom. It has its king, the Lord Jesus; its rulers, his glorified followers; its subjects, Israel and the nations; its dominion, the world; its laws, God's decrees; and even a history that

is recorded in the Bible."

"Don't you think it would be a good idea to see how closely Solomon's reign compares with that of Christ?" suggested Graeham.

"A very good idea," agreed his father. "As a matter of fact, I can give you some points now, if you care to jot them down in your notebooks. I suggest that you take them straight down without Peter interrupting, and then, afterwards, you can ask any questions."

"If Peter can last that long without talking, it would be an excellent idea!" murmured Ann, glancing at her brother.

"One thing you want to bear in mind, Ann," retorted Peter sharply, "when I talk, I say something!"

Mr. Phillips was too absorbed in his subject to notice this interchange of compliments, and proceeded to outline what he called: ***The Parable of the Kingdom***, and which we have reproduced on the next page. Having done so, he invited the family to discuss the points he had brought forward.

"Now what about some arguments, Peter," he suggested with a smile.

"Your outline is very good", replied Peter slowly as he pondered the points advanced by his father, and which, in an untidy scrawl, covered several pages in his notebook. "There is only one that I would question, and that is the point you make about 'satan being bound'."

"I can't understand what you are getting at there, either," said Ann. "I turned up 1Kings 5:4, and it doesn't say anything about 'satan'."

"It uses the word 'adversary' though", answered Mr. Phillips.

"That is true, it reads: 'There is neither adversary nor evil occurrent'."

"The word 'adversary' in that verse is *'Satan'* in Hebrew," explained Mr. Phillips. "The verse speaks of a time when there was no *'satan'* in Israel, that is, no adversary to Solomon, for that is all *'Satan'* means. The idea that some people advance, that *Satan* applies to a fallen angel from heaven is not really supported from the Bible when the verses usually quoted to prove it are properly understood."

"Does that mean that in 1Kings 11:14, where we read that 'Yahweh' stirred up an 'adversary', that the word means 'Satan' also?" asked Ann.

"Yes, it shows that Yahweh stirred up a *satan* against Solomon, clearly showing that 'satan' is not as is generally thought — the great angelic enemy of God leading hosts of angels in revolt against Him, and influencing men to sin. God would never use such a being as that!"

"But don't people go to the Bible to prove their belief in such a satan?"

The Parable of the Kingdom of God

The notes Mr. Phillips gave his family showing how Solomon's reign typified that of Christ's reign.

	PAST	FUTURE
A time of peace preceded by great wars	1Kings 5:4	Ps. 110:2; Isa. 9:6-7.
Jerusalem the Throne of Yahweh	1Chron. 29:23; 28:5	Jer. 3:17
One King over a united Israel	1Kings 4:20	Ezek. 37:22.
Israel, a multitudinous and powerful nation	1Kings 4:20	Micah 4:7
Israel, secure and at peace	1Kgs 4:25 Zeph.3:19,20.	Mic.4:4;
Israel, the chief of the nations	1Kings 4:21	Micah 4:8
Israel, the principal third with Egypt and Assyria (kings of the south and north Dan. 11:40)	2Chron.9:26; 1Kgs 10:29.	Isa. 19:23-25
Israel, the mart of nations	2Chron.1:17	Isa. 23:18
Wealth of the Gentiles flows to Jerusalem	1Kings 4:21, 2Chron.9:23-24	Isa. 60:11; Psa. 72:10
Surrounding nations submit to Israel's power	1Kings 4:21	Ps. 72:11
Fabulous wealth in Jerusalem	2Chron. 1:15	Isa. 60:17
A time of great fertility in the land	1Kings 4:22-28; 5:11.	Isa. 35:1-2
A period of tremendous building activity.	1Kings 9:10-20.	Isa. 65: 21-22.
Gentiles assist in the building of Israel	2Chr. 2:2, 17, 18	Isa. 60:10, 13.
Glorious Temple built at Jerusalem	1Kings 6.	Isa. 56:7-8.
Temple constructed from God-provided plans	1Chr. 28:11-19	Ezek. Chps. 40-48.
Temple built by Prince of Peace	1Kings 6	Zech. 6:12
Solomon known as Prince of Peace	1Kings 5:12	Isa. 9:6
The King noted for wisdom, enlightenment	1Kings 4:29-34	Isa. 32:4; 33:6.
The King noted for piercing, unerring judgment	1Kings 4:29-34	Isa. 11:1-4
Jerusalem the centre of worldwide pilgrimage to hear the wisdom of its king	2Chr. 9:23; 1Kgs 4:34	Isa. 2:2-4; Zech. 14:16
Tyre (Tarshish) the great friend of Israel	1Kings 5:1.	Psa. 45:12; Isa. 60:9.
Zadok the High Priest	1Kings 1:34; 2:35.	Heb. 7:11-12; Ezek. 40:46.
Priests serve day and night in Temple (Ps. 134) thus figuratively immortal (Isa. 40:28-31)		Heb.7:15-16; Rev.4:8,5:9-10.
Full order of Divine worship established for first time	1Kings 9:25; 2Chr. 8:12-16.	Deut. 30:6-8; Isa. 42:21.
Satan bound	1 Kings 5:4.	Rev. 20:2.
Satan unloosed towards the end of reign	1 Kings 11:14.	Rev. 20:7.

The glory of Solomon was a fading glory. He commenced to reign almost exactly 1,000 years before the birth of Christ, but what could have been a Millennium of peace turned into 1,000 years of suffering and trouble because of folly and sin.

"They do, it is true," agreed Mr. Phillips. "They take passages of the Bible out of their context, and establish their belief on these isolated and misunderstood verses, instead of seeking the meaning of the Bible as a whole. They teach that in heaven warfare ensued between God and the Devil — but surely upon a little reflection such a thought is abhorrent. Did not Christ teach his disciples to pray: 'Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven?' How could he have done so if heaven is the arena of such rebellion and warfare as some teach?"

"Some of the verses people quote seem to give support to this idea," said Graeham.

"Tell me one," replied Mr. Phillips.

"I cannot think of one at the moment," replied Graeham, "but I will do so some other night."

"Very well," answered his father. "You look them up and we will consider them."

"That's a challenge," said Peter.

"Never mind about all that, Daddy," said Ann a little impatiently. "Those boys can read *Christendom Astray* which will give them all the answers, without worrying you. They are taking us right away from the subject. I am more interested in the reign of Solomon at the moment and how it foreshadows that of Christ. Now, in what way will the Lord Jesus 'bind Satan' at his return?"

"Satan stands for anything that is adverse," explained Mr. Phillips. "The word itself means merely 'adversary,' and sometimes refers to a good adversary opposing a wicked one. When the Bible speaks of Christ 'binding the devil and satan' it means that he will restrain all the forces of sin and evil in the world. He will do that by his righteous laws and judgments. During the 1,000 years of Christ's reign, men will be compelled to submit to his teaching. But the Bible also teaches that after the 1,000 years are completed, 'satan shall be loosed for a little season'. The restrictions of Christ will be relaxed, and men shall have an opportunity of demonstrating their loyalty to Christ by voluntarily submitting to his will. Many will continue to do so. Some will not. They will revolt against the teaching of Christ, and will be destroyed for so doing. Then, those who remain, like those who will be found approved at his coming a thousand years earlier, will be given life eternal, and Yahweh's purpose with the earth will be completed. He will be 'all in all' (1Cor. 15:28). There was a foreshadowing of this in Solomon's reign, for whereas at first there was 'no satan', later on 'satan was unloosed' — to use the phrase of the Book of Revelation. This is a deep subject, however, and we will discuss it more at a later time. You can think about it a little."

"Are there any other points apart from the ones you have given us that show how Christ's reign was foreshadowed by that of Solomon?" asked Graeham.

"Yes, there are bound to be many such if you search for them. I have given you this list as an example only. I want you to think on the subject for yourselves. You know that Solomon's kingdom existed, that it was real. His Kingdom can thus become a stepping-stone to grasping at the reality of Christ's coming reign on earth. Solomon's reign provides many other types that point forward to this time."

"I would like you to give me a list of them," said Graeham. "I will mark them in my Bible."

"I will let you have a list of some of them," promised his father, "but you will find a greater pleasure in seeking them out for yourself. In that way, you will find the Bible a far more interesting book to read. Meanwhile, are there any more questions you would like to ask upon the chapter we have just read?"

"There must have been a great number of people at the palace of Solomon, if he needed the amount of food mentioned in this chapter, every day," said Joan.

"There was no stinting of food, certainly", said Mr. Phillips. "Each day he used 240 bushels of flour, 480 bushels of meal, ten stall-fed oxen, twenty oxen out of the pastures, 100 sheep, as well as deer, antelope, and poultry. It certainly shows how great was the court of Solomon, and how fertile the country that could provide such resources. Even in this, we have a foreshadowing of conditions under Christ. Isaiah 25:6 declares: 'In this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things'. This is prophetic of the future, and the feast here referred to is not of meat and drink, but of spiritual food. In that day, Jerusalem will be noted as the city where there is found ample food of that kind!"

"I've got a good question," said Peter. "In v. 26 we read that 'Solomon had 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariots,' but looking up the references in the margin (2Chron. 9:25), I find it reads 4,000. Which is right: 40,000 or 4,000?"

"I believe 4,000 is right" suggested Mr. Phillips. "Some translations (such as the *Septuagint*) give this number in 1Kings 4:26, indicating that originally the same number was given in both places. Evidently some scribe made a mistake in copying this number when writing the early copies of the Bible, and the mistake was repeated. But the *Septuagint* version indicates that originally, 4,000 was found in both places.

"But it is now getting late. I have promised Graeham I will write out a list of some of the types contained in the life of Solomon, so you had better let me get down to this and other work that I must finish tonight."

"I notice that Dad always finds other work to do when the questioning becomes tough!" commented Peter in closing the talk.

Chapter Three

THE GLORIOUS TEMPLE OF SOLOMON

Solomon had been chosen by God to succeed David (1Chron. 28:4-5), and to build the Temple in Zion that his father had wanted to erect. He had been educated to that end. Time and time again, his father had spoken to him about it, and had advised him what to do when the time came to build it. He had stored up great wealth and materials for it.

It was therefore inevitable that as soon as Solomon had established himself in the Kingdom, he should turn to this, the most important work that he was to undertake.

First, workmen were required. In Israel there were thousands of foreigners, many of whom had been taken captive in battle (2Sam. 12:31). A check was taken of their number, and it was found to total 153,000 men. Solomon divided them into groups, some to bear burdens, others to hew in the mountains, others again, to oversee the work (2Chron. 2:2).

He also required skilled labour, and for this he found assistance from the neighbouring nation of Tyre. Hiram, the king of Tyre, was a lover of David. After David had died, and when Solomon reigned as sole monarch, Hiram sent an embassy to his court to express his sorrow at the death of his friend, and to congratulate Solomon in his appointment as king.

He offered his assistance to Solomon in any way it might be required. That assistance was eagerly accepted.

Solomon reminded Hiram of David's great ambition to build the Temple of Yahweh, and how the honour had fallen to him. He asked for Hiram's help in supplying him with skilled workmen to supervise the preparing of choice timber in Lebanon, and the bringing of it by sea to Joppa where it could be conveyed by land to Jerusalem.

Solomon offered to pay Hiram for his help (1Kings 5:11; 2Chron. 2:10), and also to provide workmen out of Israel. A levy of 30,000 Israelites was raised to work month by month, 10,000 at a time, in the forests of Lebanon.

Thus Israel became a hive of activity. In the forests of Lebanon, trees were felled, craftsmen laboured to shape them according to the divine plans that had been given them, seamen conveyed them by floats down the Mediterranean coast to Joppa. Meanwhile, in the quarries underneath Jerusalem, and elsewhere, stonemasons cut and shaped the huge stones of all kinds that were quarried. These included hard white building stone for the foundations and the floor of the court, and beautiful, costly marble of many colours for the walls of the building. In other places, huge smelting works were set up, to

purify and mould the brass and other metals to be used in the building.

Among the workmen that came out of Tyre, there was one with the same name as the king, Hiram. His father was a man of Tyre, but his mother was a Jewess, a widow of the tribe of Dan who had previously been married to a man of Naphtali*. He was thus part Jew, part Gentile, and stood as a symbol of the great army of workers of all nations who are even today labouring to build the Temple of Yahweh. He was a man of outstanding ability, filled with wisdom to do this work (1Kings 7:14); just the kind of person Solomon wanted to overlook the most important work of all: the making of lavers, the golden lampstands, and the golden tables for the shewbread. When Yahweh has a work to do, He provides the workmen suitable for the need.

Hiram proved of the utmost assistance to Solomon in his work.

Brief Outline of Solomon's Temple (1Kings 6:2; 2Chron. 3)

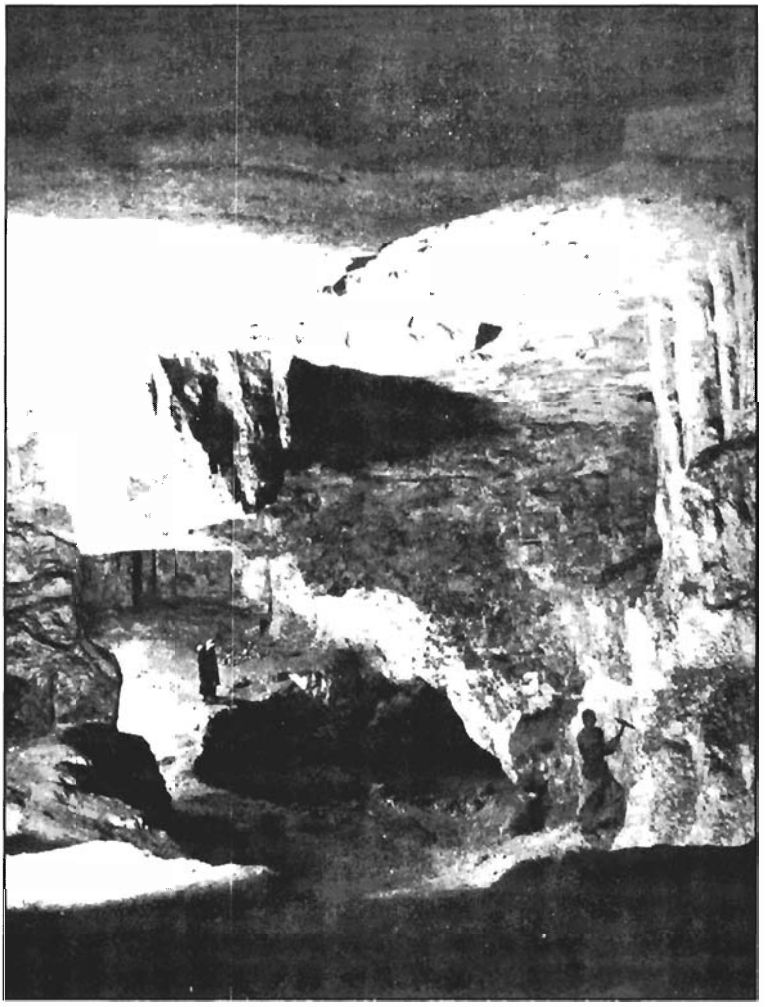
The Temple was twice as large as the Tabernacle that had been set up in the wilderness, and was, therefore, 90 feet long and 30 feet wide (1Kings 6:2 — see *Story of the Bible*, vol. 1 pp. 342-348).

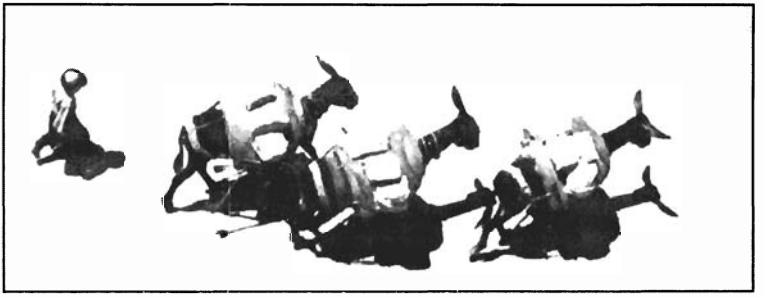
This is not a large building compared with other temples that were erected in those times, or today. But its greatness did not consist of its size, but in the wealth that was poured into it, and the loving care that was put into its workmanship. A vast army of men laboured for seven years to complete it, gold and other precious metals were used without stint to beautify it, and in all its parts it was designed to teach wonderful spiritual lessons to those who were prepared to seek the meaning of it. We must not think of the Temple as a place IN which people gathered to worship Yahweh, but as a place AT which to worship Him. It was not a church or a meeting hall. The common people were not allowed inside it. It was considered the dwelling place of Yahweh in Israel, and therefore a very sacred place, where people gathered to seek Him. As the faithful looked at its different features, they saw lessons teaching concerning the greater living Temple of Jesus Christ (2Cor. 6:16; 1Pet. 2:5).

The Temple was built upon a historic site where incidents had happened of great importance. The site was Mount Moriah. It was there that some 800 years earlier in a wonderful act of faith Abraham had offered Isaac (Gen. 22:1-3). It was also there that the angel had appeared to David with drawn sword directed against Jerusalem, at the time of great pestilence (1Chron. 22:1). Mount Moriah, of course, is one of the hills of Jerusalem.

In general pattern Solomon's Temple was similar to the Taberna-

* This reconciles the apparent discrepancy of 1Kings 7:14 and 2Chron. 2:14.





cle. There was the Temple court, answering to the court of the Tabernacle, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. In the court, sacrifices were offered and priests and Levites ministered; but in the Holy Place, only the priests were allowed to enter; and into the Most Holy, only the High Priest could go. Thus it was very similar to the Tabernacle, but was of greater glory and a more permanent building. The Tabernacle had no settled abode, it was taken from place to place, even in the land of Israel; but the Temple represented a permanent site for the divine worship.

Both the Tabernacle and the Temple were representative of God's dealings with man. The Tabernacle taught principles of divine worship relating to the present, when the followers of the Lord Jesus are as pilgrims on the earth, with "no continuing city" (Heb. 13:14). The Temple foreshadowed the settled conditions of worship as they will be established when the Kingdom of God is set up on earth.

Therefore, though the ground-plan was similar to the Tabernacle, it differed from it considerably in many other ways. It was much higher than the Tabernacle, for whereas that was 15 feet high, the Temple was 45 feet high. The Most Holy, however, was much lower than the Holy Place, for, like the Tabernacle, it was built in the shape of a cube, being 20 cubits (or 35 feet) high, 20 cubits wide, and 20 cubits long (1Kings 6:20). The ceiling of the Most Holy was thus much lower than the rest of the building, and it has been suggested that there was another room above the Most Holy to bring the overall height of the Temple to the 45 feet of the Holy Place.

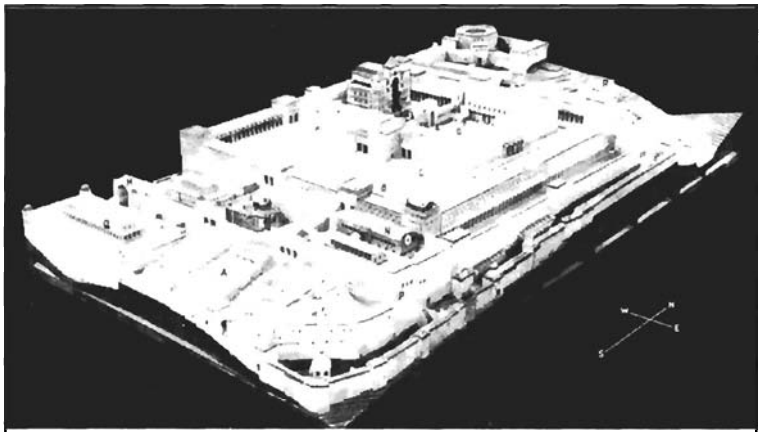
Unlike the Tabernacle, it had a large porch in front, with two tall pillars of brass standing in front of the porch; it had ten lavers instead of one, ten lampstands instead of one, ten tables of shewbread instead of one. And there were other differences as well, which we will consider as we come to them.

A Visit to the Temple

Let us imagine that we are living in the days of Solomon, and, belonging to the priestly class, we are permitted to enter the Holy Place. This is our first visit to the Temple, and we have with us an

Above Left: Where the stone was quarried for the Temple. Just outside Jerusalem, between Herod's Gate, is the entrance to Solomon's Quarries. This vast subterranean cavern is now beneath part of the city, but in the time of the king who "told out... fourscore thousand to hew in the mountain" (2Chron. 2:2), the quarries were some distance beyond the then existent walls. Experts say that enough limestone has been excavated to build the ancient city and the Temple of Solomon several times.

Below Left: "They brought hewed stones". This primitive method of carrying stones from the quarries for the construction of houses in Palestine is still common. The donkey has been from early Biblical times the usual beast of burden for short distances. Doubtless there was a well-organised ass transport service, ruled over by some of the three thousand and three hundred overseers in Solomon's day, for the conveyance of the "costly stones, and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house" of the Lord in Jerusalem (1Kings 5:16,17). These limestone blocks are a creamy colour greyed by exposure.



The Temple that Solomon built in Jerusalem. From a photograph of the model made by Sir Conrad Schick, a good idea can be gained of the Temple and its surrounding standings in the time of Solomon until the fall of Jerusalem in the days of Zedekiah.

older priest, skilled in the knowledge of the Law, who is able to help us understand the meaning of all that we shall see.

From the lower city of Jerusalem, we climb the steep hill to the Temple Mount above, reminding us that we must ascend from the ways of men to the ways of God. It is early morning as we leave the city, for we want to be present when the morning sacrifice is offered. We walk past the great court that encloses the Royal Palaces and Gardens of Solomon, ever climbing until we come to a great door that faces east. We pass through this door into the outer court, and nearly opposite us, we see a further door that gives entrance to the Court of the Temple.

We pass through that, and are now in the area of the Temple itself.

Here we learn our first lesson. The old priest who is with us to act as guide, pauses that we might take in the scene before us. It is early morning, and the Temple is bathed in a golden glow of light. Scattered around the spacious court are a number of large brazen vessels, and before the Temple itself are two lofty pillars of brass. All these catch the rays of the sun and gleam like fire.

"When Moses received the Law from Yahweh," declared the priest, "he was told that a place would be chosen in the land in which Yahweh would 'place His Name', and where the people would be expected to assemble for worship (Deut. 12:11). The site of the place was not revealed to Moses, but it was to David, the King. He was told: 'Yahweh hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation. This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell; for I have desired it' (Psa. 132:13-14; see also Ezek. 43:7). That is why the Temple has been

built at this place."*

"Did not the Tabernacle have a settled abode?" we ask the priest.

"No, it was taken from place to place. For many years, the Ark was not in the Tabernacle, so that complete worship could not be undertaken by the people. Even in David's time, the Ark had been taken to Zion, and the Tabernacle was in Gibeon" (2Chron. 1:3-5).

We glance around the court of the Temple. Immediately in front of us we see a platform, with steps leading up to it. It stands between us and the great brazen altar.

"What is that platform for?" we ask the priest.

"It was used by Solomon at the dedication of the Temple," he replied, "and is now reserved for use of the king (1Kings 8:22; 2Chron. 6:12-13). The King is the anointed of Yahweh, and therefore representative of the great Messiah (Christ) who will one day appear in Israel, as the seed of David. When the king comes to worship he stands there (2Kings 11:14)."

The service was just commencing. Between the king's platform and the altar were gathered a number of Levites. They were the musicians and singers associated with the Temple worship. As the early morning sun streamed down from out of the eastern sky, the singers, accompanied by the musicians, commenced to chant one of the Psalms of David, designed for the morning service. This spake of the goodness of Yahweh, of His mercy which is ever extended to those who seek Him in truth.

"You notice that the Temple faces the rising sun," said the priest to us, breaking in upon our thoughts. "With the morning sacrifice we commence a new day — may it be wisely used in Yahweh's service. The rising sun also reminds us of that great day of which David spake, of the mighty King who shall come, whom he likened to 'the light of the morning, when the sun riseth' (2Sam. 23:4). The sun has driven away the darkness of the night with all its doubts and fears; its golden rays penetrate all parts bringing warmth and colour and beauty and health. It is healing in its action, it causes growth, it is life-giving in its effect. So also will be this glorious Son of David when he appears in our midst. May his coming not be long!"

"Why is the sacrifice burnt upon the altar?" we ask the priest.

"The fire that burns the lamb is a divine fire that came down from heaven (2Chron. 7:1)," we are told. "The altar represents the table of Yahweh (Mal.1:7), and the sacrifice represents His food that He consumes (Lev. 3:11; 21:6,17; Num. 28:2). The lamb has given up its life

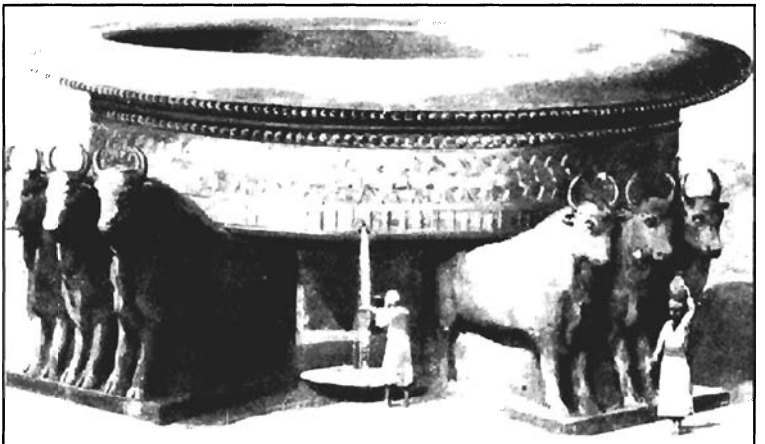
* In addition to the instruction of this aged priest, we are fortunate to have the Apostle Paul to help us understand the spiritual lessons of the Temple. He reminds us that the Temple is symbolic of believers (Heb. 3:6; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22). Peter also spake of believers as "living stones" joined to the great Corner-Stone, the Lord Jesus Christ, and built up as a spiritual Temple, the abiding place of Yahweh (1 Pet. 2:4-7).

that it might be consumed by Yahweh. In similar manner, we must sacrifice our own desires to serve Him, thus giving ourselves completely to His will."*

"Why is the altar made of brass?" we asked the priest.

"Brass, silver and gold all have a meaning when applied to the worship of God," the priest explained. "Brass (or copper) stands for the flesh which it resembles in colour; silver always stands for redemption, for a silver coin is used by the people for that purpose under the Law; and gold is the symbol of a tried faith. The brass for this altar has gone through the fire, and is thus purified. It therefore stands for the great Redeemer of mankind who will one day appear (cp. Heb. 13:10), and through whom we approach Yahweh. The sacrifice is only good if it is offered upon the altar, because, as Moses has taught us, it is contact with the altar that makes the sacrifice holy (Exod. 29:37)." §

We looked with curiosity around the court, and saw that, in addition to the altar, there were ten lavers, or large bowls, five on the right



"He made a Molten Sea" One of the finest achievements of Hiram, skilled artificer in metals, was the making of a great brazen laver for the Temple. Used for ceremonial purification, "it stood upon the twelve oxen," grouped in three's, looking respectively toward the north, west, south and east: "and the sea was set above upon them" (1 Kings 7:25).

* Jesus Christ is described as the Lamb of God (John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:6). Of him it is said, "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up" (John 2:17). As the fire consumes the lamb upon the altar, so Christ was consumed with the desire to do his Father's will. Through his offering our sins are forgiven, and we are able to approach God. We cannot do this apart from sacrifice, and the only acceptable sacrifice is that of the Lord Jesus.

§ No sacrifice to God is acceptable unless made through Christ. As all who touched the altar were made holy (Exod. 29:37), so all who make contact with Christ through baptism are constituted "holy", or separated unto God (Rom. 6:1-3). Even in times before the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, a worshipper had to perceive the spiritual import of the sacrifices if they were to be effective.

hand of the court, and five on the left hand of the court (1Kings 7:39). These lavers stood on undercarriages to which were attached wheels, so that they could be conveniently moved from place to place (v. 30). These undercarriages were enclosed with panels on which were beautifully engraved cherubim, lions, and palm trees.

"For what do you use these lavers?" we asked our priestly guide.

"They are used to wash the sacrifices before they are burnt on the altar," he explained (see 2Chron. 4:6). "The sacrifice, before it is acceptable to God, must be perfectly clean inside and out. We, too, must strive to be clean, not only outwardly before men, but also inwardly where only Yahweh can see!"

"And it is the water that cleanses," we answered.

"Yes, but that only represents the Word of Yahweh which really cleanses us. As you know, one of our greatest Psalms says, 'Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word' (Psa. 119:9; see also John 15:3). So, as the sacrifices are washed before being offered, we must allow the power of the Word to cleanse us."

"What do the strange figures engraven on the sides represent?" we asked.

"The Cherubim represent the true Israel of God through whom He manifests His power and glory. You know that we, as a nation, were called out of Egypt for that very purpose (Deut. 28:9-10), and as we marched out in four companies, under four standards, so the Cherubim have four faces (Ezek. 1). The lion is the symbol of leadership, and kingly glory, which is vested in the house of David (see Rev. 5:5)."

"And what do the palm trees represent?" we asked our priestly guide.

"That is a most interesting symbol," he replied. "We sing of it every sabbath day, when the 92nd Psalm is sung in the Temple worship. Verse 12 says: 'The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree.' The palm tree flourishes in the desert, generally around an oasis. In like manner, the righteous draw strength from the water of life, though living in a spiritual desert. The palm tree is straight and upright (Jer. 10:5), so also are the righteous. The palm tree produces fruit (Joel 1:12), so also must the righteous. The palm tree is ornamental, lending beauty to any scene, so also do the righteous. We use it as a token of deliverance, victory and peace on the feast of Tabernacles, and thus it points forward to the ultimate deliverance, victory and peace which it will be the joy of the righteous to receive."

We thanked our guide for his interesting comments, and looked with curiosity about us. In front of the Temple, and in the centre of the two rows of lavers, there was a large brazen tank, formed like a huge bowl. It was about 15 feet wide, and some 7 ft. 6 inches high. There

were a number of heads shaped like oxen surrounding it,* and it stood upon twelve oxen which were set in groups of three looking north, south, east and west. The brim of it was very beautifully decorated with lilies (1Kings 7:23-26).

"That is called 'the molten Sea'," said our guide as he watched us looking at it. "We are very proud of the work of Hiram regarding that, for it was cast in one piece. And even in that there is a lesson to be learnt. These vessels of brass, which I told you before represent human nature purified by fire, were cast in clay ground 'between Succoth and Zarthan' (1Kings 7:46). It is remarkable that Succoth was the name of the first stopping place for our nation when it left Egypt under Moses, and Zarthan (or Zaretan as it is also called, Josh. 3:16) is the place where we passed over Jordan, forty years later. The first place is therefore notable for leaving Egypt, and the second place for entering the Promised Land. This journey speaks of leaving the ways of the world and entering the promised inheritance, and is typical of the journey of life. During such a journey, human nature is purified and moulded and made fit for Yahweh's use."

"What is the 'Sea' used for?" we enquired.

"The priests wash their hands and feet in the water before entering the Holy Place. That reminds them that they must be clean in their spiritual work and walk before Yahweh. The water, you see, comes out of the mouths of the ox-heads that encircle the 'Sea', so it stands as a symbol of the means of purification, which, of course, is the Word of Yahweh. It stands on 12 oxen, because the ox is the symbol of the worker in the field (the Hebrew name for 'ox' means 'to plough'). The ox is noted for being responsive to its owner (Isa. 1:3), as a profitable worker (Isa. 32:20), and is therefore a good symbol for a people who bring before others, the purifying knowledge of God's will.† There are 12 oxen because twelve is the number representing Israel, and they are divided into four groups, because Israel is really divided into four divisions (Num. 2). They face all points of the compass to represent Israel taking God's message to all parts of the earth, as we believe they will do one day."

"A vessel of that size must hold a great amount of water!" we remarked.

"Yes, it is capable of holding upwards of 24,000 gallons, but it is never filled; it only contains 16,000 gallons." ‡

We walked past this Sea, towards the Temple proper. The first objects that commanded our attention were two tall, highly ornamental pillars of brass, some 35 cubits high (52 ft. 6 inches). They did not

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* The "knops" of 1Kgs. 7:24 were apparently in the shape of ox-heads (2Chr. 4:3).

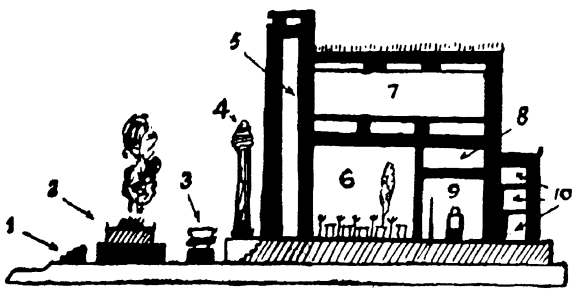
† Paul likens those who labor in the gospel to oxen ploughing the fields (1 Cor. 9:9).

‡ This reconciles the apparent contradiction between 1 Kings 7:26 and 2Chron. 4:5. Notice that in the first place it is said to "contain" 2,000 baths, in the latter place it "held" 3,000 baths.

support any part of the building, but stood in front of it (2Chron. 3:15). The head of the pillars formed an attractive capital of shining bronze formed into network in which was wreathen work in the form of chains, ornamental lilies and brazen pomegranates. The highly polished bronze seemed to burn with fire as the rays of the early morning sun fell upon it.*

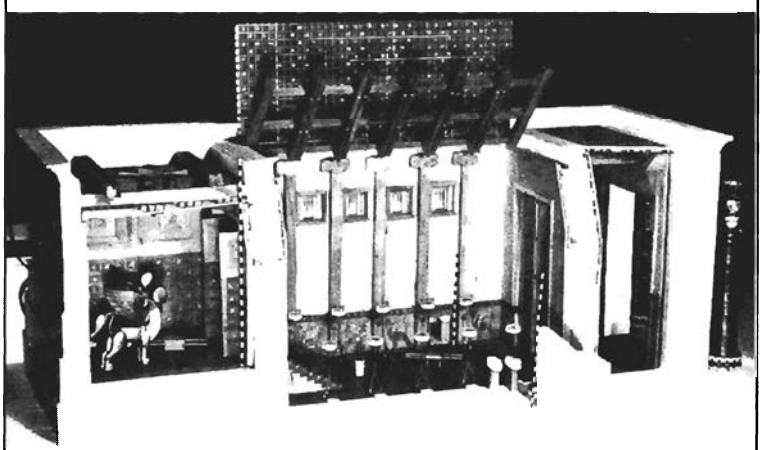
"Those two pillars are called Jachin and Boaz," the priest told us.

* It has been thought that there is a contradiction between 1Kings 7:15 and 2Chron. 3:15. The former speaks of the two pillars as being 18 cubits high, the latter as 35 cubits high. In fact, both accounts are correct. In Kings the stem of the pillars was 18 cubits (v. 15), the lily work on the top 4 cubits (v. 19), the capital 5 cubits (v. 16), whilst the foundation, or base, is not given. It evidently was 8 cubits, making 35 in all.



Key to Diagram:

1. The King's platform (1Kgs 8:22);
2. Brazen Altar;
3. The Laver or Sea (1Kgs 7:23);
4. The Brazen Pillars (1Kgs. 7:15);
5. The Porch (2Chron. 3:4);
6. Holy Place;
7. Upper Chamber (2Chron. 3:9);
8. Small Upper Room;
9. Most Holy;
10. Side Chambers (1Kgs. 6:5).



Solomon's Temple: reconstruction from the Howland-Garber model, with the Holy of Holies to the left and the vestibule entrance to the right. In the Holy of Holies, the portable Ark of the Covenant is shown guarded by two cherubim.

"What do those names mean?" we enquired.

"'Jachin signifies 'He shall establish,' and 'Boaz' means 'In it is strength.' Combined, the two words form a sentence: 'He shall establish it in strength.' They speak of how Yahweh will establish His purpose through the strength He shall reveal. Boaz, of course, was the redeemer of Ruth, and from him came our great king David. This pillar therefore stands for the great Redeemer who shall come, to be King of Israel, whilst the other pillar stands for the priesthood through which Yahweh establishes His work in Israel."

"How beautiful the tops of the pillars look with the early sun shining upon them!" we remarked in admiration.

"Yes," answered the priest. "The wreathen work represents the crown of victory, the lilies stand for purity, and the pomegranates for productiveness."

"I can understand how the lily stands for purity," we remarked, "but in what way does the pomegranate stand for productiveness?"

"The pomegranate is a remarkable fruit," replied the priest. "If it is cut with a knife and squeezed, red juice runs out, reminding one of the blood of sacrifice. Inside, the fruit is completely packed with seeds speaking of productiveness. It is a wonderful symbol, therefore, of the fruit of a life that is given to sacrifice. Remember that all the sacrifices of the Law point forward to the great Redeemer of mankind whom God, from the beginning, has promised to send (Gen. 3:15). That Redeemer is like the pomegranate: in some way he must become a sacrifice for sin, but as the pomegranate is packed with seed, so he shall redeem many unto life eternal (Isa. 53:12)."

The Temple Itself

The Temple itself was to the far end of the court of the priests, and faced east. In front of it, with steps leading up to it, was a high porch, some 15 feet wide, and 180 feet high (1Kings 6:3; 2Chron. 3:4). This lofty porch towered high above all the other buildings, and was visible from a great distance. In other parts of Jerusalem, even when the people were not close to the Temple, this tall tower could be seen, reminding them that they were an holy people, and that Yahweh dwelt in their midst.

We stopped to admire some of the great stones that formed part of the Temple proper. Like those used for the paving and wall of the Inner Court they were of huge size measuring from 18 feet upwards. The priest showed us the chief cornerstone of the building, which measured, he told us, nearly 40 feet long!* We were struck with

* Archaeologists report that a stone measuring over 3 metres long still remains in place. One report says: "This great stone is one of the most interesting stones of the world, for it is the chief corner stone of the Temple's massive wall. Fixed in its abiding place 3,000 years ago, it still stands sure and steadfast." What a wonderful lesson regarding the true Chief Corner Stone (1 Pet. 2:6).

amazement at the size of these stones, and the perfect manner in which they fitted one to the other. Other stones he showed us were of beautiful marble, brightly polished to bring out their various colours.

"There is a wonderful history behind these stones," he told us. "Some came from a quarry below Jerusalem.* Others came from quarries afar off. But wherever they came from, they were cut, shaped and polished on the spot, and brought here ready to fit into the building. When the Temple was being built there was no tool of iron used on the spot. The stone was made ready before it was brought here, and so perfectly did they fit that no mortar nor cement was used."

"How were the stones so perfectly shaped before being brought here?" we asked.

"The plans and specifications of this building were copied for that purpose, and given to master craftsmen on the spot. They could then follow out God's will in this regard, for the plans came from Him (1Chron. 28:11-19). In the same way, Yahweh has given us His Word to follow, and that Word will shape and polish us according to His will if we use it rightly." ‡

"Why should Yahweh be so particular that the sound of a tool of iron should not be heard in the building of the house?"

"Iron rusts more easily than any other metal," explained the priest, "and therefore bears the same defilement as the flesh it represents. The use of iron in the construction of an altar was not permitted (Josh. 8:30-31), or otherwise that altar was considered defiled. In commanding that no tool of iron be used in the Temple, Yahweh was showing that in the building of His spiritual Temple of living stones, there should not be any reliance placed upon the flesh."

On the north, west and south sides of the Temple we saw a series of rooms in three storeys (1Kings 6:5-6). On the south side of the Temple there was a door (v. 8) which led into these side rooms. We entered this door, and before us was a spiral stairway leading to the floors above. We saw that these rooms are used by the priests as storerooms and for other purposes (Neh. 13:4-9).

Inside the Holy Place

After exploring the side rooms that extend around the two sides and the back of the Temple, the priest invited us to enter the Holy Place. Being descendants of Aaron, it was our privilege to be able to

* This quarry below Jerusalem has been discovered and has been opened for inspection. It is a huge cavern sloping down for about 600 feet underneath the hill, or suburb, of Bezetha.

‡ As the finest stones were selected for the Temple from different parts of the world and gathered together in Jerusalem, so out of nature's dark quarry of flesh, living stones (1 Pet. 2:5) have been hewed, cut and polished for a place in the spiritual Temple (2Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:20-22). In due time, at the resurrection, all this material will be gathered together to form the grand spiritual Temple of Yahweh, of which the Lord Jesus is the Chief Corner Stone.

do so. We did so with pleasure and reverence. It was not mere curiosity that caused us to seek this privilege, but a deep desire to understand more of the service and meaning of Temple worship.

Inside it was quiet, and it would have been dark but for two means of light. On each of the two sides of the Holy Place were five lampstands, with seven lights each, burning brightly to give ample light to the interior. And in addition to these, from concealed windows high above us, we could see shafts of light directed upon the veil which shut off the Holy Place from the Most Holy.

We looked at the side walls, and we found that they were of gold! We looked down at the floor, and found that we were walking on gold! By the lampstands (which were also of gold) were ten tables for shewbread, also made of gold, and at the far end was the golden altar for incense.

There was gold everywhere!

This was a dramatic contrast to the brass used in the court outside. We remembered how David had stored up much gold, and how his son Solomon had added to it, that this Temple might be thus built.

The priest saw us looking at the gold. "This gold is actually plated on boards of cedar and fir," he told us. "The floors are of fir, the walls are of cedar, and division between the Holy and Most Holy is of olive wood."

"Why should different wood be used?" we asked him.

"The fir represents strength, the cedar points to immortality (for it is never known to have been attacked by worms; there is something in the sap that is death to that creature), and the olive, which is rich in oil, speaks of the spirit. Strength, incorruptibility, spiritual bodies, can come only from one direction, from Him who inhabits the Most Holy."

"Those are much more valuable woods than that used in the Tabernacle," we remarked.

"Yes, the acacia wood is but a desert plant, and is not considered a very precious wood. In fact, its name signifies, 'That which is despised,' and it stands for human nature. The Temple is much more glorious a place of worship than the Tabernacle.* There is also a valuable lesson to be learned in the use of these woods. Like the stones of the Temple, the wood was prepared on the site where the trees were felled. First, skilled workmen visited forests afar off, and selected the finest trees they could find. They were trees that stood proudly aloft on Lebanon's heights, clothing the sides of the mountain with beauty.

* The contrast between the shittim wood of the Tabernacle and the fir, cedar and olive woods of the Temple seems beautifully expressed in Paul's comparison between the natural and the glorified body of resurrected saints: 'It is sown in weakness (shittim wood) it is raised in power (fir). It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption (cedar). It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body (olive)' — I Cor. 15:42-46. For the spiritual significance of the Lampstands, Tables of Shewbread, Altar of Incense, Holy and Most Holy Places, see "Story of the Bible", Vol. 1, pp. 335-356.

But before they could be of use to Yahweh they had to be humbled. They were thus cut down and laid in the dust. Then master craftsmen worked upon them, cutting, planing, shaping them according to divine specifications. Finally, they were brought together in Jerusalem, to stand up once again as a building 'fitly framed together, an holy habitation of the Lord' (Eph. 2:20-22). These are lessons all must learn if they would serve their heavenly Father. They must be humbled, they must permit the master craftsman to work upon them, they must be shaped and fashioned according to the divine plan, and then they will be fit for a place in the spiritual Temple that He builds."

"You have given us much food for thought", we told our friend.

"What you have heard is but a brief outline of the remarkable lessons to be gained," he replied. "But come, let us now view some of the other wonderful buildings not far from this Temple. Let me explain to you something about Solomon's palaces, and the glory that is exhibited there."



The majestic cedars of Lebanon that provided much of the attractive timber for Solomon's Temple and Palace. They were renowned in those days for their tremendous value and beauty; although the forests have been largely depleted during the course of the centuries, and no longer are as grand as in former times.

Chapter Four

THE MAGNIFICENT PALACE OF SOLOMON

At one stage, as we followed the wall towards the South, we passed across a bridge that took us over a valley.

"The outer court of the Temple ends here," explained our priestly guide. "The wall you are now following encloses the royal gardens and palaces. Behind this wall are some of the glorious parks and gardens Solomon has caused to be planted, and in which are kept some of the strange animals that have been collected from different parts of the world. There are also artificial lakes and fountains, beds of beautiful flowers, and of fragrant smelling spices (Eccl. 2:4-6)".

We gazed with greater curiosity at some of the large trees and shrubs that we could see towering above the high walls that enclosed this park, and we could also smell the pleasant scent of the spices which was borne on the morning breeze.

"It must have taken a long time to build all this!" we exclaimed.

"It took thirteen years," said our friend.

"Longer even than the Temple!" we remarked.

"That is true," he answered, "but of course, it is a much larger building."

"Can we see inside?" we enquired.*

"There are parts I cannot show you," said the priest, "but we can certainly see some of it."

We followed the wall south, turning with it to the west until we came to the entrance. Before us were some broad steps. We climbed up these, and passed into a large and lofty hall, the floor and walls of which were beautifully panelled in cedar.

At the far end of the hall was a large canopied throne of gold, ‡ flanked by two huge lions. Six steps led up to the throne, and on either side of the steps were also lions, making twelve in all on the steps, and two more flanking the throne. Before the throne itself was a footstool of gold. The workmanship of all this was most beautiful. The gold of the throne gleamed out in spectacular contrast to the cedar, and the lions stood as though they were guarding the sanctity of the throne.

"The throne is made of ivory covered with gold," explained the priest (2Chron. 9:17-19). The hard, durable, white ivory is an appro-

* Very little detail is given concerning the palace buildings of Solomon. The best outline which we have read is that contained in the *Companion Bible* which we have here followed.

‡ The word translated "throne" (Heb. *kisse* or *kicceh*) signifies a covered or canopied throne. It is from the same root as the Hebrew for the word "atonement" ("kaphar") which signifies "covering".

priate symbol for righteousness, and it is covered with gold which speaks of a tried faith."

"What is the throne used for?" we enquired.

"It is the great throne of Judgment," was the answer. "Here king Solomon sits to judge those who come before him for that purpose (1Kings 7:7), for this is part of the king's duties" (2Sam. 8:15; 15:2, 6; 1Kings 3:11). ‡

"Why has it six steps?" we asked.

"I see that you are beginning to learn that everything has a meaning," said the priest with a smile. "That is excellent, for all that Yahweh does has some significance, and it is good that we try to find out what He is teaching in any particular thing. Numbers are often used in a spiritual way, and in that regard, the number six is used to represent the number of man (one short of the perfect number, seven!). This we base on the fact that man was created on the sixth day. Six is associated with the Judgment Seat established for the purpose of assisting mankind to understand the divine will. Anyone can appeal to it for help in judgment."

We passed through the Hall of Judgment to a covered way that led to another lofty Hall, some 75 feet wide and 45 feet deep. It was supported by a large number of tall, elegant pillars which gave an appearance of strength and beauty to it.

"This is called the Hall of Pillars," said our guide. "Here the King receives visitors of state, or transacts any business relating to the Kingdom. It really acts as a Porch to the main building which is called 'The House of the Forest of Lebanon' (1Kings 7:1-6)".

"What a strange name!" we exclaimed. "Why is it called that?"

"There are two reasons," answered the priest. "Firstly, the word Lebanon signifies 'white', and speaks of righteousness; and secondly, because the timber of this Hall was specially selected from Mount Lebanon."

We walked into the House of the Forest of Lebanon, and were deeply impressed with its beauty. Its size was quite impressive, for it was 150 feet long, and 75 feet broad. Rows of massive, square cedar pillars supported the roof, three rows of square windows were set in the walls in such a way that the light streamed through to illuminate the beauty of the Hall to the best advantage. On the panelled walls of this huge Hall hung 500 large and small shields of gold (1Kings 10:17), and elsewhere we saw beautiful drinking vessels and plates all of gold.

"What a tremendous amount of gold Solomon must have!" we exclaimed.

"There is no lack of gold in Israel today!" remarked the priest.

‡ Solomon was a type of Christ concerning whom it is also said that he shall have "a great white throne" of judgment (Rev. 20:11).

"Every year, 666 talents of gold are paid into Solomon's coffers (1Kings 10:14)."

"That number agrees with what you told us regarding '6' being the number of man (cp. Rev. 13:18)!" we remarked. "How appropriate, for thus man pays his tribute to Yahweh's king in Jerusalem."

"When Messiah comes, the fulness of this glory and this homage will be seen," said the priest with joyful fervour (see Isa. 60:11,13,17).

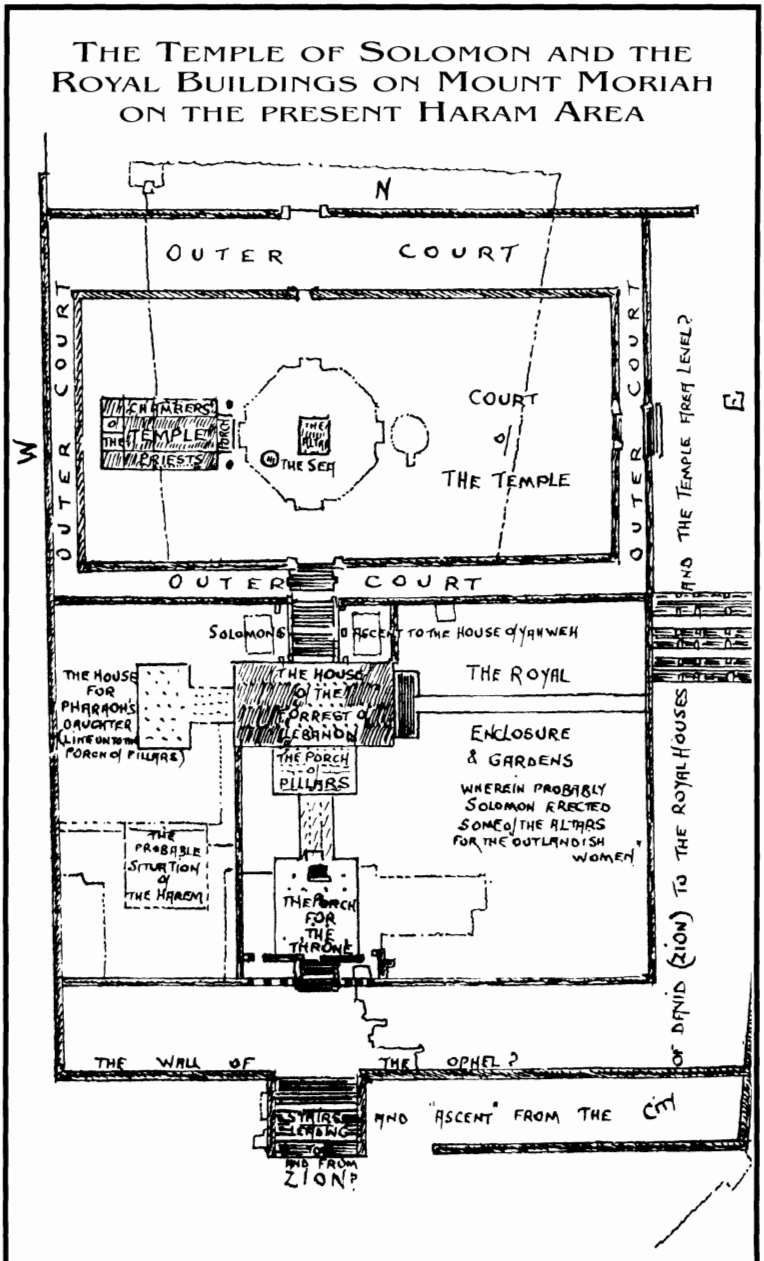
We looked with curiosity at the small and large shields that hung from the walls of this stately Hall.

"What are they used for?" we asked the priest.

"Those shields have a very important lesson which every true Israelite must learn," explained the priest. "First consider the metal of which they are made. Gold is the symbol of a faith that has gone through a fiery trial. This gold came from the Gentiles, and having been purified by fire, has been beaten into the shape you now see. It teaches that Yahweh takes those whom He would use in His service from out of the nations, and purifying them, will mould them into the shape He desires for His purpose. The large shield is called a 'target' (Heb. *zinnah* 1Kings 10:16). It covers the whole body. When David fought with Goliath, the giant sheltered behind such a shield (1Sam. 17:7). David also found protection behind such a shield, but his shield was not visible to human eyes. It was Yahweh. The small shields (Heb. *magen:* 1Kings 10:17) are such as are used in battle by foot-soldiers, and are designed to protect the head and heart from the arrows or thrusts of the enemy. David makes mention of the *magen* in Psalm 3:3 where he says: 'Thou, O Yahweh, art a shield for me!' What better protection could we have for heart or mind than faith in Yahweh! So these shields hang here as a constant reminder that the shield of faith is the best defence of heart, mind or body."

"Are they never used?" we asked.

"Yes, they are used in ceremonial processions; not in war," replied the priest. "When the king goes to the Temple for worship, he is conducted over the valley that divides the Royal Enclosures and Gardens from the Temple Grounds by a guard of 500 bearing these shields which have such wonderful significance. At the head of the procession is the Chief of the Guard bearing the large Key which we call 'The Key of the House of David' (cp. 1Kings 14:27 with Isa. 22:21-22). This procession, leading the king in glory, comes first to the Palace Gate looking towards the Temple where it is met by a detachment of Levites acting as Guards of the Gate. The Key Bearer opens the gate and the procession passes through, to cross over the bridge connecting the Palace Grounds with the Temple Grounds which are separated by a valley. On the other side there are steps of red sandalwood, leading to the heights above (2Chron. 9:11). This brings the



Suggested plan of the Temple and Palace area of Solomon, according to the Companion Bible — Drawing by L.J. Colquhoun.

procession to the gate of the Outer Court of the Temple. Here it is met by a further detachment of Gate Guards, and, again the Gate is ceremoniously opened to let the king through. The procession then proceeds to the Gate of the Inner Court where we went this morning. A third Guard here meets it, and again the Door is opened for the king to enter. He then takes his place at the King's Platform which I showed you earlier, before the great Altar of burnt offering (2Kings 11:14; 23:3; 2Chron. 23:13). After the service, the king returns in similar manner, and the shields are hung up in this Hall again, awaiting the next occasion. It is a very beautiful sight to see the King, in all his glory, surrounded by his Guards, conducted to the Temple, to bow in worship and humility before Yahweh."

"All these buildings we have seen are for purposes of state," we remarked. "Where does the king have his living quarters?"

"He has his own private palace in these grounds in addition to those we have seen," said the priest (1Kings 7:8), "but naturally we cannot go there. He also has a palace for the Queen, Pharaoh's daughter, which is built very similar to the Hall of Pillars (1Kings 7:8). But we cannot go there either."

"We feel that we have seen enough for today," we remarked. "It has been a most enjoyable experience to see the beauty of the Temple and the glory of the King's palaces. There is much in all that you have told us that we will have to think upon."

"Yes, these are matters of deep importance, and the true meaning of all that I have told you will only be appreciated when you think and meditate upon it," said our priestly guide.

We walked back through the House of the Forest of Lebanon, through the wonderful Porch of Pillars, back through the covered walk, into the lofty Hall of Judgment, with its beautiful, gleaming throne of ivory and gold, standing up high at the far end. Deep in thought, we descended the steps that led down from the mount to the city below, determined to think upon all that the priest had told us, and by prayer and study seek out the full meaning of it all.

Chapter Five

DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE

An army of men had laboured for seven years to complete the Temple of Yahweh; the wealth of the world had been gathered together to glorify it, and now that it was finished, the proper month of the year was selected for the ceremony of its dedication. This was the seventh month of the year (1Kings 8:2), a month that called the people together for the great day of Atonement, and the joyous celebrations of the Feast of Tabernacles.

The celebration of these important festivals had fallen into disuse since the Ark had been separated from the Tabernacle, but they were now about to be properly conducted throughout Israel.

Careful preparations were made for the wonderful occasion of dedicating the Temple. The priests and Levites were carefully instructed as to their duties. Some were to conduct the Ark from Zion to Mount Moriah where the Temple was established, whilst others were to bring the Tabernacle from Gibeon where it had been set up for some time.

At last the Day of Dedication dawned. It is a day which Israelites look back upon as the most glorious of their nation. Instead of two sanctuaries as before (one in the converted Gentile city of Gibeon and one on Zion), there was to be but one. The Ark at Zion and the Tabernacle at Gibeon were both removed and brought to the new Temple; but the brazen altar of Bezaleel remained at Gibeon (2Chron. 1:5-6; 1Kings 8:4). A great gathering met to witness the ceremony. The two processions converged and became one at Mt. Moriah where the Temple was built. Special services attended the removal of the Ark. Sacrifices without number were offered. Josephus says the road streamed with the blood of the offerings, and the air was darkened and scented with the clouds of incense. A procession of priests and Levites, arrayed in white linen, playing music, singing and dancing, conveyed the Ark to its new resting place. We can imagine that as the procession moved up the slope leading to the eastern gateway of the Temple, the words of Psalm 24 would have been sung: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in."

The priestly procession entered the Inner Court of the Temple. The Levites separated themselves from the priests, and took up their position between the Altar and the Door playing their instruments, chanting the psalms. The King took his place on a raised platform that had been built for the purpose. The priests, bearing the Ark, marched forward without pause, to the music of the orchestra and choir, to reverently enter the Temple proper, to convey the Ark into the Most

Holy, and to place it with care in the position prepared for it beneath the two large Cherubim with wings outstretched.

It was a most solemn occasion, and one into which Yahweh fully entered with His people. For as the Ark was conveyed into the Most Holy, a cloud of Divine glory, representing the presence of Yahweh, filled the whole Temple. The priests found they could not minister therein because of the glory and were driven out.

This indication of Yahweh's approval was the climax of the procession. As the assembled singers and players, including the 120 priestly trumpeters saw all this, they were moved by extreme excitement and joy. They rent the air with their praises, singing "as one" to the glory of God (2Chron. 5:12-14).

And Solomon, too, was moved by the general excitement and the wonder of it all.

Standing above the people on his raised platform looking towards the Temple, he saw the cloud of glory fill it,* driving the priests from it.

"Yahweh said that He would dwell in the thick darkness," he said. "I have surely built Thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for Thee to abide in for ever" (1Kings 8:12).

His words really signify: "Here is the manifestation of Yahweh's presence; here is the place of His glory!"

He turned to the people, and now acting as king-priest, he blessed them. We are not told, but he probably used the common blessing recorded in Numbers 6:24-26:

"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."

He then turned in thanksgiving to Yahweh, expressing his joy that he had been chosen to build the Temple, and that the great expectations of his father David had at last been fulfilled.

And now came the prayer of dedication.

It stands as one of the great prayers of the Bible, and should be closely studied that its beauty might be appreciated.

To offer it, Solomon who had been standing erect on the brazen platform he had built, now kneeled in humility, and stretched his arms towards heaven in supplication (2Chron. 6:13).

He addressed himself to Yahweh Elohim of Israel, to the One who "keepest covenant and mercy with His servants that walk before Him with all their heart," and not merely from outward appearance (1Kings 8:23-26). He acknowledged the majesty and condescension

* This pointed forward to the time when the Glory of Yahweh would appear in the midst of Israel (Jhn 1:14) and the work of the Aaronic priesthood would be rendered unnecessary (Heb.7:11).

of Yahweh, "the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" It was but a symbol of Yahweh's presence in Israel (vv. 27-30). When, therefore, the people turned to pray towards the Temple, they turned to God.

He earnestly pleaded the mercy and intervention of Yahweh in times of need, on condition that the people pray towards the Temple, and with a feeling heart, make supplication to the Throne of mercy. He advanced seven specific cases of need.

Seven Petitions for the People

The first is the Oath of Ordeal. An accused man could plead his innocence before the altar, either by invoking on himself a curse, or permitting the priest to do so (Exod. 22:11). Solomon prayed that Yahweh would see justice done.

"HEAR Thou in heaven, JUDGE Thy servants, CONDEMN the wicked, JUSTIFY the righteous."

The second concerned times of national defeat (vv. 33-36). If the people confessed the true cause of defeat, and "turned again" to Yahweh, Solomon asked that God would HEAR, FORGIVE, and BRING THEM AGAIN TO THE LAND (v. 34). He thus knew that God would scatter His people. The Temple was later destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and Israel taken into captivity, but in Babylon Daniel acted on Solomon's prayer and in a time of national defeat, prayed towards the site of the Temple for help (Dan. 9:4, 18-20).

The third concerned drought (vv. 35-36). He acknowledged that this was a Divine punishment for sin, and he pleaded that Yahweh would HEAR, FORGIVE, and TEACH THEM THE GOOD WAY.

The fourth made mention of various afflictions that could blight the land (vv. 37-40) including plague, which Solomon said would come as a result of "the plague of their own hearts." He called on Yahweh to HEAR, FORGIVE, DO, and GIVE.

Then came the stranger's prayer (vv. 41-43). The purpose of Yahweh is not only that Israel should know, but that all the world through Israel should be brought unto Him. They do so by accepting the hope of Israel. Solomon spake of how they "shall hear of Thy great name," and shall be urged to likewise pray to the God of Israel. Solomon pleaded for these Gentiles, that ultimately "all the people of the earth may know Thy name."

He prayed for the success of the army at war abroad (vv. 44-45). He made mention of how they must war only at the direction of Yahweh; against "whomsoever Thou shalt send them."

He pleaded for Israel in captivity (vv. 46-51), for he knew, from his study of the words of Moses (Deut. 28:64) that the nation would thus be punished. He asked Yahweh to overlook them in their trials, and when they manifested a return of heart, to bless them with a phys-

ical return to their land once more.

"HEAR Thou their prayer, MAINTAIN their cause, FORGIVE them, have COMPASSION on them."

Finally he made reference to the privileged position of Israel (vv. 51-53), called out of Egypt to be Yahweh's inheritance; and he concluded with a plea for a blessing on the Temple, the Priests and People, and finally the King himself (2Chron. 6:40-42): ‡

"Now, my God, let, I beseech Thee, Thine eyes be open,
And let Thine ears be attentive unto the prayer that is made in this place.
Now therefore arise, O Yahweh Elohim, into Thy resting place, Thou,
And the Ark of Thy strength:
Let Thy priests, O Yahweh Elohim, be clothed with salvation,
And let Thy saints rejoice in goodness.
O Yahweh Elohim, turn not away the face of Thine Messiah:
Remember the mercies of David Thy servant"

Solomon Blesses the People

Solomon's voice died away, and the prayer came to an end. He rose from his knees, and looked over the great concourse of people that stood before him with bowed heads, still and quiet. Filled with emotion, the King addressed the people:

"Blessed be Yahweh," Who has granted rest to His people Israel, as He promised; not a word has failed of all the good promises He made to us by Moses His Servant. May Yahweh our God be with us, as He was with our fathers — never leaving us, never forsaking us — that He may move our hearts to walk in His ways, to keep His commandments, and His statutes, and His judgments, which He commanded our fathers. And may these words of my supplication to Yahweh be ever present to Him day and night, that He may uphold the cause of His servant, and the cause of His people Israel, from day to day, so that all nations may learn that Yahweh is God, and none else. Keep, then, an undivided loyalty for Yahweh our God, to live by His rules, and to obey His orders as today!"

Fire from Heaven

On the new altar behind the king were heaped up the sacrifices. They had been slain but not burnt, for there was no fire kindled in the altar. But now, as Solomon ceased blessing the people, a sheet of fire flamed down from heaven, to consume the sacrifices.

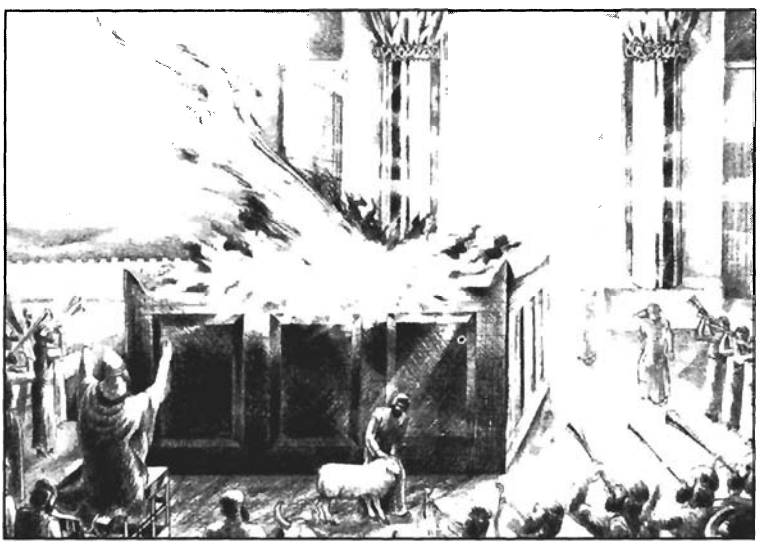
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‡ This portion of the prayer is contained only in 2Chron. 6:40-42, not in 1Kings 8. In it, Solomon uses some of the Psalms of David his father (Psa. 79:2; 132:8-10).

This further manifestation of Divine glory startled the people. They saw, as it were, a terrible flash of lightning; they saw the flames suddenly burning in the altar; they smelt the burning flesh; they saw the cloud of glory by the Temple; and in fear they prostrated themselves to the ground, worshipping Yahweh, repeating the words of the 136th Psalm: "For He is good; for His mercy endureth forever" (2Chron. 7:1-3).

But their fear soon turned to rejoicing. With Solomon's presiding as king-priest, the court of the Temple was hallowed, and thousands of oxen and sheep were sacrificed. Portion of these provided a communal feast before Yahweh. Tremendous enthusiasm and excitement swept through the crowd. The combined orchestra, together with the singers, carried away by the spirit of the moment, praised Yahweh in the glorious, rejoicing Psalms of Zion.

The solemn day of dedication was followed by a week of festival around the worship of Yahweh, which finally merged into the joyous Feast of Tabernacles. The harvest of the land had been gathered; the nation was at peace and prosperous; their king was honoured and glorious; the wonderful Temple had been dedicated; Yahweh had manifested His pleasure in what had been done. This was, perhaps, the happiest Feast of Tabernacles ever on record. As was usual on such occasions, the whole of Israel camped in the open air, like a glorious picnic, for a full week, happy and carefree. Representatives from all the tribes were there, the elders, fathers, captains, and even Gentiles from the newly acquired territories who had embraced the hope of Israel (2Chron. 6:32; 7:8; 1Kings 8:41,65). It was a time of rejoicing, at the conclusion of which, the people returned home "joyful and glad



of heart for all the goodness that Yahweh had done for David His servant, and for Israel His people" (1Kings 8:66).

But danger was at hand!

The excitement was over; the Day of Dedication, so wonderfully successful, had come to its end. Solomon retired to rest. His mind was excited. What a great privilege was his! How blessed was the nation over which he ruled! He looked forward to a glorious and prosperous reign.

So he slept.

But in his sleep he heard again the Voice he had heard at Gibeon. And now it was full of warning. It made mention of the Dedication of the Temple, of how all that had been done was acceptable to Yahweh, but it introduced the terrible word "IF".

In his dream, Solomon heard solemn words of warning and advice:

"IF you will walk before Me, as David thy father..."

"IF you shall turn from following Me..."

"IF your children or Israel follow after other gods..."

IF this happens —

"Then the kingdom will be taken from your house..."

"Then I will cut off Israel out of the land..."

"Then this Temple shall be broken up and people will rebuke Israel for their folly..."

In his troubled dream the Voice stopped, the vision was over, Solomon was on his own.

The warning had been made, but Solomon was too confident in his own success to think that he would ever depart from the ways of righteousness.

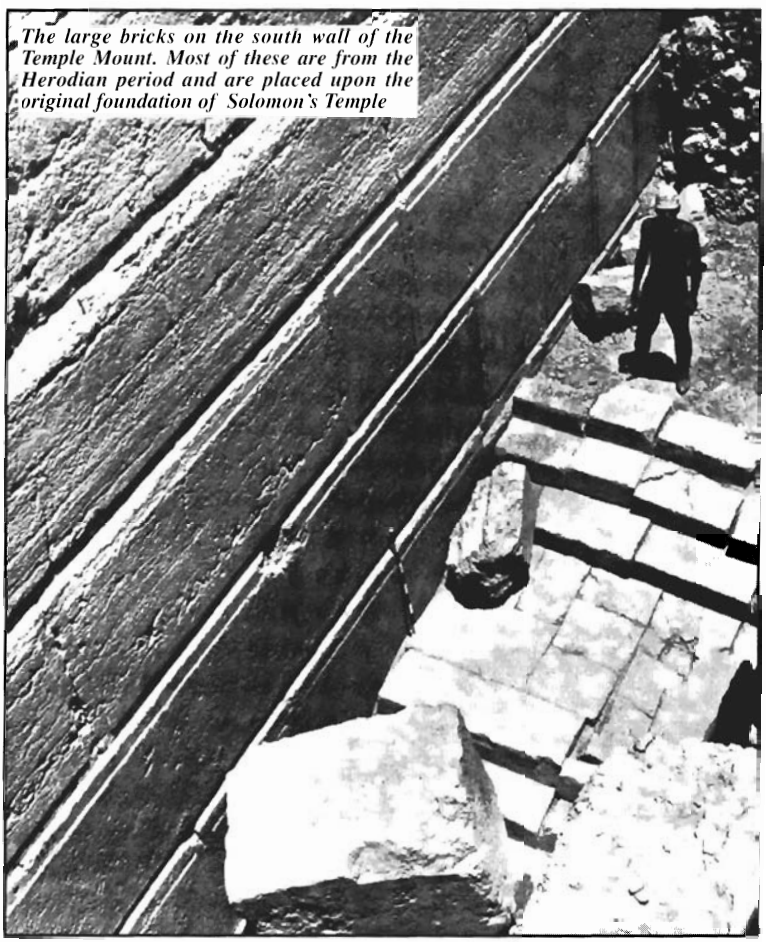
Today, however, we know how true are the Words of Yahweh. He declared:

"And at this house, which is high (or conspicuous), every one that passeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss; and they shall say, 'Why hath Yahweh done thus unto this land, and to this house?' And they shall answer, 'Because they forsook Yahweh their God, Who brought forth their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have taken hold upon other gods, and have worshipped them, and served them, therefore hath Yahweh brought upon them all this evil' (1Kings 9:8-9).

Where is the glorious Temple of Solomon today? All that remains of the grand building that once existed is a wall of time-worn stones. The ruins tell of the failure of Israel to remain true to its trust, and show that Yahweh means all that He says in warning as in mercy.

Meanwhile, Solomon little imagined that ruins would be the fate of his glorious Temple. He busied himself in the important work of re-organising the whole service of the Temple, bringing it into line

with the ordinances of the Law, and establishing the order of priestly functions and daily service as set down by David his father. Each morning and evening the daily sacrifice was offered: each morning and evening incense was offered upon the golden altar in the Holy Place whilst Israel gave itself to prayer: each morning and evening the musicians and singers praised Yahweh in the Psalms of David, standing by the altar of burnt offering; at all times the priests and Levites were in attendance as doorkeepers, teachers, or ministers at the altar. The three great national feasts: the feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles were now permanently enforced, and the full service of the Mosaic ordinances was inaugurated for the first time (1Kings 9:25).



The large bricks on the south wall of the Temple Mount. Most of these are from the Herodian period and are placed upon the original foundation of Solomon's Temple

The Glory of the Kingdom

An army of workmen had laboured to build the glorious Temple and the magnificent Palace and Halls of State for Solomon. Twenty years had been occupied in this work (1Kings 9:10). Hiram, the king of Tyre, had assisted greatly in the work, supplying Solomon with precious timber, gold, and experienced workmen. In return, Solomon had given to Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee, doubtless intending that Hiram should receive the produce of the cities in payment of the debt.

But when Hiram visited the cities they displeased him greatly.

"What is this that you have given me, my brother?" said the king of Tyre sarcastically. He called them Cabul, which means worthless.

Solomon had little time to spend on the sarcasm of his neighbour; he had a great work to do and he gave himself to it completely.

Foreigners living in Israel were forced to work on building projects that Solomon commenced, and Israelites were taxed heavily to pay for them.

Many cities were built. Some of the valleys about Jerusalem were filled in, vast walls were constructed to defend it against attack, fortresses were built at strategic places throughout Israel to protect the passes that gave access to the country; in other parts, vast store cities were developed in which to store the produce of the land; other cities were established as headquarters for the cavalry and chariot forces that Solomon placed throughout the land (1Kings 9:15-23).

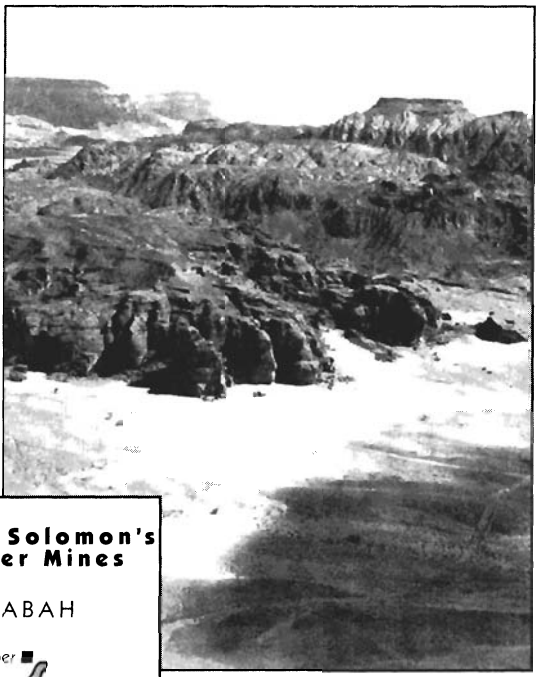
Israel was a hive of industry. Thousands were employed in building; vast smelting factories were set up in the south to work the copper and other metals that were mined; caravans were constantly arriving from distant parts, bringing foreign produce. At Ezion-geber a great port was built, and from it there sailed a navy that Solomon established with the help of his friend Hiram. This navy sailed the oceans as far east as India, returning once in three years, bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks (1Kings 10:22).*

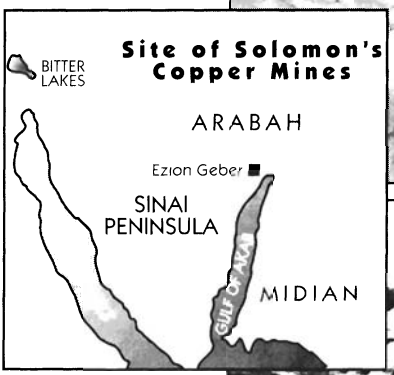
Israel was the centre of glory such as the world had never seen. Most glorious of all was the wise king himself.

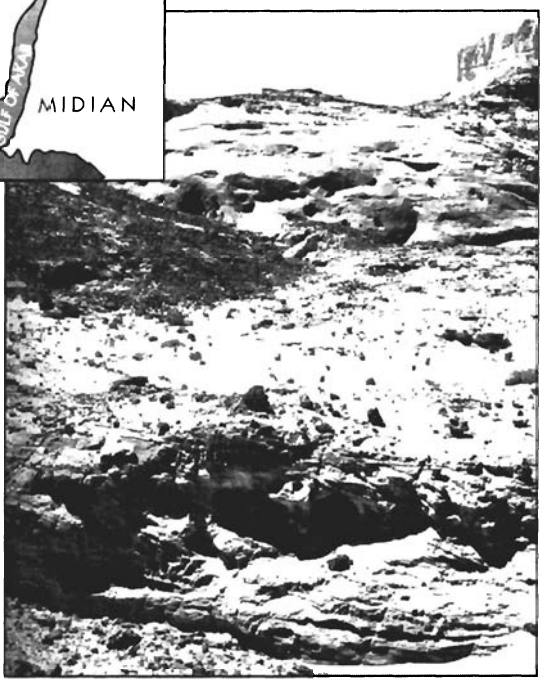
People have wondered whether the Bible record of the glory of Solomon is really true, but archaeologists have uncovered ruins which speak clearly of it. They have discovered that Solomon was, indeed, a great builder. Some of the huge stables for his horses and chariots have been discovered, and they speak of the luxurious establishment of the king even in this direction. It is said that in one of the ancient

* It has been disputed that Ophir was India, but the facts seem to point to this identity. The word for peacocks *(thukkiyim)* is an Indian word, for both peacocks and baboons (apes). The port of Ezion-geber must have been a hive of industry; large smelting works, the terminus of the Incense Road along which came the precious spices of Arabia, cargoes unloaded from the ships in harbour including precious metals; strange and chattering animals; exotic, elegant birds; as well as the constant arrival of notable foreigners from all parts of the world.

Aerial view of the central massif of Timna. It is believed that the famous copper mines of Solomon were located in this area, and the huge sandstone formation in the foreground is known today as "King Solomon's Pillars" Solomon was renowned for the considerable industry in copper and other metals, which were distributed throughout the world.







On the right are shown the ancient copper mines at the foot of the Timna Cliffs. The mining walls show traces of shallow digging where ore nodule concentrations occur.

stable buildings which were cut deep into the rock underneath the high walls of the city of Jerusalem, the Crusaders tethered their horses after the conquest of the city, almost 2,000 years after they had been built by Solomon. In all parts of the land there are found evidences of the massive walls that were built by Solomon to increase the strength of his kingdom, and withstand it against attack. Down in the south, close to the ancient port of Ezion-geber, the ancient ruins of large blast furnaces have been uncovered, speaking of the tremendous industry in metals at that time. Archaeologists have stated that these furnaces were built in line with modern methods. One has written:

"Ezion-geber was the result of careful planning, and was built as a model installation with remarkable architectural and technical skill. In fact, practically the whole town of Ezion-geber, taking into consideration place and time, was a phenomenal industrial site, without anything to compare with it in the entire history of the ancient orient. Ezion-geber was the Pittsburg of old Palestine, and at the same time its most important seaport."

Even mighty Egypt deferred to Israel at this time. Solomon had married Pharaoh's daughter, and as a suitable dowry for such an honorable marriage, Pharaoh had besieged the city of Gezer then in occupation of Gentiles, and had given it to Solomon.

Thus everything seemed set for a long and prosperous reign, a millennium of glory to Israel. It would have introduced the appearing of the Son of God himself at "the set time" (Psa. 102:13; Gal. 4:4) to bring Israel to the peak of its history. But it was not to be; how soon the glory faded! Sin brought suffering and disgrace to Israel, and a few short years found the nation in the direst trouble.



Chapter Six

MR. PHILLIPS DISCUSSES THE QUEEN OF SHEBA'S VISIT

"I think this is one of the most interesting stories of the Bible!" remarked Ann after the family had completed reading 1Kings 10 verse by verse.

"There are one or two mysteries in it though," said Peter.

"What is mysterious about it ?" asked Mr. Phillips.

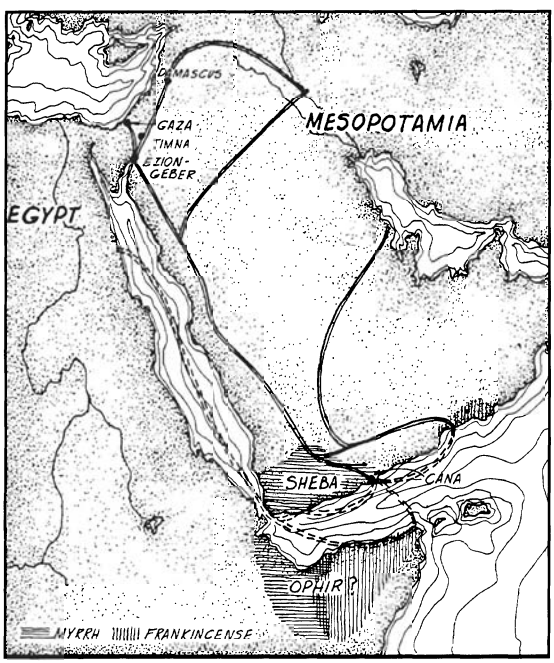
"Well, it all seems rather fabulous," remarked Peter.

"My word, Peter! That is a good word! You must have been attending night school!" said Ann sarcastically.

"Well, it is a fabulous account, but none the less true," remarked Mr. Phillips.

"Where was Sheba?" asked Graeham.

"It was in South Arabia, just inland from Aden," said Mr. Phillips. "In ancient times this was the main exporting country for spices. It was a very fertile and prosperous place. Inscriptions have been discovered recording the names of four spice kingdoms — Minaea, Kataban, Hadramaut and Sheba. They make mention of vast cities of a million inhabitants. Apparently the kings were also priests, and therefore interested in religion. Sheba itself was noted for a huge reservoir which conserved the water of the river Adhanat for irrigation purposes. Remains of the vast walls of this reservoir, some 60 ft. and more in height still defy the sands of the desert."



"Was it noted for spices?" asked Joan.

"Yes, indeed!" replied her father. "You read yourself tonight that

the Queen of Sheba brought all kinds of spices to Jerusalem (v. 10), and the kingdom was noted for this produce. The huge reservoir permitted the inhabitants to irrigate their land, so that the kingdom of Sheba became one vast scented garden of costliest spices in the world, in the midst of which was the capital Marib."

"The Queen was therefore used to splendor!" said Graeham.

"Yes," replied his father. "Archaeologists have revealed some of the glory of Sheba, and have exposed ruins of architecture of surprising splendor and beauty. The worship of the Moon goddess was well established in the land. A beautiful Temple had been built to her honor. It had a processional way, flanked with pillars, leading to an inner court in which sparkling fountains played, and through which wafted the scent of fragrant spices."

"How would the Queen get to know of Solomon?" asked Ann.

"The spices of Sheba were exported along what is called the Incense Road which led from Sheba through some 1250 miles of desert to Israel. Ezion-geber was the terminus. From there the caravans bearing their precious cargo turned either north to Jerusalem and Syria, or south to Egypt. In any case they were utterly dependent upon Israel, so that the 'fame of Solomon' would certainly come to the ears of Sheba's queen, as the first verse in our chapter tonight states. As a matter of fact, the word 'heard' really signifies 'kept hearing.' The Queen received continuous reports of Solomon's glory which excited her interest."

"I suppose she wanted to compare his glory with her own!" suggested Peter.

"That partly may have been the reason, but there was also a more important one", remarked Mr. Phillips. "She was evidently deeply



religious, and had heard of the hope of Israel, and it was this that excited her main interest. 'She heard of the fame of Solomon *concerning the name of Yahweh,*' and decided to satisfy her curiosity about this matter, for she doubted the truth of what she had heard (v. 7)."

"It was a long journey for her to take!" said Joan.

"She had to travel about 1400 miles with her train of servants, and camels bearing gold, precious stones, and spices of all kinds. It was a difficult journey, and in view of the heat, not a very pleasant one. But she was eager to learn the truth of the reports she had heard. So she travelled along the Incense Road to Ezion-geber, no doubt looking with curiosity at the huge smelting works near the newly erected harbour, and then she turned north to Jerusalem. In due time she was presented in state to King Solomon in the beautiful Hall of Pillars. She plied him with questions, trying to trap him by so doing, but with simplicity and wisdom Solomon answered all her problems. He explained to her all she desired to know. He showed her the wonderful worship established by Yahweh, and the meaning of everything that was done. She was permitted to go about and see the condition of the people, and the management of the nation. She witnessed the glory of Solomon, in his Palace, in the Temple, on the great ivory Throne of Judgment. She saw everywhere the evidences of great wealth, a united and happy nation, welded together as one in worship and in ideal.

"It impressed her greatly. She forgot how she was going to trap Solomon with her questions, and, humbled by the wisdom and glory about her, she 'communed with him of all that was in her heart' (v. 2). So that, well satisfied with the answers to her questions, the contest developed into a heart to heart talk around the things of the Truth. No wonder the Lord Jesus could later say 'She came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here' (Matt. 12:42)".

"Verse 5 says that there 'was no more spirit in her'," said Ann as her father paused. "What does that mean?"

"It means that when she had seen the order of the kingdom, the beauty of its divine worship, the magnificence of the King's person and court, her breath was completely taken away. She could not speak; she had nothing more to say!"

"It must have been very wonderful to cause a woman to stop speaking!" murmured Peter to the disgust of his sisters.

" She spoke some beautiful words when she came to sum up her experiences," continued Mr. Phillips. "She declared:

"It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard. Happy are thy men,

happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom. Blessed be Yahweh thy God which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel; because Yahweh loved Israel for ever, therefore made He thee king, to do judgment and justice."

"She certainly had a good understanding of Yahweh's purpose with Israel," remarked Graeham.

"I believe that she fully grasped and accepted the covenant of promise," declared Mr. Phillips. "I also think that all this was typical of what is yet to happen."

"In what way do you mean?" asked Graeham.

"The Bible declares that the rulers of Sheba will offer gifts to Christ (Psa. 72:10)," explained Mr. Phillips. "Today Britain occupies the territory by Sheba, and we know that Britain will be among the first of the nations to accept Christ (Isa. 60:9)".

"You are going a little fast for me, Daddy," complained Ann. "Have you any further proof to identify Sheba with Britain?"

"Yes, your proof is a little thin to me!" agreed Peter.

"The Lord Jesus described the Queen of Sheba as the Queen of the South," said Mr. Phillips, "and in the prophecies of the Bible, Britain is called the King of the South. Moreover Britain's interest in the Arab countries is considerable and the words that the Queen of Sheba used could well be repeated by Britain's rulers to the Lord Jesus, the antitypical Solomon, at his second coming."

"How do you mean?" asked Graeham.

"In this way," replied his father. "The gospel is proclaimed throughout English speaking countries today, yet it is not generally believed. But when Jesus Christ reigns on earth, people who have heard but rejected these things will say, 'It was a true report that we heard in our land, but we did not believe it.' And further, when they see the glory of Christ's kingdom, the magnificence of his court with his immortal attendants, the beauty of the form of worship he will establish in all the earth, the redemption of the nation of Israel, they will admit that the 'half has not been told them.' They will praise Yahweh for His goodness and His mercy in establishing a throne on earth for the Lord Jesus, and for redeeming the nation of Israel. They will hear of the wisdom of the king and witness his beauty, to return to their homes and impress upon their neighbours, the glory and virtue of the great King reigning in Mount Zion (cp. Isa. 2:2-4; Isa. 60:3-10; Isa. 33:17; Zech. 14:16)".

Chapter Seven

SOLOMON'S DECLINE

Under Solomon, Israel reached a pinnacle of power, wealth and glory, never to be equalled until the Lord Jesus returns to "build again the tabernacle of David that is fallen down" (Acts 15:16). From all parts of the world, men made pilgrimage to Jerusalem, to see the king in his glory, to marvel at the wonders of the Temple and city of Jerusalem, to ponder the wisdom that came from his lips (1Kings 10:24). On his ivory throne in the Hall of Judgment, Solomon dispensed justice to the people, but there was unhappiness in his heart. There was something that eluded him but which was necessary to his peace of mind; a true pleasure he could not find. All he saw about him was empty and vain (Ecc. 1:2), his wisdom only brought him grief (v. 18), his labour brought no lasting satisfaction (Ecc. 2:11), life itself seemed often burdensome (v. 17).

What was the solution to this state of things? Solomon did not know. He sought it in many ways and in many places which seemed to offer happiness and pleasure, only to leave him more dissatisfied than ever. Wonderful buildings, lovely parks and gardens, ample wealth, and endless round of pleasure, the gratification of every desire, did not bring the real joy and happiness he expected (Ecc. 2:10-11).

Solomon tired of all these things! He looked about for something new and different to do. He could not find it. He became bored with life.

Late in life he learned the answer; but it was too late to then obtain the full benefit of the lasting great joy that Yahweh had placed within his reach. As an old man, he wrote: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecc. 12:13-14).

He came to this final conclusion after tasting all the vanities of life. He set these out in the Book of Ecclesiastes, and showed therein why they are vain, and why they do not give lasting pleasure nor true satisfaction. We will briefly consider these before going on to trace the steps in Solomon's decline.

The Ten Human Vanities

In the great library which we call "the Bible", there are volumes of all kinds. Some record the history of God's people, some outline His purpose with man, some set before us His rules by which He would have us live, some reveal great prophecies of the future. And right in the centre of the Bible there is a little cluster of books that are given

over completely to divine poetry. This section comprises the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. These are not only books of poetry, but the very order in which they are set out in the Bible is suggestive of poetry.

Job speaks of blessing through suffering; the Psalms are expressive of rejoicing in hope: Proverbs provide practical wisdom for life as it is lived now: Ecclesiastes teaches us to set our affection on God, not on anything under the sun. The Song of Solomon takes us into the future, and sets before us the sweet intimacy of communion which exists between Christ and his Bride, the Ecclesia.

These books thus set before us progressive stages of true happiness: Blessing through suffering, Rejoicing in hope, Guidance in life, Service to God, Sweet communion of unity with Christ.

Solomon wrote Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. He experienced all that this life could give in reaching his final state of mind. He found the things of this life cannot provide one with true happiness; in the absence of God's way they are empty and vain.

In the book of Ecclesiastes he summed up his life's experience, setting down the ten great **HUMAN VANITIES** that delude men as set out below:

There is the vanity of HUMAN WISDOM (Ch. 2:15-16)
— it cannot solve the problems of life:
wise and fools have one end.
There is the vanity of HUMAN LABOR (Ch. 2:19-21)
— the worker is no better than the shirker in the end.
There is the vanity of HUMAN PURPOSE (Ch. 2:26)
— man proposes but God disposes.
There is the vanity of HUMAN RIVALRY (Ch. 4:4)
— success brings envy, not joy.
There is the vanity of HUMAN AVARICE (Ch. 4:8)
— "much" wants "more".
There is the vanity of HUMAN FAME (Ch. 4:16)
— it is brief, uncertain, soon forgotten.
There is the vanity of HUMAN GREED (Ch.5:10)
— money does not satisfy.
There is the vanity of HUMAN COVETING (Ch.6:9)
— the gain it brings is often not enjoyed.
There is the vanity of HUMAN FRIVOLITY (Ch.7:6)
— it only hides the inevitable sad end.
There is the vanity of HUMAN AWARDS (Ch. 8:10-14)
— the bad is often awarded.

Solomon's experience finally led him to the right conclusion in life, namely that service to God can transform these vanities into something really worthwhile. When Christ governs our lives, then wisdom, labor, purpose, fame, and pleasure take on a new meaning,

and become transformed. We see beyond the "one end" of the wise and fools; we know that work done in His name is not in vain; we can join our purpose with that of God which means that no labor we do is in vain; if we "covet the best gifts" we know that the "much" we now receive from God will bring "more" in the Age to come.

We are wise therefore, to profit from the experience of Solomon, and take heed to his exhortation: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them" (Ecc. 12:1).

That, Solomon failed to do. He learned by bitter experience that it pays to serve God in truth.

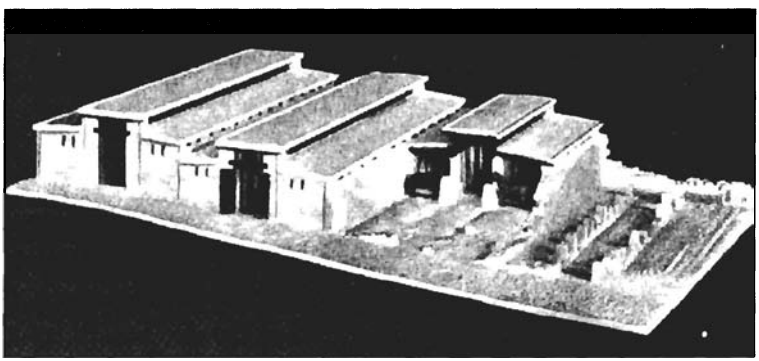
Three Causes of Solomon's Decline

Long before there was a king in Israel, the law of Moses carefully warned what should be done when they came to power. The kings were told to do certain things, and to avoid other things. The first thing the king was commanded to do, was to write a copy of the Law, and keep it by his side, that he might read therein day and night. By so doing he would learn to "fear Yahweh", to keep the Law, and be humble in the sight of his God (Deut. 17:18-20).

He was warned not to multiply horses, wives, nor store up wealth (Deut. 17:16-17). These can lead men from God. They give a sense of fleshly power such as to cause some to feel they are independent of the need of God. They induce pride and pompousness.

Solomon's great failing was the accumulation of Weapons, Wealth, and Women. He did not have the strength of character to resist their influence, and gradually fell under their spell with disastrous results.

The great number of horses and chariots, his extensive standing army, which he set up in various parts of the land, gave him a sense of



A model of Solomon's Stables. The ruins of such a building have been discovered during excavations at Megiddo. They give an idea of the arrangement of the units – the stables contained five – each built to hold twenty-four horses in two rows of facing stalls with central passage for chariots.

power which was not good for him: he no longer felt the need of Yahweh's protection. The tremendous wealth that he gathered together brought him every comfort and pleasure, every material blessing possible enabled him to complete his huge building projects, and establish his parks and gardens — but it led him away from that one true source of real wealth which men find so difficult to acknowledge — the riches of faith (Rev. 3:18). Moreover, the accumulation of this material wealth was obtained at the expense of the people who were heavily taxed to provide it, and who groaned under the burdens placed upon them.

But Solomon's greatest fault came from the multiplication of wives, in which he followed the custom of the day. They gradually led him away from the pure worship of Yahweh.

Solomon's Numerous Wives

Solomon's chief wife, the Queen of his realm, was Pharaoh's daughter. The marriage united Egypt to Israel, and was considered a great honor by Pharaoh (1Kings 9:16), so high had Israel risen in the scale of nations.

Pharaoh's daughter seems to have embraced the hope of Israel when she married Solomon, for she is recognised in the Bible as the king's bride at a time when he was still in favour with Yahweh, and whereas Solomon is said to have built altars for his other brides, nothing is said of him setting up any form of Egyptian worship.

Special honour was paid to the Queen by the King. A beautiful palace was built for her, and she lived therein in great state (1Kings 7:8).

But Solomon loved others beside her, and as was the custom of the times, he married them, until he eventually had 700 wives and 300 concubines, or lesser wives.

Many of these were not wives in the full sense of the word as we understand it today, but were possibly princesses of other places who were honored by being thus connected with the glory of Solomon and the court of such a kingdom. Some probably acted as hostages for countries over which Solomon exercised power; their presence in his court was a guarantee of the good conduct of the people they represented.

But some among them were wives in the fullest sense. They turned Solomon's heart so that he did not remain loyal to the true worship of Yahweh.

A true servant of Yahweh should only marry those who embrace the One hope (1Cor. 7:39), so that there is complete harmony in the home concerning the things of God, and husband and wife are united in the same outlook.

A mutual faith will bind stronger the bands of true love, will bring

a unity and happiness to married life not possible otherwise.

It will bind children to parents and parents to children, and bring a degree of harmony and peace in spite of all difficulties and problems.

Thus Paul taught: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers..." (2Cor. 6:14). Young people should bear this well in mind when entering upon courtship or marriage. At such a time they need to remember that they are undertaking a contract that is for life, and upon which earnest thought needs to be exercised, lest a mistake be made that will result in much unhappiness, and lead away from the Truth.

That was the case with Solomon. He married "many strange women" (1Kings 11:1). The word in Hebrew is "*nokree*" and signifies "foreign women". They were foreign in every sense: not only by birth but also by religion. They came from the surrounding nations, from Moab, Ammon, Edom and Zidon.

The Israelites were commanded not to marry any of these nations unless they embraced the hope of Israel as did faithful Ruth.

These women did not do that. Instead they introduced their religious beliefs and practices into Israel. Polygamy led to Polytheism: many wives led to many religions. They asked Solomon to build altars so that they might worship their gods.

Solomon had made one mistake in marrying them; he made a second when he allowed them to build their altars and temples to pagan gods.

And then came the final terrible step. Solomon also went after these gods.

He did not do this straight away, of course. He was gradually led to this sin. He possibly at first reasoned that it was good for his wives to have some form of religion, and thus permitted the altars to be built; and then, perhaps, his desire to seek into the philosophies and thinking of men caused him to examine the form of worship established; his curiosity induced him to associate in the worship; and finally he was found frequenting these places.

The steps that lead to sin are often gradual and not clearly defined. The slightest drift from ways of right can finally end in widely divergent paths, until we wonder how we came to so completely leave the Truth. Even the use of clerical commentaries in the study of the Word can develop such a decline. It is like worshipping the gods of the Gentiles.

It was thus with Solomon. In pleasing his wives, and in considering their religious preferences, he displeased Yahweh.

The monument to his sin was erected within sight of the Temple itself. On the Mount of Olives there were set up altars and images to the vile worship of pagan gods introduced by his wives. At least three shrines were built on its southern eminence, a standing testimony to

the folly of this once wise king.

These places of worship remained there until Josiah's day. They became a worm of rottenness in the midst of Israel, an incitement to sin and evil which caused the Mount of Olives to be renamed the Mount of Corruption (2Kings 23:13).

Solomon is Warned of Punishment to Come

Solomon's action angered Yahweh. The king on earth received a message from the King of Heaven, saying:

"Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely rend the kingdom from you, and give it to thy servant. However, I will not do this in your days because of My promise to your father David, but I will rend it out of the hand of your son. Nevertheless I will not take away all the kingdom from you, but will give one tribe* to your son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen" (1Kings 11:11-13).

Thus we see that the influence of a righteous man (David) continued long after his death. God was faithful to His promise (Heb. 10:23).

In the New Testament, David and Jerusalem sometimes are used to represent Christ and his ecclesia. For their sakes God is bringing to pass His great purpose with the earth.

Solomon's sin brought great suffering on the nation.

Hadad: First of Solomon's Troubles

In Egypt there lived a man with bitter hatred in his heart for Solomon.

His name was Hadad which means "fierceness". He was an Edomite. He was but a little child when David invaded the land of Edom and conquered it. He remembered how Joab had gone throughout the land destroying all male Edomites. It had been a time of great terror for the men of the land, many of whom had fled from the face of Joab. Hadad had been among their number. Some servants of his father had taken him to Midian where they had remained hidden for a while. Afterwards they had travelled south to Paran, and then into Egypt where Hadad had grown into manhood.

He grew up with a fierce hatred for Israel, waiting for the time when he could revenge the trouble that had been brought upon his country.

He was welcomed in Egypt at that time, for Pharaoh then feared the growing power and might of David. Hadad was brought up in the court of Pharaoh. He eventually married the sister of the Queen, and

* Actually two tribes were given to the descendants of Solomon, but they are accounted as one tribe because they were so closely united. It was the city of Jerusalem that united Judah and Benjamin as one, for the city was on the border, being partly in Benjamin and partly in Judah.

was held in high esteem throughout the land. But though he enjoyed wealth and honour in Egypt, he never forgot his hatred of Israel. Secretly he planned his revenge on David whom he both feared and hated.

Then, one day he learned that David was dead. This was his opportunity; he would return to wreak his vengeance on David's son.

But meanwhile Pharaoh's daughter had married Solomon, and Hadad had to act carefully in case he incited the wrath of Pharaoh as well. He asked Pharaoh's permission to return to his own land.

"Why do you want to return?" asked Pharaoh. "What more can I do for you than I have already done?"

Hadad did not tell Pharaoh his real reason. He felt sure that would spoil his plans, for now Egypt was in alliance with Israel.

"I am very grateful for all you have done for me," he told Pharaoh, "but I would like to return."

So Hadad left Egypt for his homeland. He established himself in the hill country of Edom, and from his mountain hideout, he gathered a few other Edomites about him, and commenced to harass the people of Israel

The peace of Solomon's reign was over. Now troubles began to beset him.

Rezon Revolts Against Solomon

In the north, in the country of Syria, a spirit of revolt simmered among the people. It was stimulated by Rezon who had been a prince under Hadadezer, King of Zobah, whom David had conquered (2Sam. 10:19). Rezon had fled from before the forces of Israel when they had occupied the land of Syria, but now he saw in the growing troubles of Solomon an opportunity to throw off the Israelitish yoke. He gathered some men about him, and at the head of his small army, he boldly marched on Damascus, occupying the city and driving the Israelites therefrom He then set himself up as king.

Rezon hated Israel, and from Damascus he constantly attacked the northern borders of Israel, causing much trouble to Solomon. He proved to be a far more dangerous enemy to Israel than Hadad, for he founded the kingdom of Syria ("Hezion" in 1Kings 15:18). This nation was to cause much suffering and sorrow to the people of God for a long time. It was the Divine way of punishing Israel for sin.

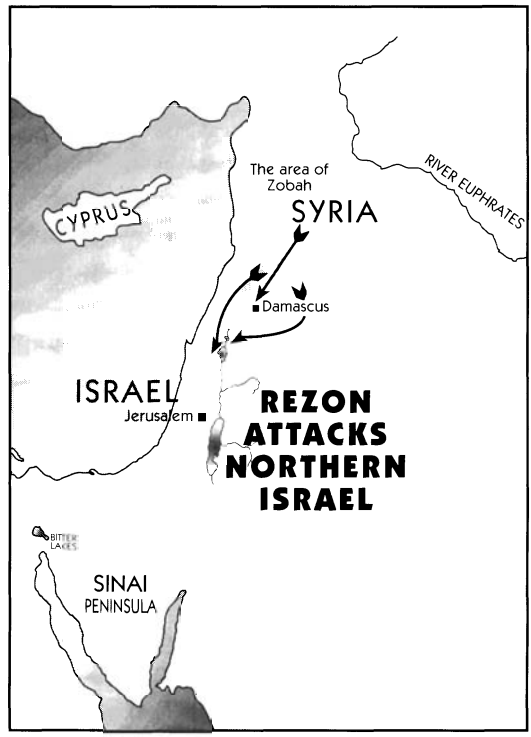
Jeroboam: Greatest of Adversaries

The greatest of all Solomon's troubles now arose in Israel. The folly of Solomon was to lead to civil war and division throughout the nation.

It was brought about by a man who left an indelible mark of evil on Israel's history and became known as "the man who caused Israel to

sin" (1Kgs. 14:16; 21:22 etc.).

His name was Jeroboam. He was an Ephraimite of considerable ability. He was greatly skilled in organisation, and Solomon, recognising his value in that direction, put him in charge of the workers from Ephraim when he set them to build portion of Jerusalem.



Jeroboam rapidly rose in the estimation of all, being acknowledged as a leader both by the people and by the king. He prided himself in his work, and as a mark of authority, had a special garment made which he wore before the people (1Kings 11:29).

One day, as he left Jerusalem, and was in a lonely place in a field, he came upon Ahijah the prophet. Suddenly, to the amazement of Jeroboam, Ahijah tore the new garment off Jeroboam, and quickly cut it into twelve pieces. Ten of these he gave to Jeroboam, two he retained himself.

"Take these ten pieces", said the prophet to the prince, "for thus saith Yahweh, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee, but he shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel. And it shall be, if you will hearken unto all that I command thee, and will walk in My ways, and do that which is right in My sight, as did David My servant, then I will build thee a sure house, as I built for David. And because of the sin of Solomon, I will afflict the house of David, but *not for ever*."

Jeroboam was greatly pleased with the prophet's words, for he was an ambitious man, and sought power over men. But he did a foolish thing. The prophet had told him that he would be raised to power *after* the death of Solomon (1Kings 11:34,35). Jeroboam should have



"...Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee, (Jeroboam)... because that they have forsaken me..." (1 Kings 11:29-38).

kept the prophet's words to himself, and waited for his time of glory to come. Instead he told others of the message. It came to the ears of Solomon. Solomon had been told that Yahweh would raise up one who would divide the kingdom with his son. The identity of this one was now revealed to him. He tried to defeat the purpose of God by destroying Jeroboam. But Jeroboam fled into Egypt, and sought the protection of Shishak. The alliance between Egypt and Israel was not now as powerful as before, and Shishak willingly gave refuge to Jeroboam who continued there until the death of Solomon.

Death of Solomon

Solomon had riches and honour such as no other man has ever had; yet his life is also a record of wasted opportunities. He commenced well, but his keen enthusiasm for Yahweh waned, and the luxury and ease of his court led to spiritual apathy, sin and iniquity. He permitted the cruel and vile worship of pagan gods to rear its evil head in Israel; he brought oppressive taxation upon the people, and paved the way for civil war and division in Israel.

But all this has now passed away. The Temple he built has been destroyed, the shrines to paganism have been broken down, his empire has come to an end and no longer dominates mankind. But the wise words that Solomon spake are still with us, and have continued to influence men from generation to generation to the present day. This teaches that good once done in Yahweh's name, can never be entirely undone, wisdom once spoken can never be entirely cancelled. Let us do good, and speak wisely in accordance with the will of God,

knowing that the benefit of such actions and words can continue long after we are gone.

So Solomon passed to his end. He brought the nation to the apex of glory, but also laid the foundation for its decline. He was a type of Christ, but because of the weakness of the flesh, he allowed the "golden reign of Israel" to dim. But in spite of all its weaknesses, his reign revealed a glory foreshadowing that to be revealed when the "greater than Solomon" shall reign.

Then, as in Solomon's reign, the "Gentiles shall come to the light" that shall radiate from Zion, the caravans of the east shall once more bring their gold and incense to "shew forth the praises of Yahweh," representatives of Sheba shall come to Jerusalem to hear Christ's wisdom, the gates of the Temple shall be opened to receive the never-ending flow of worshippers that shall converge there, the glory of Lebanon shall again be used to beautify the city, and gold shall be as plentiful as the stones in the streets (Isa. 60:3,6,11,13,17).

Then the golden reign of Israel will find its full glory under Messiah's rule (Amos 9:11).

As we close our consideration of Solomon's reign, we ask the question: Did he die a pagan, or a worshipper of Yahweh? There is no clear-cut answer to that question. We are not told. The indications are that he saw the error of his ways and returned to his former worship. The Book of Ecclesiastes speaks of this. It indicates that he tried all the pleasures possible to man, to finally reach the conclusion in old age that none are equal to "fearing God and obeying His commandments" (Ecc. 12:13). It is comforting to think that this son of David reached that conclusion in time to correct his faults; but the future alone will reveal the true answer to our question. Meanwhile, now is our time of opportunity.

Solomon reigned forty years in Jerusalem (1Kings 11:42), and as he commenced to reign early in life, when he was only about 18 or 20 years of age, he died quite young. He thus did not enjoy the long life that was promised him conditional upon his obedience (1Kings 3:14).

His death ended the epoch of Israel's glory. The nation went into decline, the glory faded until the time of Hezekiah when, for a short time, it was revived once more.

Division in Israel

1 Kings 12 opens a new era in the history of Israel. It records how the disobedience of Solomon brought disruption and disgrace to the nation. Israel became divided into two nations: the north and the south. This division in turn weakened the influence, and destroyed the peace of Israel, until, finally, the nation was completely overthrown and taken into captivity.

We must now trace two lines of history: that of the northern kingdom known generally as Israel; and that of the southern kingdom known generally as Judah. We shall see how the great promise made to David was kept alive in the southern kingdom, how the continuation of the Davidic line hung often in the balance, but was preserved by Yahweh, who guaranteed the covenant that He made with the king.

The history of the times also shows how Israel became weakened through internal strife and division, how a people who should have been united were broken asunder through folly, and spent their energies in destroying each other, how one became stronger at the expense of the other, but finally, how both were destroyed through a common enemy.

There are many important lessons to be learned through the incidents that took place during this period, but the most important one of all is that true peace both with God and with man comes from seeking the divine way and walking therein.

Meanwhile, we visit the seaside home of Mr. and Mrs. Phillips as their family gathers around the Word of God to discuss together the reading from the Bible for the day as set down in the "Bible Companion". It is 1 Kings 12 that is under discussion.

Chapter One

JEROBOAM INCITES THE PEOPLE TO REVOLT

"There are some important lessons to be gained from this chapter," remarked Mr. Phillips as Joan finished reading 1Kings 12.

"It starts off rather abruptly," said Graeham. "Why should Rehoboam go to Shechem to be made king?"

"He doubtless knew that the spirit of revolt was stirring in the northern kingdom," replied his father. "Jeroboam had returned home from Egypt and was inciting the people to revolt against the house of David. He doubtless remembered the message of the prophet, and now decided to move to gain the kingdom for himself."

"The people must have been tired of paying all the heavy taxes," said Joan.

"That is true," said Mr. Phillips. "Time and opportunity played into the skilful hands of Jeroboam to make more easy the cleaving of the knot that tied Ephraim to Judah. Ephraim had entered the Promised Land as the smallest of the tribes with the exception of Simeon (Num. 26), but the tribe had rapidly increased in numbers until it became dominant in the north. It became jealous of Judah's power. The people recalled that Joshua was of the tribe of Ephraim, that for some 300 years the tabernacle had been stationed in Shiloh in the area of Ephraim, and that Shechem, a city of Ephraim, had already been used as a royal city. There had been jealousy between the north and the south in David's time (2Sam. 19:43) which perhaps accounts for the way in which David emphasized that Judah had been chosen by God as chief of the tribes (1Chron. 28:4). But now the tribes had a personal grievance as well as tribal jealousy to inflame them, and Jeroboam played on that. Rehoboam doubtless heard of this seething discontent in the north, and thought he would go to Shechem to be proclaimed king before all the people in those parts."

"The two names Rehoboam and Jeroboam sound very much alike, but the men seem to have been complete opposites," remarked Ann.

"Their names have similar meanings," declared her father. "Rehoboam means, 'He enlarges the people', and Jeroboam means 'The people are numerous.' These two names probably reflected the growing power of Israel during the times of David and Solomon, but the influence of these two men was to cause a great decline in Israel. Thus they both belied their names".

"Shechem seems to have been an important place," said Ann. "Shechem was a very important city in Israel," said Mr. Phillips. "It was in a valley overshadowed by the mounts Ebal and Gerizim where the tribes had assembled to hear the blessings and cursings of the Law

pronounced when they first entered the land. It is a valley so constructed that the voice carries easily, and is therefore admirable for the purpose of a national conference. A tense, explosive atmosphere prevailed when the son of Solomon arrived to meet with his people. They wanted some relief from the oppressive taxation that they were compelled to pay. They established Jeroboam as their leader, and so that when Rehoboam stood forth before the people in his royal robes and surrounded by the princes of his realm, he stood face to face with the enemy of his father. Jeroboam made known the demands of the north:

" 'Your father made our yoke grievous,' said Jeroboam, 'we want you to lighten our burdens. If you will do so we will serve you faithfully.'

"This was a reasonable demand," continued Mr. Phillips as he traced the story. "It shows how clever was Jeroboam. Because it was reasonable, it was also powerful. It put Rehoboam at a disadvantage. If he rejected it, he appeared as a tyrant; if he accepted it Jeroboam's prestige was enhanced. Whatever happened would be to Jeroboam's advantage. Moreover, Rehoboam could not argue against the justice of the request. He could not brand Jeroboam as a mere disturber of peace, nor charge him with treason. In fact, Jeroboam posed as a patriot, anxious to serve the king and the country rather than cause any trouble."

The Conference at Shechem

In a tense and explosive atmosphere, overshadowed by the mounts of Cursing and Blessing (Ebal and Gerizim), Rehoboam and Jeroboam bargained for the loyalty of the people.

REHOBOAM: Was a man used to the adulation of the crowds. He was brought up in the luxury of Solomon's court, accustomed to his slightest whim being instantly obeyed, expecting that the authority and glory of his father should rest on him. He came before the people with the pomp and dignity befitting his position and the occasion. He sought to be accepted as king, not to reason with the people, nor to grant them concessions. He was both headstrong and inexperienced, and fell into the trap carefully prepared for him by Jeroboam.

JEROBOAM: Was an energetic, industrious, efficient organiser, with a reputation for leadership (1 Kings 11:28). Solomon both admired and feared him, and had attempted to destroy him. He thus smouldered under a sense of grievance against the house of David. He knew he had the ability to rule. He also had received a divine commission to that end, and now destiny had presented him with the opportunity to press his claim and attain his ambition. He did

this with such admirable skill as to place Rehoboam at a complete disadvantage.

THE PEOPLE: Knew but one thing: that they suffered from the oppressive taxation. They wanted relief from that, and were not unwilling to be loyal to the king if it were granted. Ill at ease before Rehoboam, but determined to make their demands and claim their rights, they accepted Jeroboam as their chief, and aided him in his secret ambition.

In this incident Yahweh used the schemes and emotions of men to further His plan.

"That is a very good point," remarked Graeham.

"It is always a good thing to remember that truth cannot be made to appear more true by exaggeration," replied his father. "In fact, if an aspect of truth is over-emphasised, it is weakened. There was one way in which Rehoboam could have put Jeroboam at a disadvantage, but he failed to make use of it."

"What was that?" asked Peter.

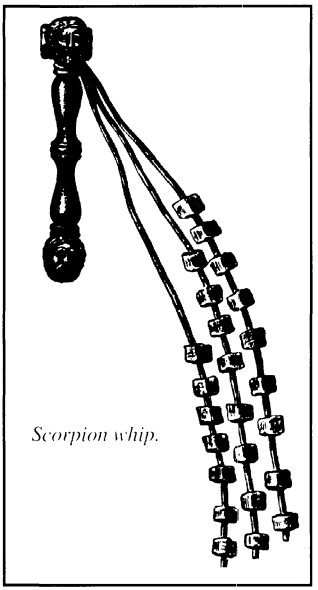
"He could have reminded Jeroboam before all the people that he himself had been only too glad to be an instrument of this heavy service originally, when he was pleased to accept the position of overseer (see 1Kings 11:28). But Rehoboam failed to take advantage of that. There is usually a weak point in the armour of such place-seekers as Jeroboam, and in times of dispute it is always wise to quietly seek for any such weakness.

"Rehoboam asked the people to give him three days to think over their demands. To this they agreed. He then consulted with the counsellors who had been with his father Solomon. They were wise men, and realised that if the king did not give way he was faced with revolt. They urged that he accept the conditions set before him.

"But Rehoboam also had with him some younger advisers, men who had grown up with him and who liked to exercise power. They were arrogant, proud and inexperienced. They felt that to give way to the demands of the people was an evidence of weakness. They advised Rehoboam to reject the demands of the people. And this he agreed to do".

"Why should he act so foolishly?" asked Ann.

"We are not told," replied her father. "But perhaps the very presence of Jeroboam caused Rehoboam to act as he did. Verse 15 says that 'the cause was from Yahweh'. In other words, God used natural situations to bring about His purpose. The presence of Jeroboam must have antagonised Rehoboam who, in anger, was caused to make a false move. Thus, when the deputation of the people gathered before him three days later, certain that their reasonable request would be granted, they were roused to irreconcilable anger by the unreasonable



Scorpion whip.

attitude of the king. He answered them roughly. He made them feel the power of his position. 'My father did lade you with a heavy yoke, but I will add to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions', he declared."

"What are scorpions?" asked Joan.

"They are thought to be whips armed with sharp points and termed 'scorpions' because of the sting that they gave when used," explained her father. "Thus Rehoboam threatened to add to the pain of the sufferings of the people."

"This was the final act of tyranny as far as the people were concerned. Their anger was roused to such an extent that nothing Rehoboam could do would appease them. They called upon Jeroboam to become their leader, and rejected Rehoboam as king.

"Rehoboam attempted to quell the revolt. He sent Adoram to speak with the people. He could hardly have made a worse move. Adoram was over the tribute. He was the man in charge of collecting the taxes concerning which the people were complaining. They identified him with their complaints, for he had served under Solomon in the same capacity (2Sam. 20:24). His appearance among them incensed the people more. They took up rocks and stoned him to death. Rehoboam could see that they were in a very ugly mood, and that he himself was in danger of attack. Hastily getting into his chariot, he made speed to Jerusalem. Back in Shechem the people appointed Jeroboam as king.

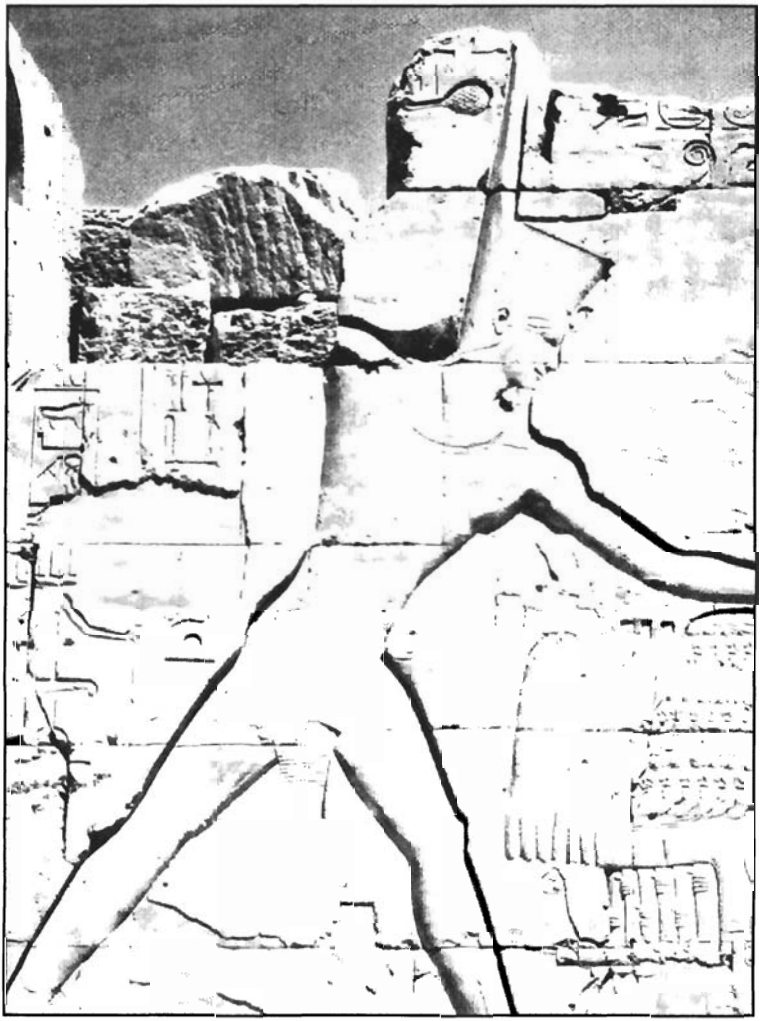
"In Jerusalem, Rehoboam meditated revenge. He gathered together a large army of warriors, and prepared to invade the north. He might have succeeded in his attempt, but Yahweh did not permit it. He sent Shemaiah the prophet to warn Rehoboam against the venture because it would surely fail. 'This thing is from Yahweh,' Shemaiah told the king. Rehoboam heeded the advice of the prophet and recalled the army.

"Thus Israel was divided into two nations, never again to be united until Christ returns," concluded Mr. Phillips.

"Does the Bible teach that the division will then be healed?" asked Peter

"Yes," replied his father. "Ezekiel 37:22 declares: '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." When Jesus Christ returns the great schism will be healed. In fact, the Prince of Peace will solve all the problems that have perturbed and divided men, both internationally, personally and ecclesially. Usually the divisions that have occurred among men, nations, or ecclesias have been the result of headstrong folly such as was exhibited on this occasion by Rehoboam. But now, time is up for our discussion this evening and I have work to do."



Chapter Two

JEROBOAM STRENGTHENS HIS HOLD ON ISRAEL

Jeroboam attained his ambition when he was appointed king. But now he became obsessed by a fear that his power might be taken from him. He set himself the task of widening the breach between the two kingdoms, and severing the links that held them together. This caused him to violate the principles of God, for all the ordinances of divine worship were to unite the people of Israel as one.

Jeroboam contrived means to stop the people assembling at the Temple in Jerusalem even for worship. He lived in Egypt for a long time, and now introduced the worship of Egypt to hold the people to him. He set up golden calves in Beth-el and Dan, and proclaimed to the people: "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt."

People are ever ready to find excuses to avoid their responsibilities to God, so that when Jeroboam suggested it was "too much" for them to go to Jerusalem, they readily agreed.

He thus introduced fleshly diplomacy and cunning into a situation that should have been met by courage and faith.

This became the great sin of Jeroboam. He is recorded in Scripture as "the man who made Israel to sin."

Thus headstrong folly brought division in Israel, and blind ambition led to apostasy. All this had come from the sin of Solomon in introducing "strange women" with their false worship into Israel. For the mother of Rehoboam was Naamah the Ammonitess (1Kings 11:1).

The Rebuke of the Nameless Prophet (1Kings 13)

Jeroboam set up two golden calves at Dan and Beth-el, and built a temple for the new worship. He made priests of the common people, for the priests and Levites appointed by the Law refused to engage in this false worship. Thus Jeroboam was led more and more to sin against God (see 1Kings 12:31; Num. 3:10; Ezek. 44:7-8).

This false worship caused Beth-el (which means "House of God") to be known as Beth-aven ("House of Shame"— Hos. 4:15; 5:8; 10:5). It became the cause of the punishment that God later brought upon the nation.

Jeroboam ordained a feast to be held in the eighth month, at which time his new altar and temple would be consecrated and opened for worship. At the appointed time, a great concourse of people assembled at Beth-el to witness the ceremony.

The king stood before the people as high priest, full of the importance of the occasion and his position. The sacrifices were laid upon the altar, and the newly appointed priests stood at their selected places. Everything was proceeding as the king desired; he was very pleased with the arrangements of the day, and the way they were being carried out.

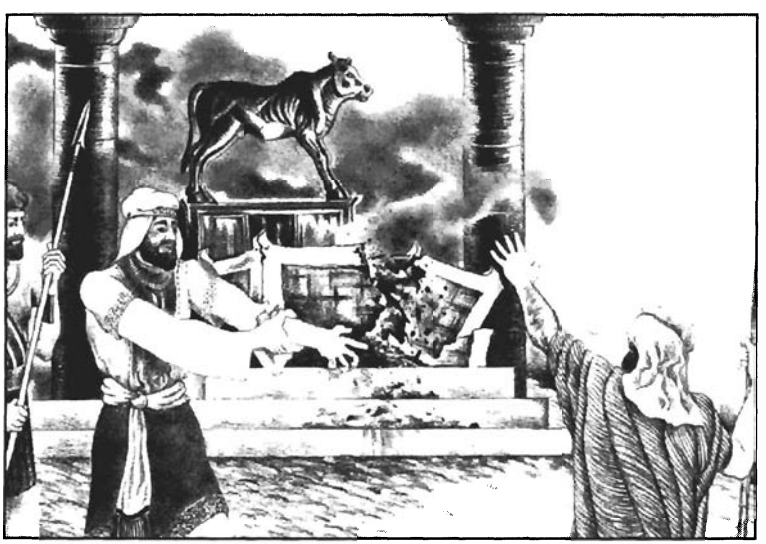
But suddenly they were rudely interrupted.

A man pushed his way through the crowd that stood watching the proceedings, and standing before the altar, he spoke to it, ignoring the king, the priests, and the people.

"O altar, altar!" he exclaimed. "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. And here is a sign that my words will come to pass. Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out."

These words of the prophet from Judah made Jeroboam very angry. He was incensed that the prophet should condemn the worship he had set up. He was even more angry at the reference to the house of David which he hated. The prophet had ruined the celebrations of the day, and all the king's joy had turned to disappointment. Filled with wrath, he lifted his arm, and, pointing to the prophet, commanded his soldiers to take him captive.

But as he did so, Yahweh moved against him. The king found that his arm was paralysed; he could not move it, nor bring it back to his



In Bethel, Jeroboam's idolatrous altar is cursed and smitten and his defiant hand shrivelled up.

side. He stood there, speechless, with his stiffened arm still pointing at the prophet from Judah.

Silence had fallen on the astounded crowd that just before had been so stirred with excitement.

Then, suddenly, the altar rent, and the ashes of the fire poured out upon the ground.

It was the sign of which the prophet had spoken. The king realised that this indeed, was a prophet of Yahweh. He was completely helpless with his hand outstretched before him.

"Pray for me, and intreat Yahweh that He will heal me," he pleaded the prophet. The prophet did so, and the arm of the king was healed.

There was no doubt that the prophet had a divine commission.

Among the priests that Jeroboam had appointed, there was nobody with such authority and power as this prophet. The king hoped that he might induce him to stay with him and act as his priest or prophet.

"Come home with me and refresh thyself, and I will give you a reward," he said to the prophet.

But the man answered: "If you gave me half your house, I would not go in with you, neither would I eat bread nor drink water in this place; for Yahweh charged me, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that you came in."

The prophet had been commanded that he was not to accept the hospitality of such a wicked people, that after conducting his mission, he was to shake the very dust of the place from off his shoes (Cp. Acts 13:51).

Tragic Death of the Nameless Prophet

Having shown the people the will of God, and having warned the king of the folly of his ways, the prophet made ready to return.

But close to Beth-el there dwelt an old prophet of Yahweh, who mourned the evils that had come on the northern kingdom. His sons had been present at the opening ceremony of the temple of Jeroboam and returned home full of excitement at all they had seen and heard. They outlined to their father the exciting incidents of the day; how the king's service had been interrupted by the prophet, how the king had been rendered helpless by paralysis, how the altar had broken in two as the prophet had decreed.

Their father was anxious to meet this man of God from the south. He told his sons to saddle his ass and then rode out to find the prophet. He found him sitting under the shadow of an oak, tired out after the exciting events of the day.

The old prophet invited him to return to his home and refresh himself, but, faithful to God, the nameless prophet refused. "I am not permitted to do so," he told him. "Yahweh declared that I must not eat

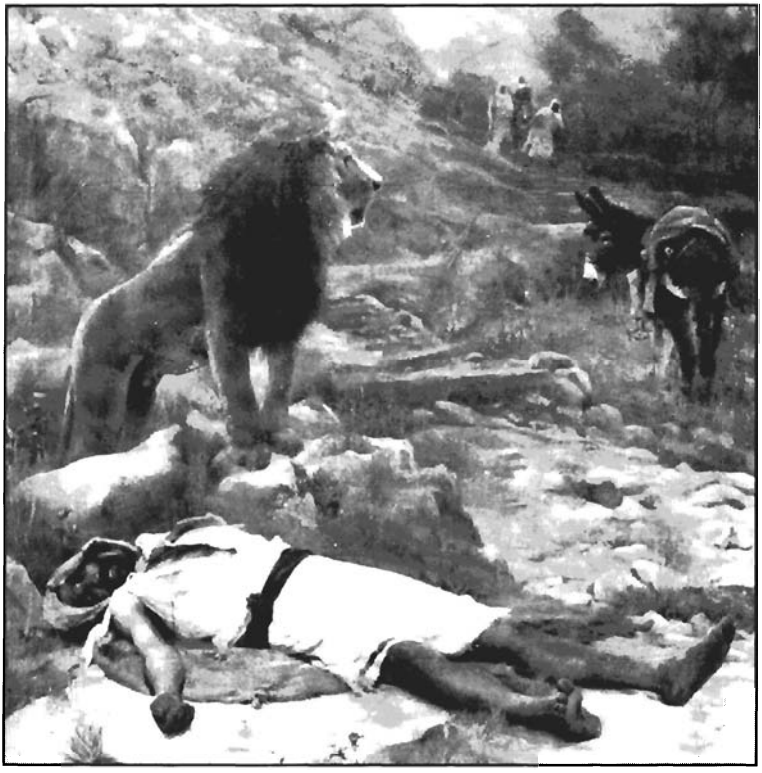
bread nor drink water in this place, nor return by the same way by which I entered the land."

But the old prophet replied: "I am a prophet also as you are; and an angel spake unto me, saying, Bring him back with you into your house, that he may eat bread and drink water."

This was a lie. But the prophet from Judah did not know that. Nevertheless, he had received a command from God, and should have strictly obeyed it. But he was weary, and desired to be refreshed. He therefore accepted what the old prophet told him, mainly because he wanted to believe it. He eagerly returned with the old prophet, and partook of the refreshments placed before him.

But suddenly, the spirit of God came upon the old prophet, and he called out: "Thus saith Yahweh. Because you have disobeyed His instructions, and have not kept His commandments, but have returned to eat bread and drink water in this place, you will die and will not be buried in the sepulchre of your fathers."

The prophet was not told how and when he would die. Shortly afterwards he left the house, little realising that his punishment was to come swiftly and suddenly upon him.



The prophet had not gone very far when suddenly a lion leaped out upon him and slew him. But the lion did not molest the ass upon which the prophet rode, nor did it eat the carcase of the man. Instead it stood guard over the man and the ass.

This most unusual sight attracted the attention of some men passing by that way. They went into the city and told others about it. It came to the ears of the old prophet and he remembered the words that God had forced him to utter to his guest. Hastily saddling his ass, he rode out to the place of the tragedy. He saw the prophet lying dead on the wayside, with the lion standing guard, and the ass standing by. Sorrowfully he lifted the dead body of his friend on to his ass to carry him into the city for burial. The lion did not attempt to harm him, but when he saw the body of the prophet thus cared for, trotted away.

The old prophet took the body into his own sepulchre for burial. He commanded his sons that when he died they were to lay his body alongside that of the prophet from Judah.

The fate of the prophet shows how serious it is to disobey the commands of God. We must seek out His will and do it. Some people think that it does not matter what we believe or do, so long as we are sincere and earnest in the things we believe, and so long as we do good to others. But the lesson of this nameless prophet shows that we must be careful to follow exactly what God would have us do — even if others tell us otherwise.

Many years later, Paul warned the believers in the province of Galatia: "Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which ye have received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8-9).

Paul could have had this incident of the two prophets in mind when he wrote those words. They teach the importance of seeking out God's will in everything, and following His Word (Isa. 66:2). How important it is that we seek out God's truth, and that we obey His commands. Jesus Christ instructed his disciples: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel; he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved." We must believe; we must be baptised if we would please God.

But so many people are like the nameless prophet: they do not think these things really matter. But if they continue to ignore the instructions of God, as did the prophet, they will reap the punishment of death. The Bible teaches: "Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption" (Gal. 6:7-8).

The story of the nameless prophet points the lesson of that teaching.

There are three chapters of the Bible that teach this lesson, and they are all numbered 13. They are Deuteronomy 13; 1Kings 13;

Ezekiel 13.

The first one warns against those teachers who lead men astray from the true worship of God, and are able to perform great signs, or point to a large following as proof of what they teach (vv. 1-3).

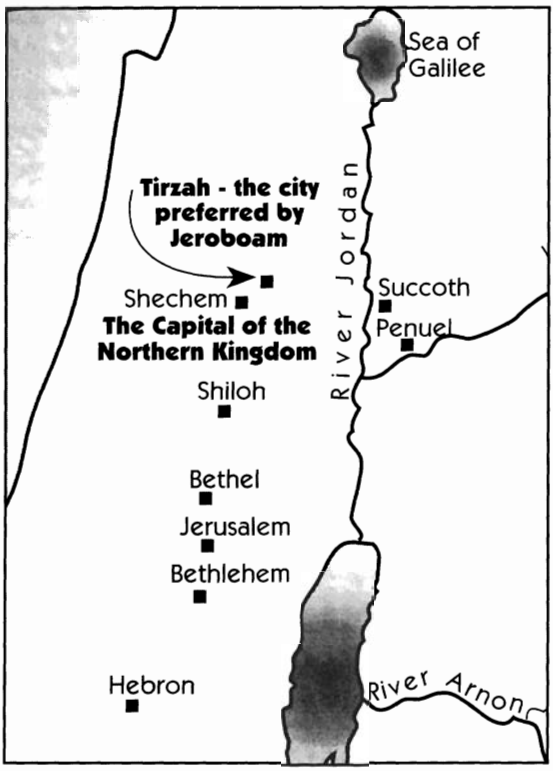
The second one gives the story of the nameless prophet.

The third one heaps condemnation on those "foolish prophets" who "follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing" (v. 3), and who lead people astray with their false teaching.

It is our responsibility to seek God's way in truth. That is how "true worshippers" worship Him, and that is how Yahweh desires them to worship Him (John 4:23).

How a Blind Prophet Showed that He Could See

The nameless prophet of Judah had warned Jeroboam that his folly would result in tragedy for his house. At the time, Jeroboam had made Shechem his capital, but soon afterwards he changed it for Tirzah (meaning "pleasantness"), a beautiful spot about 13 miles north of Shechem, which commanded a pass that led to the Jordan valley.



Some time later, his son Abijah fell sick, and Jeroboam feared that he would die. He had no one to turn to. He realised that the priests he had appointed in the northern kingdom could not help him. But in the city of Shiloh, there dwelt a prophet, named Ahijah. This was the prophet who had told Jeroboam that he would become king, and he felt that Ahijah would be able to help him in his distress.

But he also

feared that the prophet would condemn him for setting up the gods of Egypt in the cities of Dan and Bethel.

He therefore told his wife to disguise herself, and, taking a present to the prophet, to enquire regarding the sickness of their son.

But God revealed the intention of Jeroboam to Ahijah the prophet.

When the Queen, Jeroboam's wife, reached the door of Ahijah's house, she was startled to hear the voice of the prophet from within calling upon her to enter: "Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam: why do you make out to be another person? I have sad tidings for you!"

She was amazed that the prophet should know who she was, and was thus able to address her though he had not seen her.

When she entered the house, she found that the prophet was blind. Her amazement increased. In spite of his blindness, in spite of her disguise, even before she had entered the house, the blind prophet knew who she was!

She realised that whatever he said was from a Greater than he. And she heard evil tidings.

She was told that her son would die before she returned home, but she was instructed not to mourn for him because it was better that he die than live to experience the judgments about to fall on the house of Jeroboam. He would be buried in peace and all Israel would mourn his death because of the degree of good that he alone of Jeroboam's house had revealed. As for the rest of Jeroboam's house, it would be completely destroyed because of its great wickedness, and nothing would prevent this terrible judgment. The house of Jeroboam had proved itself unworthy of the honor paid it and would be completely overthrown. Jeroboam's wife was further told that the man who would destroy the house of Jeroboam and reign in its stead was even then alive. As for the northern kingdom itself, the prophet told her that God was determined to punish it for so foolishly following the king in his wickedness. It would be overthrown and the people taken captive into a foreign land.

The Queen returned with these evil tidings, with her heart burdened with sorrow. What suffering men bring upon themselves! God had given Jeroboam great opportunities, but foolishly and deliberately he had rejected the counsel of God and introduced a great sin into Israel that caused the nation to depart from the true worship. He could have been a wise and great man, but he is recorded in history as a foolish man. Let us see that we use our opportunities in life wisely.

When the Queen reached her house, her son died as the prophet had warned. They buried him, and all Israel mourned for him.

His death was but the beginning of trouble for Jeroboam.

Chapter Three

DIFFICULTIES IN BOTH NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN KINGDOMS

The Phillips' family had read 1Kings 14 which records the deaths of both Jeroboam and Rehoboam, and shows how that gradually the breach between the kingdoms of Judah and Israel was widened, and conditions in both nations worsened.

"I find it very hard to follow this history," said Ann as she puzzled over the readings for the day.

"It's more difficult because some of the history is recorded in Kings, and some in Chronicles", remarked Graeham.

"That is true," commented Mr. Phillips, "but it is very important to compare the two records side by side to gain the true picture. In some cases, as I will show you later, the book of Chronicles reveals only one side of the character of a man, and we might be disposed to think of him very highly, whereas in Kings another side of his character is presented. I will give you examples of this as we study a little more closely the record of the men who reigned in Judah. This treatment reminds us that we sometimes only see half the picture. A man might appear worthy in our eyes, and yet hide from view his true character which is known only to God. That is why it is important to understand the reason for the two books, and to carefully compare in both the details about any particular person or situation."

"Verse 19 says that the rest of the acts of Jeroboam are recorded in the book of Chronicles," said Peter. "Is that the Book of Chronicles in the Bible?"

"In verse 29 similar words are spoken of the acts of Rehoboam," added Joan.

"The Book of Chronicles referred to here is not that found in the Bible," explained Mr. Phillips, "but a record of the reigns of the kings which was kept by the official historian or scribe. The complete histories of the kings were kept in these national records, but the Bible books of Kings and Chronicles only record those incidents which God wants us to know, and which illustrate the true characters of the men referred to, or His purpose with them."

"It is all very confusing," said Ann.

"It might help if you make a list of the kings of the two kingdoms, and write it in your Bibles," suggested Mr. Phillips. "You will then see at a glance what kings were reigning at the same time in the two kingdoms. Here is a list of the Kings of Judah and Israel at the time we are now studying:

IN JUDAH
Rehoboam ..... reigned 17 years
Abijam .....reigned 3 years
Asa ..... reigned 41 years
= 61 years

IN ISRAEL at the same time
Jeroboam ..... reigned 22 years
Nadab ..... reigned 2 years
Baasha .....reigned 24 years
Elah ..... reigned 2 years
Zimri ..... reigned 1 week
Omri ..... reigned 12 years
= 62 years

"From this you see that Jeroboam of Israel outlived the reigns of both Rehoboam and Abijam of Judah."

"Yet the death of Jeroboam is recorded before that of Rehoboam," said Graeham pointing to verses 20, 31.

"Yes," replied his father, "We must exercise a little care in setting out the history properly."

"Rehoboam reigned badly according to v.22," said Ann.

"For three years he reigned well," replied Mr. Phillips. "We have the record of his early reign in 2Chronicles 11. "He obeyed the instructions of the prophet Shemaiah who prohibited him from invading the kingdom of Jeroboam (2Chron. 11:4); he fortified the strong cities of Judah in order to protect the people against any invasion (v. 5); he encouraged those of the northern kingdom who desired to worship Yahweh in truth to settle in the southern nation so that it was strengthened by an influx of faithful men and women (2Chron. 11:16-17); he dealt wisely with his children, training them to take up positions of authority throughout his kingdom, for he knew he could put every confidence and trust in them (2Chron. 11:23). So his hold on the kingdom was strengthened."

"He seems a pretty good king to me," commented Peter. "Why should the Book of Kings say that he brought evil on the nation?"

"He did well for three years", said his father (see 2Chron. 11:17), "but then he drifted from God. He repeated the mistake of his father in marrying many wives, and from them he had a numerous family, no less than 28 sons—".

"That would give him a headache," interrupted Ann with a glance at her brothers.

"— and 60 daughters" (2Chron. 11:21).

"That would give the whole of Israel a headache, I should think!" responded Peter.

"All went well with Rehoboam for three years," continued Mr. Phillips ignoring the interruptions, "but as he found his power

increasing with the influx of people from the north, and feeling secure in the strong forts he built all around his borders, he forgot Yahweh, and forsook His law. His example was followed by the people round about, and gradually the most evil conditions developed. We have read of these tonight in this chapter. He allowed the most depraved pagan worship to be set up on all sides. Instead of the pure worship of Yahweh, there were found all kinds of evil practices. Groves were set up as items of worship, and impure rites celebrated thereat."

"Excuse me interrupting," said Graeham. "But I do not understand what you mean when you say that 'groves were set up.' Are not groves clusters of trees?"

"No," replied his father. "Notice that in the chapter we read this evening, it mentions that 'groves were set up' in both the northern and the southern kingdom; v. 15 speaks of Israel 'making groves'. The word 'groves' appears as a translation for the Hebrew word '*Asherah.*' However, students believe this word denotes the wooden symbol of a goddess, not a clump of trees. In the Revised Version it is translated as *Asherah* or *Asherim* (the plural). Apparently the most evil practices were indulged in at the worship of these wooden images."

"In v. 22 this is said to have 'provoked Yahweh to jealousy'," said Graeham. "That seems a strange expression to use."

"Not really," answered his father. "Yahweh represents Himself as the husband of Israel (Isa. 54:5), so that the children of Israel constitute His sons. Therefore, for Israel to turn to other forms of worship was accounted as a form of spiritual adultery, and to indicate this, that form of expression is used in the New Testament for those who are found as friends of the world, are described as 'adulteresses' for they have left their true association with God, in order to find their pleasure with the world which is His enemy (James 4:4). The use of such language shows that God demands of His true worshippers, an undivided loyalty to His principles. In Israel that was not found at the time of which we are speaking. Therefore, to show to the people the enormity of their conduct, Yahweh represents Himself as being 'provoked to jealousy,' by their faithlessness. And as sin brought suffering in earlier times so it did now. This is shown in 2Chronicles 12:2 which Joan will read for us."

Joan read: "It came to pass, that in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, *because they had transgressed against Yahweh.*"

Mr. Phillips continued: "Shishak was the king of Egypt who had earlier sheltered Jeroboam when he had fled from Solomon (1Kings 11:40)," explained Mr. Phillips. "Archaeologists have discovered his name on the monuments of Egypt. He is said to have been of Ethiopian origin, and it is thought that, with the support of the military caste



Egyptian inscription on the Temple of Karnak.

of Egypt, he dethroned the Pharaoh who gave his daughter to Solomon (1Kgs. 3:1). He thus looked upon Judah as an enemy and took the first opportunity to invade the land. He commemorated his attack on Judah, which Joan has read about, by recording it in stone, in a great pictorial inscription on the wall of the temple of Karnak which can be seen today. Great preparations were made for the attack. A powerful army of 1200 chariots, 60,000 cavalry, and a huge host of infantry drawn from Egypt and the surrounding countries, including his own nation of Ethiopia, were gathered together. At its head Shishak invaded Judah (2Chron. 12:3). God was with him in this attack, and city after city fell before his power. At last he stood before the capital of Jerusalem. Inside the city, Rehoboam, with the princes of his realm, had taken refuge. They were determined to make a last stand against the Egyptian forces. But the prophet Shemaiah warned them that resistance was hopeless. 'You have forsaken Yahweh,' he told the king, 'and Yahweh has now given you into the hands of Shishak.'

"The king and his princes recognised the folly they had committed.

" 'Yahweh is righteous,' they confessed humbly.

"This attitude pleased Yahweh.

" 'I will not destroy Judah at this time,' He declared through the prophet, 'but will grant them some deliverance. Nevertheless they shall be the servants of Shishak that they may know My service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries' (2Chron. 12:8)".

"What does the phrase 'know My service' mean?" asked Graeham.

"It means that they might compare how much easier is service to Yahweh than service to Egypt. By bringing the nation under the power of Shishak, God taught them the lesson of the sojourn in Egypt all over again.

"On the advice of Shemaiah," continued Mr. Phillips, "Rehoboam submitted to the demands of Shishak. Jerusalem was thrown open to the invader, and he was offered an expensive tribute which drew much of the wealth from the city. Among the things taken away at the time, were the shields of gold that Solomon had made, and which were kept in the beautiful Palace of the Forest of Lebanon (1Kings 10:16-17). These were replaced by shields of brass. These shields of gold were used by the Guard of Honour that conducted the king in ceremony when he ascended to the Temple for worship. Gold is the symbol of faith (1Pet. 1:7), so that these shields represented the defence of faith. But now they were replaced by shields of brass, which is used in the Bible as a symbol of the flesh. Faith had given way to confidence in the flesh in the reign of Rehoboam."

"Did Rehoboam learn a lesson from his defeat?" asked Ann as her father paused.

"Yes, we read that when he humbled himself 'things went well in Judah'." "The margin of my Bible reads a little differently," said Peter. "It says, 'and yet there were good things in Judah'."

"That is doubtless a better reading," commented his father. "There were many faithful men in Judah, and much that was good, and for this reason, God overlooked the full measure of Judah's iniquity. However, there were other troubles that the people also experienced at the time."

"What were they?" asked Peter.

"We have to return to our reading for this evening (1Kings 14) for a statement of these troubles. There we read that 'there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all their days' (v. 30). A miserable state of things existed in what was once a united nation (in Acts 7:38 it is called the *Ecclesia*). The nation was weakened by division, and laid open to invasion. Wars and disputings spread over this land where there should have been peace. Families were divided by the split between north and south; political expediency took the place of Divine worship; apathy and error abounded. This was a grief of mind to those who truly loved Jerusalem and the Temple worship. Division in Israel led to hatred, bitterness, war. Forts were built, standing armies established, barriers erected, and every attempt to destroy unity explored. Israel had commenced to walk the road that leads to ruin. Yet Yahweh was for peace. He had commanded: 'Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren' (2Chron. 11:4). It is the duty of all true Israelites to 'contend earnestly for the faith' (Jude), but the warfare that now broke out between the north and south was only designed to sustain sectional interests and not to maintain the faith. Care must be exercised that our contention for the faith does not descend to mere contention over the so-called rights of dominant personalities or mere sectional issues apart from the fundamentals of the

Truth. In Israel such things led to hatred, bitterness and irreconcilable warfare."

"It seems remarkable that a man with such opportunities as Rehoboam had, should waste them as he did," said Graeham.

"The cause of Rehoboam's failure is given in 2Chronicles 12:14," replied Mr. Phillips. "He 'did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek Yahweh.' Notice how the margin renders this: 'He fixed not his heart to seek Yahweh.' The phrase implies that he was not constant in his attitude, his faith was without objective. It reminds us that we must set ourselves a purpose in regard to the Truth, and aim for it. We cannot just drift along in the things of God. The Bible exhorts that 'with purpose of heart' we must seek the Lord (Acts 11:23); it calls upon us to set the 'mark of the high calling of Christ Jesus' before us and aim to attain unto it (Phil. 3:14). This Rehoboam did not do. He should have taken heed to the Law of Moses, and he would not have made the mistake he did."

"What part of the Law are you referring to?" asked Peter.

"There are many exhortations in the Law he should have heeded, but the one I am referring to now is that contained in Deut. 32:46-47, 'Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day... for it is not a vain thing for you; BECAUSE IT IS YOUR LIFE; and through this thing ye shall PROLONG YOUR DAYS in the land.' To set one's heart upon the things of God implies a fixed purpose which Rehoboam did not have. Therefore he was driven by circumstances to a course of action that failed to please God. As a result of this he brought trouble upon himself and upon the nation. After an unsatisfactory reign of seventeen years he died, and Abijah his son, whom he had trained for the position (2Chron. 12:16), reigned in his stead."

Abijah's Short Reign

"Abijah did not reign for long," said Mr. Phillips as he continued his discussion of the daily readings of the Bible with his family. "His father Rehoboam had carefully educated him to be king, but in doing so he had overlooked the methods that God had designed for the education of kings on David's throne (see Deut. 17:14-20). The new king proved unsuited for the position and did not last long. Though man proposes many things, it is God who disposes and regulates them. However, in the short reign of Abijah, we have some very interesting details."

"You are calling him Abijah," said Peter thinking that he had caught out his father, "but you must be making a mistake. He is called Abijam in 1Kings 15:1."

"His name is given as Abijah in 2Chronicles 13:1," replied his father.

"Why is that?" asked Peter.

"We are not told, but often, in old time, the names given to men were changed when the circumstances of their lives altered."

"Was that the case with Abijam?"

"Yes, we have two accounts of his life in the Bible. One shows him as a most worthy king, the other as a wicked king."

"Then the Bible contradicts itself in regard to him?"

"Not really," replied Mr. Phillips. "One record (that of 2Chronicles 13) shows us the king as the people saw him, and as he revealed himself at the beginning of his short reign; the other record (that of 1Kings 15) presents him from the standpoint of God with all his motives revealed for what they really were. One shows us the ideal Abijah, the other the real Abijam."

"Has the change of name any significance?" asked Graeham.

"Yes," replied his father. "Abijah signifies: 'A Father is Yahweh,' but Abijam means 'A father of the West.' When he first came to the throne, Abijah acted with courage and faith, but afterwards he turned from God. Thus he turned his back upon God who is described as the Sun of Israel which rises from the east (Psa. 84:11). In a spiritual sense he looked to the west for his direction — to the place of darkness! There are important lessons to be learned from the two records of this man. They teach that a man cannot be judged righteous for one act of faith or courage, but only if he endures consistently unto the end. This Abijah did not do. Let us first consider the young king as he set out seemingly to do the divine will, and to obey the instructions of God".

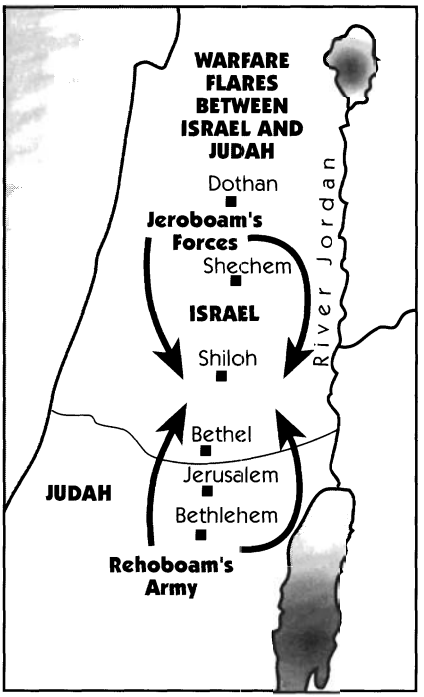
The Ideal Abijah Mr. Phillips continued his explanation: "The state of friction that existed between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, flared into actual warfare when Abijah came to the throne. The southern kingdom had grown stronger through the steady influx of people from the north who desired to worship at the Temple (1Kings 12:17; 2Chron. 15:9). They realised the importance of the throne of David established in Jerusalem, and gave their support to Abijah. Thus whereas Rehoboam had been able to raise only 180,000 soldiers (2Chron. 11:1), Abijah found himself at the head of an army of 400,000 men.

"He decided to invade the northern kingdom, even though Shemaiah the prophet had forbidden his father to do so.

"But he found Jeroboam ready to meet him.

"As his army streamed over the border between Benjamin and Ephraim, at a place called Zemaraim or 'The Two Cuttings,' it was intercepted by a powerful force of 800,000 men with Jeroboam at their head.

"Abijah found himself in great danger. He was outnumbered two to one, and opposed by a skilful and energetic leader in Jeroboam. He



decided to weaken the confidence of the men following Jeroboam. Standing on a rising overlooking the army of Jeroboam where his voice could carry and thus be heard, he addressed the king and the people of Israel: 'Hear me, Jeroboam and all Israel,' he called. 'Yahweh gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, and to his sons by a covenant of salt, but Jeroboam, the servant of Solomon, rebelled against his lord, and gathering to himself a company of worthless men, strengthened himself against Rehoboam when he was young and tenderhearted, and could not withstand them. And now you think to withstand the kingdom of Yahweh in the hand of the sons of David. You have a great multitude with you, but you have not God with you; only the golden calves which Jeroboam made for gods. You have cast out the true priests and the Levites, and have made priests of the common people. We have not forsaken Yahweh in that fashion. We still worship according to the Law. The burnt offering is offered every day, incense ascends unto heaven as it has been appointed by the Law, and we try to keep its commands. Besides all this, we have God Himself for our Captain, and His priests with their trumpets to sound the alarm before them. In fighting us you therefore fight Him. Do not do so, for you will not prosper!'*

"This speech must have made a great impression upon the people following Jeroboam. It perhaps weakened many for the fight that was impending. To that extent Abijah's tactics succeeded. But Jeroboam was also busy. He used the opportunity of delay caused by Abijah's speech, to draw off part of his troops and surround the army of Judah.

* In his address before the battle of Zemaraim, Abijah posed as the champion of the Davidic covenant, though his heart was not perfect with Yahweh. He conveniently forgot that the covenant to David's sons was conditional (Psa. 132:12; Psa. 89:30-32) and that neither his father nor his grandfather had kept the conditions. In a literal sense Rehoboam could not be called "young and tenderhearted" when he came to the throne at 41 years of age (2Chron. 12:13), but Abijah doubtless meant that he was inexperienced, which, in fact, he was. A "covenant of salt" is a permanent agreement, for salt is a preservative, and invariably was used in sacrifice (Lev. 2:13).

Abijah thus found himself in a most dangerous position. He was surrounded by the enemy. But he was not deterred. He besought Yahweh that He would help His people in that time of need. The priests also sounded with the trumpets, which was the God-given pledge that He would remember them in time of war (Num. 10:9; 31:6). Thus encouraged, the men of Judah gave a shout, and, calling upon God to help them, they boldly attacked the enemy who heavily outnumbered them.

"God fought with Judah that day, and a great victory was the result. Much spoil was taken by Abijah, and important cities close to the border fell into his hands. He returned to Jerusalem well satisfied with the results of victory.

"On the other hand, Jeroboam suffered a terrible defeat. He returned a disappointed man. People were tiring of his rule, and the overthrow of his army by the much smaller force of Abijah was a disgrace from which he never fully recovered.

"But Abijah's victory also proved a delusion. He 'waxed mighty' in consequence of it (2Chron. 13:21). He became conceited with success. He had been greater in adversity than in prosperity, because now he became elated with his success, and fell into a state of wickedness such as is recorded in the book of Kings.

The Real Abijam "In 1Kings 15:1-8 the real Abijam is set before us," said Mr. Phillips as he continued to outline the record of this king to his family.

"We are told that he was the son of Maachah, whose name means 'oppression.' She was favoured by Rehoboam above his other wives (2Chron. 11:18-21), but proved to be a dominating, self-willed woman whose influence was for evil during the reigns of three kings: Rehoboam, Abijam and Asa (1Kings 15:13). She introduced pagan gods into Israel, together with the vile worship that went with the religion of the groves*.

"Abijam followed in the way of his father, favouring his wicked mother, and setting a bad example to the people whom he governed. We read in 1Kings 15:3 that 'his heart was not perfect with Yahweh.' Strong's Concordance will show you that the word in the Hebrew here translated 'perfect,' is *shalem,* from the same root as is derived the Hebrew word for 'peace.' The word really means 'to be at one,' for true peace is being at one with God. Christ can give us that peace (John 14:27), a peace that will cause us ultimately to be absolutely 'at one' with God and His Son (Jhn. 17:21).

"That peace, that unity of outlook and purpose with God, Abijam lacked. Though he appeared to the people to be a man of faith and

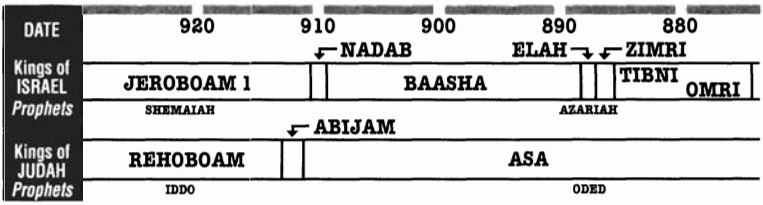
* The R.V. renders "an idol in a grove" (1 Kings 15:13) as "an abominable image for an Asherah". The form of religion thus suggested indicates the most impure rites and orgies, such as were common among some pagan forms of worship.

courage, God could read his heart. He knew his true character. Despite his appearance of righteousness, he was so evil in the sight of God that He would have left him without descendants but for the wonderful promise that He had made with David.

"After a short reign of three years, Abijam died, and Asa his son reigned in his stead. There is a very interesting comment upon the reign of Abijam contained in 2Chron. 13:22. It states: 'The rest of the acts of Abijah, and his ways, and *his sayings* are written in the story of the prophet Iddo.' The emphasis upon 'his sayings' implies that Abijah was a man of words not deeds; he was excellent at saying what men should do, but not doing it himself. There are many characters like Abijam who talk a lot but do little, who appear righteous but whom God will finally judge. We can learn by the examples set us in the Scripture to avoid their ways.

"Some two years later (cp. 1Kings 15:9 with Ch. 14:20), Jeroboam the king of Israel, also died and Nadab his son reigned in his stead.

"The different kings that now followed one another in rapid succession make the record a little more difficult to follow," said Mr. Phillips as he concluded his talk upon the readings, "but there are some excellent lessons to be learned, and some most interesting and dramatic incidents to consider. We must leave it now, but will discuss these matters again another evening."



Chapter Four

ASA: A GOOD KING IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Asa: the Physician Asa, the son of Abijah, had been reared in an atmosphere of evil. His grandmother had introduced pagan worship into Jerusalem, and had assumed the title of the Leader.* His father had not given a very good example to his sons. But in spite of this bad example, Asa grew up to be a God-fearing man, to reign for 41 years over Judah during which five kings reigned in the northern kingdom of Israel: Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri and Omri.

Though a state of hostility existed between Israel in the north and Judah in the south (1Kings 15:32), there was no open conflict for ten years. The land had peace (2Chron. 14:1), and Asa was free to implement his religious policy. He did this with courage and firmness. He took steps to destroy the vile practices and evil worship that had been established, even though his strong-willed grandmother had been responsible for much of this. In fact, he seized the idol she had set up for worship and in the sight of all the people he took it to the dark and gloomy valley of the Kidron just outside Jerusalem, and after smashing it into pieces, he burnt it in the fire.

He then set about restoring the worship of Yahweh. He brought in the things that his father had dedicated from the spoils of the battle of Zemaraim (2Chron. 13) and delivered them up for service in the Divine worship (1Kings 15:15). On all sides, pagan worship was overthrown. A royal command was issued demanding that the people observe the divine law, and seek Yahweh in truth (2Chron. 14:4).

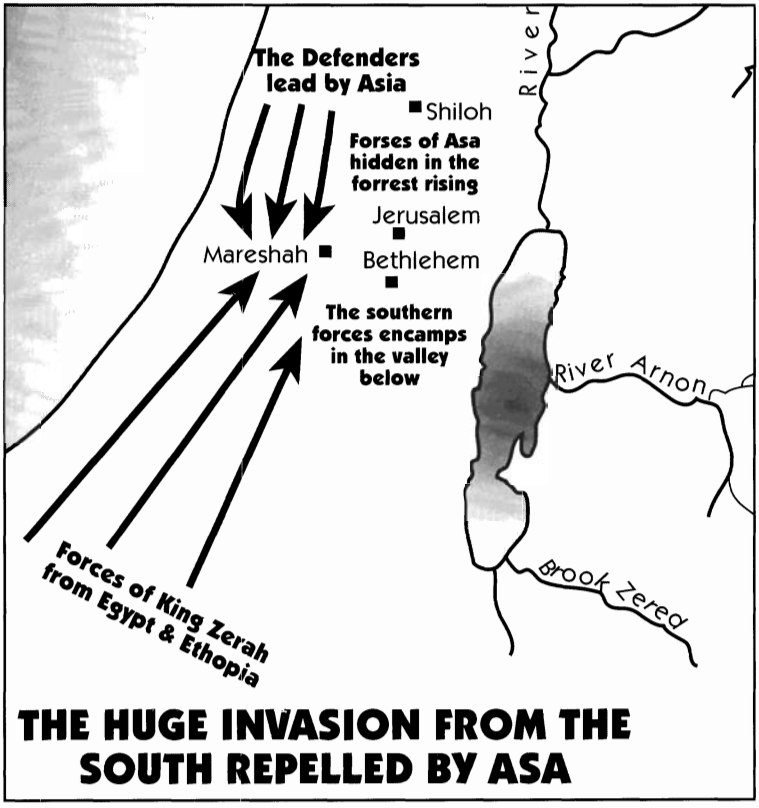
Having made Judah strong in a spiritual sense, he commenced to build up its military power. He strengthened the forts that lay along the border between Judah and Israel, and built up a large standing army ready for any emergency (2Chron. 14:6-8).

How Asa Overthrew a Huge Force of Ethiopians at Mareshah (2Chron. 14:9-15) It was just as well that Asa made these preparations, for Judah was soon to be put to the test. The land was invaded by a huge force of Ethiopians and Egyptians, the largest assembled army mentioned in Scripture. At their head was Zerah, thought to be the successor of Shishak, king of Egypt. His army numbered one million men, plus some 300 chariots, possibly representing the elite of the Egyptian army.

* The word translated "queen" in 1 Kings 15:13 is *Gebivrah*, or Leader. Maachah assumed this position in setting up the pagan worship she favoured. There have been women good and bad in Israel; some like Ruth, setting an example of humility and righteousness; some like Maachah, using their ability and position for evil.



Yahweh through Azariah encourages Asa to rid Israel of idolatry after their victory over the Ethiopians.



This huge host streamed over the southern border marching towards Mareshah, about 30 miles (45kms) southwest of Jerusalem, in the lowlands of Judah. Zerah was determined to destroy Asa's power. As news of the large-scale invasion flooded the country, fear broke out among the inhabitants of the kingdom.

Asa was a man of peace. He was unskilled in the arts of war. But he was also a man of faith and courage. He led his army against the invading Egyptians and Ethiopians, and took up his position in Zephathah at Mareshah. This was on a rising above the valley along which the huge force from Egypt was marching. Sheltered by the fortress above, Asa saw the tremendous army pass below. He could see that the sheer weight of numbers could destroy any opposition he might put into the field. He realised that, from a natural standpoint, he had no hope of defeating Zerah.

In such a time of emergency, God alone could help him.

In the sight of his army he prayed for divine assistance: "O Yahweh," he prayed, "It is nothing with Thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Yahweh our God; for we rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go against this multitude. O Yahweh, Thou art our God; let not man prevail against Thee!"

In the valley below, Zerah little knew the preparations being made to attack him from the heights above. On the other hand, the comparatively small army commanded by Asa was encouraged and strengthened by the courageous example and faithful prayer of the king.

In the Law of Moses, Yahweh had promised that a small band of faithful soldiers, fighting in His name, would be able to overcome a much greater force (Deut. 32:30). Asa's army was to have evidence of the truth of these words; it would be shown the benefits of courage when linked with faith in Yahweh.

At the right moment the command was given, and Asa's small army swept down from the heights above to attack the unsuspecting host in the valley below. The men of Judah fought in the name of Yahweh, and this gave them additional strength for the battle. The Ethiopians and Egyptians had no answer to the fierce attack. Fear took hold of them. They broke their ranks and fled before the Israelites, leaving much spoil behind them.

The victory was complete. Asa chased the Egyptian army to Gerar which was the border of the two countries, continuously attacking the enemy, and overthrowing many cities on the borders of Philistia and Egypt. This wonderful victory greatly impressed the nations round about. "The fear of Yahweh" came upon all the enemies of Israel. The power and influence of Egypt was greatly reduced. All fear of Egypt ceased in Judah. Subsequent kings of Judah entered into mutual alliance as equals with Egypt (2Kings 17:4; 18:21), though this trust in Egypt called forth the ire and condemnation of the prophets (Isa. 30:1).

The Encouraging Message of Azariah (2Chron. 15)

Asa returned from this wonderful victory full of excitement at the evidence of Yahweh's help and power.

He was met by Azariah the prophet, the son of Oded. Azariah signifies "Yahweh hath helped," and Oded means "He hath restored." His name was thus a fitting caption for the victory Asa had just experienced.

The prophet greeted the king in the name of Yahweh, and before all the army he delivered an important message: "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: 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!"

He reminded the people that the history of Israel records many times when the nation had departed from the true worship and had suffered in consequence. On such occasions they found no peace, but were troubled by invasion, war and defeat.

On the other hand, when they turned to Yahweh in their trouble, as Asa had done that day, God was found of them, and helped them.

Thus he reminded them that the history of Israel showed that sin inevitably brings suffering and trouble, whereas seeking God brought peace and true happiness.

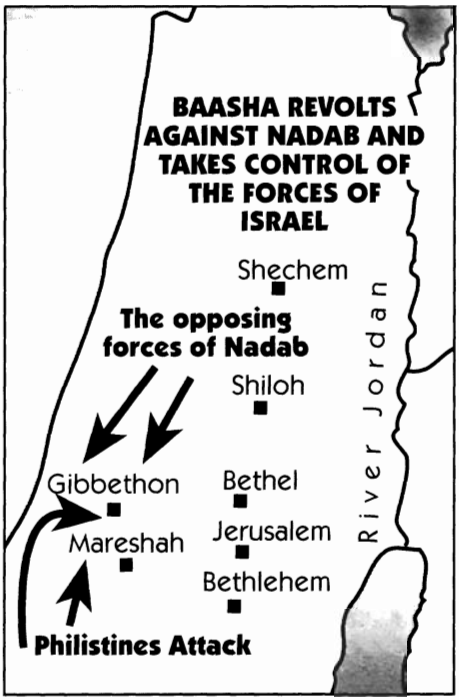
"Be ye strong therefore," declared the prophet to the king in the hearing of his victorious army, "and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded."

Asa was greatly encouraged by these public words of commendation. His enthusiasm for reform in Judah was increased. He put down false religion. To any in the northern kingdom who desired to worship at the Temple he issued invitations to settle in Judah. As a result a greater company of people were gathered to the southern kingdom, and considerably strengthened it at the expense of Israel in the north (2Chron.15:9).

Asa Incited the Anger of the Northern Kingdom

Fifteen years after the commencement of his reign, Asa reached the pinnacle of his power. He found himself at the head of a powerful nation that was growing in strength from day to day. He had instituted widespread reforms in divine worship, and had thus fulfilled his name of Asa (signifying "physician"), healing the nation of the spiritual sickness it had suffered under the reigns of previous kings.

In the third month of the 15th year of his reign, that is, at the time of Pentecost, when the people were required by the Law to gather together, he called for a great national convention, that the people might renew their covenant with their God. This was a most binding agreement. In accordance with the Law of Moses it stated that those



who would not seek God should be put to death (2Chron. 15:13; Deut. 17:2-7).

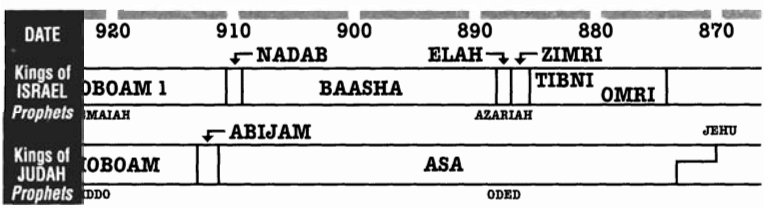
Asa's enthusiasm for the worship of Yahweh impressed the people. They rejoiced at the covenant into which they had entered, and determined that they would continue to seek Yahweh with all their heart.

And for a time all went well. The people had turned to God, and He in turn helped them. Conditions of peace and prosperity were found throughout Judah.

But this was not the state of things in the northern kingdom. When Jeroboam died, Nadab his son had ascended the throne. Under his reign, the troubles of Israel increased.

The people found that their problems were not solved by throwing aside their allegiance to the house of David. In fact, troubles increased. The nation suffered several reverses at the hands of others. It was weakened by hundreds of its citizens migrating to the southern kingdom where conditions were much better. Dissatisfaction was rife throughout the kingdom of the north. The Philistines had also gained strength and invaded the land, occupying the town of Gibbethon in Dan (1Kings 15:27).

One man in particular viewed these conditions with growing resentment. His name was Baasha. He decided to do something to stem the decline in Israel. He gathered some companions about him who were like-minded, but they found they could do nothing as long as Nadab reigned. They decided he must die. The conspiracy grew in strength, and the conspirators awaited the opportunity to strike.



It was not long in coming.

Nadab was forced to oppose the invading Philistines. At the head of an army he laid siege to Gibbethon. It was the opportunity Baasha wanted. He made his plans carefully, and in the confusion of battle arranged for the death of Nadab. Then, at the head of the army, he took control of the nation himself. To prevent any counter-revolution, he slew all the descendants of Jeroboam.*

Thus was fulfilled the prophecy of Ahijah who had predicted the tragic murder of Jeroboam's descendants (1Kings 14:10).

Baasha was not only a ruthless, but also an energetic leader and organiser. He was determined to correct the increasing weakness of the northern kingdom. One thing he knew he had to do quickly, and that was stop the migration of so many of his citizens to Judah in the south. It was demoralising to his people, and weakened his power.

But meanwhile, Asa was encouraging them to settle in Judah. The great national convention he had called together had brought further numbers from Israel to Judah.

Baasha now determined this must cease. About five miles north of Jerusalem was the Benjamite town of Ramah. It was situated on a height overlooking the pass through which the deserters of the north travelled to Judah. Baasha invaded Judah, occupied Ramah and fortified it, to prevent any passage between the two kingdoms. So he stopped any of his people moving towards his enemy. At the same time he probably entered into some agreement with Ben-hadad, king of Syria in the north, to assist him, if necessary.

Asa the peace-lover thus found a war on his hands that he did not desire. He sought means to avoid it, and in doing so did wrong.

The Bible teaches us there is a time for peace and a time for war. (Ecc. 3:8). It also shows there are wrong and right ways to seek peace. It commends peacemakers, but is careful to show that there must exist proper conditions for peace. Purity and righteousness must precede peace (James 3:17; Heb. 7:2). Asa sought for peace and harmony, but not in the way God desires. He sought it by alliance with a Gentile power, by establishing friendship with the world. In that he did wrong. Men of peace must learn to fight in "time of war" (Ecc. 3:8) and to remember that God established "enmity" between the cause of truth and the ways of error. It is in such a time of war when ways of righteousness or principles of truth are challenged, the seeking of peace can lead to sin.

It did in Asa's case.

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* There is an apparent contradiction in 2Chron.16:1. It speaks of Baasha coming up against Asa in the 36th year of his reign, whereas this war took place in the 16th year of his reign (cp. 1Kgs. 16:8). The word "reign" is translated from *malkut* elsewhere translated "kingdom" (cp. Num.24:7). The "thirty-sixth year of the kingdom of Asa" (i.e. the kingdom of Judah) would be the 16th year of his actual reign, for the kingdom over which he reigned was brought into existence at the time of the division between Rehoboam and Jeroboam.

He decided to buy the help of Ben-hadad king of Syria. Collecting all the treasures of the Temple together, he offered them as a bribe to Ben-hadad inviting him to invade the northern kingdom of Israel with the strong forces of Syria, and thus force Baasha to withdraw from the defensive fortress of Ramah that he was building.

Ben-hadad was happy to oblige Asa. He invaded the northern districts of Israel and laid them waste. Baasha found that he had two enemies ranged against him. He hurriedly left off fortifying Ramah to deal with the Syrian army which was ravaging the northern part of his realm.

Meanwhile Asa made a proclamation throughout Judah commanding all without exemption to gather together to destroy the fortress Baasha had erected at Ramah. He completely destroyed it, and in its place, at Geba and Mizpah, along the border between Israel and Judah,* strong fortresses were built by Asa to keep free and open the pass between the two nations. He not only strongly fortified these places, but dug wells for them, in order that they might have ample water in time of siege (Jer. 41:9).

Having thus strengthened his border he returned to Jerusalem well satisfied with all that he had done.

How Asa's Policy of Peace Brought War

But though Asa was pleased with his work, God was not. The king was suddenly confronted by the prophet Hanani who rebuked Asa for seeking peace in the wrong way. "Because you relied on the king of Syria, and not on Yahweh to help you, therefore the king of Syria has escaped out of your hand," the prophet told the king.

From these words it seems evident that Baasha had also been negotiating with the king of Syria to help him, but if Asa had proved faithful, God would have brought the power of Syria in subjection to Judah.

The prophet continued to condemn the king: "Were not the Ethiopians a huge host? And yet because you relied upon Yahweh He delivered them into your hand. The eyes of Yahweh run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect (i.e., at peace, or at one) toward Him. You have done foolishly; therefore from henceforth you shall have wars."

Asa was incensed at the words of the prophet which were probably spoken in public. All Judah had looked upon him as a faithful and courageous man; and now here was this prophet telling him he was

* The building of these forts along the common border between Israel and Judah shows how bitter was the civil war that raged between the north and south. Archaeologists have unearthed the remains of some of these forts, and have been impressed by the tremendous fortifications thus revealed. The frontier fort at Mizpeh had an enclosing wall some 26 feet thick. The enmity between these two kingdoms, which should have been united, was a very real thing in those days.

both a coward and faithless!

For many years he had reigned over a people at peace; on all sides he had received words of praise for all he had done; he had been commended by the prophet Azariah.

How dare Hanani now speak to him thus!

It was more than Asa could bear. Full of anger he commanded that the prophet should be imprisoned.

He thought that he could stop the voice of criticism and opposition by the use of force and cruelty but this only increased his troubles.

His foolish action was commented upon by others, and he found that he was being condemned by a people who one time had helped him. He thought he could stop this voice of criticism by further use of force. He "oppressed some of the people the same time" (v. 10).

How much wiser Asa would have been if he had patiently listened to the voice of criticism, and tried to amend his ways.

However, it is very difficult for men to do this.

As a result, some who commence to walk well in the sight of God, ultimately stray from His ways, rejecting the very principles for which they once fought.

Later in life Asa made another mistake. He suffered a painful illness in his feet, possibly gout. It hindered his activities and gave him much pain. In his agony he sought the help of physicians at the expense of Yahweh. He forgot that God could have helped him. He had become interested in the science of healing (his name means "physician") and was impressed with man's ability to help in times of sickness. He was led by this to ignore the assistance of God.

It was a bad mistake on the part of a man whom God had so greatly helped; it is a mistake for anybody to do. In times of trouble, in sickness and in pain, God can, and will help us, if we seek Him aright. We may not recover from the sickness, we may still suffer pain, but if in all our troubles we seek the help and comfort that He can provide, we will find the strength to conquer in spite of our troubles.

Science could not help Asa when the great sickness of mortality finally took hold of him. In spite of all the fleshly knowledge he had amassed, one day he fell prey to a sickness from which he did not recover. He died in Jerusalem, honoured by the people, for in spite of all his weaknesses, he had reigned well in Judah, and performed much good.

He was buried with great pomp and glory. In accordance with the custom of the times (Jer. 34:5; 2Chron. 21:19), spices were burnt at his funeral, and the people sorrowed that a great king and leader had passed to his rest.

Asa had been guilty of great folly, but so are all men. But more lasting than his folly were the faith and courage he revealed in times

when great troubles crowded upon him. It was only when his reputation had advanced and his heart was lifted up that he found he could not bear with criticism. This became a pitfall for him and led him into grievous errors. The pomp and splendour of his funeral could not erase the wickedness of his action towards Hanani and others that had been committed earlier. One, alone, can do that, at the Judgment Seat before which Asa must one day stand. The commendation of men will mean nothing in that day.

Strength Through Righteousness

There was a greater measure of "good things" in Judah than in Israel (2Chron. 12:12, mg.), and the southern kingdom prospered as a result. Thousands fell away from Israel and gave their support to Asa, so that his influence was greatly strengthened. The following figures show the gradual increase of Judah's fighting force, and the shrinkage of Israel's:

JUDAH	
Rehoboam's army	180,000 (2Chr. 11:1)
Abijah's army	400,000 (2Chr. 13:3)
Asa's army	580,000 (2Chr. 14:8)
Jehoshaphat's army	1,160,000 (2Chr. 17:14)
ISRAEL	
Jeroboam's army	800,000 (2Chr. 13:3)
Ahab's army	7,232 (1 Kings 20:15)

Israel gradually became so weak that marauding bands presented a major threat (2Kings 5:2; 6:23). Then the east of Jordan was taken and Israel was "cut short" (2Kings 10:32). Finally it was taken into dispersion by the Assyrians.

For the cause of this decline — see 2Chr. 11:14, 16, 17; 2Chr. 15:9.

On the other hand there was always a nucleus of true worshippers in the midst of Judah.

How the History of the Past is Repeated Today

The portion of the Bible's story we have just traced, illustrates a most important lesson which Jesus underlined when he taught: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand" (Matt. 12:25).

These words proved true in the case of Israel, and they can also apply today.

The nation of Israel is described in Acts 7:38 as the Ecclesia selected by God to reflect His glory in the surrounding world. Thus,

in the dreadful details of the division that took place in Israel there are seen the results of a house divided against itself — of an ecclesia that had failed to maintain its separation from folly.

The nation was brought to a condition of hatred and bitterness against itself, each section trying to destroy the other, both North and South being weakened by civil war. The common enemy of both — the Gentile world outside — waited the opportunity to move in and overthrow what little power and truth remained in the two nations.

This ecclesial division in Israel was caused originally by headstrong folly, but it was widened by the selfish policies of dominant personalities who sought to preserve their own dignity and status in the eyes of man rather than seek the good of others.

Jeroboam had been promised that the northern kingdom would be his. He should have had sufficient faith and confidence in God to know that he need not fear the people descending to Jerusalem to worship, or associating with Judah. If he remained constant and faithful to what was right, educating his people in God's way, encouraging them to fulfil His will wherever it might lead, all would have been well. He would not have suffered loss of power nor influence, but would have become a strong and wise ruler of his people.

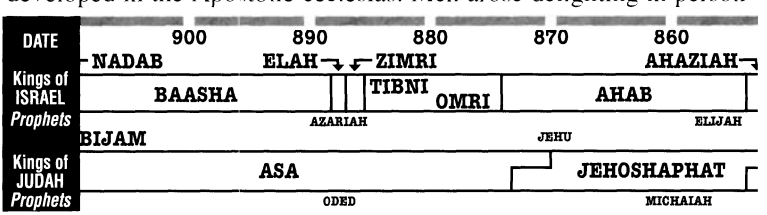
He should have forgotten his own dignity and worked for the good of the people and the honour of God. God would have seen that he did not suffer as a result of his personal sacrifice.

He failed to do this.

And in Judah the leaders were moved by desire and from selfish and fleshly motives to increase their numbers and influence. They were jealous of the North, and sought to weaken Israel in every way. Asa tried his best to hurt them, even employing Gentiles to that end.

Thus division led to bitterness and hatred, to recrimination, accusation and false report. The original cause of division was forgotten, and it finally developed into a struggle between personalities, with the bulk of the people knowing little of the true cause of trouble, being merely swayed by fleshly patriotism for sectional interests. To belong to Judah ensured the hostility of an Israelite, and vice versa. And in this ugly struggle for sectional interests, the real good of Israel was forgotten, and the Truth fell into decline in both kingdoms.

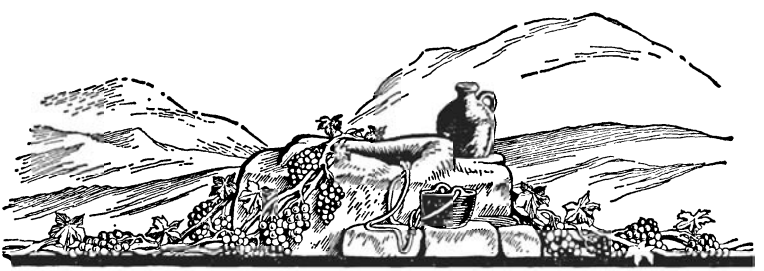
And in these conditions we see reflected the state of things that developed in the Apostolic ecclesias. Men arose delighting in person-



al pre-eminence (3 John 9), sectional interests were magnified out of all proper proportion, patriotism was encouraged for ecclesial division without brethren knowing or understanding why they stood divided from each other, until what should have been a united body was torn and divided by strife and commotion. Paul, with true patriotism for the things of God, set the Truth before his brethren and called upon them to receive it as such, warning them: "If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (Gal. 5:15).

Similar distractions can disturb the Truth today, causing the minds of men to be diverted from the study of the Word and its application in their lives, to arguments and contentions on unprofitable matters that cannot help in the race of life. Extreme care must be exercised that we do not permit the folly of man to influence our service to God, nor allow contention to discourage us in our walk of life. Whilst it is imperative that we ever uphold Truth and contend earnestly for it, we need to be sure that it really is the Truth that is exercising our attention. In all controversy we must be just and fair to those whom we oppose, trying always to elevate God in our thoughts and actions and let even argument be conducted so as to reflect to His honour.

Let us consider the sad division that took place in Israel, and the folly that brought it into existence, and remember the words of Paul: "All these things happened unto them for examples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1Cor. 10:11).



Chapter Five

WICKEDNESS IN THE NORTHERN KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

How Baasha was Punished Because of his Evil Reign (1Kings 16)

During Asa's long reign in Judah, seven kings reigned in the northern kingdom of Israel. This constant change of government caused a most unsettled state of things to develop. The true worship became neglected; paganism flourished everywhere; political conflict and civil troubles of all kinds grew daily.

King Baasha of Israel had seized the throne by treachery and violence. He was the servant of Nadab the son of Jeroboam, first king of Israel. But he conspired against Nadab, and when the moment was ripe, he arranged for him to be murdered and reigned in his place.

And now the time came when he, the murderer, was to be punished for his sins. God gave the message of this impending judgment to Jehu the prophet, that he might announce it to the people, and so warn them that wickedness does not pay.

"Behold," said God to the prophet, "I will destroy the house of Baasha, and will completely cut it off, as I did the house of Jeroboam. He will be hated of men, so that in the time of disaster that will come on his family, no one will help him. He that dieth of Baasha in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth in the fields shall the birds of the air eat."

Few people took heed of this dreadful message, but in due time it was fulfilled. Baasha died suddenly* and his son Elah reigned in his stead. He was not fit to reign. Baasha had been a strong-willed man who had ruled the people firmly, even though he did not seek the worship of Yahweh; but Elah was a weak man who easily succumbed to bad habits. This finally led him to acts of folly that brought tragedy upon himself, his family, and his friends.

How the Folly of Elah Involved His Family in Tragedy

It is very important to remember that our actions frequently affect others besides ourselves. We might think that it does not matter what we do, or how we live, because even if we rebel against God, we alone will suffer. But that is not so. When we act foolishly, we often hurt others in addition to ourselves. It is very important to remember this, and always consider whether our attitude to any matter may affect others besides

* Note the concluding words of 1 Kings 16:7. They read as though Baasha killed Jeroboam. This was not so, however. The implied meaning of this verse is that "He" (i.e. God) killed "him" (Baasha) because he was like the house of Jeroboam. He was probably smitten with some illness and died.

ourselves. If we constantly think of others in this way, we will learn to be unselfish in our actions.

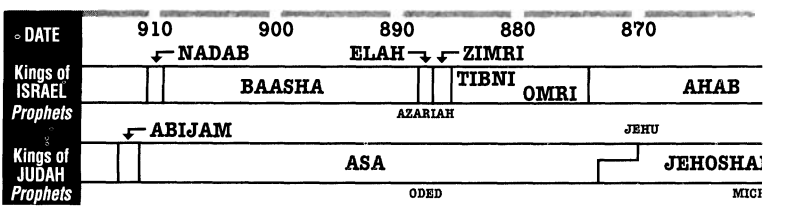
How often has one act of folly brought suffering and disgrace to a family? How often has a selfish, thoughtless deed brought pain and sorrow to others besides the one who has committed it? Parents have often been hurt by the thoughtless attitude of children who are indifferent to the love they have received. Whole nations have been involved in war, misery and bloodshed through the foolish actions of statesmen who have been more concerned with their own dignity and position than with the good of the people they suppose to serve. We all might like to live independently of others, but under the present arrangement of things that is impossible, for none of us can live completely to himself. The things we do, the words we speak, affect others for good or ill.

In these few verses of the Bible we are reminded of those truths in a very graphic way. We are told how Elah brought tragedy to his family and his friends by his great folly (1Kings 16:8-10).

He only reigned for two years, but they were disastrous years for Israel. His presence on the throne plunged the nation into the depths of misery and evil. For Elah was not capable of ruling wisely. He was nothing but a drunken fool (v. 9). He was in the habit of visiting the house of one of his servants, a steward named Arza, and there he had whatever drink he asked for; and he asked for a good deal, so much so that he was often drunk in his servant's house. He set a bad example to his servant, who probably laughed at the sight of the drunken, foolish king, and he set a bad example to the whole nation which could not have much respect for a man who wasted his opportunities in such a silly way.

When people accept the position of leadership in any way, they must remember that they can only retain the goodwill and respect of those who look up to them so long as they manifest a good example themselves. They must be prepared to put to one side things that are perhaps lawful merely because they are not expedient. To do otherwise can bring the leader into disrespect.

This is the wise advice of the apostle Paul, who explained that even in activities which might be legitimate, a person must exercise care and discretion. Of himself he said: "all things are lawful but all things are not expedient" (1Cor. 10:23). Our actions must be helpful



to others as well as ourselves, and this is especially important when difficult situations arise, demanding our personal example.

Therefore everyone who sets himself up to be a leader must remember to sacrifice his own inclinations for the benefit of the community or nation over whom he rules.

Elah was not moved by any such considerations. He liked being king because it gave him the money and opportunity of having a good time in the only way he understood the term. He was not prepared to work for the good of the people; he just wanted to please himself.

His name signifies a "large tree." He probably looked upon himself as such — great and majestic among his fellows like the grand cedars of Lebanon just to the north of his kingdom (Psa. 104:16). If so, he was a tree that was soon to be cut down!

He had another servant called Zimri. Zimri was a born traitor. He was governed only by the rewards of treachery. He was a captain in the army of Elah, but he had no loyalty for either king or country. He served his own interest. He looked upon the king as a drunken fool, and had only contempt for him. He awaited the chance to kill him and grasp the power of the vacant throne. One day his opportunity came.

The Philistines had invaded the land of Israel and occupied the city of Gibbethon in the territory of Dan. The army of the Israelites had been sent to lay siege to the city and take it.

Both Elah and Zimri should have been with the army, but they preferred the comforts of the beautiful city of Tirzah, at that time the capital of the northern kingdom: the king to enjoy its pleasures, the captain to grasp the opportunity of betraying his lord.

Then, one day Zimri acted. The king had visited the house of Arza (whose name means "earthiness" and who lived up to its meaning), and was there drinking as usual. Boldly pushing his way into the house, Zimri found the king in a drunken stupor, and without hesitation, he murdered him.

Having begun with murder, Zimri set about establishing his power by continuing with it. He slew all the kinsfolk* of Elah, and all his friends, leaving nobody to take up the cause of the dead king. All associated with him died by the hand of the murderer. Elah's folly had brought tragedy to his family and everybody associated with him. Through the evil actions of brutal men, the grim, warning prophecy of Jehu was fulfilled.

If only Baasha had listened to the words of the prophet and

* 1 Kings 16:11 states that Zimri slew all the "kinsfolks" of Elah. In Hebrew, the word "kinsfolks" is *goel*, or "redeemer." The duty of the *goel* was to avenge the death of the nearest of kin (the same word is rendered "avenger of blood" in Num. 35:9-34). Zimri thought himself safe when he slew these people, doubtless believing that nobody was left to take up the cause of Elah. But he reasoned without God. Who will act against injustice and wickedness. In such cases, the words of God are true: "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." God ever looks after the destitute and the helpless, if they put their trust in Him.

amended his ways, he might have avoided the disgrace and tragedy that destroyed his family. God was giving him the opportunity of doing this when He warned of evils to come through Jehu the prophet. But Baasha rejected the message; he probably thought that it would never happen to him.

Are such men as Elah and Zimri unknown today? Acts of similar folly and treachery as were then committed are heard of, or seen, every day. We do not have to go to the full extent of evil done by these men to be guilty of similar deeds of folly. We can misuse our privileges as did these men. Elah had a wonderful opportunity to do good; he wasted it by a slip in his character, a weakness he failed to control. We can do likewise. In his case, the weakness was drunkenness; in us it can be indolence, indecision, idleness, an excess of pleasure. The weaknesses, if not checked or controlled, can prevent us using the great opportunities for good with which the Truth presents us.

Meanwhile, Zimri had seized power by treachery and murder. He had destroyed all the relatives and friends of Elah thinking that, by so doing, he had removed all possible objection to him taking the throne. But there were those in Israel who looked upon his elevation with disapproval, and were quick to act.

How the Army Revolted Against Zimri and Championed the Cause of Omri

On the field of battle the army heard with anger what had happened in Tirzah the capital. The soldiers were incensed that whilst they were risking their lives in battle, the king and the captain should be taking their pleasure back home in such a manner. It was not the time for the king to be relaxing, nor for the captain to grasp the power he coveted. The army was not prepared to accept Zimri as king — a man who had remained at home in time of war. They set up their champion, a man named Omri, another captain of the army who was with the soldiers in the camp. His name means "untaught," or "impetuous," but he was a brave and skilful fighter, and he had gained the respect of his men in times of danger.

At the head of his supporters, Omri marched against the city of Tirzah. Zimri was in despair when he heard the news. He had hoped that the army would support him. He had no army capable of matching the ruthless vigor of Omri and his forces. A cruel, unscrupulous man himself, he feared to fall into the hands of his enemy. He remembered the bloodshed he had caused, and realised that he could expect no mercy from Omri. He decided to end his life. But how best to do it? There were many pagan customs introduced into Israel at that time, and Zimri decided to follow one such in ending his life. Following the action of some pagan kings, he shut himself up in his palace, and then set fire to the building. In the smoking ruins of the royal



house, the short reign of this traitor-king thus came to a dramatic and terrible end.

But his death did not bring an end to the troubles of Israel. The nation was still divided. Another man, Tibni by name, had also attracted a following. Like Omri, he likewise desired to be king, and had marched on the capital with that purpose in mind. But he was too late. Nevertheless he set up his authority, and for some months civil war raged throughout the northern kingdom. But Tibni was no match for the energetic skill of Omri. His name means "strawy," and he proved to be but a man of straw. His army was defeated, and eventually Omri reigned as sole monarch in the northern kingdom.

The treachery of Zimri was long remembered in Israel (2Kings 9:31). So, also, was the punishment of God, reminding men that such sins do not go unknown nor unrewarded.

Omri: Prince of Evil Men

Omri was a strong and ruthless leader, greatly skilled in war. He imposed his will on the northern kingdom of Israel, and brought a measure of stability to the country. He was not a righteous man, however. In fact, he is referred to as one of the most evil of all the men to sit on the throne of Israel (1Kings 16:25). In that terrible record, he was exceeded only by his son Ahab — the most wicked of all men.

Omri was thus a man of ability who ruined his work because he could not see the benefits of seeking God. There have been many "Omris" throughout the ages. They are men of ability who nevertheless fail to seek God's way. Ruthless and skilful in that to which they put their hands, but forgetful of the fact that "unless Yahweh build the house we labour but in vain." They refuse to co-operate with God in the decisions of life.

The work of Omri ultimately proved in vain because he failed to grasp that truth.

In his day he commanded the respect of his own subjects and the surrounding nations. He was doubtless flattered and admired by his associates. But God did not flatter or admire him. The true estimate of his character is clearly set down in the Bible for all mankind to read. "Omri wrought evil in the eyes of Yahweh, and did worse than all that went before him" (1Kings 16:25).

These terrible words remind us that it is not what men think of us that counts, but what God sees in us. We must exercise care lest we mistake the praises of men for the commendation of God. These principles are expressed in the following poem:

"Teach us to look in all our ends
On Thee for judge and not our friends,
That we with Thee may walk uncowed
By fear or favour of the crowd."

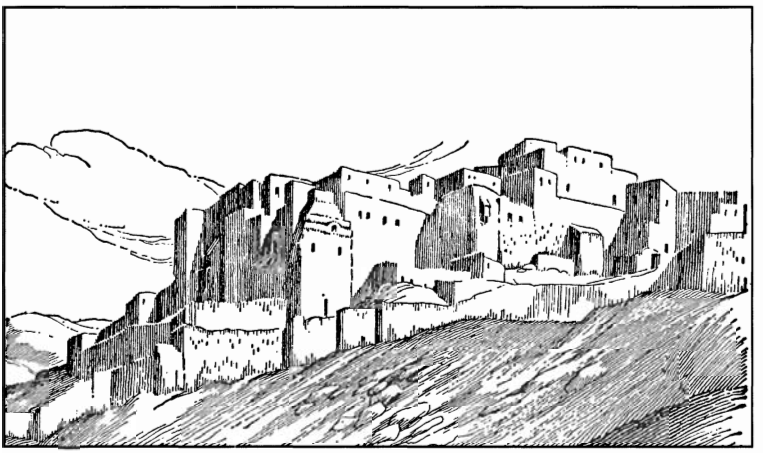
The crowd applauded Omri. He feared neither God nor man. Expediency was the god he worshipped, and in its cause he sacrificed every principle of righteousness. He did not live by faith but by sight. He ruled for present benefits, and not to the ultimate glory of God. He thought he was doing good for Israel, but he was actually laying the foundation for its decline and overthrow.

He lived at a time (B.C. 882-871) when a deadly danger to Israel was developing in the north. The ruthless, brutal Assyrian Empire, destined eventually to take Israel into captivity, was growing in power. Already Mesopotamia was subject to its control; and now it was looking to the south. Although nothing of this is recorded in the Bible, the Assyrian records that archaeologists have discovered, tell the story of the growing power of this nation. They speak of an attack that an Assyrian monarch called Ashurnasirpal II, launched on Syria. On the tablets describing this event, the king caused to be written: "I marched from the Orontes. I conquered the cities. I caused great slaughter. I destroyed, I demolished, I burned. I took prisoners and impaled them on stakes before their cities. I settled Assyrians in their place. I washed my weapons in the Great Sea".

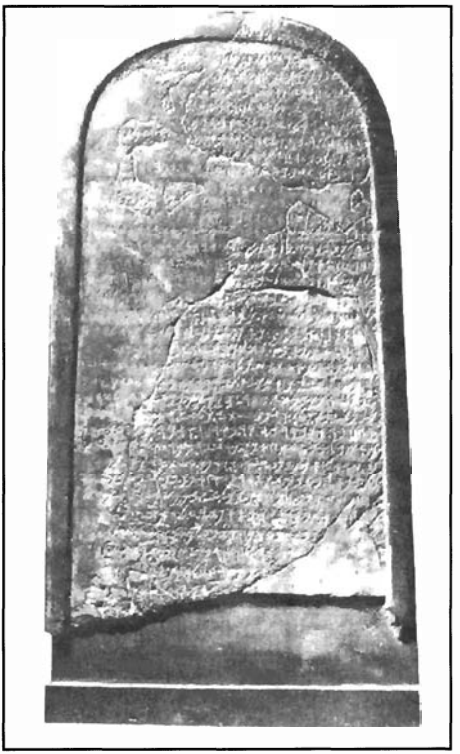
Then, as suddenly and unexpectedly as the Assyrians had come, they departed. They returned, the records declare, laden with silver, gold, lead and copper, all tribute taken from the kings of Tyre, Sidon and Byblos. These nations were situated just north of Israel, and



Assyrian war chariots, a detail of the bronze gates of Balawat from the reign of Shalmaneser III



Above: Samaria, capital of the Kingdom of Omri.



Right: A replica of the stele or monumental stone of Mesha, king of Moab. It was set up by him in Dibon to commemorate the victory over Israel shortly after the middle of the ninth century, which for the first time in a century and a half made his country independent.

though the Assyrians did not descend any further south at that time, it was a grim warning to the nation that it could suffer as had its neighbours.

Omri could see that the kingdom was in deadly peril. Now was the time, if only he had realised it, to make his peace with God, and seek Divine aid in fortifying Israel against its enemies. He did not do that. Instead, he set about strengthening his defences and adding to his fleshly power.

Records that archaeologists have found, show that he invaded Moab at this time, and was successful in bringing the Moabites under

his control.*

He also changed the capital of the kingdom (1Kings 16:24). Previously the kings had reigned from the beautiful city of Tirzah. But Tirzah could not be easily defended. Omri looked for a place with greater security. He discovered it in the hill that later became known as Samaria, and which played a prominent part in Jewish history. The city of Samaria was built on a solitary hill which rises out of a broad and fertile valley for about 100 metres (300 feet). It is surrounded by a semi-circle of higher mountains, but itself looks out upon the west and commands a view extending to the Mediterranean Sea. A spring within the city provided ample water in time of attack or siege. The broad walls that Omri built around the city made its defences formidable. He sought every means to strengthen Samaria against a time of need, except the most important Source of all — the Strength of Yahweh. He forgot the wise words of the Psalm that enjoined working *with* God in the labor and activity of life: "Except Yahweh keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain" (Psa. 127:1).

The king thought that he was doing well. He applied his vigorous energy to preparing Israel for the attack which he feared would one day come. His conquest of Moab gave him additional power, and earned him the respect of the surrounding nations. His reputation even extended to Assyria itself. There, Israel and Omri were identified as one. This is shown by Assyrian inscriptions that have been found in recent years. They reveal that a century after the dynasty of Omri had come to an end, Israel was still known to the Assyrians as *"Beth Khumri"* (the "House of Omri"). The energetic policy of this evil king had done much to extend the influence and power of Israel. But he failed in one important work. He failed to lead the nation back to God and to preserve the spiritual heritage of the divine laws given through the fathers of Israel. If he had done that he would have made the nation really powerful, and would have protected it far more effectively than could the mighty defences and widespread preparations for war that he made.

He reigned for twelve years, and on his death, his son Ahab took over control.

Ahab: Israel's Worst King

The successful reign of Omri, from a natural standpoint, may have caused his son Ahab to reason that it does not much matter whether God is worshipped or not. Ahab was not a strong-willed man like his

* The record of Omri's successful invasion of Moab, and the way in which he forced the Moabites to pay tribute is recorded on what archaeologists call "The Moabite Stone." It speaks of the way in which surrounding nations viewed with awe his reputation for power. To the outside world, Omri appeared as a capable king whose rule greatly benefited the nation; the Bible, however, reveals how he lamentably failed to perform those things that would have brought true strength to the nation. He worshipped expediency and not the God of Israe .

father. He was easily swayed by stronger personalities who dominated the kingdom about this time. This caused him to exceed the wickedness of the kings that had gone before him.

He was encouraged in this terrible folly by his wife, Jezebel. She was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians. According to Josephus, the Jewish historian, Ethbaal was also priest of the evil worship of the goddess Astarte. He was thus king-priest of a nation that Omri imagined could greatly aid Israel. Doubtless the marriage between Ahab and Jezebel had been arranged to join Syria to Israel as an ally.

Jezebel was a very dominating woman, with an iron will and determination. She was devoted to the pagan worship of the god Baal and the goddess Astarte, and tried in every way possible to introduce these false religions throughout the kingdom over which she was now Queen. Shrines were erected in Samaria and Jezreel; hundreds of pagan priests flocked the palace of Ahab as honoured guests (1Kings 18:19); the people were encouraged to forsake the worship of Yahweh for that of Baal and Astarte.

In permitting this, Ahab exceeded even the wickedness of Jeroboam (1Kings 16:31).

Yet he did not entirely cut himself off from the worship of Yahweh. His servant Obadiah (1Kings 18:3), supported the true worship and in some way the king thought that this man, being faithful to Yahweh could help him. Ahab was a religious man, seeking the worship of many gods, hoping, in some superstitious way, to receive support from all, including Yahweh, in time of need.



Jezebel officiating in the church of Baal.

But Yahweh demands the undivided loyalty of those who would seek Him in truth. This requires a strength of character to reject any influence that would lead away from God.

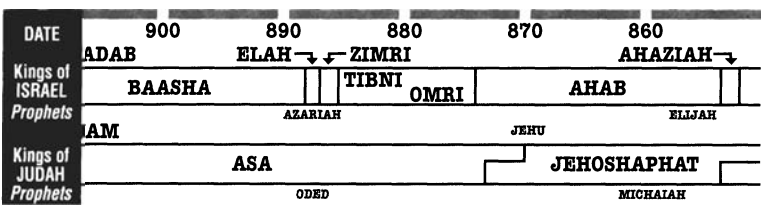
But Ahab had not the strength of character to do this; he divided his allegiance among the false forms of worship about him, serving their idols.

It was a mad policy, and brought him only trouble.

About this time, Israel had a striking warning that what God declares He will perform. Six hundred years before the reign of Ahab, when the Israelites had first entered the land and Jericho had been overthrown, Joshua had warned the people saying: "Cursed be the man before Yahweh that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it" (Josh. 6:26).

The curse had long been forgotten during the passage of the centuries, but now it came into remembrance again in a very dramatic way. A man of Bethel named Hiel set out to rebuild the city of Jericho. The undertaking brought disaster upon his family as Joshua had warned, for two of his sons died as a result. Hiel "laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub" (1Kings 16:34).

This tragedy was a grim warning to rebellious Israel that God means what He says. Hiel was probably ignorant of the curse when he commenced to rebuild Jericho, but he nevertheless suffered for his folly. When God speaks, warns and rebukes, men should heed. The disaster that came upon the family of Hiel should have warned Israel that it would not escape the judgments of God if it persisted to ignore His teaching. Instead of doing so, however, the people continued on their way unheedful of the warning message of the prophets.



Chapter Six

JUDAH IS STRENGTHENED BY THE WISE LEADERSHIP OF JEHOSHAPHAT

In Judah, the long reign of Asa came to a close, and Jehoshaphat, his son, reigned in his stead (2Chron. 17). In comparison with the troubles in the northern kingdom, Judah experienced a happy period of peace and prosperity. Under the king's wise administration, the defences of the country were strengthened, and everything possible was done to shut off Judah from the corrupting influence of Israel where Jezebel was busy extending the worship of paganism. Jehoshaphat did his best to guard his kingdom against this, and thus widened the breach between the two nations as much as possible. In his own territory, he greatly encouraged the true worship, and under his rule, the people were united and contented. Their king set them a good example. They were pleased with his wise and energetic rule, and they freely offered their gifts to him (2Chron. 17:5).

Jehoshaphat means *Judgment of Yahweh.* His name fittingly describes his character, and he found his greatest joy in the work of Yahweh. "His heart was lifted up in the ways of Yahweh" (2Chron. 17:6) which means that the things of God gave him great pleasure.

The King Introduces a Program of Spiritual Education

He realised that something more than a good example was necessary. The people must have an inward desire to worship God in truth; the Word must be in "their hearts and minds" and not merely forced upon them as the law of the land. This could only come from one direction: understanding better the love of God and what He has done, and will do, for man. The answer to the problem that faced the king was a better knowledge of the will of God on the part of the people. The king commanded that the basis of all education in Judah should be the things of God. He ordered that the civil and religious authorities should combine to that end. He arranged that princes should be sent throughout the land to enforce this upon the people, and with them he sent Levites so that all that was taught would be in agreement with the law of God. The Bible declares: "And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of Yahweh with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people" (2Chron. 17:9).

This widespread teaching brought all people together in one common ideal and outlook; it brought about a true national unity, as well as individual happiness.

This was quite a contrast to conditions in the northern kingdom. There the people were in a state of discontent, rivalry, division, blood-

shed and violence. They were desperately unhappy. The leaders set a terrible example to them. Baasha had murdered Nadab to grasp the power of the throne, Zimri had murdered Elah for the same purpose and then had committed suicide, Tibni and Omri had involved the nation in civil war.

But in the south, the people were united and happy. They were educated in the law of God so that it became the rule of life. This bound them to the throne of David and the service of Yahweh, and made the nation powerful. Perhaps Jehoshaphat remembered the words of the prophet when he reminded his father that Israel had suffered when they tried to get along without "a teaching priest and without law" (2Chron. 15:3).

In the contrast which the Bible shows between the two kingdoms at this time, we learn the lesson as to what is the wisest course for us to pursue. The study of the Scriptures brings great blessings now (Rev. 1:3), as well as leading us along the way to life eternal in the kingdom of God. It will bring a peace of mind, and a state of happiness and contentment that passes the understanding of man. There is a wonderful satisfaction in labouring for God, in personally worshipping Him, in acknowledging Him as Father and reposing in His love. The Bible invites us to "Taste and see that Yahweh is good." Those who have done this know the wonderful benefit that comes from such worship, and as they come to experience the love of God, so they desire to render back to Him the loving obedience which is His due.

Jehoshaphat found that peace with God brought peace with men. The nations round about observed the conditions in Judah. They could see that the people were united and happy, they realised that these things give power to a nation, and they hesitated to wage war on a people thus welded together as one. The nations "made no war against Jehoshaphat" (2Chron. 17:10).

They even went further than that. They not only feared Jehoshaphat's power, but sought his friendship. Such warlike nations as the Philistines, and such fierce, independent, restless people as the Arabians, came bowing before him with their gifts, desiring to enter into treaty with Judah, offering a yearly tribute.

Jehoshaphat did not neglect means of defence. Though he had supreme faith in God, he realised that God desired him to use the means that He provided for the safety of the nation. The king took the opportunity to strengthen the fortifications of the nation so that he might have the means of effectively defending the country in time of war. He had faith in God, but recognised, as we should also, that he had a responsibility to use the natural means provided for his defence.

His reign was a prosperous time for Israel. There was "much business in the cities of Judah" (2Chron. 17:13). People were attracted to these happy conditions. The flow of migrants from the northern king-

dom continued until Jehoshaphat found himself at the head of a powerful force which commanded the respect of the surrounding nations.

His reign foreshadowed the kingdom that Christ will set up on earth (Dan. 2:44; Zech.14:9), after the judgments of Yahweh (Jehoshaphat means "*Judgment of Yah*") will be manifested in the earth.

Foolish Alliances with the Ungodly

But though a time of happiness and peace had opened for Judah similar to the conditions under Solomon, flesh is weak, and before his end, Jehoshaphat committed an act of great indiscretion. He entered into alliance with the wicked house of Ahab; he married his son to the daughter of Jezebel, and brought great trouble on Judah.

Meanwhile, the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah presented a great contrast. Both had the same opportunity, the same worship, the same privileges. But in the northern kingdom, a false worship had developed, that led to great sins and brought terrible suffering. In the southern kingdom, however, there was peace, plenty and power. What was the cause of the evils of the north and the success of the south? The answer is not hard to find. In the south the king saw that the people were governed in a way that caused them to respect God, to love His Word, to seek out its meaning, and obey its precepts. Such an education helped their spiritual development, and caused them to obey God in the way He desired. From such worship there came great and immediate blessings that provided for the wellbeing and happiness of the people then, as well as preparing them for the Kingdom Christ will set up on earth at his coming.

The Word of God will do that for us now just as much as it did in the days of Jeshoshaphat. If we seek to prayerfully understand the Bible, we shall not only find a great delight in its teaching, but we shall discover a power that will greatly assist us from day to day, enabling us to overcome the problems and trials that may come our way. The person that seeks God's way does not find that all his problems are suddenly solved, and that all difficulties immediately disappear — but he does discover a means of happiness and peace in spite of them. And that is a blessing that the world knows not. The world is not really a place of happiness and peace. In spite of all the material advantages it offers men, in spite of the daily seeking after pleasure, men and women are not really happy nor contented with their lot. In fact, many are desperately unhappy and realise how empty are their lives. They are also oppressed with a terrible fear as to what the morrow may bring forth (cp. Matt. 6:34).

Let us seek the way of peace with God, and we will not only find contentment and happiness in this life, but will be able to live in hope of a time of great joy when the Lord Jesus returns to reward those who have lived according to his precepts (Rev. 22:12).

Every now and then, God has raised leaders who have done outstanding work in the cause of the Truth. Such were men like Noah, Abraham, Moses, David. Their influence lived on long after they had died. Even today, the things they said or did, or the great promises that God made to them, play a vital part in our salvation.

Elijah was one such man. He was the greatest of Israel's prophets, a man who stood up in a time of terrible wickedness, to sternly rebuke the nation of Israel for its folly. He set a wonderful example which still speaks to us today.

Elijah's life can be considered from three angles. Firstly, it provides a wonderful example of faith and courage. Secondly, it presents a most interesting type of the work of the Lord Jesus. Thirdly, it contains a prophecy of work yet to be done.

Elijah suddenly appears in the story of the Bible. We do not know who his parents were, and he left no children. He appears unexpectedly, without warning, giving his harsh and uncompromising message, then abruptly disappearing. He describes himself as "standing before Yahweh," like a slave doing his master's bidding (1Kings 17:1; 18:15). There is nothing gentle about him, nothing that appeals to the flesh. Instead there is a wildness, an isolation, an austerity, a roughness, a hardness about him which contrasts greatly with the milder attitude of the other prophets. He came from Gilead, which is a rough, mountainous district bordering on Arabia, and in some way his character seems to reflect the country from whence he came. One writer has said: "There was a wonderful similarity between the man and the region — stern, bleak, grand, majestic and awful were they both." Like John the Baptist who revealed a similar spirit, Elijah seemed to bring the wilderness with him when he entered the city. His very appearance commanded attention: long, shaggy hair hung over his back, a large mantle of rough sheepskins was fastened about him with a girdle of hide (2Kings 1:8). His forthright, challenging, uncompromising message could not be ignored; it incited the violent anger and bitter opposition of his enemies.

The story of his life as recorded in the Bible reads like an exciting adventure. It is found in the chapters between 1Kings 17 and 2Kings 2. We do well to consider these chapters in detail as did Mr. Phillips and his family, when, during the nightly readings of the Bible in the home with the aid of the Bible Readers' Companion, *they commanded their attention. Let us join the family circle as the children settle down to discuss with their father some of the incidents of the prophet's life.*

Chapter One

ELIJAH: ISRAEL'S GREATEST PROPHET

"The story of how God made the ravens feed Elijah used to be one of my favourite lessons when I was in kindergarten," remarked Ann, after the family had finished reading 1 Kings 17.

"There does not seem much point in the story to me," grumbled Peter to his sister.

"The story of Elijah is one of the most dramatic in the Bible," declared Mr. Phillips enthusiastically.

"Why is he called 'Elijah the Tishbite'?" asked Graeham.

"His name in Hebrew is Eliyah," explained his father. "It means, *'Yahweh, He is God.'* The Hebrew name for God contained in the word 'Elijah' is *'El'* which means *'Strength'* or *'Might.'* Elijah's name therefore means that Yahweh will reveal Himself in Power and Might."

"But what does 'Tishbite' mean?"

"Tishbite shows the place from whence he came. It was in Gilead, the rough, wild country east of Jordan. Tishbite means 'sojourner,' or 'stranger,' and Elijah was such to the rest of Israel".



"Was he known to Israel as a prophet of Yahweh before this time?" asked Joan.

"We do not know," answered her father. "Elijah appears suddenly and without warning in the story of the Bible, as we have read this evening. He is not introduced to us in any way. We know nothing of his parents nor his

upbringing. We do not even know whether he was considered a prophet of God before this time, though the chapter does read as though he was known to Israel. God viewed the evil, luxurious court of Ahab with the greatest displeasure, and sent the prophet to the king with a stern message of condemnation. He was told to warn Ahab of coming judgment and punishment because of the way in which he had allowed Jezebel, his wife, to spread the evil, pagan worship of Baal and Astarte in Israel."

"Elijah must have caused quite a sensation when he appeared in the city of Samaria," said Ann.

"Yes," agreed Mr. Phillips. "When we read such chapters as 1Kings 17, it is good to try and picture in our minds the incidents as they happened. The stern prophet, with his long, flowing hair and his rough sheepskin cloak tied about with a girdle, must have looked completely out of place in the sophisticated city of Samaria. And when it was learned that he had demanded an interview with the king himself, it must have caused quite a stir of excitement.

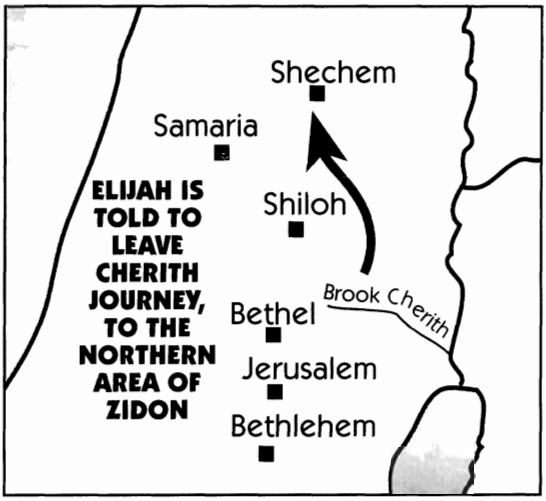
But what a sensation when he actually entered the court of Ahab! We can imagine how the pagan queen Jezebel, surrounded by her gorgeously robed prophets, would look with contempt at the stern man with his rough clothing, who claimed to be a prophet of Yahweh. He was completely out of keeping with the fashionable court of the king.

"But Elijah did not give these matters a moment's thought. He did not stand on ceremony; he did not apologise for the message he was about to give. He approached the king, not as a subject, nor an equal, but as a superior: as the servant of Yahweh to whom the king should pay attention.

"He declared: 'As Yahweh, the God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew or rain these years, but according to my word,' he told Ahab.

"The king heard the message with dread. He knew how terribly the land would suffer through drought. It put Israel completely at the mercy of the prophet. But Jezebel did not view it in the same way as did Ahab. She looked at the prophet with anger and contempt. Her greatest ambition was to spread the worship of her pagan gods throughout Israel. She saw Elijah as the champion of Yahweh, and therefore her greatest enemy. She felt indignant that he should dare push his way into the palace with such a message, and decided that he must die. But the prophet, having delivered his message, now abruptly turned and strode out of the palace. He knew, full well, that the strong-minded Jezebel would try to kill him, and that Ahab, in his weakness, would help her to do so. God had told him to hide himself by the brook Cherith, on the other side of the Jordan, and to that lonely, isolated place, Elijah now turned.

"Here, for a time, he found water. The rest of Israel began to feel



the effects of the drought he had predicted, but Elijah had sufficient water for his needs. He also had sufficient food. God saw to it that the ravens brought food to him at this place every morning and evening, and this provided for Elijah's needs. It was not a pleasant experience for Elijah. He lacked companionship, he knew that Jezebel was seeking him to destroy him, he had to be satisfied with the poor food that the ravens supplied each day. But he accepted this as a sacrifice necessary that he might preach the Truth to the people. He was of that number of whom Paul writes in Hebrews 11:37: 'They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy...' But such men as these had the faith to see beyond all troubles, to the time when God's will shall be done in earth as it is in heaven. Elijah was like Paul who could write: 'I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content' (Phil. 4:11). We live in different times from those of Elijah and Paul, and are not called upon to suffer privation for the Truth as they did, yet we still need to learn that 'Godliness with contentment is great gain.'

"Eventually the brook dried up, however, and Elijah had to leave. He was told to go to Zarephath in the territory of Zidon where he would find a widow woman who would care for him."

"I cannot understand that part of the story at all!" exclaimed Ann, interrupting her father.

"Why is that?"

"Because Jezebel came from Zidon, therefore Elijah was told to flee for refuge to the land of his greatest enemy. Would not that bring him into greater danger?"

"Not at all," replied Mr. Phillips. "In fact, Zidon would be the last place that Jezebel would seek for Elijah. She would think that he would find a hiding place among his own people, and certainly not among her people. She would doubtless believe that her own people would all remain loyal to her, and would deliver him into her hands."

"How do we know that Jezebel was hunting for him?" asked Joan.

"We are told that in the next chapter," replied her father. "Jezebel not only sought for Elijah throughout Israel, but also sent to the neighbouring kingdoms asking that if he sought refuge in their countries, to deliver him up to Ahab (1Kings 18:10). Little did she imagine that he would find refuge in her native country!"

"Nevertheless it seems strange that Elijah should go to a Gentile woman for help," suggested Graeham. "Surely he could have found somebody among the Israelites to assist him."

"This woman was not an ordinary Gentile," replied Mr. Phillips. "The Bible shows that she had been impressed with the things of God, and had been attracted to the worship of Yahweh. Unfortunately, there were few in Israel at that time with sufficient courage to defy Jezebel and support Elijah. He was probably despised by many of his own people because of his rough, uncouth ways, and the harshness of his message.

"What makes you say that?" asked Ann.

"The words of the Lord Jesus suggest it," replied her father. "He referred to this incident when he declared: 'No prophet is accepted in his own country.' He illustrated this meaning by referring to this incident of Elijah. He declared: 'There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, but unto none of them was he sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Zidon, unto a woman that was a widow' (Luke 4:24-26). The Lord thus implied that there was a sad lack of faith throughout Israel at this time, though in this Gentile city, a measure of faith was found in this widow woman. In addition to the moral lessons there also are some remarkable typical lessons to be found in these incidents."

"What are they?" asked Graeham.

"We will consider them when we have first grasped the facts of Elijah's life history," answered his father. "First let us get those well in mind, and we shall have plenty upon which to build."

"I have a problem," said Peter.

"What is it?"

"In 1Kings 17:9 we read that God told Elijah that He had commanded the widow woman to sustain him. Does that mean that God sent a message to her?"

"Not necessarily. It means that her attention had been drawn to the true worship, and therefore she was under an obligation to help a true prophet of God. When one comes to a knowledge of the Truth there is the added responsibility of obeying it. Thus it can be said with truth that God commands men and women through this knowledge, though He might not speak openly to them."

"I would like to see that proved from the Bible," said Peter boldly.

"You will find it proven in Acts 17:30," answered Mr. Phillips with a smile. "You will there read the words of Paul: 'God now com-

mandeth all men everywhere to repent.' God commands them to do so through His Word. That was doubtless the case with this Gentile widow woman. Like Rahab of Jericho, and Ruth of Moab, she was evidently of a most thoughtful disposition. It seems as though she had enquired as to the cause of the drought, and had come to the belief that the God of Israel was behind it all. She thus realised that He is One who should be revered."

"That seems a little far-fetched to me," grumbled Peter. "What causes you to suggest it?"

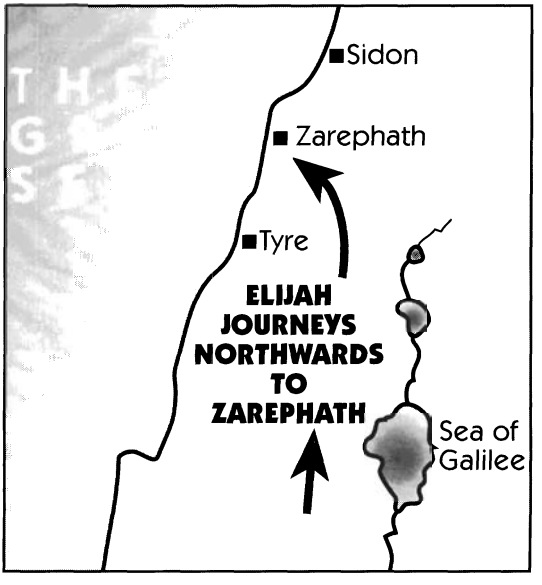
"Her conversation with Elijah implies it," replied Mr. Phillips. "She said to him: 'As Yahweh thy God liveth' (v.12). These words show that she was not a worshipper of the God of Israel, for she described Him as '*thy* God,' but they show that she acknowledged that He was a living God, and therefore capable of action either for good or ill. She therefore must have been sufficiently impressed with the happenings of the time to acknowledge that 'God lives and is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.' That is the foundation of faith, and is pleasing to God (see Hebrews 11:6)."

Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath

"In obedience to God's command, Elijah walked to the city of Zarephath. Outside the gate of the city he found the widow woman gathering sticks. He spoke to her, and, looking up, she saw the prophet gazing at her. His appearance must have given her a shock. She saw a man clothed in rough sheepskin clothing, with long flowing hair, and stern, solemn face. He possibly looked gaunt and wasted from the effects of the famine he had suffered.

"'Fetch me, I pray you, a little water in a vessel that I may drink,' he said to the woman. As she went to bring it, he called again to her: 'Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.'

"This was too much for the woman. She knew that this was the prophet Elijah, for



all the surrounding countries had been told that Jezebel was on the lookout for him. She was ready to help him with water, for she could see that the God of Israel was behind the famine, but she had no provisions to supply him.

" 'As Yahweh your God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering some sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it and die.'

"The poor woman was in a desperate state of mind. She and her son were on the point of death. But she recognised the God of Israel as a living God and was therefore ready to receive further instructions as to what she should do.

"'Fear not,' Elijah told her. 'Go and do as you have said; but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and afterwards make for you and for your son.'

"Elijah thus told the woman that she must first serve him. He did not say this out of selfishness, but because he was God's representative to the people, and in serving him she was serving God (Matthew 10:41). He also told her that if she did this she would not lack sufficient for herself and for her son. It was a challenge to faith, but the widow woman, in her extremity, accepted it, and agreed to do as the prophet commanded.



"She found that God was true to His Word. 'The barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail' all the time of the drought."

"What would she want the oil for?" asked Ann.

"The oil referred to is olive oil," explained her father. "The Israelites used it in cooking. They mixed it with meal to make cakes. It is very high in food value. The city of Zarephath was in the territory of Asher (Josh. 19:28) which was noted for the quantity of olive oil that was produced there (Deut. 33:24). That was possibly the reason why the widow woman had some left when food was so short everywhere else throughout the land."

How God Repaid the Widow for her Kindness

"It was not long after this that the widow woman learned that God never forgets a kindness done in His name," said Mr. Phillips as he continued the story. "It is a lesson we must also remember. God is always quick to pay a debt. If we seek to truly obey Him, or if we sacrifice for His cause from true motives, we will be blessed in so doing. God tells us that in Proverbs 3:9-10: 'Honour Yahweh with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.' The widow of Zarephath found that these words are true, for she experienced a time of great sorrow but out of it she received a great joy. Her only son fell sick, and died. The poor woman was beside herself with sadness. She had nobody to whom she could turn in her distress but to the prophet Elijah. She rushed to him to find out the cause of the calamity, to ask why her son had died."

"I cannot understand that part," said Ann who was following her father's explanation with her Bible open before her. "According to verse 18, the woman said to Elijah, 'O thou man of God? Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?' Whatever did she mean by these words?"

"First of all, notice that the woman addressed Elijah as 'man of God'," answered her father. "That shows that she accepted him as a prophet of the true God. But she had not always recognised Yahweh in that light, and now asks whether she was being punished for her past sins. She speaks of 'my sin,' as though it was something in particular. She possibly had in mind her previous unbelief, and the way she had supported the persecuting religion of Jezebel. Full of sorrow, suffering and misery, with tears flowing from her eyes and her dead son in her arms, she presented a pathetic picture to the prophet. He was full of sympathy for her. 'Give me your son,' he said unto her.

"He took the dead boy to the upper room where he lived, and, laying him upon his bed, he prayed that Yahweh would restore him to

life again. He then stretched himself upon the boy three times, again praying that God would grant this miracle. Gradually the warmth of the prophet was miraculously transmitted to the boy. He began to breathe, and then sat up as though he had only been asleep.

"What joy there was in the house when Elijah took the living boy down to present him to his mother. How she would clasp her son to her, and weep tears of joy over him! She now realised that her sacrifices for God were not in vain; she had been repaid a thousand times



for all she had done for the prophet at the bidding of his God. The presence of Elijah in the house had brought a wonderful blessing to it. Not only had the whole household been provided with food during the time of drought, but life had also been given to the dead.

"The blessings that the widow woman received are typical of blessings we will receive if we devote our energies and labour to doing God's will," continued Mr. Phillips. "We shall always be provided with our needs if we serve God in the way He desires, and we will have, in addition, the great joy of looking forward to life after death by a resurrection. In short, as the widow woman learned, serving God brings present blessings as well as the prospect of life eternal in the Age to come.

"The widow of Zarephath was made a very happy woman in that time when drought and misery were widespread. 'Now I know by this that thou art a man of God, and that the word of Yahweh in thy mouth is truth,' she joyfully told Elijah.

"I have a question to ask," said Peter as his father paused.

"What is it?"

"Verse 22 says that 'the soul of the child came into him again.' Could not that be used to teach the immortality of the soul?"

"It is used for that purpose," remarked Mr. Phillips," but a little thought will show that such a use of the verse is wrong. If the soul of the child had gone to heaven, why should Elijah desire to bring it back to earth where famine and misery existed, and persecution was being levelled against the true worshippers? The child would be better in heaven!"

"I know that the immortality of the soul is not taught in the Bible," said Peter impatiently. "What I want to know is what is meant by the statement, 'His soul came into him again'."

"The word 'soul' in the Hebrew is '*nephesh*'," explained Mr. Phillips. "The same word is translated 'life' in Genesis 9:4; Deuteronomy 12:23, and in other places. In Leviticus 17:11, we read: 'The life of the flesh is in the blood.' In the Hebrew of this verse, 'life' is translated from the same word as that rendered 'soul' in the verse before us. It should also be used in 1 Kings 17:22. The widow's son had his life restored to him again."

"Are the references you quoted the only places where 'nephesh' has been translated 'life?' asked Graeham.

"By no means! If you check with an analytical concordance, you will find that 'nephesh' has been rendered 'life' over one hundred times in the Bible. The word actually comes from a Hebrew root meaning simply "to breathe." Thus it relates to a breathing creature — see Genesis 2:7.

"It is a strange expression," said Graeham, who was puzzling over the verse.

"It is a Hebrew form of speech and is used in various ways in the Bible," explained his father. "In Judges 15:19 and in 1 Samuel 30:12 it is used to describe a fainting fit. The latter place speaks of how David came upon an Egyptian in the desert who had fainted with exhaustion. When he had been given some food he revived. But the Bible describes this as 'his spirit came again to him.' In like manner, the life of the woman's son is said to 'come into him,' because God had restored it to him. Verses like this are often incorrectly used by people to establish the false idea that man has an immortal soul. You will find it helpful therefore to mark your Bibles with the explanation and proofs I have given you."

The Capabilities of the Soul as Mentioned in the Bible

The word "soul" is used variously in Scripture to describe the actual person, the mind, disposition, life — subject to the principle of mortality. The word is from the Hebrew *nephesh* in the Old Testament, and the Greek *psuche* in the New Testament.

Some of its usages indicate that the soul:

• ***Is born:*** Genesis 46:18, 27. • ***Can eat:*** Exodus 12:16 (note margin); Deuteronomy 12:20; Leviticus 17:10-12; Luke 12:19. • ***Eats bread:*** Hosea 9:4. • ***Must die:*** Psalm 22:29. • ***Has a mouth:*** Psalm 103:2-5. • ***Has lips:*** Leviticus 5:4. • ***Has blood:*** Jeremiah 2:34. • ***Can thirst:*** Psalm 42:2. • ***Can be idle:*** Proverbs 19:15. • ***Weeps:*** Jeremiah 13:17. • ***Can touch:*** Leviticus 5:2. • ***Can be touched:*** Numbers 19:11 (margin). • ***Can die:*** Joshua 11:11; Ezekiel 18:4. • ***Can be smitten with the sword:*** Joshua 11:11, ***and pierced:*** Luke 2:35. • ***Can be put in a pit:*** Job 33:18; Isaiah 38:17. • ***Goes into the grave:*** Psalm 86:13; 56:13. • ***Needs redemption:*** Psalm 49:15. • ***Needs a resurrection:*** Psalm 89:48; 49:15.

Thus the Bible clearly teaches that man is mortal; that his existence is limited (Psalm 144:3-4), and is destined to death (Psalm 89:48). His only hope of a future existence is through a resurrection (1Corinthians 15:50), and a change to divine nature by the miraculous and singular work of Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:21) when he returns from heaven.

The Great Persecution

"The drought continued for three and a half years," continued Mr. Phillips as he outlined the Bible story. "The land became dry and parched; the springs, fountains and brooks gradually dried up; food became scarce (1 Kings 17:7). Conditions were so bad that the king and his overseer, a faithful man named Obadiah (which means, *The Servant of Yahweh*), had to join in the search for supplies of water in order that the royal animals be preserved alive."

"Aren't drought and famine used symbolically in the Bible?" asked Graeham.

"Yes, drought is used as a figure to describe lack of understanding of the Word of God. The prophet Amos declares: 'Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of Yahweh; and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of Yahweh, and shall not find it. In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst' (Amos 8:11-13). The prophet thus used the very conditions that troubled Israel in the days of Ahab as typical of a time when God's truth is not heeded by His people."

"You said that the drought lasted three and a half years, but it does not mention that figure in 1Kings 18," said Ann. "There it says that it lasted 'many days'."

"The words of the Lord, in Luke 4:25 show that it lasted three and a half years," answered her father. "A Jewish year is made up of 360 days, so that three and a half years make a total of 1260 days."

"That is very interesting," commented Graeham. "The period of drought in the time of Elijah is exactly the same as the period mentioned in Daniel 7:25. We were studying this in our Young Folk's Class recently. The words in Daniel read: 'He shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws; and they shall be given into his hand until a time, times, and the dividing of time'!"

"How do you make that three and a half years?" asked Peter sceptically.

"A 'time' represents a Jewish year, 'times' is equivalent to two years, and the 'dividing of time' is half a year" stated Graeham reading from the notes that he had made in the margin of his Bible. "Thus the term equals three and a half years. Dad has just stated that a Jewish year represents 360 days, so that three years and a half total 1260 days, the number shown in Revelation 11:3."

"That is correct," agreed Mr. Phillips. "The circumstances of Elijah's day typified those that existed in the Dark Ages when Rome exercised her power ruthlessly over the minds of men. Those terrible times of persecution were predicted in the passages from Daniel and Revelation quoted by Graeham. They were typified by the experience of Elijah. He lived in a period of great persecution, as well as a time of natural and spiritual drought. Elijah, himself, had departed 'into a far country' as the Lord has done. Queen Jezebel was the head of a wicked religious system which changed the laws of Israel, and hunted down true worshippers. She dominated her husband and the government, as Rome did in the days of its temporal power when it ruled with ruthless control over its subjects. With fanatical zeal, she extended the worship of Baal and Astarte. The State combined with Jezebel to persecute the saints. Prophets were put to death (1Kings 18:4, 13,

22; 2Kings 9:7), the faithful were hunted down and forced to take refuge in caves and dens of the earth, the altars of Yahweh were destroyed (1Kings 18:30; 19:10), and the true religion could only be followed at risk of life itself.

"Thus, typically, the conditions existing in Israel during this time of drought, when Elijah was absent from the land, were similar to those that existed during the long period of 1260 years when Roman Catholicism exercised great power in Europe. There was plenty of religion, but not of the true kind. It was a paganised form of Christianity that was followed by most men. Rome exercised great power, and used it to persecute those who followed the true religion. They were hunted down and destroyed, and, as in the days of Jezebel, death was the weapon often used to enforce their wrong teachings on men.

"It is also significant that whilst Israel had largely turned to false worship, the Truth had found a lodgement among the Gentiles, and that, too, where the influence of Jezebel was strong, for the widow of Zarephath had embraced the worship of the true God. In fulfilment of the type, the Truth has been accepted among the Gentiles, and that, too, where the influence of Jezebel is strong today."

"You are getting very confusing," grumbled Peter who had been scribbling some notes in a book in a very untidy hand. "What do you mean by saying 'where the influence of Jezebel is strong today'?"

"Jezebel is referred to in the Bible in two ways," explained his father. "There is Jezebel the wife of Ahab; and Jezebel of the book of Revelation. A study of the latter will show that she represents a false religious organisation."

"Where is that found?"

"You will find it in Revelation 2:20. There is no doubt that the woman of Revelation 17:6 which John describes as 'drunken with the blood of saints,' also represents a manifestation of this same Jezebel, in a religious system that is found persecuting the saints."

"The connection between Jezebel and false teaching is clear from the reference in Revelation 2:20," said Graeham who had been following his father's explanation very closely, "but can you prove that the woman referred to in Revelation 17:4 represents Rome?"

"Nothing is easier," replied his father. "What do you read in v. 18?"

Graeham read: "The woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth."

"What city reigned over the kings of the earth at the time when the Revelation was given?" asked Mr. Phillips.

"The city of Rome."

"That is correct."

"But how can you say the woman represents a religious system?"

"Because the Bible constantly uses a woman to represent a reli-

gious community. The true believers are represented as a virgin (2Cor. 11:2), or as the Bride of Christ (Eph. 5:31-32), and the false church is symbolised as a wicked woman (Rev. 17:3) styled Jezebel (Revelation 2:20). In Revelation 17, this wicked system is said to have universal power."

"How is it said to have that?"

"It is described as 'sitting upon many waters' (v. 1), and these are said to represent 'peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues' (v. 15). The Roman Catholic Church claims universal power: in fact, the word 'catholic' means 'universal.' Rome also claims to be the 'mother church,' and is so described in this chapter, for it is called 'the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth'."

"Of whom is she the mother?"

"The other systems represented in this verse are those closely connected with Rome in belief and practice. They might reject allegiance to the Pope, but many Protestant churches are really the offshoots of Roman Catholicism, and therefore can be called her 'daughters.'

"Are there any other points of identification?"

"Yes. Rome is noted for riches, and in v. 4 this woman is said to be rich also. Rome has a terrible record for persecution, and this woman is said to be 'drunken with the blood of saints' (v. 6). Rome has made use of national governments to enforce her will, and this woman is also represented in that way (v. 2). Rome has sent its false teaching into all the world, blinding the minds of men to the Truth, and concerning this woman it is said that 'the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication' (v. 2). There are other points of identification, but those are clear enough. You can also see how closely they resemble Jezebel."



Chapter Two

ELIJAH RETURNS TO THE LAND

At the set time appointed by God, Elijah received a further command: "Go, show yourself unto Ahab," God told him, "and I will send rain on the earth."

Elijah obeyed instantly. He did not argue whether it would be dangerous for him to appear openly in Israel, but immediately set about doing what God required.

This was typical of all his actions. He was moved entirely by the Word of Yahweh. When he was told to go to Cherith, he did not argue, but obeyed (1Kings 17:3). When he was told to leave Cherith for Zarephath, he did so instantly (Ch. 17:9). He was as the slave of Yahweh, immediately performing the bidding of his Master (v. 1).

Leaving Zarephath in the north, he entered the land of Israel, and showed himself to Obadiah who was searching for grazing land for the royal animals. Obadiah could hardly believe his eyes when he saw the prophet before him.

But he was more startled when he heard the request of Elijah. "Go, tell thy lord, 'Behold Elijah is here'!"

Obadiah was afraid to do this. He knew how thoroughly Ahab had searched for Elijah in vain. He had not only looked for him throughout all the land of Israel, but in all neighbouring countries as well. Obadiah feared that if he gave Elijah's message to Ahab, the prophet would remove himself, so that the king would not find him, and then the wrath of Ahab would fall on him. Already he had defied the queen by protecting many of the prophets of Yahweh during the great persecution.

"You ask me to tell Ahab you are here," he said, "but as soon as I am gone, the spirit of Yahweh will carry you to some secret hiding place, so that we will not find you, and then Ahab will slay me in anger!"

But Elijah assured Obadiah that he would be present to meet Ahab.

Not long after this, the meeting between the king and the prophet took place. Ahab looked upon Elijah as an enemy. "So you have revealed yourself, you troubler of Israel!" he said.

But Elijah replied: "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have done so in that you have forsaken the commandment of Yahweh, and followed the worship of Baal."

He challenged Ahab to a great contest to find out whether Yahweh or Baal should be worshipped.

"Send out and gather all Israel to Carmel," he declared, "and bring the 450 prophets of Baal, and the 400 prophets of Astarte that eat at Jezebel's table."

Ahab agreed to the contest. It was a good way to get rid of a troublesome enemy. There was no doubt in his mind, that the 850 false prophets would be more than a match for the solitary prophet of Yahweh. He hoped that Elijah would be discredited before all Israel. There would be no possibility of Elijah escaping him this time!

Ahab was desperate. Something had to be done and that quickly. The land was parched and dry through drought; the people were complaining; shortage of food was acute.

Ahab welcomed the contest on Carmel.

Elijah's Triumph on Mt. Carmel (1Kings 19)

At the due date, representatives of all Israel gathered at the appointed place. It was early morning. The sun shone brightly from the east, bathing the mount in light, causing the Mediterranean Sea to gleam with a thousand lights, revealing a scene of beauty and historic importance along the valley of Esdraelon.

The assembled people looked curiously at the 450 prophets of Baal in their splendid garments, contrasting so greatly with Elijah, the solitary prophet of Yahweh with his stern countenance and rough, simple clothing.

For some reason Jezebel's 400 prophets were not present.

Carmel was a most significant place at which to hold such a contest. The mount is pitted with caves, and tradition says that it was in these that the persecuted prophets had sheltered from the wrath of Jezebel. Its name means "fruitful," which greatly contrasted with the famished state of Israel at that time — for Israel was producing no fruit either literal or spiritual.

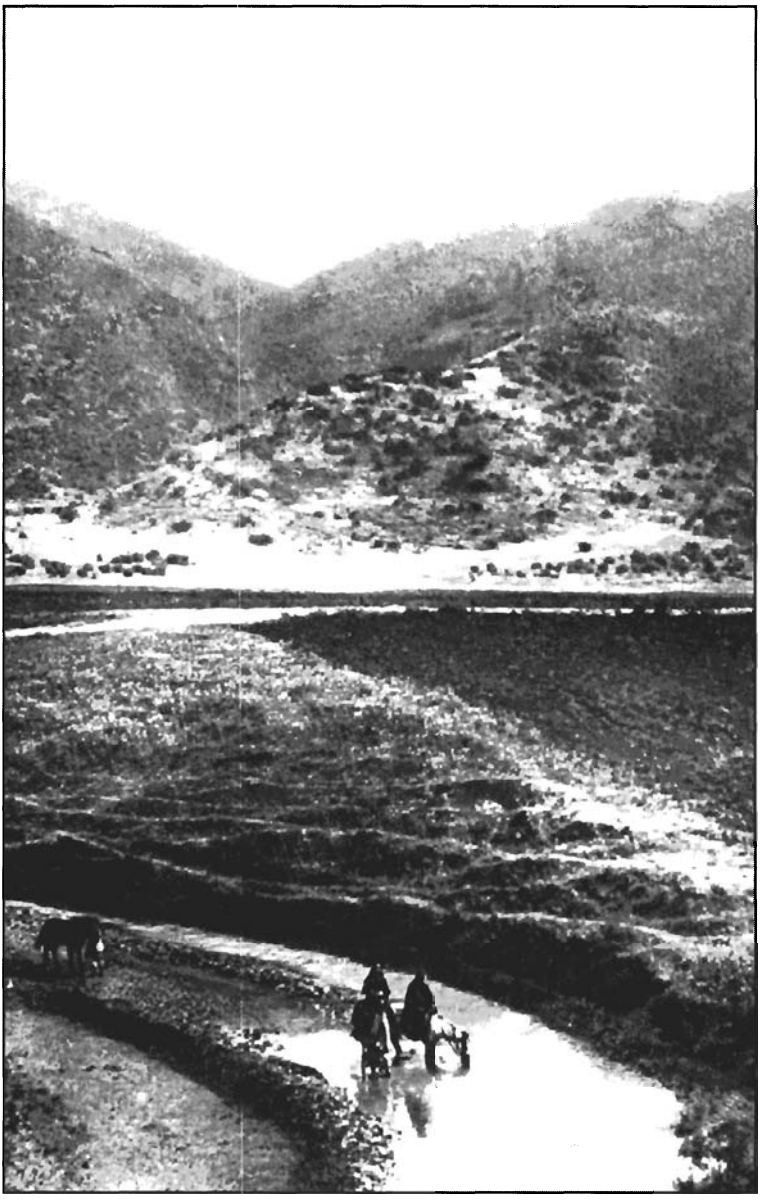
The people gathered on the mount were full of doubts and troubled by the terrible effect of the drought. They did not know which way to turn. They looked with curiosity at Elijah. Many blamed him for the troubles they were having. But now he addressed them, and his voice rang out clear and strong, on that sunny morning on Carmel. "Why do you hop* about between two opinions?" he loudly called. "If Yahweh be God follow Him; but if Baal be God follow him."

No one answered him. A deep silence followed his words. The people did not know how to make up their minds. Like most crowds, this one was fickle. The people awaited the issue, prepared to follow whoever proved the stronger.

Their silence stirred the prophet; their cowardly attitude angered him. "I, I only, remain§ a prophet of Yahweh," he called to them, "but Baal's prophets are 450. Let them give us two bullocks. Let them choose one for themselves and place it on their altar, and I will do

* The word in the Hebrew signifies to hop from branch to branch like a bird.

§ There were other righteous men in Israel such as Obadiah, but Elijah meant that he was the only remaining prophet capable of doing public battle on behalf of the Truth.



Where Elijah slew the prophets of Baal. The traditional site of Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal is on the inland ridge of Mount Carmel, overlooking the Plain of Esdraeloon (Jezreel). The river Kishon, taking a big curve, flows along by the foot of the ridge, as seen in the photograph. After the miraculous fire consumed his burnt sacrifice, putting the false prophets to confusion before the people (1Kings 18:40), "Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them; and Elijah brought themn down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there".

likewise on my altar. Then call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of Yahweh. And let us worship him that answers by fire."

This time the people did speak. The offer of Elijah was a generous one. If he should succeed in spite of the numbers gathered against him there would be no doubt as to who was God. From the crowd there came the shout:

"The suggestion is good!"

Elijah then gave the prophets of Baal the first opportunity to show their power. They selected a bullock and prepared it for the altar. When all was ready they called to their gods:

"O Baal, hear us!"

But only silence followed their pleading.

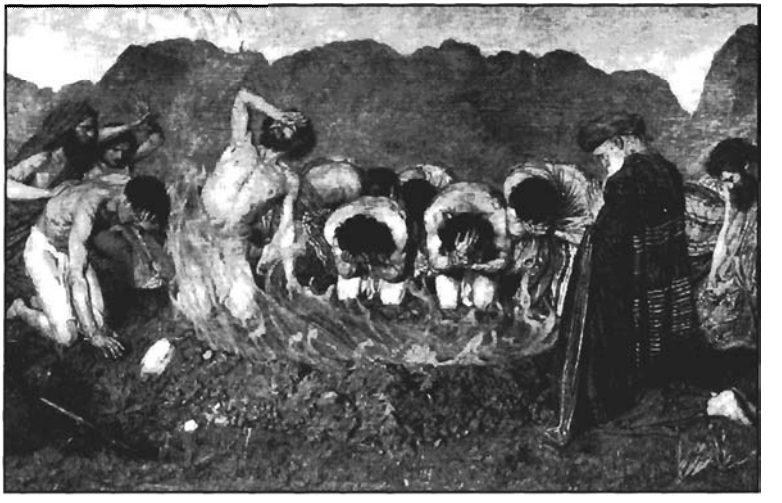
Again and again they shouted; but it was all in vain. And now Elijah began to mock them with bitter, savage words of sarcasm. He had a deep hatred for the evil prophets and their false religion. He saw it as the cause of all the sufferings of Israel. His intense love for Yahweh incited in him an abhorrence for these priests who had taught the people error and led them to ruin and death. He wanted also to show the people how foolish they had been to leave the worship of Yahweh for that of Baal.

"Cry louder!" he invited them.

The prophets shouted louder but to no avail. There was no response from their god!

"He is a god," Elijah added sarcastically. "Perhaps he is talking, or has gone hunting, or is on a journey, or is asleep and you have to awaken him!"

The sarcastic words of Elijah sent the false prophets into a frenzy



of anger and excitement. It was now midday. The sun was at its full strength, and these Baal prophets were sun worshippers. Now was the time he should answer if ever he was to. They shouted louder. They danced more frantically. They took lancets and knives and gashed themselves until blood ran down their bodies to mingle with the perspiration that dripped from them to the ground.

But a deadly silence was their only reward.

And now it was past midday. The sun god had failed them. But still they carried on with their shouts and leaping, though now, through very tiredness, their efforts lacked power.

It was almost the time of the evening sacrifice, a most important ordinance of the Law of Moses which the people had neglected for so long. Expectantly, the people looked at the solitary figure of Elijah. It was now his turn.

The prophet of God was standing by an altar once used for offerings; apart from the official ones made at the Temple. The altar was in ruins, broken down at the order of the very prophets of Baal whose pleading had proved so useless (1Kings 18:30).

He took twelve unhewn stones, to represent the twelve tribes of Israel, and, setting these up one upon another, he restored the altar of Yahweh on Carmel.

He then set the wood in order, laid the bullock upon the wood, and then, to the astonishment of the people, he dug a trench around the altar. Having done this he commanded that they fill four barrels of water and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and the wood. There was ample water in the ocean though it was scarce on the land, and in all, twelve barrels of water were poured over the sacrifice. Together with



the wood it was completely soaked, and the trench ran with water.

And now Elijah was ready.

It was evening time. The sun was sinking in the west. In happier days, when Israel followed the way of Yahweh in truth, this was the hour when the evening sacrifice was offered and the people gave themselves to prayer.

But that had all been long forgotten. The people no longer worshipped Yahweh in the way set down in His law. They were hostile towards His prophet. Elijah stood lonely, though unafraid, before the multitude. His water-soaked sacrifice was ready upon the altar he had just repaired. And now, standing before the people, and with arms outstretched to heaven, he began his prayer.

"Yahweh God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel, and I Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word. Hear me, O Yahweh, hear me, that this people may know that Thou art Yahweh God, and that Thou hast turned their hearts back again."

The solitary Elijah made an impressive figure as he stood beside the Altar. There was no leaping and shouting such as the Baal prophets had indulged in. There were but quiet words of prayer, but words in which there was great power. The people saw the stern, courageous prophet, with long hair hanging over his shoulders, clad in a rough mantle of sheepskins fastened together with a girdle of hide. They heard his earnest, faithful prayer.

Would Yahweh answer his plea?

They soon had the answer.

Suddenly, without warning, a sheet of flame struck down from heaven towards the sacrifice on the altar. Reversing the normal course of nature, it burnt downwards, consuming, in turn, the sacrifice, wood, stones, dust and water in the trench.

It was the answer of Heaven.

So unexpected was the sight, so powerful and blinding the flame, so fiercely did it burn, that the people were taken aback. They bowed to the ground in the face of this manifestation of divine power.

"YAHWEH HE IS GOD! YAHWEH HE IS GOD!" they shouted with one accord.

This is similar to the meaning of the name of Elijah, so that it, by a slight change, became a war cry against the false prophets of Baal.

And Elijah now became their leader. "Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape," he commanded the people.

The persecuting prophets of Baal now became the victims. Having seen this visible evidence of Yahweh's power, the multitude sought vengeance on these false teachers who had led them astray. They captured them, and taking them down to the brook Kishon at the foot of Carmel, they slew them there.

These false prophets had paid the penalty of failure.

The Drought Breaks

And now Elijah had a message of peace for Ahab. "Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain," he told the king. It was no ordinary feast Elijah called upon Ahab to eat, but a sacrificial one. He invited him to accept the covenant of Yahweh around the altar just erected, and the sacrifice just offered. He thus invited the king to turn again to the true worship.*

Meanwhile, the prophet ascended to the very summit of the mount which looks out upon the blue waters of the Mediterranean. There he bowed down to the earth in prayer unto Yahweh (1Kings 18:42). As he had previously prayed for drought, that Israel might be humbled to seek their God, he now prayed for rain that God might bless the people (James 5:18).

He prayed, and then told his servant to look towards the sea if there were any signs of rain.

"There is none," the man answered.

Elijah prayed again.

But still there was no answer.

Six times he prayed, and six times his servant went to the place where he could look towards the sea, but he had nothing to report.

But on the seventh occasion there was a change. He saw a small cloud arise in the west, no larger than a man's hand. This was the sign Elijah was awaiting.

"Tell Ahab to prepare his chariot," he ordered the young man. "Tell him to hasten back to Jezreel for there will soon be an abundance of rain."

Sure enough the storm clouds gathered, black and lowering. Heavy rain clouds covered the top of Carmel and hung low over the land.

Ahab drove his chariot towards Jezreel knowing that unless he arrived before the rains came, he would be bogged in the marshy valley of Esdraelon.

But though he drove fast, Elijah, with strength given him of God, outran him. With his thighs girded, and driven by the Spirit of God, Elijah ran before the chariot of Ahab to reach the entrance of Jezreel before the king. This was the headquarters of Jezebel, the cruel,

* A wonderful type of the future is presented in this dramatic incident. Elijah suddenly and unexpectedly appears in Israel as Christ will return one day. Elijah destroyed the prophets of Baal, as the Lord will destroy all false prophets at his coming (2 Thess. 1:8). He called upon the nation, through its king, to enter into covenant relationship with Yahweh, as Christ will the nations of the earth (Rev. 11:15). This was followed by the breaking of the drought, and there will be a breaking of the spiritual drought evident through all the earth today, when Christ returns (cp. Amos 8:11-14 with Joel 2:23). All this took place after the seventh period of prayer (1 Kings 18:44) pointing forward to the Millennium.

wicked wife of Ahab. Elijah's attitude was an act of defiance to Jezebel, warning her that, as the prophets of Baal had been destroyed, so would the prophets of Ashtaroth that were under her care, and ate at her table.

Elijah ran towards Jezreel as a forerunner to the king of Israel. Jezreel means "The Place of God's Sowing." The prophet Hosea speaks of the "day of Jezreel" as a time when the children of Judah and of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, even the Lord Jesus Christ (Hos. 1:11).

Elijah is to play a great part in that future regathering. He is to be as forerunner to the future King of Israel in the day of glory yet to dawn (Mal. 4:5-6).



Jezebel's Threat All Israel was stirred with the news of Elijah's victory on Mount Carmel. It meant the end of Jezebel's hopes to turn Israel to the false worship she had introduced into the land. She felt bitter at the failure of her mission. Her hatred of Elijah knew no bounds. Those about her could tell she was consumed with a violent anger, and wondered what form her revenge would take.

Ahab also wondered. He was completely dominated by his wife, and though he may have liked to serve God, he did not dare oppose her will. Thus he was torn between two loyalties. He had given support to the worship of Baal, he had also supported and protected his servant Obadiah, a faithful worshipper of the Truth. Though Ahab bowed down to the false worship Jezebel introduced into Israel, he also gave his sons names honouring Yahweh.*

Ahab told Jezebel all that had happened on Mount Carmel. Perhaps he hoped she might be impressed with the story and turn to the

* For example, Ahaziah, whose name means "Yahweh has sustained" (1 Kings 22:51).

worship of Yahweh. If that was his hope, it was dashed to the ground. The strong-willed Jezebel was furious. She saw the victory of Elijah as a threat to her power and influence. She determined to take up the challenge in support of her beliefs.

With her heart filled with hatred, she sent a violent message to Elijah: "As surely as you are Elijah and I am Jezebel, may the gods kill me and worse, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life the same as any one of those whom you killed."

This was a terrible message, a terrible threat, and Jezebel meant every word of it.

Elijah's Despair Jezebel's message had a depressing effect upon Elijah. He was tired out by the contest with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel; he felt an intense nervous reaction after the tension he had gone through. Strong, faithful and courageous as he was, he was but human after all, and there was a limit to what he could bear.

Perhaps he expected the demonstration of Yahweh's power to be followed by a great spiritual revival in Israel. Perhaps he thought that the people would reject all forms of idolatry after such a manifestation of God's presence.

That had not been the case. In the face of the queen's wrath, the king had weakly stood aside as she made every preparation to murder Elijah.

Perhaps Elijah had expected great things of the people of Israel. The multitude had been so enthusiastic in their applause on Mt. Carmel, so ready and willing to slaughter the prophets of Baal when they had witnessed the flaming fire consume the sacrifice.

Like most multitudes, the fire of its zeal had now burnt out. In a time of need it was completely silent. Elijah learned the lesson men of God have had to learn throughout the centuries, that it is little use putting any confidence in the flesh. The person who relies upon the votes of a crowd can be as easily destroyed by the same crowd. It was the very same people who cried unto Christ, "Hosanna to the king!" who a few days later, were angrily shouting: "Crucify! Crucify him!"

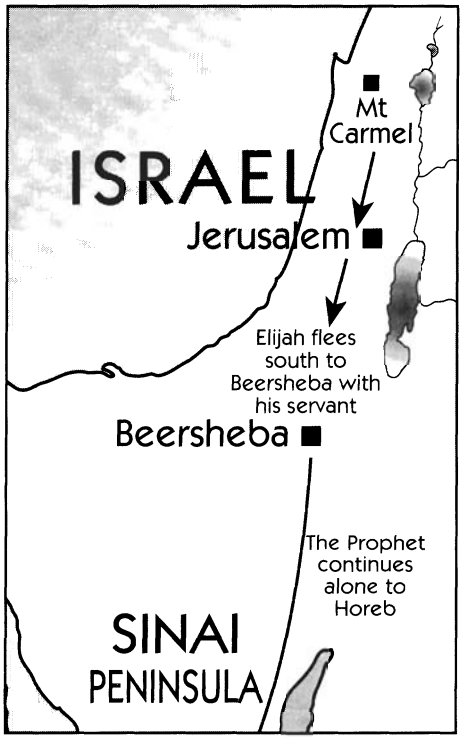
They were now doing this to Elijah.

The prophet became despondent and depressed. It seemed to him that the numbers gathered against him were so numerous and powerful that he could not possibly succeed. Many who should have been his supporters were strangely silent, whilst his enemies fought with weapons he would not stoop to use.

He wanted strength, help, companionship. Where could he find these needs? Only in Yahweh. He wanted rest and quietness that he might seek his God. He felt an urgent need for communion with God, and that ALONE.

In his despair he fled. He left the north, and with his servant travelled through the hilly country of central Palestine towards Beersheba. This was in the southern part of Judah. Though he was out of the territory of Ahab, he still did not feel safe, because Jehoshaphat, Judah's king, had married his son to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, and Elijah feared he might be betrayed (2Chron. 18:1).

At Beersheba he left his servant, and travelled alone towards the south. Wearied with worry, worn out by his long, tedious travel, weakened through lack of food, he entered the hot, isolated wilderness of the south. The sun beat down strongly on the desert of sand, and was reflected back in waves of heat over the lonely prophet. He felt tired and ill, and sought a little relief in the shadow of a juniper tree that he found growing in the wilderness.



As he lay down in its shade, he wished that the time of his long rest might come; he hoped that he might die. "Oh, Yahweh," he prayed, "it is enough; take away my life, for I have been unsuccessful, no better than those who went before me."

Depression completely overcame him. He could see no way out of his troubles, no prospect of success. And yet, whilst he sought death, whilst he was prepared to give up his life, he would not allow Jezebel to take it. That would have been a triumph for the system of religion he hated with a bitter contempt.

Worn out with tiredness, the prophet lay down in the shade of the tree and slept.

He soon had evidence that God cared for him. He was woken from his sleep by an angel, who invited him to arise and eat. Elijah found that food had been miraculously provided. He ate and found strength ebbing back into him.

But again he fell asleep for he was tired out. Again the angel awakened him and provided him with reviving food.

This time he was told there was still work for him to do. He must arise and travel south to Horeb.

Elijah found that the food he received from the angel gave him strength to continue his journey. Its strength remained with him for forty days and nights. He left the wilderness of Beersheba, and plodded his way through the hot, tiring desert, down to the wild maze of valleys and mountains in the Sinaitic Peninsula. Deep valleys, overshadowed by rugged, harsh granite mountains now closed in upon him. The lonely prophet continued on his long way until he came to the silent, brooding Mount Horeb.

The word Horeb means "waste." Here, in the past, great manifestations of divine power had been revealed. It was at Horeb that Moses saw the burning bush, and heard the voice of the angel commanding him to return to Egypt to rescue the children of Israel. It was at Horeb that the tribes gathered to receive the Law, and where they heard the awful sound of thunder, and saw the tremendous flashes of lightning, and were encompassed with the blackness of night as the thick cloud descended upon it. It was at Horeb many years later, that Paul, another wonderful man of God, went to gain encouragement, knowledge and strength for the great work before him (Gal. 1:17; 2Cor. 12:2). It will be at Horeb that Christ will gather his followers to him at his coming, that they might be strengthened and prepared for the wonderful future before them as his co-rulers (Deut. 33:1-2; Psa. 68:17; Hab. 3:3) Horeb and Sinai are at the same spot). And from this place, again, Elijah will go forth to complete the mission he commenced so long ago (Mal. 4:5).

Elijah at Horeb Lonely and despondent, feeling that his mission had been a complete failure, the prophet came to Horeb, and sheltered in a cave close to the Mount. Moses, also, had sheltered in a cleft in the rock, when he, too, likewise discouraged, had besought that the glory of Yahweh be revealed unto him (Exod. 33:22). It could have been the same spot at which Elijah now sought refuge.

He sheltered there. All was silent and still. The prophet awaited a sign from God that he might learn what He required of him. Then, suddenly, the silence was broken by a commanding voice:

"What doest thou here, Elijah?"

There was a touch of rebuke in the question. It was as though the angel had said, Why hide as though your work is finished? What value is gained by fleeing from the face of the enemy? Your presence here is a desertion of duty!

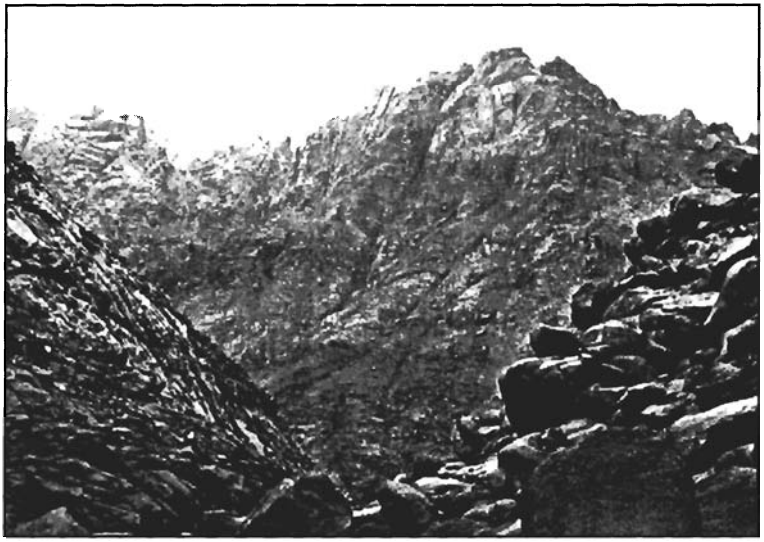
What an exhortation there is in this question thus put to the prophet. How often do we allow ourselves to be overcome by discouragement! How often do we permit the depressing circumstances

of life to cause us to sulk and turn our backs upon labour! We perhaps seek the praise of men, whereas we should ever remember that we work only for God. Paul quotes this very incident in Romans 11:3 as an exhortation never to give up.

Elijah had an answer, of course. We all have excuses to justify our actions. We can always find reasons to say why the work will not succeed, and that it is useless labouring. We often say these words without the justification that Elijah had. He declared: "I have been very jealous for Yahweh God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away!"

Certainly, this seemed excuse enough. There is no doubt that Elijah had laboured, no doubt that he had suffered for the cause of the Truth, no doubt that Jezebel sought his life. But God taught him a lesson, and in teaching him, He also teaches us. Elijah was told to go out and stand upon the mount, that he might see the glory of Yahweh revealed in the angel.

He did so. He looked out upon the waste of mountain and valley before him. Then he saw the great Creator revealed in an angel. And, suddenly, the scene of quietness and peace was broken. As the angel passed before him, a tremendous storm of wind suddenly tore at the mountain upon which he stood. The roar of the hurricane burst like thunder about him. The violence of its power loosened huge slabs of granite from out of its side and hurled them into the valley below. The mighty roaring wind left fear and ruin in its path.



But it did not build up anything; it only destroyed.

Yahweh was not in the wind; He is not in that which is only destructive.

This manifestation of divine terror filled the prophet with fear. He sought the shelter of the cave that he might hide until it was over.

The wind died away, but it was followed by an earthquake, and Elijah felt the earth shake beneath him. The cave was no longer a refuge; it could fall in upon him. The prophet became filled with even a greater fear.

Yahweh was not in the earthquake either; like the wind, it could only destroy.

The earthquake was followed by a fire. Elijah looked out from his shelter and saw in the thick darkness about him that the rugged granite mountains were alight with flames. It not only gave the place an eerie appearance, but it burnt and consumed all that was before it. Yet Yahweh was not in the fire. Like the wind and the earthquake it could only consume and destroy.

These things were like the ministry of Elijah to Israel. When he thundered upon the people, and called down the divine punishment upon them, he filled them with fear. This was necessary to bring them to a proper state of mind to accept God, but in itself it accomplished nothing. Elijah was being taught that something more than the slaughter of Yahweh's enemies, the fearsome and wrathful denouncing of sin, and the scattering of the forces of evil is necessary before Yahweh's purpose is expressed in a work.

As the roaring hurricane, the fearsome earthquake, the consuming fire raged around Horeb, the prophet cowered trembling in the cave.

But now it ceased, and instead he heard "a still small voice."

What was this voice?

The Hebrew words in the original signify "the sound of stillness." One translation (*Rotherham's*) has rendered the words as "a gentle whisper." Another translation (the *Septuagint*) gives them as "a gentle breeze."

The hurricane, earthquake and fire had expended all their wrath, and now he heard the noise of a gentle, persistent breeze. It reminded the prophet that there is a need for the quiet, insistent voice of instruction and upbuilding after the storm has swept away the evil. He was thus shown that his work was only yet half done. Like the raging hurricane, the fearsome earthquake, the consuming fire, Elijah's mighty work of condemning evil, slaughtering the prophets of Baal, vigorously opposing sin in all its ways, had caused all (even Yahweh's worshippers) to take shelter, just as he had done so in the cave by Horeb. And now there was the need for the gentle voice of instruction to help to draw from their hiding-places those who had "not bowed the knee to Baal."

They had to be brought into the open, as the gentle whisper of the breeze had penetrated the cave where Elijah was hiding to tell him the storm was over, that it was safe to come out into the open.

He came out, wrapping his face in his mantle, for he realised that he was in the presence of God. In lonely humility, with mantle-wrapped face, the stern, rough-clad prophet awaited God's instructions. He heard a Voice: "What doest thou here, Elijah?"

It was a Voice of gentle reproof. It was as though he was told: "There is work to be done, Elijah! You are neglecting your duty."

Again the prophet explained his attitude: "I have been very jealous for Yahweh God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

More Work for Elijah

Elijah was commanded to return to his work. He was to anoint Hazael to be king over Syria; he was to anoint Jehu to be king over Israel; he was to anoint Elisha to be prophet in his stead.

He was told the purpose of these several anointings.

Hazael would bring to pass the judgments of God on the blasphemous Ben-Hadad.

Jehu would bring to pass the judgments of God on the wicked house of Ahab and the vile Jezebel.

Elisha would pronounce judgments upon those of Israel who proved disobedient.

But despite these judgments, the "still small voice," the gentle breathing of God's spirit would be heard, for He would look after His own. Elijah was told: "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him."

Elijah had said: "I, I only am left!" Now he learned that there were 7,000 throughout Israel who still remained faithful to Yahweh.

But like Elijah during the storm of wind, earthquake and fire, they had sought shelter, had hidden from the unleashed fury that had swept Israel because of its evil ways.

Chapter Three

ELISHA, THE SUCCESSOR IS SELECTED

Elijah thus returned to fulfil the duties bestowed upon him. He went down to the Jordan Valley, and to a place called Abel-meholah, or the *Meadow of Dancing*. There he saw Elisha, the son of Shaphat, ploughing in the field. With him were eleven servants, each with his yoke of oxen, ploughing beside him. To employ so many servants for such a purpose implies that Elisha was in comfortable circumstances. He was also very young, for sixty years later he was still exercising his office as prophet. Therefore in many respects, Elisha was quite different from the stern, rough prophet from Gilead.

It was, perhaps, a gentle rebuke to Elijah that such a man, young, inexperienced, wealthy, should be selected as his successor. But Elijah was not one to question the decision of Yahweh. As Elijah passed close by Elisha, he took his mantle, the sign of his office as prophet, and cast it upon Elisha. The startled young man knew the symbolic meaning of such an action. It implied that he was to follow Elijah as his successor. Elisha willingly accepted his duty, and agreed to follow the aged prophet, but first he desired to say goodbye to his parents. He said: "Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you."

The old prophet answered: "Go! But mind that you return again; for see what a great privilege I have given you!" (1Kings 19:20).*

He said goodbye to his parents, and, returning to the field and to Elijah, he took the yoke of oxen with which he was ploughing, and sacrificing them, he made a feast unto all the people on his farm. By this act he solemnly dedicated his labour to Yahweh. It was a public declaration that he was renouncing all things for Him; his labour from thenceforth would be given entirely unto God.

Elisha became the constant companion of Elijah, looking after his comfort (see 2Kings 3:11), listening to his instruction, learning to become his successor. During these closing months of Elijah's ministry, the "still small voice," the "gentle breeze" blew constantly through Israel, refreshing and reviving with its influence. Elisha was greatly helped, the schools of the prophets revived once again (2Kings 2:3), and a little spiritual strength was generated throughout the nation.

Samaria Besieged by Ben-Hadad (1Kings 20)

North of Israel, king Ben-Hadad looked upon the weakened condition of his southern neighbour with pleasure. As king of Syria, he wielded great power. Thirty-two chieftains acknowledged his might, and he longed to add the king of Israel to

* This is the idiom of the Hebrew words of this verse.

their number. Earlier, in the time of his father, Israel had been defeated (1Kings 20:34), and Ben-Hadad wanted to complete the overthrow of Ahab.

With pomp and ceremony, king Ben-Hadad invaded Israel at the head of his 32 vassal kings, and a numerous army. All Israel trembled before this mighty display of power. The Syrians came up to the city of Samaria and besieged it. A mocking message was sent to king Ahab by messengers of the King of Syria.

"Thus saith Ben-Hadad: Your silver and your gold is mine; your wives also and your children are mine."

The presence of the 32 subservient kings with Ben-Hadad shows what was meant by this demand to Ahab. It required him to submit to the king of Syria as these other kings had done. Ahab was prepared to accept these conditions. He sent back a message to Ben-Hadad: "My lord, O king, according to your saying, I am yours, and all that I have."

Ben-Hadad was not satisfied with this. Confident of his power, he wanted to humiliate Ahab still further. He demanded that his servants be allowed to search the houses of the Israelites and take away whatever they pleased (v.6).*

Ahab did not know what to do. He doubted that he had the power to successfully oppose Ben-Hadad, but he felt he could not give way to the arrogant demand of the Syrian king. He called his advisers together and asked them what they thought he should do.

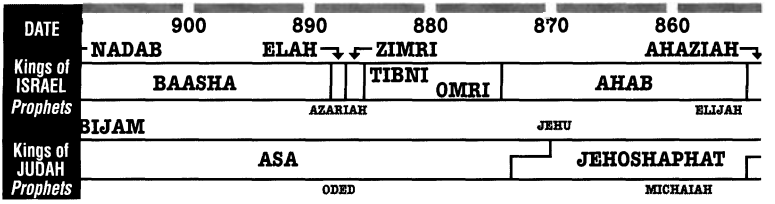
"Do not consent to the king of Syria," they declared.

Ahab decided to act on this advice. At the same time, he conducted himself humbly before Ben-Hadad, and by his attitude put the latter plainly in the wrong concerning his subsequent actions.

"Tell my lord the king, All that you did send for thy servant to do the first time we will do; but this further demand I cannot accept," he told the messengers of Ben-Hadad.

This angered the Syrian. He sent an insulting message to Ahab declaring that he would destroy Samaria. He boasted that his army was so numerous that when the city fell, there would not be sufficient rubbish to provide a handful for each soldier.

* This further demand shows that in accepting Ben-Hadad's previous ultimatum it did not signify that Ahab or his family would be required to leave Samaria. It apparently meant no more than becoming as one of the vassal kings of v. 1.



Ahab answered this boast with admirable restraint: "Tell him, Let not him that girdeth on his armour boast himself as he that putteth it off."

Ben-Hadad received this message as he was sitting in state before his vassal kings, feasting and drinking with them in a large tent he had pitched for the purpose.

The message angered him. He immediately ordered the army to prepare to attack.

Meanwhile, in the city, fear spread on all sides. The Syrian army was so numerous and powerful that the leaders of Israel knew no way to combat it. But unexpectedly the king was visited by a prophet with a message from Yahweh. "Thus says Yahweh," he told the king, "You see all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into your hand this day; and you will know that I am Yahweh."

Ahab was incredulous. "Who will do it?" he asked.

"The young men of the princes of the provinces," was the answer.

These were immature youths, unused to war. By using them to gain the victory God made it obvious that it came from Him.*

"Who shall lead the battle?" was Ahab's next question.

"You!" declared the prophet.

Ahab was desperate, and when men are desperate they turn religious. He decided that on this occasion he would follow the instructions of Yahweh. He numbered the young men and found that there were 232 of them. He then numbered the army of Israel, and found that he had 7,000 soldiers.

This was not many to pit against the thousands that Ben-Hadad had at his command. Ahab decided to attack immediately, thus taking the Syrians off guard. At the head of the young men he sallied forth from the city. Ben-Hadad was still drinking himself drunk in the tent of state he had set up. He was so confident of success that he treated the war as a picnic. He heard the young men come out of the city and commanded that his soldiers take them captive alive.

It was a foolish order. The Syrian soldiers dared not kill the Israelites in case they were court-martialled by their king. The result was that the young Israeli men had an easy victory, and the mighty Syrian army fled before them. Caught by surprise, Ben-Hadad, likewise fled.

Second Syrian Attack

Ahab was pleased with the victory. But as he was congratulating himself he was accosted by the prophet, who told him to lose no time in strengthening his defence because Ben-Hadad would attack the following year.

* In a previous challenge from enemy forces, God reduced the army of Gideon from 22,000 to 300, that it might be evident to those of faith that Yahweh's power is the means of victory — cp. Judg. 7:2-4.

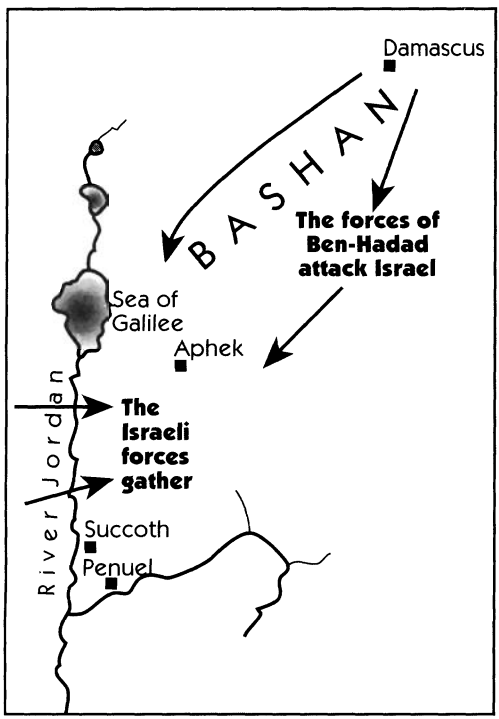
In Syria, preparations were immediately commenced for this attack. Ben-Hadad had been disgraced by his former failure. His advisers knew that it was due to his drunken folly. They feared to tell him that, however, and instead they blamed it on to the gods.

"Their gods are gods of the hills," they said of the Israelites, "therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall defeat them."

This was an excellent excuse. It covered the drunken folly of Ben-Hadad, and was a satisfactory explanation of the failure of the Syrian soldiers. At the same time, the Syrians decided not to rely only upon their gods. They decided to take the vassal kings away, and put trained captains in their place, and to recruit an army as large as the last.

At last the mighty army was ready, and leaving Damascus, it invaded Israel east of the Jordan. It came to the fortress Aphek, in the heights on the east of the sea of Galilee. Here, the Israelitish army was gathered. The vast Syrian army covered the country to the north, but the Israeli army looked like a couple of small flocks of goats in comparison.

Again fear swept the ranks of the Israelites. But again Yahweh's prophet came to king Ahab with a message of encouragement. "The Syrians have said that Yahweh is only powerful in the hills," he said. "Therefore, today, He is going to reveal Himself to be all-powerful, and will prove it by delivering this mighty army into your hands".



But for a few days nothing happened. The Syrians were cautious. They could not afford to lose this time! They made thorough preparations for the attack which they confidently thought would completely destroy the Israelites. Six days passed away with the

two armies facing each other*. On the seventh day the battle was joined. Furiously the little bands of Israelites attacked the large Syrian forces, until the field of battle was strewn with 100,000 dead Syrians. The rest fled into the shelter of the fortress Aphek. At the base of the mighty ramparts of this fortress-city was a large space, and this was packed with the frightened and defeated soldiers. They were safe from the Israelites, but not from Israel's God. An earthquake shook the wall, which fell upon a further 27,000 soldiers which were left, killing many of them.

Meanwhile Ben-Hadad had fled from the field of defeat, and had taken refuge in an inner room in one of the houses of the city. He was desperate. Not only was his army defeated and largely destroyed, but with the destruction of the wall, Aphek no longer gave any protection. His servants decided to throw themselves on to the mercy of the Israelites. Wearing sackcloth as a sign of mourning, and with ropes on their heads to indicate captivity, they came before Ahab pleading for the life of their once boastful king.

"Thy servant Ben-Hadad says, I pray you, let me live," they told Ahab.

"Is he yet alive? He is my brother," Ahab replied. It pleased the vanity of Ahab to overlook the blasphemy and treachery of this arch-enemy of Israel.

Ben-Hadad's messengers were quick to catch the note of mercy in Ahab's voice. "He is your brother Ben-Hadad," they agreed.

"Go, fetch him!" commanded Ahab.

When the king of Syria came, Ahab brought him into his chariot, and together they rode in state before the people.

"The cities, which my father took from thy father, I will restore," said Ben-Hadad to Ahab, "and you shall make streets for you in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria." ‡

This was a pact between the two nations which reversed the privileges originally enjoyed by the Syrians (see 1Kings 15:20). It pleased both the kings. Ben-Hadad went home rejoicing that he had got out of a difficult position so easily, and Ahab returned well satisfied because his vanity had been flattered.

But Ahab incurred the anger of Yahweh by his kindness to Ben-Hadad, for by so doing he was strengthening one who was set on destroying Israel. We must remember that sometimes anger and hatred are necessary. The Lord Jesus looked with anger on the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (Mark 3:5), and he commended the believ-

* Similar to the previous experiences of Joshua, as he challenged the mighty of Jericho — Josh. 6:2-4.

‡ "Streets for thee in Damascus" (1Kgs. 20:34), indicates that sections of the city would be given over to the sole use of Israelites in whatever way they desired — whether for living, for trade, or for religion. Thus they would be represented as conquerors in the capital of their enemy.

ers of Ephesus because "they could not bear them which are evil," and "hated the deeds" of certain ones which the Lord also "hated" (Rev. 2:2,6).

A hearty hatred of evil is as important as a healthy love of good. This was taught Ahab in a very graphic way through the enactment of this truth in the following pantomime.

A certain prophet went unto his neighbour and commanded him in the name of Yahweh to hit him hard. The neighbour refused to do it. "Because you have not obeyed the voice of Yahweh, behold, as soon as you are gone from me, a lion will kill you," the prophet told his neighbour.

It happened even as he said.

This taught that men must implicitly obey the commands of Yahweh.

The prophet then went up to another man. "Smite me, I pray you," he commanded.

This second man hit him so hard that he wounded him. Bandaged up, and with ashes on his head, the prophet waited for the king to come by. Ahab soon came by, excited with the victory, lifted up in pride with the thought that he had defeated the Syrians. He came to the wounded prophet by the wayside, and stopped as the man called to him. "Thy servant went out in the battle," said the prophet, "and, behold, a man brought a captive to me and said, 'Keep this man; if you let him escape, your life will be taken in exchange, or you will pay a talent of silver'. But I was busy with many things, and the captive escaped!"

"Then you must pay the penalty," said the king, harshly. Little did Ahab realise that he had passed judgment on his own failings. Yahweh had delivered Ben-Hadad into his hand, but he had allowed him to escape.

This was soon brought home to him with a dreadful message.

The prophet took away the disguise he was wearing, and the king recognised him for what he was.

"Thus says Yahweh," pronounced the prophet in warning tones. "Because you have let go out of your hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life and your people for his people."

All the pleasure of victory was taken from the king as he listened to these words of doom. He realised how true they were, and returned to his palace in Samaria depressed and displeased.

Ahab The Envious (1Kings 21)

The victory over the Syrians brought a measure of peace to Israel. It gave Ahab the opportunity of indulging in his desires at home. He had built a wonderful ivory palace at Samaria, and a further



palace in Jezreel where Jezebel set up her court.

Close to the palace of Ahab at Jezreel, there was a well-kept vineyard belonging to Naboth. Ahab thought that if he could acquire this vineyard, it would make a lovely park of shrubs and herbs to beautify his palace.

"Sell me your vineyard," he commanded Naboth.

But Naboth refused. He made a religious matter of it. It was the land of his inheritance — his family's security in the nation.

"Yahweh forbid it me that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee," he said. The Law of Moses forbad that any Israelite should sell his inheritance (Lev. 25:23). Naboth was quite right, therefore, in refusing to do so. In demanding that Naboth sell, Ahab was insisting that he sell something money could not buy — his divine heritage. Ahab was trying to force Naboth to disobey God by offering him money for his vineyard.

For Naboth to do as the king demanded would be equivalent to a



man selling his allegiance to Christ for money. The Lord Jesus warns: "Let no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11).*

When Ahab was refused his request, he became sulky and angry. The spiritual benefits of Yahweh's inheritance meant nothing to him. He could not understand why one should reject material advantages for such a reason. It stood in the way of his plans, and like a spoilt, little boy, he set his face to the wall and became angry, refusing to eat his dinner (cp. 1Kings 21:4).

Jezebel came in to find the king in that mood. She could not understand the problem. Was not Ahab king? Any wish should be fulfilled. She said to him: "Do you not govern the kingdom? Come, get

* There is a remarkable type in this well-known incident of the Bible. Ahab here represents those political powers who, in association with spiritual Jezebel, have oppressed the saints (Rev. 12:17; 13:6-9). Naboth (whose name means "height"), represents those elevated ones who have tried to follow the commands of God.



out of bed, arise, eat and drink and be merry. I will get the vineyard for you."

She then wrote letters in Ahab's name, and commenced to weave a trap for poor Naboth. She arranged that the elders of the city should proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people. Then, in the midst of this, she organised for false witnesses to challenge him, to condemn him, and to stone him.

This terrible, evil crime was carried out. The fast was proclaimed. The people came together in a solemn meeting. Naboth occupied a place of honour. Then in the midst of the celebrations, the voices of the two hired false witnesses were heard:

"Naboth did blaspheme God and the king!"

They pressed their charges home with lying tongues. Others, in the pay of Jezebel, supported them. The elders of the city, urged on by the terrible queen, demanded the death of their honourable citizen. In the face of such scheming, Naboth did not have a chance. They condemned him, then took him out and stoned him to death, falsely, on the basis of the Law (Lev. 24:16).

Jezebel sent a message to Ahab: "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth, which he refused to give thee for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead."

The coveted vineyard was his!

Ahab forgot his fit of the sulks. He could now make his park of shrubs and trees; he could beautify his lovely palace. He did not give much thought to the poor, bruised, battered body of Naboth. All he could think of was that, at last, the vineyard was his.

Joyfully he set off to claim it. He walked up and down its slopes, admiring its position, thinking how he would root out the vines, and replant his garden. As his mind was filled with this, he did not notice the grim figure of a well-known man standing before him with long hair flowing over his shoulders, with rough sheepskin cloak clad about him, with stern, piercing eyes that were now fiercely turned on Ahab warning him of trouble to come.

Ahab was taken aback at the sudden, unexpected appearance of Elijah. "So you have found me, O mine enemy?" he fearfully muttered.

"I have found you," answered the angry prophet. "I have found you because you have sold yourself to work evil in the sight of Yahweh. Behold, He will bring evil upon you and your posterity. He will cut off your house, and destroy it completely as the house of Jeroboam was destroyed. As for Jezebel, the dogs shall eat Jezebel by the walls of Jezreel. Your house, Ahab, will be bereft of any to help. Those who die of your house in the city shall the dogs eat, and those who die in the fields shall the fowls eat."

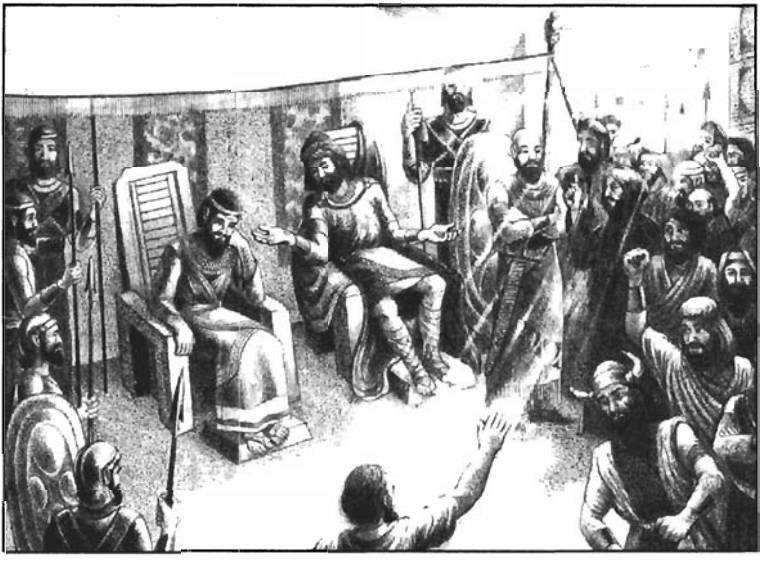
The words were terrible enough, but the manner in which they were uttered, the very appearance of the austere prophet as he looked



sternly at the king absolutely overwhelmed Ahab. He could not bear to look at the prophet. He hid his head in shame. He realised the full enormity of what he had done. He rent his clothes, thus figuratively revealing that his feelings were uncovered: he put on sackcloth in mourning, he fasted to afflict himself; he lay in sackcloth to publicly reveal his repentance; he walked before the people in a manner that showed he was genuinely sorry for all the wickedness he had done.

A merciful God partially forgave him. A message came from Elijah to say that seeing Ahab had thus humbled himself, the evil would not come in his day, though it would in the days of his son.

As for Naboth, Yahweh did not desert him. There is a great reward for him at the coming of the Lord, because he thought more of his divine inheritance than material gain, and because he was prepared to defend it unto death. He will be raised from the grave, to inherit that which Yahweh gave unto him so long ago. But then it will be in conditions much happier than before, whilst he, himself, will be clothed upon with immortality.



God's true prophet bravely warns the kings of their defeat and Ahab's death.

Chapter 4

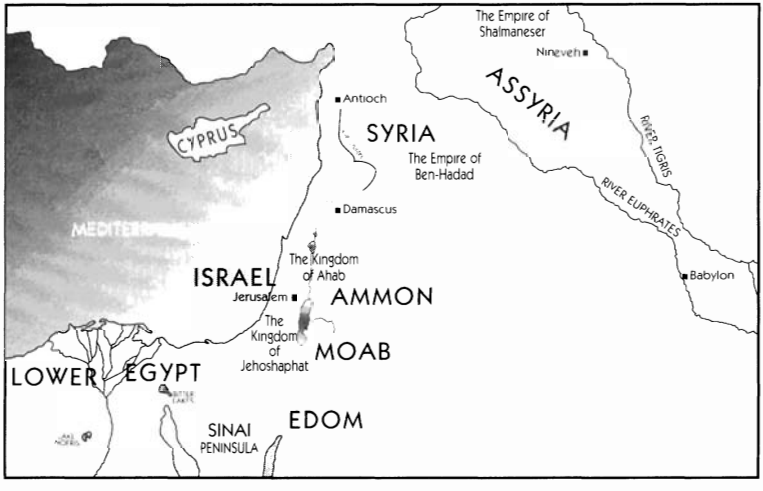
TIMES OF CRISIS ERUPT THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

For three years an uneasy peace continued between the neighbouring kingdoms of Syria and Israel. It was probably made necessary by a deadly danger that threatened them both. In the northeast, the mighty empire of Assyria looked covetously at the countries of the Holy Land and the prize of world conquest. From inscriptions on Assyrian monuments, it is recorded that Shalmaneser 3rd, the king of Assyria, several times attacked Syria without, however, being completely successful. In 853 B.C. he again marched against Syria, and, being opposed at Kharkar on the River Orontes by a coalition of Syrian and Israeli troops, was forced to retire. The inscriptions reveal that Ahab co-operated with Syria in this defence, supplying troops and chariots for the battle. The empire of Ben-Hadad protected Israel against the threat of Assyria. It is probable that those considerations played a part in his decision to save the life of Ben-Hadad when he had him in his power (1Kings 20:32).

On that occasion, Ben-Hadad had been defeated through help Israel had received from Yahweh. The Syrian monarch had been forced to enter into a treaty with Ahab (1Kings 20:34) which he probably did not carry out. Instead he again built up an army, and prepared to attack Israel.

Ahab, too, strengthened his army, and made all necessary preparations for defence.

Meanwhile, the Assyrians had returned to their own land, and now Syrians and Israelites looked angrily at each other across the border.



Ahab Seeks Help of Jehoshaphat

Ahab needed help. He sought it in Jehoshaphat, King of Judah. Jehoshaphat had succeeded Asa as king over Judah, and proved a good king.* Early in his reign he had strengthened himself against Israel (2Chron. 17:1-2), and had given his energy to increasing the knowledge of Yahweh among the people. Unfortunately he did not continue in this course. He later 'joined affinity with Ahab' (2Chron. 18:1). He permitted his son to marry Athaliah, daughter of the king of Israel (2Kings 8:18), and was increasingly drawn into the counsels of the northern kingdom. His association with the weakened and ungodly kingdom of the north was to be his undoing.

So now that Ahab wanted help he turned to Jehoshaphat. He invited him to visit Israel. Jehoshaphat was flattered by the invitation. He came down§ in full pomp and show. A great public feast was prepared for him (2Chron. 18:2), and he was received with every mark of honour and pleasure before the people of the land.

During the celebrations, Ahab made known his desires. "The city of Ramoth in Gilead belongs to us,"‡ he declared, "yet it is occupied by the king of Syria, and we sit still and do nothing. Why not take it out of the Syrians' hands? Will you go with me to battle to Ramoth-Gilead?"

In view of all the marks of honour that had been paid him, Jehoshaphat found it impossible to refuse. "I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses," he said.

He had thrown in his lot with Ahab.

Jehoshaphat Seeks Help of Yahweh

Though Jehoshaphat had agreed to help Ahab he was very uneasy in mind. He knew Ahab's reputation for following the worship of Baal; he had heard of Jezebel and her antagonism to the worship of Yahweh. Jehoshaphat was a deeply religious man, and now sought to bring his convictions to bear upon Ahab. "Let us ask Yahweh's advice about the battle," he suggested to Ahab.

The king of Israel gathered together about 400 men for this purpose. They were brought before the two kings who were sitting in state just outside Samaria. "Shall I go up against Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall I forbear" asked Ahab.

"Go up," replied the false prophets, "for Yahweh shall deliver it into your hands."

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* See "*Story of the Bible*," pp. 237-245, for an outline of his reign.

§ It is significant that the Bible describes his journey up to Samaria as "he *came down* to the King of Israel." Jehoshaphat "came down" in every sense of the words. He did so matrimonially (2 Chron. 18:1,2; 2 Kings 8:18), then militarily, finally commercially (2 Chron. 20:35-37). At every point where he touched Ahab it was to his spiritual disadvantage.

‡ Notice the flattery in the use of the plural "ours" in 1Kings 22:3. It was a family possession, for the two kings were linked together by matrimonial ties.

Expectantly, Ahab looked at Jehoshaphat. But the king of Judah was a genuine worshipper of Yahweh. He realised that these were false prophets. He desired to hear what a true prophet would say.

"Is there not a prophet of Yahweh besides all these, that we might ask of him?" he enquired. For Jehoshaphat was uneasy. He was a good man, and was not misled by the smooth words of these false prophets. He felt ill at ease in the unaccustomed surroundings.

His question put Ahab in a quandary. There were other prophets, but they were his bitter enemies. He could have called for Elijah, but he doubted whether he would come. Besides, he knew that Elijah would only condemn the venture.

There was another prophet called Micaiah, the son of Imlah, but Ahab detested this man almost as much as he did Elijah. "I hate him," he told Jehoshaphat, "for he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."

His words shocked the king of Judah, who demanded that Micaiah be brought before them to give his message.

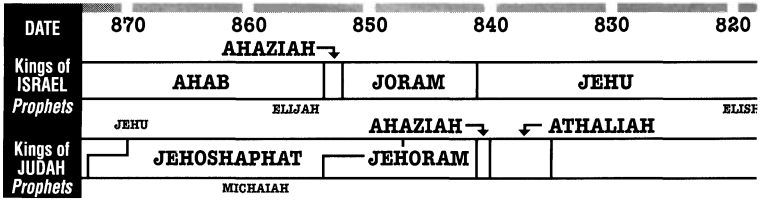
Micaiah Before the Kings

Micaiah son of Imlah, signifies, "Who is like Yah full of Confidence." He was known in Israel for his forthright speech, and because of this was hated by such as Ahab. He was now brought before the kings. They were seated in state, in a large open square before the gates of Samaria. Each king was dressed in his royal robes. Around them were set the various ministers of State. Before them stood the curious people.

As Micaiah arrived, a curious ceremony was in process. The 400 false prophets whom Ahab had called together were indulging in a little pantomime designed to give the king what the wanted — the impression that a great victory awaited him.

A man by the name of Zedekiah, the son of Chenaanah* had assumed the leadership over these prophets. He had made horns of iron, and was using them as a symbol of the way in which Ahab would confidently push his enemies. "Thus says Yahweh," declared

* Zedekiah son of Chenaanah, signifies "Righteousness of Yah filled with the Daughter of Canaan." The word "Canaan" comes from a root signifying to "humiliate oneself" for present gain; to grovel as a trader. This man whose name was dedicated to the righteousness of Yah was prepared to humiliate himself, to prostitute the Truth for present advantage.



Zedekiah, "With these you shall push the Syrians until you have destroyed them."

His acting caused a frenzy of excitement to sweep through the 400 false prophets. With one voice they shouted to the two kings: "Go up to Ramoth-Gilead, and prosper; for Yahweh shall deliver it into the king's hand!"

Micaiah looked sadly at the scene before him. He could see that the kings wanted him to agree with the words of the 400 prophets; he could see that the people also desired to hear the same thing. Now the messenger by his side tried to move him likewise: the smooth voice of persuasion and expediency was brought to bear upon him: the voice most difficult to resist. "Behold how the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one voice," said the smooth, quiet, tempting voice of the messenger. "Now let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good!"

This was a big temptation to the prophet. It would have been very easy for him to shout with the crowd, to join his voice in the popular refrain. He knew Ahab hated him; he knew that it would not go well with him if he opposed the king. He also knew that he had a greater Master than Ahab to serve. Micaiah was of the stuff of which heroes are made. He was determined to do what was right. The opinion of the crowd meant little to him. He did not care that 400 false prophets were there shouting a false message. He was not impressed with the clever symbolism of Zedekiah their leader.

"What Yahweh says unto me, that will I speak," said this courageous man to the messenger.

He was led before the kings. From their lofty seats they looked down upon the solitary prophet before them. Ahab hated him. He knew him as a forthright speaker who would not hesitate to embarrass him by telling the truth.

"Shall we go up to Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall we forbear?" asked Ahab.

"Go and prosper; for Yahweh shall deliver it into the hand of the king!" was the unexpected answer of the prophet.

These were exactly the same words as the 400 false prophets had shouted when Zedekiah had pushed with his iron horns (cp. 1Kings 22:12, 15). But though they were the same words, there was a world of difference between the way they had shouted them, and the manner in which Micaiah uttered them. He used mocking, sarcastic tones of irony that insulted the king; that revealed the prophet did not believe the words he spake.

It made Ahab angry.

"How often shall I adjure you that you tell me nothing but what is true in the name of Yahweh," he fiercely said to the prophet.

And Micaiah told him the truth. In front of the now silent crowd,

with the puzzled Jehoshaphat looking on, he declared in solemn, warning tones: "I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills as sheep that have not a shepherd; and Yahweh said, These have no master; let them return every man to his house in peace."

Micaiah not only predicted the defeat of the enterprise, but also that the king would be slain in the battle. Boiling with anger, Ahab turned to Jehoshaphat: "Did I not tell you that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?" he said.

Micaiah heard the king with indignation. He knew how unjust was the accusation. He had uttered words of truth, not words influenced by personalities. He tried to show this to the king by a parable designed to teach that Ahab's prophets were liars.

"Hear the word of Yahweh," he declared. "I saw Yahweh sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right hand and on His left. And Yahweh said, Who will deceive Ahab to make him go and be destroyed at Ramoth-Gilead. And a spirit* came forth and said, I will persuade him; I will go and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. Now, therefore, if Yahweh is speaking through your prophets, it is through this lying spirit.‡

This was an insult to Zedekiah, chief of the 400 prophets. Micaiah was publicly calling him a cheat and a liar!

Zedekiah thought he would try and match the sarcasm of Micaiah, and discredit him before the assembled people. Rushing up to the courageous prophet who was standing before the two kings, Zedekiah violently punched him on the cheek. "Which way went the Spirit of Yahweh from me to speak to you?" he mocked.

Micaiah was equal to the occasion. "You will see in that day that you go into an inner chamber to hide yourself," he answered. He was inferring that Zedekiah's prophecy would prove false, and he would seek to hide himself from the judgment of those he had led astray.

Ahab had had sufficient of all this. "Tie up Micaiah and take him away," he told his officers. "Tell the governor of the city, and my son, that this man is to be put in prison and harshly treated awaiting my return from the battle."

Micaiah was grabbed by the officers, and bound ready to be taken away. But as he was being dragged from the king's presence, he had the last word. "If you return at all in peace, Yahweh has not spoken by me," he shouted. He called on the people to witness this saying: "Hearken, O people, every one of you."

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* The term "spirit" is sometimes used to define a messenger, an angel, or the teaching of such — Heb. 1:7; 1 John 4:1-3.

‡ This is the import of Micaiah's parable. It taught that if it were claimed that Yahweh was speaking through these false prophets, then the only explanation was that a lying spirit had been put in the mouth of the prophets. In fact, God was not speaking through them at all; they spake only as the flesh guided them to speak — as they saw it to be expedient. His parable was highly figurative, sarcastic language.

Bound hand and foot the prophet of Yahweh was roughly hustled off by the guards. We need to pause a moment in our story to consider the greatness of this man who boldly defied the nation, knowing full well the treatment he would receive. Many probably mocked at him as he was being dragged to prison with the threat of death overshadowing him. But it is really a moment in which all the friends of Micaiah (and we can be of them) can glory, a thing to be remembered, when he was thus turned away. Here was a man who single-handed had the courage to deliver a message of truth faithfully in the face of persecution and opposition. The King of Israel was against him, the prophets were against him, the people were against him. But in spite of all this weight of public opinion, enforced by the law of the land, he did not cower or blanche even though threatened with torture and death. We need to recognise that there have been men who have not counted their lives dear unto themselves when they were called upon to testify for truth and goodness. We must remember the men and women who stood courageously for Truth when the opposition was powerful, when it meant sacrifice, pain and loss to do so.

Let us remember that history testifies (though his contemporaries may not have done so) that the moment when the bruised and bound prophet was dragged away with the insults of the king, and doubtless of the people, heaped upon him, to be flung into a dark prison cell and tortured — that moment when the people must have thought his power for good was at an end — was really MICAIAH'S GREATEST MOMENT.

Ahab Prepares for the Battle

The prophet left Ahab ill at ease. In his heart the king knew that the 400 prophets were false. He had been very bold towards Micaiah in the face of Jehoshaphat and the people, but all the same he thought he would disguise himself as he rode to battle, just to be sure! In those days it was usual for kings to wear their royal robes into battle as an encouragement for their soldiers, and to direct the strategy; but Ahab, knowing that Ben-Hadad would direct his soldiers to seek him out above all others, decided against doing this.

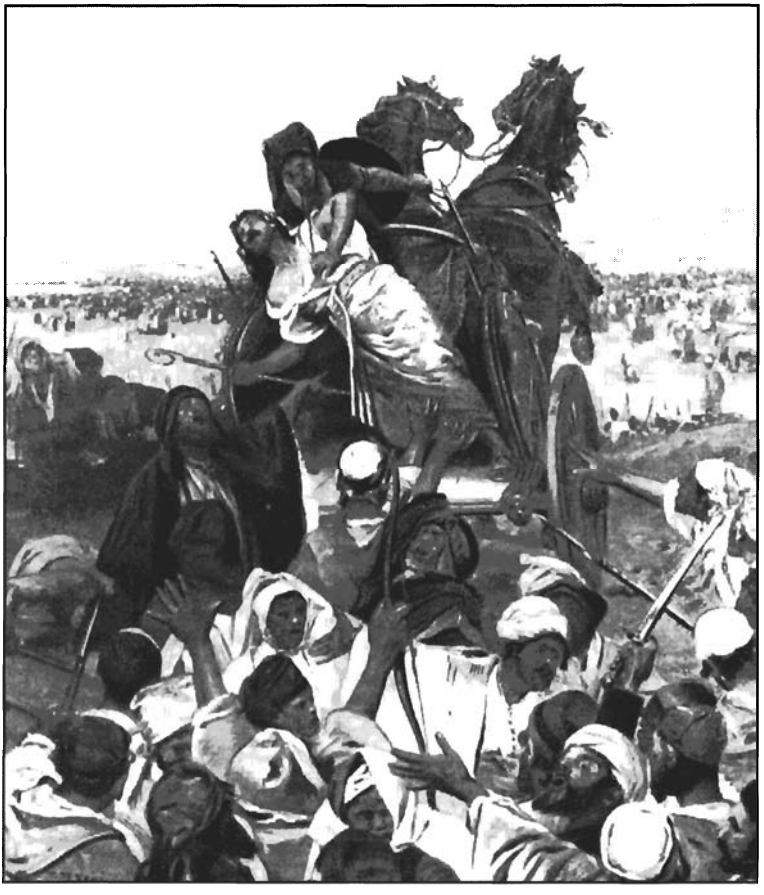
"I will disguise myself, and enter into the battle; but you put on your robes," he told Jehoshaphat. Ahab knew that the Syrians would not molest Jehoshaphat; for the battle was between Israel and Syria. He knew the Syrian strategy would be directed against himself, and that the enemy would become confused when they could not distinguish him. It was necessary for one king to be in his robes, however, in order to direct the battle.

Ahab's guess proved correct. Ben-Hadad instructed his men only to fight with Ahab, to seek him out at all costs, and destroy him. Thus, when the two armies attacked, the Syrians sought for Ahab. At first, some mistook Jehoshaphat for him. The Syrians tried to break

through to where they could see the king of Judah in his robes. The Israeli army pressed back, and it looked very bad for Jehoshaphat for a time. In his extremity, he cried out to Yahweh for help, and help came (2Chron. 18:31). The Syrians saw that he was not the king of Israel, and turned to search for their chief enemy.

Back and forth the battle raged furiously. The massed archers filled the sky with their arrows to cover the infantry men who tried to break through the opposing forces. The slingers, under cover of the arrows, fired their stones to beat down their enemy from afar. The charioteers awaited the opportunity for a break-through. The captains and kings standing high in their chariots above the fighting infantry, encouraged the men, and directed the course of the battle. Back and forth it raged without an advantage being gained by either side.

Unthinkingly, one of the Syrian archers fitted an arrow to his bow. Little did he realise how destiny would be fulfilled in the shaft he had



Ahab the Wobbler

"How long halt ye between two opinions?"

This rebuke of Elijah condemned all Israel, but the nation was led in its policy by the king's contradictory attitude as shown in the following ways:

He allowed the Altar of Yahweh to be broken down —
but he protected the righteous Obadiah.

He served Baal "a little" (2Kings 10:18) —
and also tried to serve the God of Israel.

He had 450 prophets of Baal (1Kings 18:19) —
and 400 false prophets of Israel (1Kings 18:19).

He permitted the idolatry of Jezebel —
yet permitted the murder of Naboth on the basis of the Law (Lev. 24:16).

He allowed the prophets of Baal to be slaughtered because they proved false —
and allowed Naboth to be slain because he remained true.

He relaxed the Law within the nation —
but invoked the Law to obtain the death of Naboth.

Ahab was a "sitter on the fence"; he was no benefit to either party.

selected. He pulled the cord back with all his strength, and without taking particular aim, let the arrow go. It sped on its way, curving in the air towards its mark. It found one of the charioteers, and penetrated the joints of his armour. Though dressed like the other captains, this soldier was Ahab. The prophecy of Micaiah was about to be fulfilled.

Ahab was mortally stricken. Around him the battle raged; men fought and died in his cause. "I am badly wounded," he told the driver, "just drive out of the battle for a moment."

The king felt weak with loss of blood. He crouched down in the chariot looking wearily over the field of battle. The Syrians were pressing home their attack. They did not know the king of Israel was mortally wounded. But dismay was spreading through the ranks of the Israelites who knew he was smitten.

Though a foolish man, Ahab was a brave one. Though terribly wounded and weak from loss of blood, he propped himself up in the chariot as though nothing was wrong, and commanded his driver to turn back into the thick of the fighting again. The Israelites rallied. The battle continued with varying fortunes. By night time neither side had gained an advantage. Both were ready to give up. A general proclamation was issued to both armies to retreat.

By then Ahab was dead, slumped down on the floor of his chariot.

They took his body to Samaria, and there it was buried. The chariot was covered with his blood, so taking it to a pool of water outside the city, they washed both it and his armour, whilst the dogs stood around and licked the blood on the chariot as Elijah had predicted (1Kings 21:19). Thus both the prophecies of Elijah and Micaiah were fulfilled on that day of tragedy for Ahab.

When Jehoshaphat Returned from the War (2Chron. 19)

In order to obtain a connected story of the two kingdoms, it is necessary to set in order the records in Kings and Chronicles. They both speak of this time, one book giving details lacking in the other. 2Chron. 19 does not appear in Kings, and therefore, to follow in sequence the events of this time, we must now turn from 1Kings 22 to 2Chron. 19, where is recorded what happened to Jehoshaphat when he returned home from the war.

Ahab was dead; the alliance between Judah and Israel had profited nobody. As Jehoshaphat drove home to Jerusalem in his chariot, he must have lamented the fact that he had not taken heed to the wise words of Micaiah the prophet. Jehoshaphat was a good and faithful king, but like many good and faithful men before and after him, he had been drawn into foolishness by joining the schemes of a wicked man.

The king travelled along the mountainous road that leads from Samaria to Jerusalem. As he neared the capital of his kingdom he saw a man approaching. It was Jehu the prophet. Many years earlier, this man had been sent by Yahweh to speak warning words to Baasha, the wicked king of Israel. He was the son of a prophet, for his father, Hanani, had been sent to rebuke Asa, the father Jehoshaphat (see page 243,248). Now the two sons, the son of the prophet and the son of the king, stood face to face. As Jehu approached Jehoshaphat could see in the countenance of the prophet that he was about to hear words of rebuke. The prophets of Israel were servants of Yahweh, and never hesitated to meet the highest men of the realm with their message. They were not afraid of kings, for they served a greater Monarch than any earthly ruler.

"Should you help the ungodly, and love them that hate Yahweh?" the prophet harshly demanded of the king. "Because of this, wrath will come on you from before Yahweh.* Nevertheless, there are good

* These words do not mean that God would be directly responsible for the evil, but that He would not intercede to prevent it. Actually the family of Jehoshaphat was responsible for all the trouble it experienced. And how terrible was the self-inflicted trouble! Jehoshaphat's foolish action in marrying his son to the daughter of Ahab brought directly into his family the evil influence of Jezebel, and from this influence came sin, dissension and bloodshed. The king also suffered for his folly. The land was invaded, his fleet was wrecked when he entered into commercial alliance with the son of Ahab. He learned the bitter lesson that prosperity and happiness do not come by association with wicked men. From such we must turn away.

things found in you. You have taken away the idols out of the land, you have prepared your heart to seek God."

Jehoshaphat was wise enough to heed these words. He realised that the best answer he could give to them was to try and set himself right with God, and teach the people to do likewise. He redoubled his efforts to reform the nation. Teachers were sent throughout the land to educate the people in the ways of God. Judges were set up in the cities that they might solve any disputes according to the Law of Moses, and they were warned to do their work justly. A supreme court of appeal was established in Jerusalem (v. 8) so that if any person thought he had not received justice in his own city, he could appeal to the court in the capital.

In all this Jehoshaphat remembered the warning voice of Jehu the prophet, and using almost the same words as the prophet had addressed to him, he told these judges that they must be just and true in all their dealings with the people lest "wrath come upon you and your brethren" (cp. v.10 with v.2). He instructed the priests and Levites likewise, exhorting them to "deal courageously, and Yahweh shall be with the good" (v. 11).

These are wise words, and they show that Jehoshaphat himself was able to take a rebuke when delivered by God.

Victory Through Prayer: Jehoshaphat's Greatest Hour (2Chron. 20)

Shortly after this, Jehoshaphat, who had "set his heart to seek Yahweh," faced a tremendous test of faith. It reminds us of the words of the Lord Jesus: "Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth (prunes) it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (Jhn. 15:2). Faithful men are tested because trial makes their faith brighter; it brings out the best in them. It is the "*trial* of faith," and not mere faith itself, that the Lord will find "more precious than gold" at his coming (1Pet. 1:7).

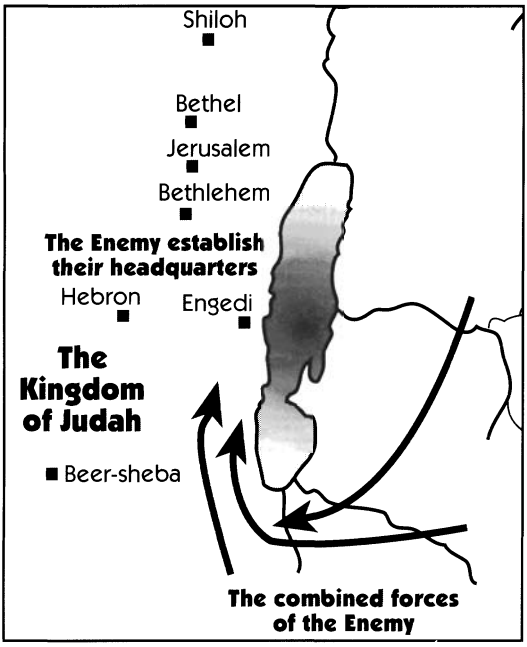
We must go through difficulties for this to be revealed.

Jehoshaphat did so. Across the south-eastern border of Judah there swarmed a mighty army of Moabites, Ammonites and Edomites. Marching around the southern tip of the Dead Sea they struck north, determined to destroy the kingdom of Judah. At the large oasis of Engedi, the army set up its headquarters, and made preparations for the attack.

This part of the land is a tangle of steep hills, deep ravines and rugged watercourses. It is a type of country in which a large enemy force could remain hidden until it wanted to reveal itself.

That, doubtless, was the strategy of the invading commanders.

But the army was seen by some Israelites, and a messenger was swiftly despatched to the king to warn him of the grave danger which faced the country.



The king was completely unprepared. He had given his attention to educating the people in divine truths rather than building up a strong army, and had no effective means to defend himself.

He decided to seek the aid of God. He made it a personal issue as well as a religious one. He "set his heart" to seek Yahweh. This was not merely a matter of turning to God in prayer, but preparing himself that he might do so in an acceptable manner. He realised his personal unworthiness, and with mind humbled approached the great Monarch of the heavens, beseeching His aid.

He exhorted the people to do likewise. He called for a fast that the people might prepare their hearts also to seek God. Thus the whole nation was found in a praying attitude, united together with common purpose to seek divine help.

A national gathering of representatives was called. They hastened from all the cities to Jerusalem (v. 4.). They came with fear in their hearts, under the shadow of a danger that threatened their nation, their families, themselves. They came with one accord, to seek Yahweh.

There is something great in a man, a family, a congregation, a nation that does that. There is power in prayer, and strength in a community welded together in its exercise at a time when it really feels its need.

Jehoshaphat felt this power. This was to be his greatest hour. Adversity brought the best out of him. He stood before the people as a true ruler in their approach unto Yahweh, acting in the capacity of king-priest before the congregation, leading them in prayer to the Father in the heavens.

Thus, whilst in the hiding places in En-gedi the enemy was busy preparing its weapons and deciding its strategy, the whole of Judah was united as one before their God.

Standing before the people, the king prayed: "O Yahweh God of our fathers, art not Thou God in the heavens? and art Thou not ruling throughout all the kingdoms of the nations? and in Thy hand is there not strength and might? and is there any who against Thee can stand? "Art not Thou our God who didst dispossess the inhabitants of this land from before Thy people Israel — and didst give it unto the seed of Abraham Thy friend for ever? and they have dwelt therein — and have built for Thee therein a sanctuary for Thy Name, saying: 'If there come upon us calamity, the sword of judgment or pestilence or famine, we will stand before this house and before Thee, for Thy Name is in this house — that we may make outcry unto Thee out of our distress, that Thou mayest hear and save.'

"Now, therefore, Behold! the sons of Ammon, of Moab, of Edom whom Thou didst not suffer Israel to invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt — but they turned away from them and destroyed them not, yea, behold! how they repay us, by coming to drive us out from Thy possession which Thou didst cause us to possess.

"O our God, wilt Thou not bring judgment upon them, seeing that there is in us no strength, before this great multitude that is coming against us; neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon Thee."

The king was standing before the Temple as he recited this prayer. The people were standing before him. He invoked the aid of that One whose presence was symbolised in the Temple. His wonderful prayer moved the people. It spake of the all-powerfulness of God. It invoked the covenant Name of Yahweh, that Name first proclaimed when Moses was called to deliver Israel from Egypt, and which signifies that Israel will never be destroyed (See "Story of the Bible," vol. 1, pp. 237-251; cp. Ezek. 36:22-23). It referred to the visible manifestation of Divine power in the history of the nation which gave the people first-hand evidence of His might. It recalled the covenants made with Abraham, Moses and Solomon, how Yahweh had promised Solomon that He would help if the people turned to the Temple in time of need and sought His assistance. It set before God the distress the people were in, the vastness of the army that had invaded the land, their helplessness to defend themselves, the brutal intentions of the invaders.

The prayer finally throws the whole issue on to Yahweh:

"WE HAVE NO MIGHT AGAINST THIS GREAT COMPANY AGAINST US; NEITHER KNOW WE WHAT TO DO, BUT OUR EYES ARE UPON THEE".

The prayer came to an end. For a moment there was a silence. Then the people were startled by the voice of the prophet Jahaziel, whose name means "God (El) giveth Visions." The spirit of God came upon him, causing him to suddenly shout out a message of encouragement from the midst of the congregation.

"Hearken all Judah, you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you king

Jehoshaphat. Thus says Yahweh: Be not afraid or dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not your's but God's. Tomorrow go down against them. They are now marching north, but you will meet them before the wilderness of Jeruel. You will not need to fight in this battle. Set yourselves, stand you still, and see the salvation of Yahweh! Fear not! Don't be dismayed! Tomorrow march against them, for Yahweh will be with you!"

"Stand still and see the salvation of Yahweh!" These were the words also of Moses when it had seemed that all Israel must be destroyed by the advancing Egyptians, and at the last moment the sea had opened to let through the people of God (Exod. 14:13).

What wonderful words of encouragement; how difficult to fulfil them. It is hard to stand still and wait in time of crisis. It seems so much easier to use fleshly means, to become restless and impatient, and try to obtain the victory by our own might.

"Fear not!" said Jahaziel. Many times those words had echoed down Israel's history. They were the words of encouragement of Moses to the people (Deut. 1:29, 30); they were words that were uttered to Joshua (Josh. 1:6-7; 8:1); they were the words by which Jonathan encouraged David (1Sam. 23:17).

Jehoshaphat recognised that Jahaziel's words were from Yahweh. Overwhelmed with gratitude at this evidence of divine care, he bowed his head again, and gave himself up to silent, personal prayer of thanksgiving. The whole congregation did likewise. A moment of telling quietness settled on the gathering, until it was broken by the chanting of Levites, as they sang the praises of Yahweh in the psalms of David.

Fear was driven out of the hearts of many people by the power of prayer and the courage of the king.

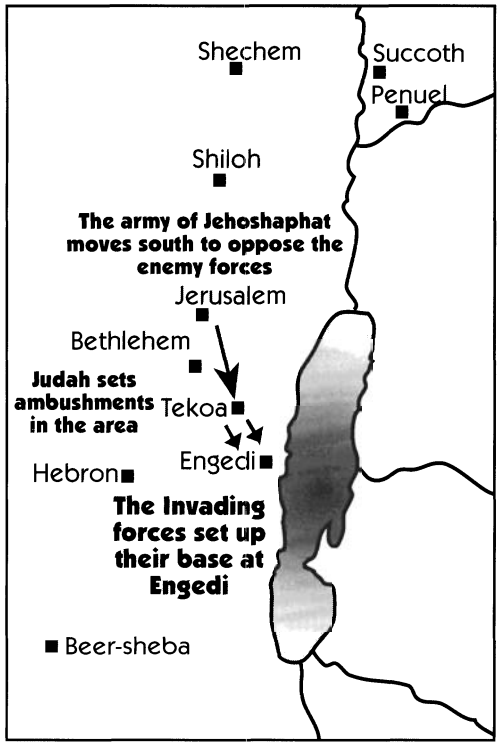
The Remarkable Victory

Next morning the king, with his army, left Jerusalem to meet the enemy. They came to Tekoa, a broad, flat hill about ten kilometres (six miles) south of Bethlehem, standing about 850 metres (2790 feet) above sea level, from where a good view of surrounding country can be seen.

The king again called the people before him to encourage them. "Believe in Yahweh your God, so shall you be established; believe His prophets, so shall you prosper," he declared.

In consultation with the leaders of the people, he arranged for a special service to be conducted on the hilltop. Appointed singers filled the air with hymns of praise for the everlasting mercy of God. They went before the army so that it marched to the refrain of glorious Divine music.

Down in En-gedi the other army was preparing its weapons,



glorying in the might of the flesh, looking for an easy victory over these psalm-singing, prayer-uttering Israelites. They viewed with contempt the trust that the men of Judah placed in God.

Meanwhile, following instructions that had been received, Jehoshaphat set ambushments in the rough, wild, deep valleys of the country between En-gedi and Tekoa. On the top of ravines, in narrow, winding valleys where a few soldiers could keep at bay an army, men were placed, awaiting the advance of the enemy.

The invading army marched north, little suspecting the traps that had been set for them. Suddenly the attack came. Though the attackers were few, the huge invading force was thrown into a state of confusion. The Moabites and Ammonites blamed the Edomites, and turned their weapons on them. The Edomites retaliated against their one-time allies. Caught in the confusing valleys in this wild, rough part of the country, the soldiers went mad with fear; the destruction was terrible, and their fury unleashed against each other brought the complete ruin of the whole invading army.

Meanwhile Jehoshaphat was advancing to the tune of the psalms of David. They came to a watchtower that overlooked the country towards En-gedi. Here an amazing sight met their eyes. Far below in the valleys they could see the heaped-up bodies of the slain.

The battle was over. The victory had been won.

The words of the prophet had proved true: "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle."

Instead, they obtained great wealth. The invading army had left a huge spoil of jewels, precious stones, and other things — so much that the men of Judah found difficulty in carrying it all back with them.

A very relieved and happy army commenced the march back. It came to a valley just south of Tekoa, and there they paused for a service of thanksgiving, naming it the Valley of Berachah (*Blessing*) because of the goodness they had experienced.

So they returned to Jerusalem. At the head of this army of faithful men, Jehoshaphat marched along the road that winds through the mountains leading ever upwards to Jerusalem that stood on the peaks above them. Here, in the city of David, another service of praise took place, in which all the people could take part.

Thus victory came through PRAYER. The result had a profound effect on the surrounding nations. They could see that God was with Israel, and, in turn, feared to attack a nation so well protected.

Jehoshaphat had experienced the truth of Solomon's words: "When a man's ways please Yahweh, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. 16:7).

Unfortunately, Jehoshaphat did not always manifest the same degree of faith and obedience.

This was his greatest hour.

Ahaziah's Daring Wickednesss (2Kings 1)

Ahab was dead, and his son Ahaziah sat on the throne. His name means *"Yahweh Has Sustained,"* but though Ahab had given his sons names that honoured the God of Israel, it was merely lip service. Certainly Ahaziah did not live up to his name.

He was a weak, faithless king — far weaker than his father Ahab, who did not lack fleshly courage.

His was a disastrous reign. No sooner had he ascended the throne than the Moabites, whom Israel had subdued, revolted against him. Ahaziah took no steps to quell the revolt. This meant that on the eastern border an enemy, which bitterly hated Israel, commenced to build its power.

Then Ahaziah himself had an accident. He fell through the open window of one of the upper rooms of his house and badly hurt himself. This accident did, at least, make him humble. It forced him to seek a strength outside of himself. If he had sought Yahweh it would have been to his advantage, but family training directed him to the wrong god — one which had no power to assist him! He sent servants to enquire of Baal-zebub, a Philistine god, whether he would recover.

Baal-zebub means *the god of the flies*. The Philistines worshipped the sun god under this name because the warmth of the sun produces flies in great numbers. In later times, the Jews, in contempt, slightly altered the name to Beelzebul, *the lord of the manure heap!* (Matt. 10:25).

So the messengers went off to *the Lord of the Manure Heap,* sent by a foolish man who could have sought the true God, but they soon

Second Book of Kings

To follow our *Story of the Bible* in a connected way, we must leave Jehoshaphat and the southern kingdom of Judah for a moment, and return to the north, to the nation of Israel. This requires that we turn back the pages of the Bible to 2nd Kings.

This a dramatic and tragic book of the Bible. The early chapters record Elijah's disappearance into the clouds; the closing chapters record the transportation of disobedient Jewry to Babylon. The great empires of Assyria, Babylon and Persia now dominate the scene more and more. The book traces their influence upon the two nations into which Israel was divided. In the northern kingdom infidelity towards God and moral degradation increased until, with the full measure of wickedness, the nation was destroyed. Later, the battered, broken tribes of the southern kingdom were ignominiously dragged behind the chariots of the heathen conquerors to captivity. It is a terrible story telling of opportunities that were squandered, of privileges that were abused, of hardships experienced for "the way of transgressors is hard" (Prov. 13:15).

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK:

History of the Northern Kingdom from removal of Elijah to death of Jehu, Israel's 10th king — Chapters 1-10.

Alternating History of both Kingdoms to the overthrow of the northern kingdom — Chapters 11-17. Jonah, Amos and Hosea prophesied at this time.

The End of the Kingdom and the captivity to Babylon — Chapters 18-25. Obadiah, Joel, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah and Jeremiah prophesied at this time.

The Kingdom of Judah outdistanced Israel for over a century.

returned with a remarkable story. A man of commanding personality had met them and commanded them to go back to the king with the message: "Thus saith Yahweh: Is there not a God in Israel that you must seek the help of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? For this you will not come up from your bed, but you will die."

"Describe to me the man who told you that," demanded the king, indignantly.

"He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins," was the answer.

"It is Elijah the Tishbite," replied the king, gloomily. He feared

Elijah, knowing only too well his power. He decided he would send a captain with 50 soldiers to bring Elijah to him and force him to reverse his words. The captain met Elijah seated on the top of a rising. "You man of God, the king has said, Come down!" he commanded.

The captain was as foolish as the king. He recognised Elijah as a prophet, and yet refused to recognise that he served a greater King than Ahaziah. Instead of threatening him, he should have sought his advice and followed it.

"If I be a man of God, fire shall surely come down from heaven and consume thee and your fifty soldiers," warned Elijah.*

The captain took no heed, and as a result died with his men. A flame of fire flared down from heaven like that on Carmel, and the fifty soldiers were consumed.

Ahaziah was told of this tragic happening. This foolish, stupid king refused to heed the lesson. Obstinate and rebellious, he commanded that other soldiers be sent. He allowed his soldiers to be slaughtered rather than acknowledge that he was wrong! And they died because they put loyalty to the flesh before loyalty to God.

All will die eternally who do that (see Gal. 6:7-8). A third fifty were sent. This captain was different from his fellows. He obeyed the laws of the land as far as he was able, but he also had respect for God. Coming to Elijah, he openly and humbly acknowledged the authority of Yahweh and His servant. He fell on his knees before the prophet, and pleaded his help, explaining that he only was there because of the king's command.

By that humble and faithful action he saved himself and the men with him.

Elijah willingly arose and went with him. He did not fear Ahaziah. He went, without hesitation, to proclaim the judgment of God against a foolish monarch. He entered the beautiful ivory palace (1Kings 22:39) where, on all sides, was evidence of material wealth and glory, and was taken into the bedroom of the sick king. Fearfully Ahaziah looked into the eyes of the stern, rough prophet. There was no hope for him there. Instead he heard words of indictment and judgment. The king sank back into his bed in despair. His death followed shortly after. The glorious ivory palace became the residence of a new king. Two years of folly and misery brought this weak reign to an end.

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* This construction of Elijah's words is according to the Hebrew and the Septuagint. The descending fire was a demonstration that he was Yahweh's prophet. The Lord rebuked his disciples for drawing attention to this means of vengeance as an example of what he should do, because the circumstances were then different (Luke 9:54-56). The Lord was on a mission inviting the people to accept him. However the time will come when the Lord will use similar means against his opponents — 2Thess. 1:7-8.

Chapter 5

ELIJAH'S DEPARTURE

The Phillips' family had just completed the reading of 2Kings 2, and were expectantly waiting for the discussion that usually followed.

"It is strange that this is the first occasion since Elijah anointed Elisha that the two men are mentioned together," remarked Graeham.

"We are not left altogether without comment on that time," answered his father. "Elisha is described in 2Kings 3:11 as the servant of Elijah, tenderly caring for the needs of the aging prophet, whose stern, courageous words of rebuke had limited the development of sin in Israel. But Elisha was a disciple as well as a servant. He listened to Elijah's instruction, learning from his lips words of wisdom that would stand him in good stead when he would have to take over from his master."

"It seems as though Elijah gained some support from the people towards the end of his life," said Peter, "for in the chapter we read tonight it speaks of the 'sons of the prophets' in Israel".

"That is true," agreed his father. "The work had made some progress. The still, small voice of instruction had brought the worshippers out of the caves where they had sheltered in fear, and they had been organised into groups in various parts of the country, that they might teach and instruct the people. Perhaps in this, Elijah's greatest work was accomplished. He was preparing for his successor to take over. Now that time had come and Elijah was told that he must be taken away. He was at Gilgal by Shechem when he received this message, but before departing, Elijah desired to give a final message of instruction and help to those he had gathered around him. For that purpose he decided to visit Bethel and Jericho, and from there pass over Jordan to his native soil.

"He told Elisha to remain at Gilgal. The parting would be painful for them both. But Elisha refused to do so. He wanted to be with his master to the end.

"So they walked together for the last time from Gilgal through the mountainous parts of central Palestine, to the Heights of Bethel. Here they found another group of the 'sons of the prophets'" (2Kings 2:3).

"Who were the sons of the prophets?" asked Joan.

"The Hebrew words mean 'Disciples of the Prophets'," answered her father. "They were a very valuable group within the nation, particularly in evil times, for they kept wickedness in check through their teaching and influence."

"They seemed to have known that Elijah was to be taken away," remarked Ann.

"Elijah could well have told them that himself," answered her father. "They mentioned it to Elisha for they knew that he would be

the successor. But he refused to comment".

"The two men travelled to Bethel, to Jericho, then to the Jordan," continued Mr. Phillips. "Before them the river flowed swiftly, an impassable barrier. But it was no obstacle to Elijah. He took off his mantle, wrapped it together, and smote the waters. The water began to swirl like a whirlpool; then, suddenly, it divided. A path spread before the two men, whereas before there had been a river. Across they went to witness the last dramatic event of Elijah's life.

"On the other side, Elijah turned to his youthful companion.

" 'Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you,' he invited him.

"Elisha was ready with his answer: 'Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me', he pleaded".

"Does that mean that he wanted twice the power that Elijah had?" asked Ann.

"No," replied Mr. Phillips. "The word in the Hebrew signifies 'two parts.' You remember that when we discussed the Law of the Firstborn (See Story, vol. 1, p. 218) we discovered that by inheritance the firstborn was to receive two parts: a double portion of the inheritance That is what Elisha now asked for".

"But he did perform more miracles than Elijah," said Graeham.

"True," replied his father, "but that was not because he had twice the power of Elijah, but because he ministered at a time when miracles were required."

"When he asked for two parts of Elijah's spirit, was he really asking that he should be his successor?" asked Peter.

"That is so. As I mentioned before, the inheritance of the firstborn was two parts (Deut. 21:17). This Elisha now claimed. In receiving it, he became as the Firstborn, a type of Jesus Christ."

"Why did Elijah say that this was a hard thing to give?"

"Because it was something Yahweh alone could bestow: it was beyond the personal province of Elijah to grant it."

"There is one thing that puzzles me," said Graeham as he considered the chapter the family had just read (2Kings). "Elijah told Elisha that he would receive what he requested if he saw him ascend. Why was it necessary for him to do this?"

"He was teaching Elisha that his eyes must be firmly fixed on the things for which he stood if he were to successfully follow his footsteps," replied Mr. Phillips.

"It must have been a very solemn occasion for both men," remarked Ann.

"Yes," replied her father. "The two great men talked together sadly before the moment came. It was their last conversation before Elisha was to take over the work, and they doubtless had much to say. Then, suddenly, as they were talking, their attention was drawn to a

remarkable sight. They could see a whirlwind of fire driving towards them at tremendous speed. It parted them both asunder, and then they saw, as it were, a chariot of fire drawn by speeding horses. Elijah was drawn up by its power into the sky above until he disappeared out of the sight of the watching Elisha. It was a great symbolic picture, and he knew what it meant. The angels of heaven are as chariots of fire driven by Yahweh who dwells in them by His spirit (Hebrews 1:14). In these figurative 'chariots' they fought for the defence of Israel, though unseen to mortal eyes. As God by His spirit drove the angels of heaven as a charioteer might drive his vehicle, so Elisha knew that Elijah had been used in a similar manner amongst God's people on earth. So, startled by all he had seen, he cried out: 'My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!' Then sadly, and doubtless feeling lonely, he turned to retrace the steps along which he had come."

"Before you go on, I would like to ask a question," said Ann who was frowning at her Bible whilst her father was speaking.

"Yes, what is it?"

"Where, really did Elijah go?"

"We are not told. We know he did not go to the place where Yahweh dwells, because the Lord Jesus declared that 'no man hath ascended' there (Jhn. 3:13). The Hebrew word rendered 'heaven' in 2Kings 2:1, 11 is in the plural, and should be translated 'heavens.' If we look into the sky we will see many heavens. Every star that we see gleaming from the sky is actually a sun governing a universe as large or larger than the solar system, having its own particular 'heaven.' Thus heaven above is filled with 'heavens.' The Bible makes reference to this for it refers to the 'heaven of heavens' (Neh. 9:6) where Yahweh dwells in unapproachable light (1Tim. 6:16). Elijah did not go there, but was taken to some other place."

"I must think about that," said Ann.

"As Elisha turned to go he saw that Elijah had dropped his mantle," said Mr. Phillips as he continued the story. "It was now his. He tore his own garment into two pieces in token of his sadness at the parting of his friend, and took the mantle of Elijah as his own. He returned to the Jordan. The flowing river was before him. Did the spirit of Elijah truly rest upon him? He took the mantle of Elijah, folded it as the prophet had done, and then smote the water of the river. But nothing happened. 'Where is Yahweh Elohim of Elijah?' asked the prophet. This was like a prayer. He was asking Yahweh to manifest His power. Again he smote the waters, and this time they parted in twain. Elisha had learned the lesson that there was nothing miraculous in the mantle of Elijah — the power was with God, and He would only manifest it if he sought the strength of Elijah which was from above. It was the power of faith that performs such miracles

(see Matthew 17:20)."

"Just one moment!" exclaimed Peter with determination written over his face. "I think you read too much into the Bible! I cannot see where it speaks of Elisha smiting the river twice!"

"That is because you have not read the account carefully enough," answered Mr. Phillips with a smile. "I am always telling you to carefully examine every verse if you want to get the most out of it. Now read v. 14 again. Notice that it states he smote the waters, then, later, 'when he also had smitten the waters.' The word 'also' implies again."

"See Peter!" said Ann triumphantly, pleased when her father gets the better of her brother.

"I must check up on Dad," was all Peter said in return.

"On the other side of Jordan, Elisha was met by a company of the disciples of the prophets. They had seen the miracle of the Jordan, and had said among themselves, 'the spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.' Now they came to acknowledge him as their leader. They asked him to make a search for the body of his beloved predecessor.

" 'Perhaps he is upon some mountain, or in some valley,' they said. They probably recalled the death of Moses on Mt. Nebo and how he had been buried in an unknown spot in a valley in the mount.

"Elisha knew that such a search would be fruitless. 'Do not send,' he advised them.

"They were determined to do so, however, and Elisha knew that they would not feel satisfied until he let them do as they wished. So they searched for the body of Elijah, but they never found it, for it had been taken from the earth.

" 'Did I not tell you not to go?' was the only comment of Elisha when they returned with their report".

"Do you think that Elijah is still living?" asked Graeham as his father paused.

"We have nothing definite on that question," answered his father. "But there are indications that like Enoch he still lives. For example, he appeared to Jesus on what is called the Mount of Transfiguration. Of course, this could have been an angel impersonating Elijah, but we are not told that it was. Again, in 2Chronicles 21:12 we read of a message that came from him to wicked King Jehoram of Judah. This was many years after he had been taken from Elisha, and only two things are possible: either he had written the message prophetically before he died, or else he had been sent with the message which was delivered through Elisha. Finally, the messenger who conveyed the Revelation to John describes himself as 'thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book' (Rev. 22:9), and it has been suggested that this could be Elijah — one of those described as of 'thy brethren the prophets'."

"But would not that idea defeat the statement of Scripture that Christ is the firstfruits of them that have died?" suggested Peter.

"Not if Elijah did not die," answered his father with a smile.

"Paul declared the 'wages of sin is death' and therefore death must have taken hold of Elijah," said Graeham.

"Certainly it did." replied his father. But whilst the nature of sin and death took hold of Elijah as it does of us all, it does not mean that all necessarily must die. Paul taught that those faithful believers who are living at Christ's coming shall not die (1Cor. 15:51). This does not defeat the principle that the wages of sin is death, for apart from God's intervention, all would most certainly die. If the purpose of God requires it, there would be no difficulty in Him keeping Elijah alive until the time that he will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ. But in the absence of proof this is all conjecture, and we need not worry our minds about it."

Elijah's Return "A far more profitable source of study," remarked Mr. Phillips as he continued the family discussion, "is in considering the future work of Elijah."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Joan.

"Yahweh has told Israel that He will again send Elijah the prophet to prepare them for the second coming of Christ," replied her father.

"Where does it say that?"

"In Malachi 4:5."

"Were not those words fulfilled by John the Baptist?" asked Peter.

"John came in the 'spirit' of Elijah as a forerunner to Christ (Luke 1:17; Matt. 11:7, 18)", replied Mr. Phillips. "But the prophecy of Malachi was not fulfilled in John's labour. This is clearly shown by the words of the Lord himself, in Mark 9:12-13. In verse 12 he declared: 'Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things,' and in the next verse he said, 'Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they liked.' Thus the Lord spake of the work of Elijah in two ways, one when the people would reject him, the other when he would restore all things. John fulfilled the first at the first advent of the Lord Jesus; Elijah will fulfil the second at Christ's future coming. Our studies in Kings have shown us that the work of Elijah was incomplete; it will be completed in the future."

"What will Elijah do?"

"Christ will send him to the people of Israel scattered throughout the world, to advise them that their Messiah has returned, and to prepare them to receive him. References to his work are found in Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6. In Isaiah 40:1-11 his message to the people is given. Unfortunately we have not time to consider this tonight. It is far too late and the discussion would occupy too much time. I think we must leave the matter at this point."

Elijah's Wonderful Miracles

Elijah performed eight notable miracles. As with the miracles performed by Christ, these were not done merely to demonstrate the power of Yahweh, but also to teach a spiritual lesson. There seems to be a parable of the purpose of God in the miracles performed by Elijah, listed below. Each miracle has an application in the spiritual development of the faithful.

1. Shutting Heaven (1Kings 17:1) — There is a time of spiritual drought (Amos 8:11).

2. Oil multiplied (1Kings 17:14) — Food for the godly in the midst of drought.

3. Widow's son raised (1Kings 17:22-23) — The resurrection.

4. Fire from heaven (1Kings 18:38) — Vindication at judgment.

5. Rain (1Kings 18:45) — Outpouring of the spirit (Joel 2:23).

6. Destruction of 50 (2Kings 1:10) — Individual rejection at judgment.

7. Destruction of another 50 (2Kings 1:12) — National rejection at judgment.

8. Waters divided (2Kings 2:8) — Domination over symbolic waters (cp. Rev.17:15).

The destruction of two companies of godless soldiers by fire from heaven can have an antitype in the twofold judgment of Christ at his return: firstly, the punishment on believers who have rejected the way of righteousness; then on the nations who prove obstinate to his command. Thus in the miracles performed by Elijah it seems that God was telling the story of His purpose with mankind.

Chapter Six

THE WORK OF ELISHA THE PROPHET

As we watch Elijah taken from the earth we bid a temporary farewell to that great man, hoping to meet him personally at Christ's return.

Down the ages the Jewish people have waited for the return of Elijah as forerunner of the Messiah. Year after year, as the Passover has been celebrated in Jewish homes all over the world, a vacant place has been set for Elijah, and an empty chair has been placed in the family circle to remind them that he has not yet returned. Jewish children are taught to expect the return of the great prophet to introduce the advent of their promised Messiah.

In life, he acted as forerunner to Elisha, preparing the way before him as John the Baptist did that of the Lord.

The harsh, unyielding, outspoken, determined voice of Elijah demanding reformation, denouncing sin, proclaiming coming judgment, and calling down vengeance from heaven stirred all Israel. It made the labour and teaching of the quieter, more gentle Elisha more effective.

Elisha saw the fruit of these labours in the growing number of disciples throughout Israel to whom he ministered. He performed more miracles than Elijah, and many of them bear a remarkable similarity to those of the Lord Jesus whom he so closely resembles.

In Elijah is revealed the Law typified in its complete repudiation of sin, and its terrible judgments. In the work of Elisha there seems to be a setting forth of the principle of grace and mercy which is so beautifully exhibited in the Lord Jesus whom he typified.

Elijah signifies: "Yahweh He is El" (*God* or *Strength*), whilst Elisha signifies: "El (*God*) is salvation." The Strength of Yahweh was manifested in the life of Elijah; the salvation of Yahweh was exhibited in the work of Elisha.

Elijah must have been somewhat surprised in the choice of his successor, especially after his outburst at Sinai: "I, I only, am left." (1Kgs. 19:10).

He found Elisha a young man (for Elisha was still living 60 years later) in comfortable circumstances (in comparison to his own destitute state); bald-headed (whereas he had flowing hair like a Nazarite); ploughing with eleven other servants in the fields of his father (whereas Elijah lead a solitary life). Even the name of the place suggests ease and comfort, for Abel-meholah (v.16) signifies *the Meadow of Dancing*.

But Yahweh chooses His servants from all walks of life, and Elisha proved an admirable choice to follow on with the work of Elijah.

Elisha Heals The Water of Jericho (2Kings 2:19)

After he had watched Elijah taken from the earth, Elisha had passed over the Jordan and obtained residence in Jericho where there was a company of prophets. There, the people of Jericho were faced with a serious problem. The city lay under a curse (1Kings 16:34) that apparently affected the water supply. Though ample water came up from a spring that served the city of Jericho it was no good for drinking.

One of the inhabitants explained the problem to Elisha.

"The situation of this city is pleasant," he told the prophet, "but the water is not good, and we cannot plant any seed."



"Bring me a new cruse and put salt therein," commanded Elisha.

The people did so. The prophet took the cruse of salt, and casting the salt into the water that flowed from the fountain spring, he told the people that they would now find that the waters were healed.

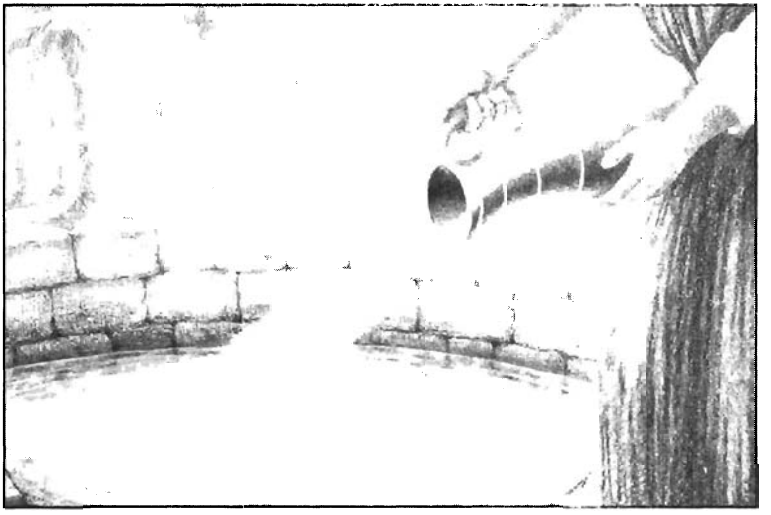
"Thus saith Yahweh," he said to the people, "I have healed these waters; they shall no longer destroy the plants."

The people found that it was as Elisha said. The water of the fountain now proved to be fresh and brought life

Elisha's well

Jericho today is a very fertile place of tropical plants and trees. On a rising not far from the modern city there are the ruins of the ancient fortress whose walls fell down when Joshua marched against it. Just below these ruins there is a large well that supplies all the town with its drinking water. In summer and winter this fountain produces ample water for all, and has been doing so for many hundreds of years. Many, many millions of gallons of pure water have come up from the depths of the earth through this fountain to revive thirsty mankind.

It is called the Well of Elisha.



instead of death to the land.

It was not the salt that worked this miracle of course but Yahweh. All the Israelites knew the significance of salt. Yahweh's covenant with the people is called a "covenant of salt" (Num. 18:19). Salt is a symbol of the lasting nature of His covenant, and of the righteousness and purity that it demands. Salt was always added to a sacrifice (Lev. 2:13), and also speaks of healing and preserving.

When the people followed Elisha to the well with the cruse of salt, they would have had some knowledge of what salt signifies in the things of God.

He threw it into the water, because water represents teaching (Jhn. 7:37; 1Cor. 3:6). The salt healed the waters as the doctrine of Yahweh's covenant gives value and life to doctrine and teaching. Where the salt of the covenant is not found, teaching and doctrine is only arid and sterile, leading to death.

The covenant, of course, relates to God's promises to Abraham and David which we have discussed in earlier pages of the *Story of the Bible*.

The Tragedy of Bethel (2Kings 2:23-25)

The town of Bethel, in the heights overlooking the pass that leads from the Jordan up through the hill territory of Israel had witnessed many wonderful incidents in Bible times. There, Abraham heard the wonderful promise that he and his seed would inherit the land forever; there also, Jacob had his refreshing dream of the ladder that reached unto heaven, teaching him that he had One who would help him in time of need.

But in the days of Jeroboam it had become a centre of calf wor

ship, and since Ahab's time the evil worship of Baal had been set up there.

Elisha decided to visit the town because there was also a company of prophets in the city. As he struggled up the steep pass that led to the city, some young men* came out and mocked him. They knew him as the successor of Elijah, and laughed at his appearance, for Elisha was bald-headed, and that was considered a disgrace in those times.

"Ascend you bald head; ascend you bald head!" they cried out at him.

They had probably heard that Elijah had been taken from the earth and now mockingly invited Elisha to do likewise that the country might be free of his presence, and that the worship of Baal might proceed unhindered.

There was also more in the insult "bald head" than a mocking reference to Elisha's appearance. The words in the Hebrew mean "empty skull," and were probably meant to reflect upon the teaching of the prophet as well. The young men were ridiculing Elisha, implying that his bald head was evidence of his ignorance.

Thus they mocked Yahweh, His prophets, and His message.

Elisha turned around and cursed them in the name of Yahweh. He pronounced the divine judgment on these blasphemous, mocking idol worshippers of Bethel.

He had no sooner done so than two she-bears came angrily out of the forest close by the road. They attacked the young men, destroying forty-two of them.

Thus Israel was taught that the people must show respect for Yahweh's truth and His messengers. It was a warning that if the nation continued to "mock the messengers of God, despise His words, and misuse His prophets," its "young men" would be slain (cp. 2Chron. 36:16) by being delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, whose symbol is that of wild beasts of the jungle (see Daniel 7).

Meanwhile, Elisha continued to visit the towns where the disciples of the prophets were found that he might strengthen them in the things of God.

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* Many people have found fault with the Bible because of this incident. The A.V. makes reference to "little children," and readers have imagined that Elisha took exception to the innocent banter of babies. That is not so. Rotherham renders the words as "young lads." The same Hebrew word (*naar*) has been used to describe a child, a young man, a soldier, etc. It is used of Ishmael when he was 14 (Gen. 21:5-12), of Joseph when he was 29 (Gen. 41:12) and for Ahab's soldiers (1Kgs. 20:14). Thus they were responsible men who foolishly mocked this prophet of God, and drew upon themselves his condemnation.

Chapter Seven

MIRACLES IN MOAB AND ISRAEL

In Israel, Jehoram, the son of Ahab reigned. Though he was not a righteous king, he had learned a lesson from the tragic death of his father and brother. Both had died because they had refused to serve Yahweh. His brother had died of a painful illness because he had sought the aid of Beelzebub and despised the God of Israel.

Jehoram decided not to make such a foolish mistake as that!

He put away the image of Baal that his father had set up, but though outwardly it seemed as if he was living righteously before God, he still encouraged the calf-worship that had been set up by Jeroboam.

During the short reign of his brother, Mesha, the king of Moab, had revolted against Israel. Previously Mesha had given a large yearly tribute to the king of Israel, but when Ahab had died, and the control of the kingdom had passed into the weaker hands of his sons, he had refused to continue to do so.

Jehoram decided he would punish the king of Moab and force him to render rich tribute again to Israel. He sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah for help (2Kgs. 3). Once again, this otherwise good king made a bad mistake. He joined forces with the evil house of Ahab. Perhaps he thought that as Jehoram had put away the image of Baal that he had completely changed his ways, and had embraced the true worship of Yahweh with enthusiasm. Jehoshaphat also realised that the growing power of Moab represented a danger to Judah as well as to Israel, and welcomed the opportunity to reduce this threat. He therefore agreed to come at the head of his army, and bring with him the vassal king of Edom as well. For, at this time, Judah ruled over Edom (1Kings 22:47).

Israel and Judah Invade Moab

Joining forces with Judah, the combined army marched south of the Dead Sea, and then turned north into Moab (2Kgs. 3:9). This is a very arid stretch of country. The sun beats down hot and pitilessly upon the dry, parched ground. In this hot climate the army needed plenty of water, but they found this was very scarce. The further they marched the more thirsty they became, until the army found itself in dire straits. Soon the whole venture was threatened with disaster. The three kings had doubtless intended to take the king of Moab by surprise, but, so ill-planned had been the project, that they themselves were now in no condition to fight if they were attacked.

The fault all lay in the planning. They had consulted only with themselves, and not with Yahweh. Now they were forced into a con-

dition in which they had to turn to Him for help.

This irritated Jehoram. He had no true love for Yahweh. Now he blamed all the trouble on to Him. "Alas! that Yahweh has called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!" he lamented.

Jehoshaphat did not see it like that. He knew that they had been in fault in not approaching Yahweh first. He learnt the lesson we must also learn. When we go forth to fight (and we have battles to fight today: in proclaiming the Truth, in conquering ourselves!), do not delay to seek the blessing of Yahweh. Prayer is a great help; an absolute necessity. Jehoshaphat knew that. Though the outlook seemed hopeless, though he realised they should have sought God's direction before, he now was determined to make amends. "Is there not here a prophet of Yahweh, that we may enquire of Yahweh by him?" he asked.

An attendant standing by mentioned that Elisha was with the army. He had doubtless accompanied it on the instructions of God. Jehoram, who had accused God of blinding the three kings and so bringing about their destruction, was now to learn something of the mercy of Yahweh.

But the kings had to humble themselves before the servant of the King of Heaven. They "went down to Elisha" (v. 12); their condition was too desperate to command him to come to them!

Elisha saw them coming and knew their mission. He also knew the true character of Jehoram, the king of Israel. He looked at him sternly, for he realised that he was a hypocrite whose heart was with the false prophets of his father and mother.

"What have I to do with you?" the prophet said sternly to the king of Israel. "Get you to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother!"

But Jehoram had been humbled by reverses. "Do not treat me like that!" he pleaded. "I am sure that Yahweh has called us together that He might punish us by delivering us into the hand of Moab."

"Yahweh of hosts lives*!" retorted Elisha. He implied that the three kings before him were acting as though He did not live.

"I stand before him as his servant," he continued, "and I can tell you that if it were not for the presence of Jehoshaphat, Yahweh would turn His face from you, and would not consider your plight for a moment" (v. 14).

The kings felt humbled and abashed before the forthright words of the prophet. It sounded so much like the echo of Elijah; as though the old prophet were speaking through his disciple!

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* The same claim was made through Moses in Num. 14:21 against the background of Israel's rebellion in the wilderness: vv. 10-12. The nation had then acted as if God was unable to save the people out of their distresses (cp. vv. 2-3).

Elisha called for a minstrel to play music for him. Under the soothing influence of the sacred music, which doubtless brought to mind the glorious psalms of David, his irritation against the kings subsided, and gradually he found his mind in tune with God.

Anxiously the three kings now watched the silent prophet whose mind was concentrated on the problem before him, whose silent lips were moving as he spake to Yahweh. At last he finished, and now he turned to the waiting and expectant kings. "Make this dry ravine full of pits and trenches," he commanded, "for Yahweh declares, though you see neither wind nor rain, this dry ravine shall be so full of water that you and your armies and your beasts shall all drink. This is a small thing to Yahweh. He will also deliver the Moabites into your power; you shall storm every fortified town and destroy every tree,* and fill up every well of water, and spoil every field with stones."

Early next morning the words of the prophet were fulfilled. The early morning offering was being made, for adversity had made the kings exceedingly religious! The sun was peeping above the hills in the east, when, to the startled gaze of the army, they saw the dry water-course of the ravine in which they were camped flowing with water from the south.

They were saved! Through the word of the prophet, Yahweh had given them the water of life!

Elisha had fully justified the meaning of his name — *The Salvation of God!*

Mesha Destroyed by a Strong Delusion (See 2Thess. 2:11)

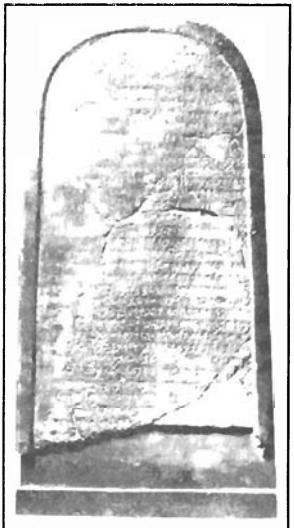
Meanwhile, news of the invasion had reached the ears of the king of Moab. He was not unduly concerned. He had already repelled the army of Israel on previous occasions‡ and felt capable of doing it again. He gathered his forces together, and marched towards the place where his spies had said the army of Israel had camped. He had learned of the extremity of the Israelites, and doubtless thought an easy victory was before him.

They came to the valley and decided to attack early on the following morning. That was the time of the morning sacrifice, and with the miracle of the water fresh in mind, the army of Israel now sought to worship God, and to honor Him. All attended the morning sacrifice, and the camp was silent and still at that time.

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* The instructions doubtless had relation to trees of value for fortifications, and not fruit trees. The law prohibited the destruction of these — see Deut. 20:19-20.

‡ Mesha was a mighty king in Moab, and left a record of his reign engraven in stone. This has been found, and is known as the Moabite Stone. On it, Mesha records how he triumphed over Israel with the aid of Chemosh, the god of Moab. He boasts that he had taken "the altar hearths of Yahweh and dragged them before Chemosh." Thus he looked upon his battles as religious wars, as the triumph of Chemosh before Yahweh. In his defeat at the hands of the three kings, he, as well as Israel and Edom, must have seen the vindication of Yahweh's power.



Moabite Stone

Thus, when Mesha looked down from the heights above, he saw no movement in the camp. He could not understand it. Then he noticed the stagnant water in the pits and trenches that the Israelites had dug to hold it. This was most unusual in that dry, arid part. The morning sun shone on these pools. Red light was reflected from the red hills of Moab on to the water. To Mesha they looked like pools of blood.

"The three kings have fallen out with their fellows and destroyed each other," he declared as he looked down from above. "They have attacked each other! Let us down to the spoil!"

The Moabites rejoiced. Victory was theirs without the need of battle. Eagerly they threw their weapons from them, and quickly they clambered down the side of the ravine to spoil the tents of Israel.

What a surprise when they reached the camp! They found an army of resolute men, revived from the water of life that had been divinely provided them, determined to destroy the power of Moab.

The battle was an easy one for the Israelites. They swept north, chasing the army of Moab before them, invading the territory of Moab, destroying the cities, felling the trees, stopping the wells of water, casting stones on the fields, weakening the power of Moab, executing Divine Judgment on the people.

Mesha, King of Moab, fled with his men to the protection of Kir-hareseth, the mighty *City of Bricks*† that he had built as his powerful fortress-capital. It stood on a high hill some 1013 metres (3,323 feet) above sea level, and some 1402metres (4,600 feet) above the depression of the Dead Sea, from where Israel had invaded Moab. Except at one or two points, this hill is separated from any neighbouring hills by precipices that fall down sheer to the deep valleys below. Therefore, though overshadowed by other mountains, it was an easy city to defend, particularly in view of the tremendous fortifications that Mesha had built.

Vigorously, the successful army of Israelites encompassed the city. They gained the heights that gave access to the city wall. Skilful slingers kept any defenders from appearing on the wall (v. 25), whilst other companies of soldiers dug at the foundations in order to weaken, then breach them.

† Kir hareseth means "City of Bricks." Reference is made to this powerful fortress in Isaiah 16:7,11 where it is implied that the fate of all the country of Moab depended upon the fate of the capital.



A fortified city of southern Moab, now known as *Kir of Moab*. It was built upon a high hill, isolated from its neighbors by precipices falling sheer down to the deep valleys below.

Mesha was in a desperate state. Something had to be done quickly to save his city, his nation and himself. Selecting 700 picked men, he decided to attack the Edomites who were with Israel and Judah in the conflict. They would have the least cause to fight and constituted the weakest point in the attacking army. They would doubtless retreat before a determined counter-attack on the part of desperate men.

So Mesha reasoned; but his strategy proved faulty. He was unable to penetrate the challenging army, and his own men were driven back into the city.

What else could be done to save the day? Mesha decided upon an extreme act of desperation that would show to his enemies, as well as his own people, that he would never give in. Publicly, in front of the city and the besieging soldiers, he (Mesha, king of Moab), took his eldest son (the king of Edom's son — see Amos 2:1; Micah 6:7), the prince of the realm, and offered him for a burnt offering on the vast, wide walls that encircled the fortress.

This act horrified all who saw it. Such determination weakened the resolve of the Israeli soldiers, who were no doubt weary from the long protracted battle that had taken them up the difficult slopes leading to Kir-hareseth. Some began to murmur that they had had enough, that sufficient punishment had been given to Moab, that if they pressed the Moabites too far they themselves might suffer.

A retreat was sounded, and the armies dispersed back to their own lands.

God's instructions had not been fully carried out (see v. 19); the weakness of Israel permitted their enemy to rise again. Mesha was anxious to avenge himself, and as he records on the Stone that he erected as a memorial of his reign, he began to harass the cities of Reuben and Gad.

Israel suffered because they had neglected to carry out Yahweh's instructions to the letter.

There was much in this incident for spiritually minded men in Israel to ponder. Yahweh miraculously had given water to Israel that had saved the lives of the soldiers; yet that same water had brought death to the deluded Mesha! It was a savour of life unto one, but a savour of death unto others. Many years later, Paul, in writing of the "water of life" which brings the Salvation of God to the notice of men, declared that "to the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life" (2Cor. 2:16).

God's Care For His Own (2Kings 4:1-7)

In Israel all was not well. The country lay under the burden of famine which brought difficulties to many people. Among those so affected was a poor widow woman, the wife of one of the disciples of the prophets.

He had died leaving a debt that she could not pay. The creditors demanded that she either obtain the money or they would sell her two sons into slavery to redeem the debt.

The poor woman was desperate. In her dire need she turned to Elisha that he might intercede on her behalf to Yahweh, and so help her in her difficulty. "What have you in the house?" asked the prophet.

There is greater significance in this question than may appear at the first.

God works on the basis of what a person has, and how much he is prepared to expend himself on his own behalf. God will help us if we will help ourselves. But He will not assist us if we waste our opportunities by our own foolishness or idleness. If we are wasteful we will want; if we are idle we will not obtain. If we are lazy it is useless crying to God in prayer for Him to help us. We have the means of helping ourselves at hand, given us by God, and He expects us to use them.

This poor widow woman had very little: only one pot of oil. Elisha told her to go and borrow all the vessels she could from her neighbours. "Borrow not a few!" he recommended.

The woman did so. With her sons she came back laden with the large stone oil jars of her neighbours. She set them before the prophet and awaited his further instructions.

First she had to shut the door to keep everybody out. Then she

was told to pour the oil from her vessel into the others. The woman acted in full assurance of faith. She knew Elisha; her late husband had been his disciple; she put implicit trust in him.

She was amazed at the result. She poured the oil from her own vessel into the others and continued to pour until all the vessels she had borrowed were filled. God had miraculously increased the oil as she poured it out.

At last all the vessels stood before her filled to the brim! Here was wealth adequate to her needs! In gratitude she rushed to the prophet to tell him the good news. "Go, sell the oil, and pay your debt," he said, "and live you and your children on the rest!"

This was more than she had requested. She had prayed only for relief from the debt that was being pressed against her. But she had not only been relieved from that but granted sufficient to live on free from debt for the rest of her life.

Her gratitude must have reflected the words of David: "Many are Thy wonderful works which Thou hast done, and Thy thoughts which are to us-ward" (Psa. 40:5); or those of Paul: "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.." (Eph. 3:20).

The Miracle Repeated Today!

This miracle, that seems so unlikely to the critics of the Bible, has been repeated many times since the days of Elisha. The helpless woman knew a desperate need; she turned to God for help; she received much more than she ever expected.

Has that not been the experience of many people since her time? It has been mine, and it can be yours!

But you might answer, that the way God helps us is not as spectacular as the way He helped the widow woman.

In reply to that, I suggest that if you seek God in the way appointed, if you really pour out your heart to Him in personal prayer, trying to seek Him and humbly approaching His presence, you will find that His help is just as real as that which the widow woman experienced. But you, like her, must REALISE your need, must GIVE YOURSELF to Him.

Read what the Lord Jesus says in Luke 18:5. Are not those words real and true? Cannot we appreciate the goodness of God now just as much as the widow woman did so long ago? To use further words of David: "Taste and see that Yahweh is good: blessed (happy) is the man that trusteth in Him" (Psa. 34:8). To really experience this joy we must act like the widow woman with her need. As she shut the door to keep others out whilst the miracle was performed, we need to go aside in some quiet place and pour out our heart in personal, quiet prayer to our heavenly Father.

We will find that we will not do this in vain.

The Parable of the Miracle of Abundant Oil

Miracles were performed not merely to show that God has power, but also to teach important truths. When this is realised we will see that they are more than incidents of wonderment — they were performed for the learning and instruction of those who lived at the time they happened, and recorded for the learning and instruction of us today. Here is the suggested lesson of this incident.

The Widow Woman — represented the Jewish people under the Mosaic Covenant — in debt to the Law — see Gal. 4:24; Lam. 1:1-3; Isa. 54:4-5.

Sons Sold into Slavery — portray the two nations of Israel taken into captivity — Isa. 50:1.

Plea for help — See Isaiah 50:2.

The Debtor — The Law and its demands — Gal. 5:3.

The Abundant Oil — The Truth's redemption giving light: Exod. 27:20-21; Matt. 25:3.

The Debt Paid — Redemption in Christ Jesus.

"Live Thou of the rest" — Eternal life in the Kingdom.

God's Reward For the Generous (2Kings 4:8-17)

At the foot of Mt. Tabor, facing the valley of Jezreel, there stood the small town of Shunem. It was a quiet little place, as its name implies. It was on the road that Elisha used to take as he travelled from Mt. Carmel teaching and helping the people. He came to know Shunem very well, for in the town there dwelt a woman who received great comfort and help from the teaching of Elisha. She was a woman "much given to hospitality" (Rom. 12:13; 1Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8), who was anxious to repay the debt she felt she owed the prophet. She invited him to stop with her whenever he passed that way, and enjoy a meal in the house. She would accept no refusal, insisting upon him doing as she desired.

Elisha was pleased to do so, for in that house he found quiet relaxation. He was not pressed to give talks nor faced with a multitude of questions when he was tired out. He was invited to relax and was provided with food.

At first the woman had to insist upon Elisha visiting her, but so comfortable did she make it for him, that it became his habit to "turn in" to this house whenever he was by Shunem.

The woman was not only kind but wise. She could see that the prophet badly needed rest. She talked the matter over with her hus-

band, and they arranged to build a little room for Elisha, where he could lie down and sleep if he so desired.

In due time the room was built and furnished. It was not elaborately furnished. Elisha did not want that! The simple bed, chair and lampstand were all that he required, and more than he expected.

Thus, when Elisha next turned into the woman's house, he was shown "his room," and invited to relax therein. He was deeply touched by the loving ministrations of this thoughtful woman of God and her husband. He called her before him. "You have been so careful to look after me," said Elisha, "Is there anything I can do for you? Would you like me to speak to the king on your behalf? Or to the captain of the army?"

The woman wanted none of this. She dwelt among her own people, and was perfectly contented to do so. She wanted no social honours.

So, for the moment, Elisha did not know how to help her or how to repay her kindness. It was Gehazi, his companion, who suggested the answer. Gehazi was an assistant who now helped Elisha, as Elisha had once helped Elijah.

When the woman had rejected his offer of assistance, Elisha looked at his servant in perplexity.

"What then is to be done for her?" he asked.

"She has no child!" suggested Gehazi.

Here was a way in which she could be repaid. She was recalled, and as she stood in the doorway of the little room she had built for the prophet, he told her that Yahweh would give her a son. "Do not lie unto me!" exclaimed the woman, excited at the prospect of such a thing. But Elisha had not lied, for by and by a little son was given to the father and mother, to their great joy. The child soon learnt to crawl, then walk, then run about and enjoy the life of the farm. How often the mother must have thanked God and His prophet for the goodness she had received. A great joy filled her heart as the little boy grew older and became even greater company to his parents.

The Woman of Shunem Learns of the Resurrection

But then, one day, tragedy struck at that home which robbed it of all the pleasure that had been brought to it by the goodness of God. The joy and sadness that came to this faithful home in Israel provide an important lesson to us all. Earlier the kindness of this woman towards the prophet of God was rewarded in that she had the great joy of giving birth to a little son. Now, however, her faith was to be tested and an important lesson was to be taught her. For a moment her joy turned to sorrow, but it revived in greater measure at the manifestation of Yahweh's kindness and goodness. It was to show her that the power of the resurrection would remove all the

sorrows of life. Let us record what happened.

Tragedy (2Kings 4) In course of time the baby grew into a little boy. He delighted to help his father in the harvest field, and to romp about amongst the reapers as they harvested the crop.

But in summer the sun is extremely hot in Israel, and in the valley of Shunem it is even hotter than most places. One traveller has declared that it "glows like a furnace in harvest time." If the head is left uncovered, a person can suffer from sunstroke, and in a young child that can prove fatal.

One day, as the boy was playing in the fields, he ran to his father, crying, "My head! My head!"

His father did not realise how seriously his son had been affected. Calling an attendant, he told him to carry the child to his mother. In the house she did what she could for him, but it was all in vain. At noon, the little boy was dead.

But though his mother was terribly upset at the tragedy she did not lose faith. She realised that in her trouble there was but one who could help her — Yahweh, the great God of love and mercy. She had doubtless heard of the miracle Elijah had performed in raising from the dead the son of the widow of Zarephath (1Kings 17:22), and in her need she determined to seek the help of Elisha. She took her son, placed him on the bed of the man of God, in the little room that she had built for his comfort, and then closing the door she made preparations for her journey.

Her husband heard that she was seeking Elisha. He did not realise that his son was dead, and wondered at the anxiety of his wife to find the prophet. "Why are you seeking him today?" he asked. "It is not



the time of the new moon, or a sabbath day!"

But the woman did not tell him her mission. Perhaps she did not want to worry him, but more likely she did not want him insisting that he should go in place of herself. Her need was great, and she was determined to seek the aid of the prophet.

She rode on an ass, with a servant walking alongside to drive and guide it. Telling him to make the greatest haste, she commenced the twelve miles ride from Shunem to Carmel where Elisha was dwelling.

To Elisha For Help From the heights of Carmel, Elisha saw the woman approaching along the valley road. "Look, there is the Shunammite," he said to his servant Gehazi. "Run to meet her and find out what she wants. Say to her, 'Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?' "

But the woman was no more prepared to discuss her problem with Gehazi than she was prepared to let her husband approach the prophet on her behalf. "It is well," she told Gehazi. She was too full of her sorrow to speak of it to anybody but the prophet. When she approached him as he stood on the hillside, her feelings overcame her completely. Giving way to her grief, she threw herself on the ground before the wondering prophet, and caught him by the feet.



This was too much for Gehazi. He had no real thought or feeling for the woman, and in his officious zeal, he tried to thrust her away. But Elisha stopped him. "Let her alone," he commanded. "She is deeply troubled over some matter that for some reason Yahweh has hid from me."

"Did I ask of you a son?" asked the woman reproachfully of

Elisha. "Did I not say to you, do not offer me a joy that is impossible?"*

These words were sufficient to tell Elisha the cause of the woman's distress. He realised that something terrible had happened to the child. Instant action was required. "Gird up your loins, take my staff, and go, lay it upon the face of the child," he told Gehazi. "Make the greatest haste! If you meet anybody do not stop to salute him, and if any salute you, do not return his salute! Hurry!"

Gehazi sped off on this mission of mercy, but the mother refused to go with him. She could perhaps sense that there was no hope in Gehazi. "As Yahweh lives, and as you live, I will not leave you,"§ she said to the prophet cp. v. 30 — 'and he arose and followed her'.

Life From The Dead Meanwhile Gehazi made haste to Shunem. Entering the little room built for the prophet, he put Elisha's staff on the still, cold face of the dead child — but nothing happened.‡ Losing no time, he hastened back to meet Elisha and the mother, to tell them of the failure of his mission.

Later, when the puzzled prophet entered the room and looked down upon the face of the dead child, he could not understand the purpose of this tragedy, why the child should be given to the woman if it were to be thus taken away. Better for her never to have experienced such a joy if it were to end in such grief and sorrows.†

He prayed, recognising that he had no power in himself, and seeking the strength that comes from above.

He then went and lay upon the child. He tried natural means, hoping that Yahweh might work through them. The warmth of his own body was transmitted to the cold body of the little boy. The prophet put his mouth to the mouth of the child, and by blowing into his mouth hoped to inflate the lungs, thus trying by means of artificial respiration to bring life to the little body beneath him, whilst at the

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* The A.V. represents the woman as saying, "Do not deceive me." The word comes from a root signifying "draw out." By questioning, Elisha had drawn out from the woman her heart's desire for a son. She had not wanted to express her mind on this matter, for she had felt that the satisfying of it was impossible, and she had "learned to be content" with that which she had. To have experienced her heart's desire and have it thus tragically snatched from her would have been beyond what she could bear. Thus her words of reproach.

§ This is a Hebraism expressing confidence in Yahweh and the prophet. Yahweh lives, other gods do not; she sought Him realising that He would hearken and bless. She sought the aid of the prophet for the same reason.

‡ Gehazi was an undeveloped hypocrite as subsequent events proved, and therefore lacked the necessary faith to perform the miracle. He continued with Elisha until he was revealed for what he was, in the same manner as Judas continued with the Lord. It is both interesting and significant to compare this incident with a similar one recorded in Mark 9:28 where the disciples were unable to perform a miracle because of "lack of faith."

† The prophet wondered at the death of this son, as the prophets did generally at the predicted death of Yahweh's Son — see 1Pet. 1:11. The miracle graphically enacted the greatest story in the world — the death and resurrection of Christ.

same time, praying that Yahweh would help him.

Elisha felt quite exhausted by these efforts. The natural warmth of his body was transmitted to the cold body of the child, and he, in turn, now felt cold and stiff. He walked to and fro in the house to increase the circulation of his blood and to recover the natural heat of the body. He then returned to lay upon the child again.

It was while he was doing this that the miracle occurred. Suddenly he felt the little boy stir beneath him. Convulsively the child sneezed as his lungs began to function. At last he opened his eyes, and sat up in bed.

Yahweh had given him life from the dead.

And now what joy in that household where before all was sorrow! With what heartfelt thanks the woman must have turned to Yahweh, as she saw again this evidence of His great love.

But first she had to be told. "Call this Shunammite," Elisha told Gehazi.

She came to the door, wondering and afraid. She saw the prophet standing by the bed. "Take up your son," he said to her kindly.

Her child was alive! The suspense was over. It was too much for the poor woman. Tired from the terrible strain of the death of her child, and weakened by the ordeal she sank to the ground before the prophet. Then, as the realisation of the miracle came to her, she bowed herself to the ground in worship, then lovingly gathered her child in her arms and took him to his own bed.

Why Did God Permit This Tragedy?

As we read the story of this miracle, we are caught up with emotions of joy, then sorrow, then a greater joy again. But is it not all unnecessary? Why should the child die if God was prepared to give him life again? Why should the poor woman have to suffer in the way she did, if it was merely to show that God can perform miracles?*

There is more in this incident than that. In fact, the more the Bible is studied, the better it is realised that God does nothing unnecessarily. There is meaning and purpose in it all.

In 2Kings 4 there is recorded the story of two women: one a widow, the other married; one recognising a desperate need as her two sons were about to be sold into slavery, the other happily married but lacking a son.

Previously we showed that the miracle performed on the behalf of the widow woman, also acted as a parable, telling the important story of the redemption of natural Israel. We likened the widow woman to Hagar whom Paul uses to represent Israel under the Law (Gal. 4:24).

* A similar incident is recorded in John 11, when Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the dead. The Master had deliberately delayed returning to the house of mourning at Bethany, in order that the power of God might be revealed, and a parable of his own death and resurrection enacted.

In the same way, the Shunammite woman can be likened to Sarah whom Paul uses in Galatians 4:23 to represent the true Israel: those Jews and Gentiles who have embraced the covenant made to Abraham and walk in its light.

She was granted a son and experienced a great joy, even as Sarah did at the birth of Isaac — and as did those in Judea who witnessed the birth of the Lord 1900 years ago. But her son was "stricken of God," and died, even as did the Lord Jesus. This caused great sorrow to the woman, and great wonderment to the prophet, because at first neither understood the reason for it.

The resurrection of the son provided the answer, however, helping them to better realise the full measure of Yahweh's love, and experiencing in them a greater joy than would have been possible in any other way.

We can share the woman's joy if we put our trust in Yahweh through the death and resurrection of His son.

We learn a few further details of this woman in 2Kings 8. There we find that famine in the land of Israel caused her to sojourn in Gentile lands (the land of the Philistines, or *the wanderers*, as the name means). The famine continued for a specific length of time (the same period as the fit of madness remained with Nebuchadnezzar — Dan. 4:32), at the end of which period she returned, to be presented before the king, and receive her inheritance.

This is typical of the true Israel, the followers of Jesus Christ. They live in Gentile lands, in a time of spiritual famine. When the famine will end (at Christ's second advent) they will be presented to the King to receive their inheritance.

Thus Elisha continued to help the Shunammite woman, and to repay her for her great kindness to him. It shows the meaning of the Lord's words: "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward" (Matt. 10:41). Let us likewise help those who labour in the service of the Master today.

Death in the Pot (2Kings 4:38-41)

Shortly after this, Elisha performed another notable miracle, which taught a most important lesson. The famine he had predicted (cp. 2Kings 8:1with 4:38) had spread over the land. Elisha had gone to Gilgal where there was a company of his disciples who delighted to hear the instruction of their teacher. They sat before him whilst he expounded to them things out of the Law.

But Elisha was concerned for their bodily welfare as well as their spiritual needs, and so, at the due time, he commanded that food be prepared for their benefit. This is a feature of Bible teaching that is sometimes overlooked. God knows our daily needs and He will provide them to us if we trust in Him. That is why the Lord commanded

us that we pray "Give us each day our daily bread." That is why the apostle Paul, in the midst of the wild Mediterranean storm, when soldiers and sailors were busy trying to save the ship, advised: "I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health" (Acts 27:34, see also 2Tim. 4:13). We can serve Yahweh better if we care for our health; He has provided all things necessary to that end.

But among the company of disciples at Gilgal was one who was not satisfied with that which Elisha had provided. He wanted more, and without asking instruction of the prophet, he went out into the field to gather herbs. His object was to find food to satisfy his fleshly cravings.

He did not seek in vain. He came upon a climbing plant that looked like a vine, and from which hung some luscious-looking fruit. Little did he know that though it looked so good, it was really bitter in flavour and poisonous in effect.

He took the fruit, shredded it and added it to the pot. Then it was served out to the disciples.

Immediately they detected there was something the matter. The food was bitter; it tasted poisonous. "There is death in the pot!" they exclaimed to Elisha.

Elisha took some meal and cast it into the pot. "Pour out for the people that they may eat," he commanded.

They did so, and found there was no harm in the pot.

Why This Miracle? What was the meaning behind this?

The disciples of Elisha were familiar with the use that God makes of meal: it was used as an offering unto Him (see Lev. 6:14-16). Meal symbolises man's labour, for it is obtained through work in the field. It was added to sacrifices to teach that a man should dedicate his labour, his increase, to the things of God.

The disobedient disciple had gone into the world merely to satisfy his own longing. When Elisha threw the meal into the pot, he taught that it is lawful for a person to labour for his own needs, so long as he did not overlook what was due to God. That truth became the basis for the miracle performed.

The miracle is still performed today! A person may get rich by his labour, but if he works merely to satisfy his own selfish desires, he will find that his very riches will become his condemnation. There will be "death in the pot." But if he dedicates the bounty he receives to the work of God, he will find that he can eat without harm. Thus Paul commanded:

"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up

in store for themselves a good foundation against time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" (1Tim. 6:17-19).

Food Multiplied in Time of Famine (2Kings 4:42-44)

Like the Lord Jesus, Elisha was anxious to teach the people, and used every opportunity to do so. In this he was helped by the miracles he performed. Gradually the people were turning more and more to him, for they could see that God was with him.

On one occasion, he was visited by a man from Baal-shalisha who brought him a gift of bread made from the firstfruits of his barley. The Law commanded that the firstfruits should be paid to the priest (Num. 18:13), but to the man from Baal-shalisha the prophet stood in relation to the people where the priest should have been found. He therefore brought this to him as a mark of honour in recognition of his holy office.

There was quite a large gathering of people together at the time, and the prophet could not resist the opportunity to use the occasion to teach a spiritual lesson. Especially as the name Baal-shalisha is so significative. It means *"The Lord of the Three Ways,"* that is, of the Crossroads. The people were at the crossroads in a spiritual sense, many of them beginning to turn to Elisha.

Turning to his companion (probably Gehazi), the prophet commanded him to give food unto the people that they might eat. There were at least one hundred people present, and the only food available was the few barley loaves the man had brought the prophet as a present.

Gehazi was bewildered. "What shall I give all these people?" he asked in amazement.

"Give the bread to the people that they may eat," commanded the prophet again, "For thus saith Yahweh, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof."

Thus commanded, the man set the bread before the people, and to the astonishment of all there was found sufficient for each one and some left over.

Why This Miracle?

How similar this is to the miracle that our Lord performed when he fed five thousand people with five barley loaves and two small fishes (John 6:5-13)! On that occasion, Andrew questioned the command of the Lord, saying, "What are they among so many?" But it was miraculously multiplied so that all had enough.

The bread brought to Elisha was dedicated bread, bread given to God. As such it symbolises the "bread of life." Though the quantity of this bread may seem so meagre to men of the flesh, there is ample to

supply "whosoever will" come and eat of it (Rev. 22:17), and will leave sufficient over to provide for the needs of the Kingdom Age!

Thus Elisha, like the Lord Jesus, went about performing miracles and teaching the people.



River Jordan

Chapter Eight

THE CONFESSION AND CURE OF NAAMAN THE SYRIAN

The Phillips family had completed the reading of 2Kings 5, and was now ready to listen to Mr. Phillips as he recapitulated the story.

"This is a remarkable chapter," he said. "It tells a story which, on the face of it is interesting but also has some very important spiritual lessons. It teaches a lesson showing plainly what a person must do to be saved, and it is also typical of the work of the Lord Jesus."

"In what way is it typical of the Lord's work?" asked Peter.

"Christ himself referred to this incident in Luke 4:25-27," replied his father. "He declared that there were many lepers in Israel at this time, but they were not cleansed — only this Gentile. The manner in which he referred to this incident shows that he looked upon it as a type of the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. But before we consider the story in detail, let us clearly have in mind the various characters presented in this chapter. I have put them on this chart". Their father now showed the family the list he had prepared.

NAAMAN is set before us in the following ways:
As a Gentile highly respected by his fellows;
As an acknowledged leper (symbolically a sinner who recognises his need of a covering for sin);
As one seeking the help of God, but with preconceived ideas (v. 11);
As a man humbled by knowledge (v. 15);
As a forgiven sinner (v. 18).

THE ISRAELITISH MAID appears as:
A humble instrument preaching the Gospel;
A courageous advocate pointing the way of salvation.

GEHAZI reminds us of:
The Jew resting in the Law;
Hating the Gospel being preached to Gentiles.

ELISHA represents Christ, who provides instruction and direction to those in need; who has the power to save from death.

"Now let us briefly review the story," continued Mr. Phillips.

"How long is 'briefly'?" murmured Peter to the indignation of his sisters.

"We will first of all consider the king of Israel's embarrassment

(vv. 1-7)," continued Mr. Phillips, unheeding of the interruption. "Naaman was not a man who could be ignored. He was captain of the army of Syria, and greatly feared by the king of Israel. His skill in war had earned him the respect and gratitude of his country and king. He was a popular man, as is indicated in the meaning of his name which signifies *"pleasantness, or beauty."*

"However he had a serious illness which the record dramatically describes in the words: 'But he was a leper!'

"In order to grasp the full significance of this chapter, it is necessary to appreciate what this meant. The Law of Moses (Lev. 13) dealt with leprosy in such a way as to indicate that it had a spiritual significance. The incurable leper was put outside the camp, for leprosy in Israel was a symbol for sin.

"But Gentiles never looked upon leprosy in quite the same light as Israelites. For that matter, Gentiles don't understand the true significance of sin, as do those who have come under God's law. Leprosy to them was more an inconvenience, a danger to life, than something of which to be ashamed. The Jew would seek to be cured of leprosy because it made him an outcast from his fellows; the Gentile would seek to be cured because it could bring death. This is the attitude towards sin which even today is shown by those 'in the Truth' and those 'outside.' The former know that sin persisted in will cause them to be rejected from their brethren at the Judgment Seat; the latter know that sin and death is something to be feared because of its ultimate result.

"Naaman was fortunate. Apparently there was something of 'pleasantness' or 'beauty' in him in the sight of Yahweh, because God overlooked the circumstances of his life to bring about his salvation from the dread disease in his flesh.

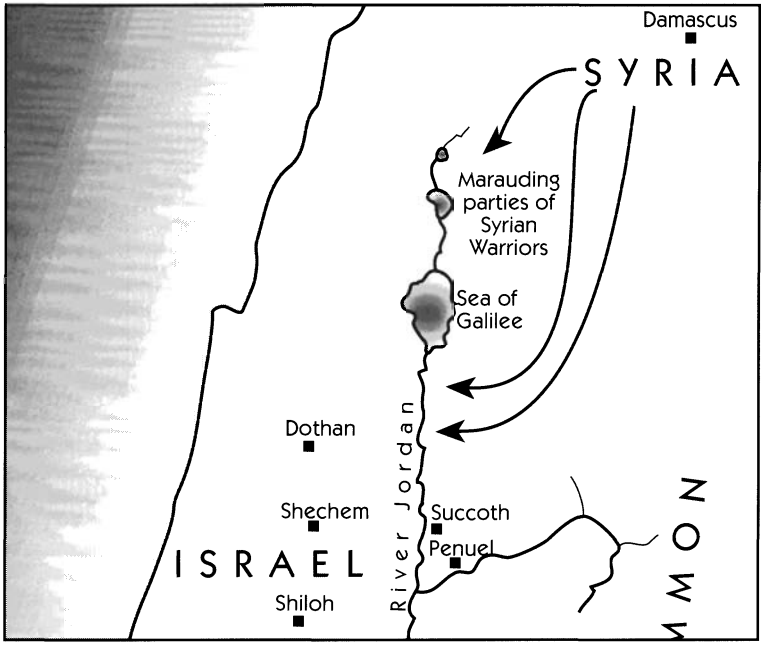
The Young Israelitish Maid Preaches the Gospel

"Though there was no war between Israel and Syria at this time, marauding parties of Syrians constantly troubled the north of Israel. They swept down upon the border towns, looting and destroying, and as suddenly disappeared.

"On one such occasion, a young Jewish maid was taken captive back to Syria, and in due course became attached to Naaman's household. She waited on Naaman's wife. The pleasant, kindly attitude of the great captain touched the little captive maid. A friendship sprung up between the wife of Naaman and the Israelitish slave. The maid observed with horror the terrible signs of leprosy on her master.

" 'I wish my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria!' she burst out one day to Naaman's wife. 'He would then cure him of his leprosy.'

"On what authority could the maid say that?" interrupted Grae-



ham. "In the quotation you gave us earlier (Luke 4:27), we are told that there were many lepers in Israel at this time, but they were not cured! Wasn't the maid taking a risk in confidently stating that Elisha would cure Naaman?"

"There were certainly lepers in Israel," replied his father. "In fact, 2Kings 7:1-3 mentions some at the gate of Samaria. The maid was evidently moved by Yahweh to speak as she did. He had protected her in all her trials. Though sorrow and dismay must have been in her home when it was learned that she had been taken captive, the Scriptures teach us that the 'angel of Yahweh encampeth around those that trust in Him' (Psa. 34), and Paul declared that 'all things work together for the good of those who are the called.' So she became God's humble instrument to bring to the notice of Gentiles the 'goodness of God.' That is the duty of the Ecclesia today which is styled a 'chaste virgin unto Christ' (2Cor. 11:2).

"The confident statement of the maid caused wonder in Syria. The Syrians had heard of some of the miracles that had been performed in Israel, and were disposed to believe the story of the captive girl. Her saying came to the notice of Ben-Hadad, the Syrian king. Ben-Hadad was anxious to assist his respected captain, Naaman, and sent an ambassador down to Samaria to command king Jehoram to arrange for the miracle. An extremely valuable present was also sent down, and Ben-Hadad confidently awaited the arrival of the prophet. As dictator in Syria, he naturally thought the prophet was subject to the



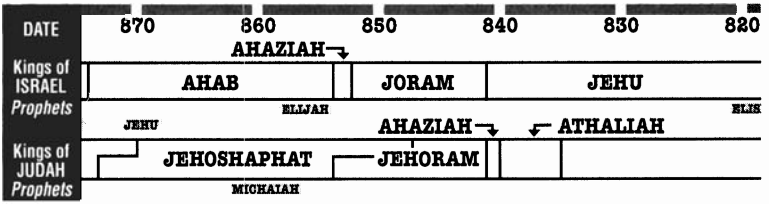
king. He did not realise that the prophet was really higher than the king, being an Ambassador for a greater Monarch than either Ben-Hadad or Jehoram — even Yahweh.

"In due time the ambassador arrived at the palace in Samaria, together with a retinue of servants, and Naaman the captain. The king of Israel wondered at the purpose for such a visit, but his wonderment turned into fear and amazement when he read the letter handed to him from Ben-Hadad. Jehoram read:

'With this letter I have sent Naaman my servant to thee, that you mayest recover him of his leprosy.'

"What a ridiculous request! How could Jehoram cure Naaman of his leprosy! As the king meditated the meaning of the letter it seemed to point to one thing: Ben-Hadad was seeking a quarrel; this letter meant war! Fearfully the king puzzled as to what he should do, for Israel was not ready for war with Syria. In desperation, he rent his clothes, saying: 'Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends unto me to cure a man of leprosy?'

"Jehoram forgot that he should have sought the aid of God in his problem.



"But Elisha heard of the king's predicament. 'Why rend your clothes?' he said to the king. 'Send Naaman to me and he will learn that there is a prophet in Israel.'

"The little captive maid in Gentile lands had shown greater faith than he who ruled Israel at that time."

Naaman's Unreasonable Attitude (vv. 8-12)

"The first part of this chapter shows us the king of Israel's embarrassment," continued Mr. Phillips, "and now we learn of the unreasonable attitude of Naaman. He had been directed to go to Elisha for the cure, but he went with preconceived notions as to what was required. In that he was very much like people today."

"How do you mean?" asked Ann.

"How often do people come to Christ with preconceived ideas of what is required!" answered her father. "They think God ought to help them in the way they desire without submitting to His requirements. In that they are like Naaman."

"I can't see that in Naaman," remarked Graeham.

"Have patience, Graeham," said Peter, "Dad will explain it all in time, we just have to give him sufficient time."

"I think you stand too much from that boy, Daddy," said Ann indignantly looking at her brother.

"Now, now, children, that's enough!" said Mr. Phillips, quelling the threatened outburst. "You will give your mother a headache, and, besides, I don't want you to miss this part of the story. Naaman made a couple of mistakes. Firstly, he tried to impress the king and the prophet with his authority and position. Notice that we read in v. 9 that he came with 'his horses and chariot and stood at the door of the house of Elisha.' A leper coming to the prophet in such pomp and state was presumptuous. He should have been more humble. Secondly, he made a mistake in the way he imagined he would be cured. He thought that Elisha would come out and ceremoniously stand in front of him, and calling on the name of Yahweh, strike his hand over the affected place and cure it."

"How do you know he thought that?" asked Peter.

"He said so in verse 11," answered Ann quickly.

"So Naaman had a preconceived idea as to how God should act through the prophet. Many people who come to the Lord Jesus have preconceived ideas as well, and that hinders them obeying the commands of Christ. They do not think it necessary to believe, or they imagine that baptism is a meaningless and childish ordinance, or they say they were sprinkled when they were babies and need not do anything else. In short, they act like Naaman.

"And when the prophet sent a messenger to tell Naaman to wash

in the Jordan seven times, the great captain was insulted. 'Are not the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel?' he stormed.

"Thus patriotic pride as well as preconceived notions hindered his obedience, as it does so often to people today!" continued Mr. Phillips.

Naaman Submits to Baptism

"Among the company of Naaman, however, there was a man of humility and good sense. 'My father,' he said to the captain, 'if the prophet had bid you do some great thing, you would have been pleased to do it. Why not obey him now when he says to you, 'Wash and be clean!'?"

"This was excellent advice, and Naaman, being a man of good sense, obeyed it. The little company of his retainers went to the river Jordan, and there he was baptised. Six times he went into the water, and nothing happened. But on the seventh occasion, a miracle had occurred: his flesh was healed; the leprosy had gone!

"It was a different man who came out of the water from the one who had gone into it! Joyfully he returned to the house of Elisha. 'Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel,' he declared.

"This was a declaration of his faith. He believed in the Hope of Israel. In his great pleasure he wanted to reward the prophet, but Elisha would take nothing. Naaman had brought a tremendous present of wealth with him (see v. 5), but Elisha was working for even greater riches than material things.



Armana and Pharpar — Rivers of Damascus

Naaman's Humble Request "Naaman then asked a present of Elisha. He requested it in humble terms so different to the haughty captain that had earlier pulled up at the door of Elisha's house in his chariot.

'I pray you, that you give to your servant two mules' burden of earth, for your servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice to other gods, but unto Yahweh,' he declared".

"Why would he want that?" asked Ann. "It seems a strange thing to take back to Syria."

"You will find an answer in Exodus 20:24," replied Mr. Phillips. "An altar such as was acceptable to Yahweh had to be made of unhewn stone, or of earth. The reason for this we discussed before. Naaman wanted to worship the God of Israel, therefore he took some soil of Israel back with him."

"Should he not have asked permission of the king to do that?" asked Peter.

"No," replied his father. Naaman recognised that Elisha was the representative of Yahweh who truly owned the soil of Israel" (cp. Deut. 11:11-12).

Naaman's Confession of Sin "If he wanted to worship Yahweh in truth why should he imply that he would continue to worship in the Temple of Rimmon, as he does in v. 18?" asked Graeham.

"A good question," replied his father. "We are not sure that those words represent what Naaman actually said. Some Hebraists translate them differently. They say that the verse should be rendered in the past tense. Some have translated it this way: 'In this thing Yahweh pardon your servant, in that when my master has gone into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he has leaned on my hand, I have bowed myself in the house of Rimmon; Yahweh pardon your servant that I have bowed in the house of Rimmon'."

"That means that Naaman was really confessing to sins he had already committed," remarked Graeham.

"That is correct," answered his father. "Naaman made confession of sins and received forgiveness at his baptism. That is why Elisha told him to go in peace, for his sins would be forgiven."

"That makes all the difference to the verse," said Peter, taking down what his father said in his notebook.

Gehazi's Folly "We can understand how joyfully Naaman departed from the house of Elisha," continued Mr. Phillips. "But there was one party who did not rejoice. Gehazi looked with disapproval on what his master had done. He thought that the Gentile should be made to pay for the remarkable healing that he

had received. He could not understand why Elisha did not accept the rich rewards that Naaman had brought with him.

'My master has spared this Syrian in not receiving that which he brought, but I will run after him, and take somewhat of him,' he said to himself.

"Naaman saw him coming, and immediately stopped his chariot. 'Is all well?' he asked Gehazi. 'All is well,' he replied, 'but my master has sent me to say that there have just arrived two young sons of the prophets: give them a talent of silver, and two changes of garments.'

"Naaman was delighted to do so. 'Take two talents of silver,' he urged.

"He commanded two of his servants, and they carried the silver and changes of raiment back to the secret place where Gehazi had arranged to hide them (see v. 24 mg.).

"So Naaman departed, and Gehazi returned to minister unto Elisha. He found the prophet looking solemn and sad. 'Where have you been, Gehazi?' asked Elisha.

" 'I never went anywhere,' was the answer.

" 'Did not my heart go with you, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet you?' asked Elisha sternly.

"God had revealed to him the action of Gehazi, even though the prophet had never left the house. Elisha now revealed to Gehazi the hidden motives of his heart, and why he had sought to obtain the money. 'Is it a time to receive money, and garments, to obtain oliveyards, vineyards, sheep, oxen and servants? The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto you, and your seed for ever!'

"Gehazi had forced Naaman to pay for his cure, and had inherited the complaint! He now became a leper, and left the presence of the prophet with the terrible stigma of this awful disease on him."

"What did Elisha mean when he said, 'Did not my heart go with you'?" asked Ann as her father paused.

"The *Companion Bible* suggests that the words can be rendered, 'Did not my heart beat!' We can understand with what sorrow Elisha would have looked upon the lying deception of his servant. All his instruction and example had been in vain. As the drama was enacted, and Gehazi ran swiftly after the chariot of Naaman, the prophet's heart beat rapidly, hoping that Gehazi's good sense might prevail, and he would turn back. But no! Like many others, Gehazi had great opportunities given him, he had the hope of life eternal set before him, but he let it all go for a talent of silver and two changes of raiment! He did not even enjoy these, for he suffered the dread disease of leprosy which brought him ultimately to the grave. On the other hand, the Gentile Naaman, by humbling himself before God and by being baptised in the Jordan, was cured of the terrible disease. A Gen-

tile was saved, a Jew was cast off. How true of conditions today, when Gentiles receive the gospel message and are baptised, whilst Jews refuse to hearken, and the disease of spiritual leprosy clings to them."

"How do you mean the sin of leprosy clings to them?" asked Peter.

"I explained earlier that leprosy is a symbol for sin (see Lev. 13). Jews, and for that matter most Gentiles too, continue to live in sin because they reject the means whereby they can be cleansed. The story of Naaman shows that only God could cure leprosy (see vv. 7, 15), and only He can cleanse us of sin. There are many striking analogies between leprosy and sin. Leprosy is feared as contagious — so also is sin. Leprosy is hereditary, being passed on from parent to child — and we are born into a state of sin. Leprosy is loathsome and polluting — so also is sin. The victims of leprosy are shunned by all as unclean — and so is the persistent sinner by the righteous. Leprosy is most deceitful in its action, often not revealing itself until far advanced — and how true this is of sin also. Newborn babies of leprous parents are often as pretty and as healthy in appearance as any other, but by-and-by its presence and working become visible — and sin acts the same. Leprosy is a form of death consuming different parts of the body — and our sinful nature is described as 'a body of death' (Rom. 7:24). In short, sin is as leprosy, it is contagious, hereditary, becomes worse as time goes by until its ravages are evident to all. Often the innocent child with its engaging prattle and pretty ways hides that which later grows into a Judas Iscariot, a Nero, or some other criminal. Thus a cure is necessary. But sin (like leprosy) has but one Physician. He has prescribed the infallible means. Thus Christ told the lepers to seek God's way — 'go to the priest' — to be cured (Luke 17:14). That involves baptism as it did for Naaman. Read Romans 6, and notice how that baptism is used as a symbol of death, burial and resurrection to 'newness of life.' This is what Naaman experienced, and what we all experience, if we follow God's way.

"Now I think I have given you sufficient to think about for one night, and there I must leave it for the time being."

Chapter Nine

FURTHER REMARKABLE MIRACLES BY ELISHA

Elisha's work in Israel was bearing fruit. Many were turning to him for the instruction he willingly gave. The "disciples of the prophets", as they were called, gathered around him to hear his instruction in the things of God.

A group of these disciples lived at Jericho. Possibly due to the famine in the land, they desired to move closer to the river Jordan. But they did nothing without first obtaining the blessing of Elisha. They explained to him their urgent need, and, asking permission to go, received his blessing on the work.

Elisha Makes Iron Swim (2Kings 6:1-7)

They invited Elisha to go with them. They did not want him to labor chopping down the trees, or building the walls of the house they proposed to erect, but the very presence of the prophet was encouraging to them.

But as one was working, the axe fell into the water. They searched for it but could not find it. The work was in danger of being delayed.

"Alas, master!" the man said to Elisha, "we have searched everywhere for it."* Elisha cut down a stake, and cast it into the water, and to the astonishment of the onlookers, the axe floated on the surface!

That which was lost had been recovered, and the work of God proceeded through His aid and blessing.

Why This Miracle?

What is the lesson in all this? It shows us that Yahweh will care for His own (see Luke 12:30; Matt. 6:8, 32). He overlooks not only the big decisions of life, but little things as well. He knows our needs and will provide. Thus the axe was made to swim again.

Let us ever approach Yahweh in prayer seeking His aid. We will not ask in vain.

But why the stake which Elisha threw in the water? Moses also healed the waters of Marah through a stake that he threw therein (Exod. 15:25). This seems to point forward to the cross, the stake upon which Christ was crucified, and which represents his death. Through Christ we can gain that which was lost. If we seek God through His Son and give ourselves to His service, we will find that

* The A.V. reads, "it was borrowed," but the word in the original signifies "sought," "enquired," "demanded." Apparently the idea is that a diligent search had been made for the axe without result. The stake in the water recovered that which was lost. See the Lord's parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:8-9) and his statement in Luke 19:10.

He will overlook our affairs, and provide all things necessary for our welfare, both now and for the Age to come (Matt. 19:29).

How an Army was Blinded and a Man was Given Sight (2Kings 6)

War had broken out between Syria and Israel. Ben-Hadad, the restless and ambitious king of Syria, had picked a quarrel with his southern neighbor, and made plans to invade the land of Israel. But when he started to carry out those plans out, he found that the Israelites knew all about them, so that the Syrians were defeated.

This happened several times. It worried the king of Syria. It seemed to him that there was a traitor in his camp who was revealing to the enemy his plans of attack. "Find out which of us is on the side of the king of Israel," he commanded his officers.

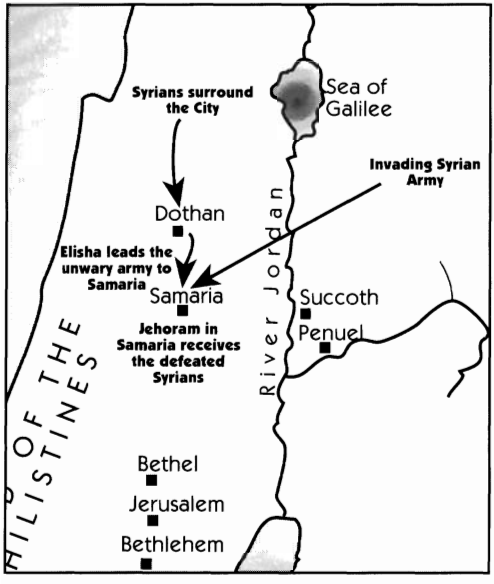
One of them answered: "None of us are, O king; but Elisha the prophet tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedchamber."

Ben-Hadad was not ignorant of the power of Elisha. Had he not cured Naaman, the great Syrian captain, of his leprosy? The king realised that he had to do something to prevent Elisha revealing his plans if he were to succeed in battle. "Go ahead and spy out where he is that I may send and fetch him," said the king.

"He is in Dothan," one of his men replied.

Dothan was a small city, about nine miles north of Samaria, the capital of Israel. It was in a valley surrounded by mountains.

To take Dothan, so far from the Syrian border, required a full-scale invasion of the land. The previous attacks had been by small marauding bands, but now a large army was organised and despatched to Dothan.



It had but one command — to capture Elisha. It was a case of an army against one man; but that man had Yahweh on his side.

Making the greatest haste, the army marched south to Dothan, and during the night surrounded the city.

News of its approach had been heard of in

the city. The people were afraid, and early next morning gathered together to view the grim enemy surrounding their town. Among those gathered was the servant of Elisha the prophet who had risen early for this purpose. He saw before him a large army of infantry and chariots. He realised the object of the army. It had come to take captive his master. He and Elisha were hopelessly caught; there was no way of escape; death faced them.

That is how the servant felt about the matter. Quickly he hastened back to Elisha. "Alas, my master, how shall we do?" he cried. But calmly Elisha replied: "Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." What a wonderful answer this was!

"Fear not!" is the constant exhortation of Yahweh to men of faith. ***"Fear not!"*** had been the keynote of God's instructions to Israel when they were about to enter the land (see Deut. 1:17, 21, 29). They were told to "fear not" the nations, though they might be both numerous and powerful (Deut. 3:22, 28; 7:18, 21; 17:19; 21:21).

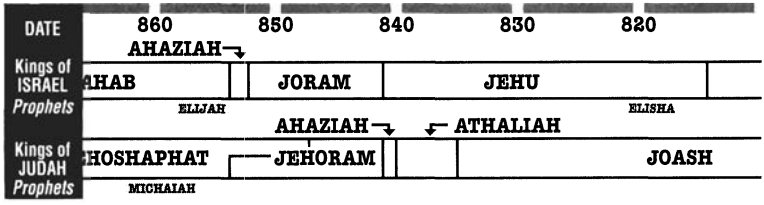
"Fear not!" had been the exhortation of Moses to Joshua (Deut. 31:6-7). ***"Fear not!"*** had been the comforting message of Yahweh to Joshua in the time of danger (Josh. 8:1; 10:8). And on other occasions of danger or difficulty, faithful men had been strengthened with the words "fear not, for I am with you!"

It is thrilling to read of these things; it is different to act as suggested when we are faced with a situation that seems completely hopeless, and somebody tells us to "fear not."

That was the position in which the young man who attended Elisha was placed.

But there is a concrete reason why we should "fear not." God is faithful who promised and will be with us. He will help us in times of difficulty and trial. He will guide our footsteps, and cause even our "enemies to be at peace with us" (Prov. 16:7); ***if*** we are true to Him. If we are true to Him we will always find means at hand to help, even though we might have to endure much. Paul taught: "God, who is faithful, will not suffer you to be tempted (tried) above that you are able; but will with the trial also make a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1Cor. 10:13).

But this seemed impossible to the young man in the city of Dothan as he looked upon the large hostile army of Syria, with all its weapons of war, determined to take his master captive. How could



Elisha possibly say that there were more with them than with the Syrians!

He forgot the words of David: "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about" (Psa. 3:6). Or: "The angel of Yahweh encampeth round about them that fear Him and delivereth them" (Psa. 34:7).

Elisha could see that his servant was full of doubts, and prayed for him. "Oh Yahweh," he prayed, "open his eyes, that he may see!"

The servant saw with astonishment the reason for Elisha's calmness. The mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire, ready to protect Elisha. It was not Elisha that was in danger, but the large Syrian army! As his eyes took in the scenes before him, the servant came to realise the truth of the words that the Lord Jesus uttered many years later: that there is but One we should fear, and that is Yahweh (see Luke 12:5-7). Thus Christ told Pilate: "You could have no power at all against me, except it were given you from above" (John 19:11).

God knows our circumstances, He knows our needs, and He will help us if we turn to Him. But He will not always help us in the way He helped Elisha and his servant at Dothan. Sometimes He desires us to endure trouble that our character may be perfected. Thus though we must constantly pray to God, we need to leave the means of help to Him. Remember, that no genuine prayer goes unanswered — though sometimes we do not receive the things for which we pray.

Meanwhile, the Syrians marched to the attack, and again Elisha used the power of prayer. "Smite this people with blindness," he prayed. One prayer had opened the eyes of the young man; the other closed the eyes of the army.

What was the blindness with which they were smitten? The word appears in the Bible only here and in Genesis 19:11. The word implies a state of confusion, resulting from the bright shining forth of glory. Evidently Yahweh's glory shone forth powerfully over Dothan as it did in Sodom in the days of Lot. The army was dazzled by the bright shining forth of divine glory and it induced a state of mental bewilderment. It placed the army helplessly at the mercy of the prophet. It became subject to a "strong delusion" (2Thess. 2:8, 11). With the Syrians in this state of mental confusion, Elisha approached the Commander. "This is not the way, neither is this the city," he declared. "Come after me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek."

He led the dazed army away from Dothan to the city of Samaria where the soldiers found themselves at the mercy of the king of Israel.

Jehoram, the king of Israel, was delighted with the prospect of taking captive the huge army of his enemy. Like most weak men, he became ruthless when he had others in his power. He knew that they had been sent to destroy Elisha, and now offered to slay them on his

behalf. "My father," he eagerly asked the prophet, "Shall I smite them?"

Elisha scorned the proposal. He did not want any blood shed on his behalf. "Would you smite those whom you have not taken?" he rebuked the king. "Set bread and water before them that they may eat and drink, and go to their master."

A strange feast took place in the city of Samaria! The Syrian army that had feared destruction was now treated with kindness. The soldiers returned home full of their strange experience, to tell the king of Syria of the power of the prophet, to speak to their friends and neighbors of the kindness they had received.

The result was a definite benefit to Israel. Ben-Hadad ceased sending the bands of Syrians over the border into Israel, and for a while, the land had peace.

Some have criticised Elisha suggesting that he told a lie, when he said: "This is not the way neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek." But this is the language of irony. In effect, he was saying, "This is not the way, neither the city for you..." They would never have found Elisha in Dothan, so he took them to the city where they would find him! But in that city they also found themselves in the hands of their enemies.

Famine in Samaria A time of great want and distress had fallen on Israel due to famine (cp. 2Kings 4:1-7, 38-44; Ch. 8:1-2). In Syria, king Ben-Hadad rankled under the defeat that Elisha had imposed upon him, and viewed with pleasure the difficulties that Israel now experienced. Though he had ceased sending his bands over the border to harass the Israelites, he now determined on a full-scale attack to completely overthrow the nation.

Again a large army of Syrians marched throughout the land, this time intent upon taking Samaria. But Samaria was a strong city, well fortified, and the Syrians had to be content with besieging it.

This worsened the conditions within the city. Already famine had made provisions short, and now the siege made the situation desperate. Food became terribly scarce. An ass' head, the worst part of this animal, and which was adjudged unclean under normal conditions and therefore prohibited to Jews, was sold for 80 pieces of silver, whilst two to three pints of dove's dung* were sold for five pieces of silver.

The distress of the people was great and many terrible incidents

* It is suggested that this is a kind of pulse or bean. The Arabs have a sort of pea which they give this name because of the supposed resemblance between the two. Thompson in *The Land and the Book* commenting upon this incident writes: "I believe that the Hebrew *cheriyonim* was a name for a coarse and cheap sort of food, a kind of bean, as some think, to which this whimsical title was given on account of some fancied resemblance between the two."

took place.

On one occasion, as king Jehoram was walking along the top of the wide wall of the city that was used for such purposes, he was accosted by a woman. "Help, my lord, O king," she cried.

The poor woman was distraught. The marks of starvation were clearly upon her. She looked terrible in her misery.

How could the king help her? "If Yahweh does not help thee, how can I help thee?" he asked. "What is your trouble?"

The woman had a shocking story to tell, one that brought home to the king how wretched was the state of the people, how hopeless his cause.

The poor, half-mad woman told her story of woe. "My friend said to me, 'Give your son that we might eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow'. So I agreed. We boiled my son, and did eat him. But when, on the next day I demanded my friend that we do the same to her son, she refused and has hidden him away!"

The king recoiled with horror at the terrible story. He forgot that the troubles of Israel were self-inflicted. He forgot that they had come upon them because the people had turned from their God. He had rejoiced when Elisha had brought the deluded army of Syria captive to Samaria, but he had not learned the lesson of that incident. He should have realised that the same God who did that to the Syrians could help Israel if king and people turned to Him in the right way.

Instead the king wanted to vent his anger against the prophet. He rent his clothes in his fury, and it was seen that he was wearing sack-cloth next to his skin. But blind anger now got the better of him, and caused him to act in a childish and foolish manner. This is often the case when we allow temper to take control. When they are driven by such, men act without intelligence. They do not wait to consult their reason, for Reason would instantly pronounce them mad!

The king now acted in that manner. He forgot the gratitude he owed Elisha, and angrily declared in the hearing of all the people on the wall: "God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day."

Meanwhile, Elisha was in his house, consulting with the elders of the city. They had been forced by the terrible condition of the city to seek the prophet's advice. They found him calm and unruffled in spite of the crisis. He knew the purpose of God, and realised that when the time was ripe, Yahweh would act for the relief of his people. But he also knew of his danger. By some means God revealed to him the threat that the king had uttered on the wall of the city, and that already a soldier had been sent to murder the prophet.

He told the elders of this. "This son of a murderer has sent to behead me," he declared. "When the messenger comes hold fast the door, for the sound of his master's feet is behind him."

The angry king was following the messenger, to see that the execution was put into effect. When the messenger arrived at the door to force his way into the presence of the prophet, he found it blocked by the elders who realised that their only hope was from Elisha. They were forced to oppose the king whose anger had blinded his reason.

"This evil is of Yahweh," shouted the king, "why should I wait for Him any longer?" The king reasoned that as the famine was from Yahweh, and Elisha was His representative, if he destroyed Elisha he could rid himself of the responsibility to Yahweh. His bold and impious threat was the attitude of desperation. The city was on the point of extinction, people were dying on all sides, the most horrible acts were being committed. In such conditions, men like Elisha, who remain calm and unruffled because they possess a divine vision, become the mark for attack by those lacking these resources, and who become jealous of their mysterious strength of character.

It was a foolish, most unreasonable attitude to adopt, but weak, ignorant, evil men often act like that.

The elders now found themselves in a state of danger. If they continued to support Elisha and oppose the king they could be destroyed with the prophet.

But Elisha startled them by a bold prediction. To the astonishment of his hearers, he prophesied that the cornmarket at the gate of Samaria would present an extremely busy scene the following day. "Hear the Word of Yahweh," he called to the king from within the room. "Tomorrow, about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria."

It seemed a ridiculous statement. A captain, on whom the king leaned, ridiculed the prophet. "If Yahweh would make sluices in heaven and pour the grain on to the earth, this might be possible!" he mocked.

"You will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat thereof," answered the prophet mysteriously.

Lepers at the Gate Seek Relief

Outside the gates of Samaria were four lepers, sitting, miserably considering their state. They were not allowed inside the city because of the terrible disease with which they were inflicted; and before them was the army of the Syrians. "Why sit we here until we die?" one of them said suddenly. "If we say, 'We will enter into the city,' then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there; and if we sit here, we die also. Let us go to the camp of the Syrians; if they save us alive, we shall live, and if they kill us, we shall but die."

They waited until the sun had gone down, and then crept cautiously towards the Syrian camp. All was strangely still and quiet there,

and they waited to be challenged by the sentry. But they arrived at the very outskirts of the camp without this happening.

Even there, they saw no sign of soldiers.

The reason was revealed later. Yahweh had sent His angels who had made a noise like the noise of an approaching army. Panic had swept through the Syrian host. A rumour had started that the noise was caused by armies of Hittites and Egyptians marching to the relief of Israel. Full of fear, the Syrians had risen and fled in the gathering darkness, leaving their tents, animals, and camp as it was, fleeing for their very life.

The lepers therefore found the camp deserted and silent. For a moment they forgot everything in the great joy of having food and drink. They sat down and ate their fill. They then entered the tents, carrying away the silver, gold and raiment that the Syrians had left behind, hiding it in the ground.

But then, looking at the silent city before them, recalling the terrible incidents and great suffering that was even then occurring therein, they began to feel ashamed. "We do not well!" they said to one another. "This day is a day of good tidings, yet we hold our peace; if we tarry till the morning light, some punishment will surely fall upon us. Let us return to the city and tell the king's household."

They returned to the city, and called the porter at the gate.

"What do you want?" he shouted to them from within.

"We came to the camp of the Syrians, and behold there was no man there, neither voice of man, but horses tied, and asses tied, and tents left as they were," replied the lepers.

Full of excitement at this good news, the porter rushed off to tell the king.

But the king saw it only as a trick on the part of the Syrians. "They know we are hungry," he said, "therefore they have gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field. If we go out of the city, they shall catch us and take the city."

The Israelites were desperate, however. Like the lepers, they knew that if they remained in the city they would die, so why not chance the hope of life that had been opened to them? "Let some men take five of the remaining horses and send and see," suggested one, "otherwise those who are left here will fare like those who have already perished" (2Kgs. 7:13, RSV).

There were not five horses suitable for this work in Samaria. They found two, however, and on them the messengers rode forth to find out the truth. They rode as far as the Jordan, and found all the way full of garments and vessels which the Syrians had cast away in their haste and panic.

Back to the city rode the messengers with their exciting news. There was a great crowd assembled at the gate to hear it. When the

people learned the truth there was no holding them back. The starving multitude burst through the gates of the city to get the food, sweeping on one side those who had been put in charge. Among these was the mocking officer who had ridiculed Elisha. He was knocked down by the stampeding crowd, who trampled him to death.

The prophecy of Elisha had been remarkably fulfilled.

A New King for Syria

Shortly after this, Elisha visited the city of Damascus, the capital of Syria. The news caused some excitement, for Elisha was respected in Damascus. It came to the notice of Ben-Hadad, the king, who was very ill. When he heard that Elisha was near at hand he thought it a grand opportunity to seek his help in his sickness. He despatched his chief officer, a man named Hazael, to Elisha with a present. "Go, meet the man of God," declared the king, "and enquire of Yahweh by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?"

A magnificent gift was gathered together and loaded upon a string of 40 camels. The "prophet was not without honor save in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house" (Mark 4:6). Elisha found greater honour in this Gentile land than in all Israel!

With respect and humility as to a superior, Hazael came to the prophet and put his petition. "Thy son, Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, has sent me to you, saying, 'Shall I recover of this disease?' "

"Return and tell him, 'You may certainly recover; howbeit Yahweh hath shewed me he shall surely die'," answered the prophet. As he said these words, he looked steadfastly at Hazael. The captain became restless and ill at ease under the steady, stern gaze of the prophet. Then suddenly Elisha burst into weeping.

"What is the matter, my lord?" asked Hazael.

"Because I know the evil you will do to Israel," answered Elisha. "You will destroy the fortress and slay the people with great cruelty."

"Is your servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" asked Hazael.

The dog was considered a despicable animal in ancient times. When Hazael likened himself to a dog, he meant that he had no power to do what Elisha indicated he would do. But it did suggest the exciting prospect of power, so that the Syrian likened the destruction of Israel to a "great thing."

"Yahweh has shown me that you will be king over Syria," explained the prophet.

Treachery was in the heart of Hazael. He was an ambitious man, and anxious to succeed his master as king. He was also possibly frightened at what Elisha had told him and amazed that the prophet could so easily read his mind. If others got to know of the treacherous plots that he was hatching, his own life was in danger. He had hoped

that Ben-Hadad would die, and then he could have taken his place. But now that he knew he would recover, he realised he would have to murder the king. He gave Ben-Hadad the message of Elisha that he would recover. But on the morrow he took a cloth, and dipping it in water, spread it over the face of Ben-Hadad until he suffocated.

No one realised Ben-Hadad had been murdered by his captain, and Hazael the murderer became the king of Syria. He proved to be a strong, ruthless leader, so that Damascus in time became known as the City of Ben-Hadad and of Hazael (Amos 1:4).

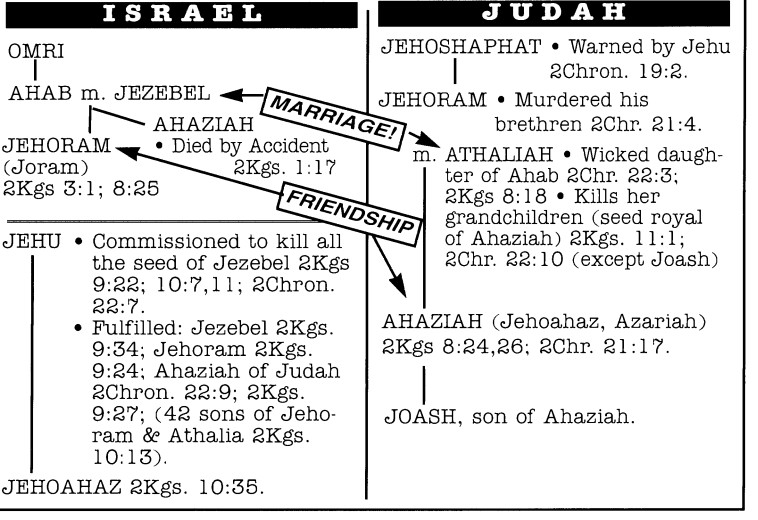
How the Evil Influence of Ahab was Felt in Judah (2Kings 8:16-24; 2Chron. 21)

If you turn back to page 310-315 you will read concerning the wonderful victory that Jehoshaphat the king of Judah had in the face of the large forces that invaded the land. He put his trust in Yahweh and found strength to help in time of need.

But though Jehoshaphat was a wise and good king, he also acted foolishly. He made alliance with the wicked house of Ahab, and by this means evil ways were introduced into his kingdom which sowed the seeds of spiritual decay.

At first he would have nothing to do with the nation of Israel (2Chron. 17:1), but later, under pressure, when he saw that trouble threatened from the North, he "joined affinity with Ahab" (2Chron. 18:1). He permitted the marriage of his son Jehoram to Athaliah the daughter of Ahab. Next, he helped Ahab in a military adventure (1Kings 22:4), and this ended disastrously, for in the ensuing battle

The Folly of Jehoshaphat and the Children of Jezebel (Rev. 2:20,23)



Ahab was slain. Finally, he joined with Ahaziah, Ahab's son, in a commercial venture, and there again, he suffered loss: it was a complete failure (2Chron. 20:36).

Jehoshaphat had learned a lesson. When Ahaziah wanted him to join again in a second venture, he refused to do so (1Kings 22:49).

All this trouble stemmed from a mixed marriage — because he made alliance with evil people. It teaches us the lesson that we must be careful in our companionships for they can affect us in an adverse way.

The full result of Jehoshaphat's foolish action in joining alliance with the house of Ahab had not been manifested as yet, however. About a year before he died, he appointed his son Jehoram as king in Judah. At this time, therefore, there was a Jehoram ruling in Israel, and a Jehoram ruling in Judah. And the wife of Jehoram of Judah was Athaliah the daughter of Ahab.

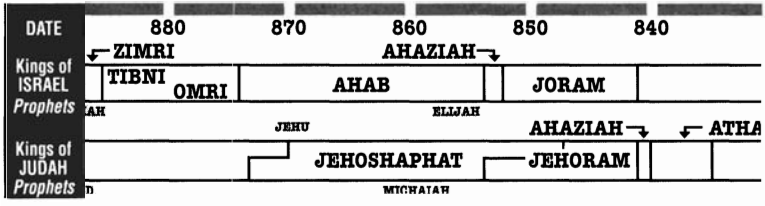
Thus Ahab's son reigned in Samaria as king, and Ahab's daughter was in Jerusalem as queen.

Athaliah was a strong-willed woman, like Jezebel her mother. She dominated her husband, and forced the wicked ways of her mother's religion upon him. It was not so bad whilst Jehoshaphat was alive, but after he was dead, there was no restraint. "Jehoram walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab; for the daughter of Ahab was his wife" (2Kings 8:18).

Here was evidence of the greatest folly. Jehoram knew of the terrible punishment that had been meted out to Ahab and his house because of their wickedness, and yet he followed in the same disastrous course of action.

How senseless and vain is man. In spite of the innumerable graves dug by the hand of divine justice, wicked men pursue a course of folly and sin without thought that the same divine Justice and Vengeance can seek them out as well. All the lessons of the Bible teach that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23); "the way of transgressors is hard" (Prov. 13:15); "though hand join in hand the wicked shall not go unpunished" (Prov. 11:21). Yet men do not heed the lesson.

The stories of the Bible impress these lessons on us, and no matter how young or old we might be, we need to learn them. We can follow a course of rebellion in our lives just as did Jehoram, and we can



blind ourselves to the fact that we are opposing God in our ways.

We need to be honest with ourselves and learn to read our own hearts. God is just. He punishes evil but He also rewards good. He does not forget as do men. Therefore, at this time of evil in Judah, He still remembered the good of David, the man after His own heart.

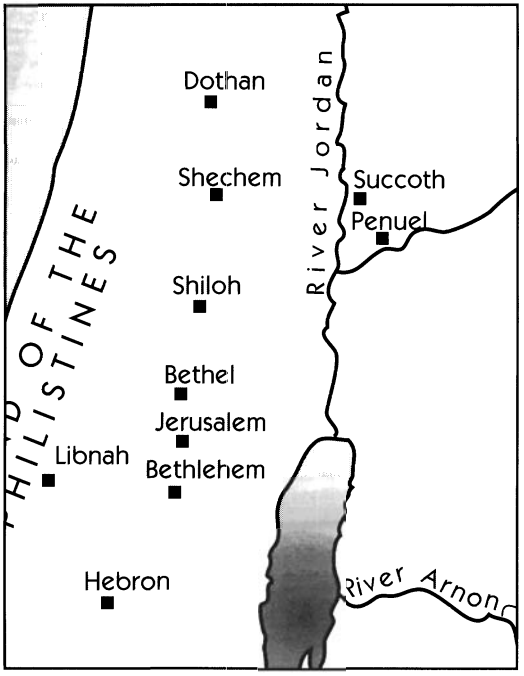
So the Bible teaches that despite the wickedness of Jehoram, "yet Yahweh would not destroy Judah for David His servant's sake, as He promised him to give him always a light, and to his children" (2Kings 8:19). Yahweh remains true when men are false; He blends mercy with judgment.

Jehoram commenced his sole reign after the death of his father by a terrible deed of murder. His father had other sons to whom he had given great gifts of wealth, as well as fortified cities throughout Judah. They therefore had power which Jehoram feared might one day challenge his own position. He could not bear rivalry in rulership. He determined to destroy his brethren. He gathered a large army together and ruthlessly plunged the nation into civil war. Marching upon the fortified cities possessed by his brethren, he lay siege to them, and the nation beheld the disgraceful scene of brother fighting brother for power.

Other princes in Israel were drawn into the quarrel, so that instead of a united nation it became filled with war and bloodshed (2Chron. 21). In all this quarrelling and fighting, Athaliah was an evil influence, urging her husband on to further deeds of infamy (v. 6).

The rumblings of revolt spread throughout the land, and into the territory of Edom then held by Israel. It was just the opportunity the Edomites sought. They raised the standard of independence, and revolted against Israel. International war now broke out. Jehoram invaded the land of Edom. In an attempt to attack before the Edomites could properly organise their forces, Jehoram left the body of his troops, and with a company of chariots as a vanguard, he "passed over" to Zair (2Kgs. 8:21). He found them better prepared than he expected and was himself surrounded by a powerful force of Edomites. He had to fight himself out of his trouble (2Chron. 21:9), and though he succeeded in doing so, his cause was lost, for he found that the main body of his army had dispersed. They had heard he had been killed and had "fled into their tents" (2Kings 8). Thus Edom revolted, and in turn prepared forces to invade Judah some time in the future.

Back home, Jehoram found his problems mounting. The city of Libnah set up the standard of revolt (2Chron. 21:10), "because he had forsaken Yahweh the God of his fathers." Libnah was a city of priests (Josh. 21:13). The inhabitants revolted against the blasphemy and idolatry of the king, for he had now repudiated every way of decency and righteousness. Spurred on by Athaliah, Jehoram had deserted the worship of Yahweh for that of Baal. The Temple worship was dis-



couraged and the building permitted to fall into decay. Its wealth was robbed and bestowed upon the rival temple of Baal (2Chron. 24:7).

The moving spirit in all this wickedness was the daughter of Jezebel, "that wicked woman Athaliah" (2 Chron. 24:7). With the death of her father-in-law, Jehoshaphat, she threw off all restraint, and appeared in her true colours — ghastly colors of self-importance and rebellion against God! It was she, most likely, who had spurred the weak king Jehoram to murder his brothers, it was she who vigorously advocated the pagan worship of her mother throughout Judah.

The Bible declares that this policy "caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication." They became disloyal to God, who was as a Husband to His people (Isa. 54:5).

These words of 2Chronicles 21:11are significant in the light of the words of the Lord Jesus in Revelation 2:20. "I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. I gave her space to repent and she repented not... I will kill her children with death; and all the ecclesias shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works."

In these verses the Lord Jesus used the very incidents we are considering, as a type of the apostasy that developed in the early ecclesias. He warned that though for a time success would attend the efforts of those who sowed error and discord among the congregations, their ultimate judgment was sure. It is significant that the Lord spake of "Jezebel and her children," for it was the children of Jezebel who brought to pass this great wickedness in Judah.

The city of Libnah revolted because of the wickedness of the king.

Libnah, as we have shown, was a city of priests. Among their number at that time was a notable priest called Jehoiada of whom we shall hear more later on. He viewed the wickedness of Jehoram and Athaliah with anger and indignation, and he was later used by Yahweh to punish the wicked Queen. He could have been the moving spirit in this revolt.

If so, he must have been encouraged by a dramatic incident that took place at this time. A messenger appeared in the court of Jehoram with a letter from Elijah the prophet. The letter denounced the king for his wickedness, declared that he had murdered brethren which were better than himself, and proclaimed great judgments that would fall upon the kingdom and the king.

Mysteriously this letter appeared long after Elijah had been taken from the nation. Where had it come from? Had he written it in the spirit of prophecy before he was taken from Elisha? It does not read like that. It does not say: "You *will slay* your brethren," but "You *have slain* your brethren." It reads as though it was written after the murders had been committed. But how could Elijah have sent such a warning if he had been taken from the earth? Only if he were still living at the time.

In any case, the appearance of this letter must have been encouraging to Jehoiada and all like him. It would strengthen the revolt of Libnah. And the judgments of which Elijah warned were soon felt.

From the east and west, from the Philistines and the Arabians, enemies poured over the borders of Judah, besieging the cities, taking captive the people. The armies of Judah strove in vain to hold the enemy at bay. They were driven back with great slaughter, and the invading armies swarmed throughout the land. They even occupied Jerusalem, and took captive all they found in the palace including some of the family of Jehoram (2Chron. 21:17). Others of his sons were slain in battle by a surprise attack of the enemy (2Chron. 22:1).

Finally, of all the one-time numerous family of Jehoram, all that now remained to him was his wife Athaliah, and his youngest son Jehoahaz also called Ahaziah.

This was but the beginning of misery for this wicked king. The terrible sickness concerning which Elijah warned him now afflicted Jehoram. He suffered a form of dysentery and internal inflammation which proved incurable. For two years he lingered on in terrible pain whilst his son acted as regent, and then he died.

The Bible records that this foolish man died "without being desired" (2Chron. 21:20). These words comprise the terrible epitaph written for this rebellious, godless king. Here was a man raised to eminence among the people, given the opportunity of doing much good, yet using the means thus provided, to do evil. He was hated

while he lived, and despised after his death. His reign was noted for corruption and oppression, for failure, war and revolt. He is held up to the execration of posterity, having done only that which could split and wreck the State. Both in life and in death he was punished by Yahweh.

All this terrible evil developed out of the unwise and unrighteous alliance that Jehoshaphat had made with the wicked house of Ahab. How important it is that we learn the lessons of the past, and refuse to join in with wrongdoing.

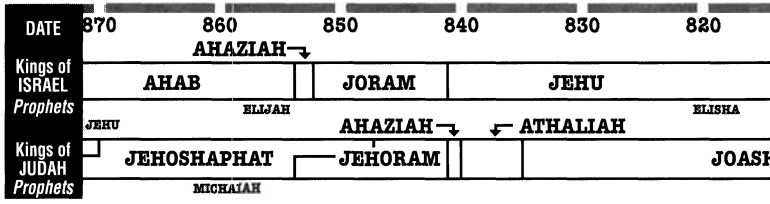
Death of Elisha Both Israel and Judah now entered a dark period of violence, civil war and confusion. In Israel, kings Jehoram (12years), Jehu (28 years), Jehoahaz (17 years) and Joash reigned.

During this long period of time, Elisha continued his work of ministering to the spiritual needs of those who were prepared to hearken to his teaching. His work was performed quietly and was overshadowed by the great dramatic national events that captured the notice of people. Therefore there is little to record of his labours. It was slow, patient work, but rewarding work, for Elisha could see the influence of his labour in the attitude of those he taught. He knew that he was helping to build the characters of men and women who will attain unto life eternal in the Age to come.

The only public work that he did at this time, was to send a messenger to Jehu, a captain of the Israeli army, to anoint him as king in the stead of Jehoram. But of this we will speak of later.

Elisha's influence in Israel was for good, so that even the king recognised it. When, therefore, king Joash heard that Elisha had fallen sick, and was on the point of death, he came to visit the prophet. He wept at the sight of the aged and ailing prophet. "Oh my father, my father," he said, "the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof."

He acknowledged that the prophet was the true defence of Israel through the Spirit of Yahweh which had been given him. The king recognised the influence for good that the prophet had been to the nation — how by his intercession to God, he had saved it from its enemies time and time again. How would the nation fare on the death of the prophet?



ELISHA'S SIXTEEN MIRACLES (2KINGS)

Like those of Elijah, these miracles were not performed merely to demonstrate divine power, but were parables in action teaching divine truths. In that they were like the miracles of the Lord Jesus. All these were designed to teach and not merely to convey some material benefit for the time being. In the course of outlining the story of Elisha's life we have discussed the significance of his miracles as parables. The miracles he performed were as follows:

1. Jordan divided 2:14
2. Waters healed 2:21
3. Bears from wood 2:24
4. Water for kings 3:20
5. Oil for widow 4:6
6. Gift of son 4:16
7. Raising dead 4:35
8. Healing pottage 4:41
9. Bread multiplied 4:43
10. Naaman healed 5:10
11. Gehazi smitten 5:27
12. Iron to swim 6:6
13. Sight to blind 6:17
14. Smiting blindness 6:18
15. Restoring sight 6:20
16. Life through death 13:21

"Take your bow and arrows," commanded Elisha.

Wondering what the prophet had in mind, the king did so.

Elisha then placed his hands upon the king's hands in order to invest the act of shooting with a prophetic character. He told the king to open the window eastward. Together they looked out towards the east, to the country beyond the Jordan, the country that Syria, the enemy of Israel, had by this time annexed.

"Shoot!" said Elisha to the king. The king drew back the bow, and sent the arrow singing towards the land of the enemy. "The arrow of Yahweh's deliverance, the arrow of deliverance from Syria," declared the prophet. "Thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till you have consumed them. Now take the arrows."

Again the king did so, not quite comprehending what was meant in all this. "Smite them upon the ground," commanded Elisha.

Joash took up the arrows, and in a half-hearted fashion he smote the ground three times.

His action angered the prophet. He could see in the king's lack of zeal that he did not appreciate the significance of these acts. It was an indignation also of the half-hearted attitude of the king to that which God required. "You should have smitten the ground five or six times," said Elisha, "then you would have smitten Syria until you completely destroyed it; whereas now you will smite Syria but three times."

This indeed came to pass as the prophet declared.

Life Out of Death So Elisha died and was buried. Then, one day, a remarkable thing happened. The Moabites had invaded Israel. Marauding bands would suddenly appear and attack without warning. It caused fear throughout the land.

On one occasion, some men were burying their friend when they saw a band of Moabites approaching. Fearful of being attacked, they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha, and fled for their lives.

But when the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood upon his feet.

Thus Elisha did wonders in life, and in death he brought life to others.

In that he was like the Lord Jesus, who "through death destroyed him that had the power of death" (Heb. 2:14).

This incident showed, also, that the power of miracle was with a Greater than Elisha.

Thus, in this final act, we have a wonderful type pointing forward to that greatest of all miracles, one day to happen, that the graves will be opened, and those who have touched the Lord Jesus will come forth to their reward.

This final miracle closed the record of Elisha in the story of the Bible.

ELISHA: A SUMMARY

He is first mentioned ploughing in the field of his father with eleven other co-workers (1Kings 19:19). From the beginning, therefore, he reminds us of the Lord Jesus who, at his first advent, was found working in his Father's field with his eleven true disciples. The very appearance as well as the work of Elisha presented a contrast to that of Elijah. The smooth, bald head of the new and youthful prophet was a marked change to the long shaggy locks streaming down the shoulders of the great and awful Elijah. The young men laughed and mocked at the appearance of the successor of this great prophet. The rough mantle of his master appears no more after its first display. He uses a walking-staff, like other grave citizens (2Kings 4:29; Zech. 8:4). He was not secluded in mountain-fastnesses, but dwelt in a house in the royal city (2Kings 5:9); or lingered amidst the Sons of the Prophets; or was sought out by admiring disciples in some tower on Carmel, or by the pass of Dothan; or was received in some quiet balcony, overlooking the plain of Esdraelon, where bed and table and seat had been prepared for him by pious hands (2Kings 4:8, 10). His life was not spent like his predecessor's, in unavailing struggles, but in widespread successes. He was sought out not as the enemy, but as the friend and counsellor of kings. Jehu was crowned at his bidding, and wrought

all his will. Jehoshaphat consulted him in war; Jehoram, on the treatment of his prisoners; Ben-Hadad, in the extremity of illness; Joash, to receive his parting counsels. "My father," was their reverent address to him. Even in Damascus his face was known. The Syrian king treated him with filial respect; Hazael trembled before him; Naaman hung on his words as upon an oracle. His deeds were not of wild terror, but of gracious, soothing, homely beneficence, bound up with the ordinary tenor of human life. He smote with blindness, but also removed it; he warned of famine, but also predicted plenty; he punished, but he also soothed; he rebuked, but he also encouraged. There was a need for an Elijah, and there was a need for an Elisha. There was a need for the awful denunciations of the law of Moses, for the revelation and acknowledgment of sin that it brought; and a need for the forgiveness and guidance of the law of grace. There is a need in our lives for the complete repudiation of sin and evil, the hardness of Elijah's attitude to apostasy and wickedness; and a need in our lives for the soothing help, the ever-ready assistance Elisha was always prepared to give. In both these great men are found many lessons for us to heed.

THE HOUSE OF JEHU

Jehu (his name means "Yahweh is He") was used by Yahweh to punish the wicked house of Ahab. To that end, he was anointed king over the northern kingdom of Israel, and became founder of its fourth dynasty. He had occupied important positions during the reigns of Ahab and his sons, and had been present when Elijah proclaimed the impending judgment of God against Ahab (2Kings 9:25,26). Under the reign of Jehoram, he had risen to the position of chief captain.

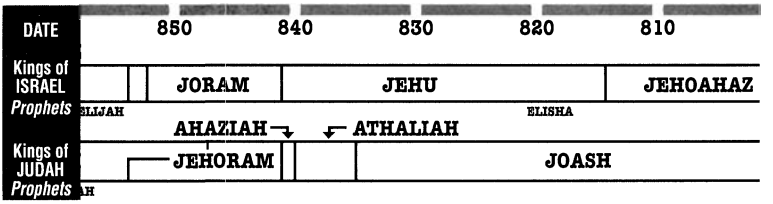
Jehu had a reputation for mad, furious driving (2Kings 9:20) which was probably an indication of his ruthless, boundless enthusiasm. He seemed to have secretly nursed the hope of reigning over Israel ever since Elijah's declaration of impending judgment against the house of Ahab, and when the opportunity presented itself to him, he willingly waded through blood to grasp power. He was commended for his zeal in carrying out the commands of Yahweh (2Kings 10:30), but his hidden motives (which were completely selfish) were condemned (Hos. 1:4). His zeal for Yahweh was directed to his own personal glory and interests, and did not extend to establishing the pure worship in its entirety. Though he destroyed the paganism set up by Jezebel and her children, he retained the idolatrous calf-worship established by Jeroboam which

drew Israelites from the true worship centred in Zion (2Kings 10:29-31).

In executing the judgment of God, Jehu destroyed Jezebel, the widow who declared she would see no sorrow (2Kings 9:30; Rev. 18:7), as well as her children (Rev. 2:20-23), and brought about a spiritual revolution in the land. Though the revolution was incomplete (inasmuch as the worship of Yahweh was not established in its purity), the work of Jehu typified that of Christ who will destroy completely the antitypical Jezebel and her children of this age (Hos. 1:11), and perfect the work of Jehu, establishing the true worship of God in its purity.

There were five kings of the house of Jehu: Jehu, Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam, and Zachariah. During the epoch when the house of Jehu took control, Israel rose to the greatest heights of political power and prestige; though spiritually it sank to the greatest depths of apostasy and ignorance. A little over forty years after the death of the last king of the House of Jehu, Israel was invaded, overthrown and taken into captivity by the Assyrians, leaving only the kingdom of Judah.

In treating of the events of this time we will deal also with the judgment of God that fell upon the house of Ahab that was found in the southern kingdom of Judah.



Chapter Ten

DIVINE VENGEANCE ON THE HOUSE OF AHAB

Joram, the son of Ahab, reigned from Samaria over Israel, and Ahaziah, the son of Athaliah, daughter of Ahab, ruled from Jerusalem over Judah. Both being descendants of wicked king Ahab (for Athaliah had married a descendant of David), the judgment of God awaited them as He had warned through the prophet Elijah. They could have avoided this judgment by responding to the laws of God in a righteous conduct, but, unfortunately, they did not seek this means of escape: they followed in the wicked ways of the house of Ahab. And so the time when judgment should be poured out upon these foolish kings drew near.

War broke out between Israel and Syria. Joram sent to his nephew Ahaziah of Judah for help against their common enemy. Little did either know how tragic was to be the outcome of the war when preparations were made for it.

Dissatisfaction in Israel's Army

At the head of their armies, the two kings proudly passed over the river Jordan to Ramoth-Gilead. It was a place of sad memories for them, for it was here that Ahab had lost his life in trying to recover this city from the Syrians (1Kings 22:29). Now his son and grandson made common cause to avenge his defeat and death.

But again the Syrians had the better of the fighting. Hazael, the king, led them in an attack that proved disastrous for Israel. The Israelites were driven back with great slaughter, and in the fighting Joram was badly wounded. He returned to Jezreel to be healed of his wounds, and his nephew, king Ahaziah, came to visit him, and doubtless to talk over plans for the war.

Jezreel means *The Sowing of God.* These two foolish kings, who had turned their backs upon God, were thus brought together in this place to reap the judgment that God had sown for them.

At Ramoth-Gilead the army of Israel remained in its tents standing guard against the successful Syrians. A feeling of dissatisfaction, defeat and impending disaster was sweeping the army. The departure of the two kings to Jezreel caused mutterings of revolt amongst the soldiers. This flared up into open conspiracy against the ruling regime in which Jehu, one of the chief captains, took a prominent part.

Jehu is Anointed King (2Kings 9)

One day, he was gathered with other captains discussing the serious defeat the army had experienced, when the door of the room in which they were sitting was suddenly pushed open, and in rushed a

wild looking young man of dishevelled appearance.

"I have an errand for you, O captain!" he said to Jehu, completely ignoring the others.

The captains were startled by the mysterious and secretive nature of their strange visitor. They recognised him as one of the followers of Elisha the prophet, and in view of the well-known prophecy of Elijah against the house of Ahab, they could guess at his mission.

Jehu took him into an inner room and closed the door upon the other captains. The young man took a flask of oil he had with him, and poured it over the head of Jehu. This was the method by which kings were appointed to their high office in ancient times.

"Yahweh has anointed you king over Israel," he told Jehu. "You shall smite the house of Ahab your master, that Yahweh may avenge the blood of His servants the prophets, at the hand of Jezebel. The whole house of Ahab shall perish, even as the house of Jeroboam and the house of Baasha perished. As for Jezebel, the dogs shall eat her in the portion of Jezreel."

Having given this message, the strange visitor abruptly opened the door, and without speaking a word to the other captains, hurriedly left the house.

He left the captains in a state of intense curiosity as to the purpose of his visit. "What did this mad-looking fellow want of you?" they asked Jehu.

"You know who he is, and you know why he came!" Jehu replied.

The captains denied that they knew, so Jehu told them all that had taken place behind the closed door. The time was ripe for revolt; they had already formed a conspiracy for that purpose; now it seemed that God had given His blessing to their schemes.

The captains were willing to accept Jehu as their leader. They knew him to be a ruthless, capable man. They hastened to give him their full support. Taking off their outer garments they spread them out so that Jehu might stand upon them, indicating that they placed everything under his control. Then they sounded with the trumpets to call the soldiers together, shouting: "Jehu is king!"

The shout was taken up by the army which was discouraged by the military reverse of Joram, and amid scenes of greatest excitement, Jehu was made king.

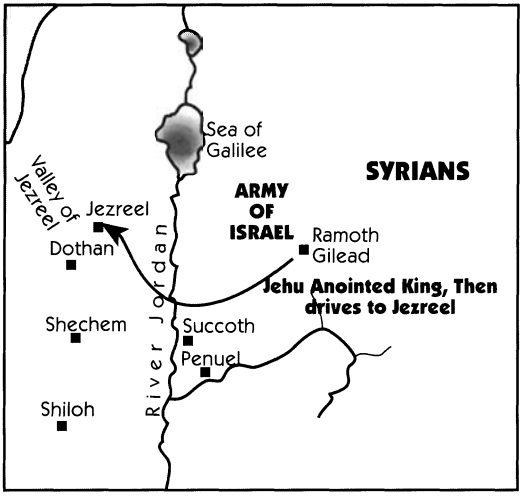
Judgment on Joram in Jezreel

Jehu was careful to preserve the greatest secrecy concerning the army's revolt. He appointed guards to prevent any sympathisers carrying the news to Joram. Then in his chariot, and with a company of horsemen, he swiftly drove towards Jezreel where the two kings were in ignorance of the revolt that had taken place.

Jezreel was a fortified city with watchtowers on its walls. On them

watchmen stood day and night, ready to report any unusual activity — for Israel was at war.

The little cloud of dust, caused by Jehu and his company rapidly galloping towards the city, attracted the attention of one of the watchmen. He reported it to the city, and a guard was sent out on horseback to meet the approaching cavalcade with the question, "Is it peace?"



But when the guard met Jehu and put the question to him the answer came back: "What have you to do with peace? Turn you behind me!"

It was useless the guard challenging such a ruthless and determined man as Jehu; he made haste to follow his instructions.

This strange conduct was reported to the city by the watchman on the tower. Another guard was sent on a similar mission, but, as the watchman reported, he, too, turned aside to join the approaching company. Gradually Jehu approached sufficiently near to the city to be distinguished by his driving. The watchman reported: "The driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi; for he drives like a madman!" (2Kings 9:20, margin).

The wounded king became anxious. What could have brought Jehu from the scene of battle? Something must be wrong. Impatient to find out, he called for his chariot and drove out to meet the captain. He met him not far from the walls of Jezreel and the palace of Ahab, in the field of Naboth, (1Kings 21:19, 29).

This was the fatal spot where Elijah had warned Ahab of the terrible judgment that would fall upon his house because of his crime against Naboth.

Now, in the ways of Providence, by apparently natural means, the man who was to execute the judgment, and his victim, had been drawn together at the very place where it had been predicted the prophecy would be fulfilled.

"Is it peace, Jehu?" asked Joram, as they came face to face in their chariots.

"What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?" harshly demanded Jehu of the king.

Joram instantly realised he was in dire danger; that his captain had revolted against him. He wheeled his chariot around to flee. "There is treachery, O Ahaziah!" he shouted to his nephew, who had followed him in another chariot.

The two kings turned to flee. But Jehu, determined to fulfil his mission, quickly took up his bow, and setting an arrow to it, let fly at the king. The arrow sped on its mission of destiny, and striking the king in the back, penetrated the heart. It was a fatal wound. With the horses wildly galloping, and the chariot now out of control, the king sank down dead.

Elijah's words had been fulfilled.

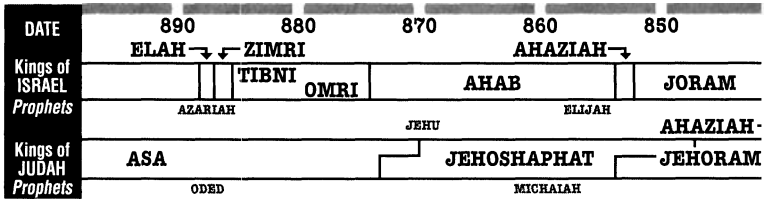
"Take him up and cast him in the field of Naboth," demanded Jehu of Bidkar, his captain, "for remember how that, when we rode together after Ahab his father, Yahweh laid this burden upon him: Surely I have seen the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons, and I will requite you in this place, saith Yahweh. Now, therefore, take and cast him into that place according to the word of Yahweh."

Bidkar did so. He was a fit captain for Jehu. His name means *"The Assassin,"* and he was to play his part as such in helping Jehu to power.

Meanwhile, Ahaziah, the king of Judah, fled for his life. He tried to reach Jerusalem but was headed off, and found refuge at Megiddo (cp. 2Kings 9:27 with 2Chron. 22:9).

Death of Jezebel After slaying Joram, Jehu approached the city of Jezreel as its conqueror. Prominent on the walls of the city was the Palace of Ahab. It looked down upon Naboth's vineyard, the dreadful scene of guilt where the murder of Naboth had taken place, a crime that had brought divine rebuke and judgment thundering against the wicked house of Ahab (1Kings 21:1).

On that fateful day, Jezebel was looking out of the window. She had witnessed the slaying of her son, had watched Jehu confidently approach the walls, and had prepared herself to meet him. She was not lacking in courage, and decided to meet him as his queen, and in a spirit of defiance. Painting her eyes, as was the custom of the day, and dressing herself in her royal apparel, she stood at the window looking down upon the approaching Jehu.





"Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?" she called to Jehu, who had paused at the foot of the walls.

It was a challenging statement. Zimri had only lasted seven days after murdering Elah who reigned before him (1Kgs. 16:9-20). In drawing attention to this fact, Jezebel was warning Jehu that he had better come to terms with her, lest he suffer a like fate.

But Jehu was not the kind of man to be intimidated in that fashion. "Who is on my side? Who?" he shouted, returning defiance with defiance.

Two or three men looked out of the window to indicate that they were on his side.

"Throw her down!" he ruthlessly commanded.

Jezebel's own servants roughly took hold of her and threw her out of the window. She crashed to the ground below, and her blood splattered the wall. As a warning to all, that he was prepared to be completely ruthless in his determination to seize power, Jehu deliberately and callously drove his chariot over the body of the fallen queen, as he turned his chariot around to enter the city.

He entered it as a conqueror. There was no pity for Jezebel from the elders of the city. They had seen a king and a queen overthrown in one day, and another king flee for his life, and were afraid to oppose such a determined man as Jehu. He was given the freedom of the city. He was accepted as conqueror, not murderer, and a great feast was prepared in his honour.

As he was feasting, he suddenly recalled Jezebel. "Go, see now this cursed woman and bury her," he ordered, "for she is a king's daughter."



Some of the people went out to do his bidding, but they found no more than the skull, the feet, and the palms of her hands.

They returned and told Jehu. "This is in fulfilment of the word of Yahweh as He spake through Elijah," commented Jehu, as he recalled the words the prophet had proclaimed against the wicked queen (1Kgs 21:23).

How Jehu's Actions Dramatised the Future

Jezebel and her fate are referred to in the Book of Revelation as typical of the destruction that the Lord Jesus will bring upon the apostate religious systems extant today (Rev. 2:20-23). Reference is made to Jezebel, but as a symbol representing a religious system, and not as a woman*. At the epoch of her destruction she is described as being "arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones" (Rev.17:4). This apostate system is thus presented in all its finery as was Jezebel when she looked down out of the window at the approaching Jehu.

She is also described in Revelation as a "queen" and "a widow," who shall see "no sorrow," which was the state of Jezebel when Jehu met her. And like the Jezebel of 2Kings 9, the Jezebel of the Book of Revelation is suddenly and unexpectedly destroyed — completely overthrown so that nothing of her remains (Rev. 18:21).

The Book of Revelation explains that this woman represents "that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth" (Rev. 17:18).

The city that reigned over the kings of the earth in the days of John was the city of Rome. This woman, therefore, represents Roman Catholicism (for in Bible symbology a woman usually represents a

* Although the specific use of the name could refer to a particular dominant personality, who manifested the characteristics of a "women's liberation movement" of the first century — an attitude condemned by the Apostles (cp. 1Tim. 2:7-12).

religious community — cp. 2Cor. 11:2) which, like Jezebel of old, has persecuted and destroyed true worshippers.

Thus the grim and tragic incidents that brought Jehu to the throne of Israel typify those events that will result in the overthrow of Roman Catholicism and the establishment of the Lord Jesus as King in Israel.

In recognising this, however, we must not mistake the character and motives of Jehu for those of Jesus Christ. Jehu sought fleshly power and personal aggrandisement; the Lord Jesus seeks only the glory of his Father.

Jehu was motivated for political achievements; the Lord Jesus seeks the elevation of truth and righteousness in all the earth.

The fate of Jezebel is to be the fate of Rome. We can pity her as we read of her flesh being eaten by dogs, and her carcase made as dung on the portion of Naboth; we shudder with horror as we learn she was so torn to pieces that none were able to say, "Here is Jezebel!" But we feel that way because we are victims of our senses, and find it hard to appreciate the terrible work of Jezebel in life. In so doing we forget how she murdered the servants of God, how she brought the life-giving Truth to ruin, how she persecuted the prophets, and brought terrible suffering to righteous men and women.

God is not indifferent to such things, and thus set in motion the events that brought her to ruin.

So it is also with Rome. As men view this system of apostasy decked out in all its glory like Jezebel looking out of the window at Jehu, they find it difficult to appreciate the need for the extreme language of the book of Revelation. That is because they have not personally experienced the cruelty and torture that has been used by Rome against others whose only crime has been a determination to serve God in truth. But God does not forget His own, and in due time His vengeance will be manifested against a system that has dared to lift itself up against His people. He hears the "souls of them which were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held" (Rev. 6:9). The Book of Revelation in recording the impending destruction of this evil system of religion says: "Rejoice over her, thou heaven and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her" (Rev. 18:20). Similar relief to this must have been felt by the righteous in Israel at the removal of such a terrible woman as Jezebel from the midst of the nation.

Jehu's Terrible Work of Vengeance

Jehu pursued the work of vengeance with ruthless efficiency. He was determined to root out every descendant and sympathiser of Ahab and grasp the kingdom to himself.

Ahaziah had fled in panic to Megiddo where he lay hidden, but after having established himself in Jezreel, Jehu sought him out and

slew him in his chariot, commanding that the dead body of the king should be driven back to Jerusalem.

From Megiddo Jehu prepared to march on Samaria. This powerful fortress had been chosen by the rest of Ahab's descendants (seventy grandsons and great-grandsons) as a refuge from Jehu's ruthless vengeance. Jehu was reluctant to lay siege to the powerful city. He did not want to divide Israel against himself; he preferred to have the support of all the people. He wrote a letter to the rulers of Samaria and the elders of Jezreel who had brought up Ahab's children, and who had fled to the shelter of the more powerful fortress of Samaria. The letter was full of bold challenge and threat. Jehu wrote:

"As soon as this letter comes to you, seeing your master's sons are with you and there are with you chariots and horses, a fortified city also, and armour; choose the best of your master's sons, and set him on his father's throne, and fight for your master's house."

The letter was a declaration of war. It filled the leaders of Samaria with fear. They knew Jehu's reputation: he was a man of energy, of decision, of single-minded purpose. He could call on the support of the army in the field. Moreover, they themselves had no true love for Ahab's house. Certainly they were not prepared to sacrifice their own interests to support it. Remembering how ruthless Jehu had been in dealing with the kings of Israel and Judah and queen Jezebel, they knew they could not expect any mercy from him if he attacked.

"Behold, two kings stood not before him: how then shall we stand?" they asked each other.

They decided to surrender. They sent back a messenger to Jehu, saying: "We are your servants, and will do all that you should bid us; we will not make any king: do that which is good in your eyes."

Back came the terrible terms of surrender: "If you are for me, then bring me the heads of the men, your master's sons, and come to me to Jezreel by tomorrow, this time."

What terrible conditions! The seventy descendants of Ahab had trusted the leaders of Samaria who now prepared to betray them. They had been taken to that city by the "great men" of Jezreel who had brought them up (2Kgs. 10:6). They had "put their trust in princes," and now were to learn that in such men "there is no true help" (Psa. 146:3).

The "great men" of Jezreel and Samaria read Jehu's letter with consternation. A conference was called, the terms were discussed, one by one they decided to save themselves at the expense of those of Ahab's house who had turned to them for help.

The act of treachery took place. The unsuspecting seventy princes of Ahab were gathered together and brutally murdered. Their heads were cut off and carried in baskets by the "great men" of Samaria to Jehu in Jezreel.

Jehu had warned them that the time limit for their capitulation was by the morrow. So filled with fear were these "great men," these "great cowards," however, that they performed their act of treachery that very night, and without waiting for the morning, rushed to Jezreel to show Jehu how loyal they intended to be towards him. Jehu was awakened and told that they had come. He commanded that the heads of the princes of Ahab should be set out in two heaps at the gate of Jezreel until the morning.

On the morrow a fearful sight thus greeted the people of Jezreel. There, in two grisly heaps at the entrance of the city, was evidence both of the treachery of the "great men" of Ahab's realm, as well as the ruthlessness of Israel's new ruler. It was a warning to all not to oppose him in any way.

A public meeting at the gate of the city was called by Jehu. Standing with him were the "great men" of Jezebel's court who had so treacherously transferred their allegiance. Little did they suspect what Jehu had planned for them. When the people had assembled, he addressed them: "Judge righteously," he declared. "Behold, I conspired against my master and slew him: but who slew all these? Know now that there shall fall unto the earth nothing of the word of Yahweh, which He spake concerning the house of Ahab; for He hath done that which He spake by His servant Elijah."

Jehu showed that the "great men" of Jezebel were guilty of a great crime worthy of death. Having thus passed judgment upon them, he executed it.

Significantly, the Book of Revelation also speaks of the "great men" of that religious system that is likened unto Jezebel (Rev. 18:23). When the judgments of God fall upon it, its "mighty ones" will likewise be destroyed.

With the execution of the leaders of Samaria, Jehu left Jezreel to take possession of the capital city. He drove past a place called Beth-Eked, or The House of Shearing. Here he met a company of men whose appearance showed they were strangers to Israel.

"Who are you?" asked Jehu as he paused in his chariot.

"We are relatives of Ahaziah, king of Judah; we have come to visit the children of the king," was the reply.

This answer sealed their fate. They were relatives of the hated house of Ahab. Jehu, as medium of divine vengeance against that wicked house, commanded that they should be taken alive, and slain in the pit connected with the shearing house.

Jehu Receives the Support of Jehonadab

Once again in his chariot, Jehu drove rapidly towards Samaria. He was met by a man called Jehonadab. Jehonadab was well-known in Israel as the leader of the Rechabites, the descendants of Hobab, the son of Moses' father-in-law, who had

thrown in his lot with Israel (Num. 10:29-32; Judges 1:16; 4:11; 5:24; Jer. 35). He ruled the tribe with a rod of iron, demanding that they live in tents rather than the more settled form of houses, that they refrain from agriculture which would establish them in one set place, that they abstain from wine which leads to excess. Thus the Rechabites tried to keep the primitive simplicity of manners that characterised the Israelites in the wilderness (Jer. 35:6-7). The Rechabites were like sojourners and pilgrims among the children of Israel. They were Gentiles who had embraced the hope of Israel. They viewed with sadness and indignation the evil conduct of the house of Ahab, and the introduction of pagan worship by Jezebel the queen.

Jehonadab had heard of Jehu's revolt with pleasure, and was even then on the way to meet him. Jehu also knew Jehonadab,* and recognised that he would be very useful to assist him in overthrowing the worship of Baal and to enable him to gain full control of the northern kingdom.

The stern, austere hermit and the fierce warrior thus met as the former was hastening to offer his aid to the latter, and the latter was driving towards Samaria to exact vengeance on the spiritual enemies of the former.

Jehu stopped his chariot as he met Jehonadab in the way. "Is your heart right as my heart is with your heart?" he asked the hermit.

By these words Jehu asked whether Jehonadab was prepared to throw in his lot with Jehu in overthrowing the religious order established by Jezebel, whether he was of "one heart" with him in this matter.

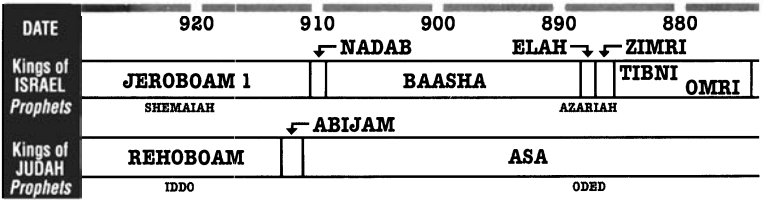
"It is," answered Jehonadab.

"Then if it is, give me your hand!" invited Jehu.

He reached down, and the two men clasped each other's hand in agreement. Then Jehu helped Jehonadab up into his chariot, and together the hermit and the warrior drove swiftly towards Samaria. Jehonadab was noted for his fiery zeal in the cause of Yahweh; he was greatly respected throughout the land, and his espousal of Jehu's cause would greatly influence many people who secretly detested the ways and worship of Jezebel.

In Samaria Jehu continued the terrible work of judgment: all sympathisers of the house of Ahab were ruthlessly destroyed.

* According to Josephus, Jehu knew Jehonadab very well.



Religious Revolution

Jehu had revealed his plan to Jehonadab, but he kept it secret from all others. He recognised that his mission demanded the complete overthrow of the worship of Baal. He knew, also, that this would establish him as king. So long as the worship of Baal continued there remained a number of sympathisers for Jezebel among the priests and worshippers of the religion she had established.

Jehu decided to destroy them completely, and for this he had carefully prepared a plan. He called a public gathering of people together, and addressed them thus: "Ahab served Baal a little, but Jehu shall serve him much. Call all the prophets, the servants and the priests of Baal together. Let none be wanting: for I have a great sacrifice to do to Baal; whosoever shall be wanting shall die."

The proclamation was sent throughout the land. It called the chief worshippers of Baal together into the huge temple that Jezebel had built, for the purpose of a sacred festival. Fearing to disobey Jehu, and imagining that he was going to support their worship, the priests and officials of the worship gathered together at Samaria. They crowded into the temple, clad in the colorful garments of their order, until it was packed from door to door.

Jehu and Jehonadab also went into the Temple of Baal. The stern, unyielding faces of the soldier and hermit did not betray the secret of their purpose as they moved among the Baal worshippers. "Search and look that there be no worshippers of Yahweh here, only those of Baal," ordered Jehu.

When this had been done, and preparations were being made for the sacrifices to be offered, Jehu slipped outside and arranged for a guard of soldiers to encircle the temple.

He commanded them that when he gave the word, they were to slay every one of the worshippers of Baal. He warned them: "If any escape, he who lets him go, will pay for it with his life!"

The soldiers knew full well that Jehu would carry out this grim threat, and made sure none would escape.

Meanwhile, Jehu returned to the temple to supervise the pagan worship that then began. The priests of Baal were completely taken off their guard, looking upon him as an enthusiastic worshipper.

At last the pagan service ended, and Jehu went again outside to give the order to his soldiers to attack. Remembering the threat of Jehu, they went grimly to the task. The temple was crammed full with priests and high officials of Baal-worship. They were dressed in all the splendid regalia of their order, little realising what was to be the terrible end of the worship. Suddenly the soldiers of Jehu burst into the temple, and the massacre commenced. Supervised by the stern, unsmiling eyes of Jehu, the soldiers methodically slew the servants of Baal, and as the bodies piled up they were ignominiously flung out-

side (2Kings 10:25). They worked their terrible way through the temple to the inner, most holy place, called the city, or fortress of Baal. Here the main image of Baal the Sun-god was set up, whilst surrounding it were other idols representing lesser divinities made of carved wood. The main idol was broken to pieces, the lesser idols were burnt, and the temple itself was given over to the most ignoble use.

This terrible slaughter destroyed the work of Jezebel in Israel. Baal-worship never completely took hold of the nation again. To that extent Jehu's revolution was successful.

Where Jehu Failed When Jehu met Jehonadab, he had said: "Come and see my zeal for Yahweh" (2Kings 10:16), and they had both driven together to the slaughter of Samaria. Jehu's zeal, however, was blended with expediency; it extended as long as was convenient to his purpose, but stopped short of a complete dedication of himself. Though he destroyed the worship of Baal, he still maintained the schismatic calf-worship introduced by Jeroboam. He doubtless feared, as did Jeroboam, that if he fully established the worship of Yahweh in its purity, he would lose the support of the people, for they would be required to attend the Temple in Jerusalem.

Jehu was given great opportunities and privileges, but he did not make the most of them. The Bible declares: "Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of Yahweh with all his heart" (2Kings 10:31). He did not make God's Word his study, nor walk in His ways. Therefore, though he was promised that his children of the fourth generation would sit upon the throne of Israel, the nation began to experience great trouble.

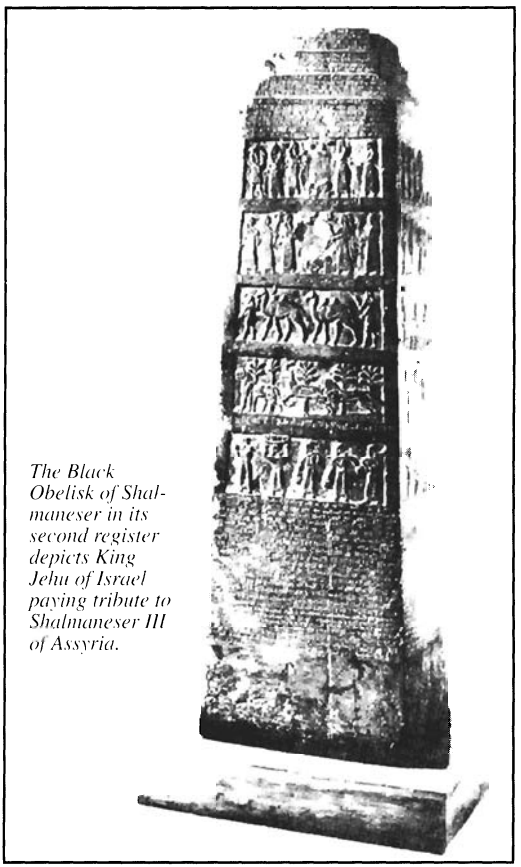
From the north, Hazael, king of Syria, invaded the land and occupied the frontier towns from where he ravaged the people round about, and particularly those dwelling on the east of Jordan. All this trouble could have been avoided by firm and godly ruling on the part of Jehu.

It is not words that constitute true zeal for Yahweh, but actions!

Jehu and History The monuments erected by kings of ancient times in honour of themselves have provided confirmation of the story of the Bible. In the days of Jehu, there reigned in Assyria a powerful monarch named Shalmaneser 3rd. He repeatedly invaded the lands of the Middle East, and recorded his exploits on a monument which is today described by historians as the "black obelisk." In the 6th, 11th and 14th years of his reign he came up against a coalition of kings of Syria and Palestine. In the campaign conducted in his 18th year, however, only one king opposed him: Hazael of Syria. The illustrations on the black obelisk show a long

queue of heavily laden envoys in richly ornamented tunics and peaked caps. The text reads: "Tribute of Jaua of Bit-Humri: silver, gold, a golden bowl, golden goblets, a golden beaker, pitchers of gold, lead sceptres for the king, and balsam wood received I from him." "Jaua of Bit-Humri" is Jehu of the House of Omri, for the Assyrians identified Israel with Omri, even though Jehu had overthrown the house of Ahab (the son of Omri) and established his own rule.

Tribute is paid by kings who voluntarily submit. Whereas previously Israel had joined forces with Syria against Assyria, on this occasion it had not done so, but had given in to Shalmaneser's demands. Jehu was evidently looked upon as disloyal by Hazael of Syria, for no sooner had the Assyrians withdrawn than Hazael began a destructive onslaught against Israel. Thus Jehu suffered through the hands of Hazael because of his failure to render unto God what is due to Him. The Bible declares: "In those days Yahweh began to cut Israel short; and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel." In so doing, he was performing the will of God, but he little realised that he was doing so. His idea was to strengthen his own power, and revenge himself on Jehu. God uses the schemes and motives of men to accomplish His purpose.



The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser in its second register depicts King Jehu of Israel paying tribute to Shalmaneser III of Assyria.

Chapter Eleven

THE WAYS OF THE WICKED ATHALIAH

The Phillips family had read 2Kings 11, and were discussing the contents of the chapter. "What a cruel woman Queen Athaliah was, to have all the children of the king murdered!" exclaimed Joan as soon as they had finished reading.

"She was a brutal and wicked woman," answered her father, "but, as we have read, she received her just punishment."

"The Second Book of Kings is a terrible part of the Bible," remarked Ann, "It is so full of bloodshed and murder."

"That is because men had turned from God's way," explained her father. "In His way alone is found true peace and happiness."

"The leaders of Israel should have known better, for they claimed to be God's people," said Graeham.

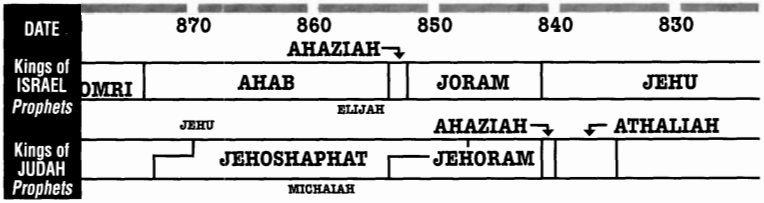
"True," answered Mr. Phillips, "but unfortunately people forget the high privileges which they receive from God. They take Him and His truth for granted. Then they begin to act like some of the leaders of Israel of whom we have been reading during the last few evenings. We must ever be on our guard lest we take the precious things of God too much for granted."

"You could hardly say that of Athaliah, for she never seemed to be under God's influence."

"That is true. She was a true daughter of her mother Jezebel. Like Jezebel, she was a self-willed, dominant woman. She had married Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, and thus became queen in Judah, polluting the line of David with the bad influence of the evil house of Ahab. The judgment that Elijah had proclaimed against the house of Ahab thus stretched forth to embrace the throne of Judah, and particularly Athaliah and her children. She exercised a very bad influence on Judah (see 2Chron. 21:6) during the reign of her husband, and after his death she continued to dominate the kingdom for evil as queen-mother."

"I do not remember reading that in the chapter we read this evening," protested Peter.

"I know that," answered his father, "but turn to 2Chronicles 22:3 where you have a further account of this period, and read what you



find there."

Peter turned to the place and read: "He (Ahaziah) also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly."

"We read yesterday how that Jehu fulfilled the prophecy of Elijah, and executed judgment on the house of Ahab by slaying king Joram of Israel and king Ahaziah of Judah, the son of Athaliah," said Mr. Phillips, as he continued the story. "When Athaliah heard that her son was dead, a mad and murderous passion for power seized her. She was determined that nobody would reign except herself. She therefore arranged for all the children of her son to be murdered."

"What a terrible thing!" said Joan in a shocked tone.

"It is, indeed!" agreed her father. "It shows just how far some will go to grasp power, particularly when they cast off all thought of God, as did Athaliah. Every age has its quota of evil men and women who will stop at nothing to gain their ends."

"It is a wonder that the people of the land did not revolt against her for this crime," said Graeham.

"They were overawed by this dominant woman, and feared for their own lives. Perhaps it was her form of retaliation against Yahweh who had poured out judgment upon the house of her father. Perhaps she wanted to blot out the house of David in Judah as the house of Ahab had been destroyed in Israel. If so, she was fighting destiny, for time and again, God had promised He would preserve the house of David because of the covenant He had made with that great king. Read 2Kings 8:19 for me, please, Joan."

Joan read: "Yet Yahweh would not destroy Judah, for David his servant's sake, as He promised him to give him always a light, and to his children."

"That is the great drama of this period of Jewish history," continued Mr. Phillips. "Despite all the evil of the times, and the reverses the nation suffered, Yahweh remembered His promise to David to preserve his line until Messiah appeared. Time and again the royal house was threatened with extinction. It was in mortal danger when faced with the revolt of Jeroboam (1Kings 12:16); it now hung by a thread by the murder of the seed royal at the instigation of Athaliah. But the line was wonderfully preserved. The murderers had not done their work properly. Among the dead bodies of the other princes, there was the youngest of Ahaziah's sons: Joash. He was but a few months old when the murder took place, and perhaps because he was so young, he had escaped the slaughter. He was found by Jehosheba, sister to Ahaziah (though most likely by a different mother) who stole him from among the bodies of the dead, and hid him from Athaliah."

"What made her do that?" asked Ann.

"She was the wife of Jehoiada the priest (2Chron. 22:11) who was

a godly man, and anxious to overthrow the influence of the wicked queen-mother. He knew, full well, that Athaliah's attempt to destroy the seed of David would not succeed".

"Why do you say that?" asked Peter.

"Because Jehoiada said it himself," answered his father. "When the time was ripe, a few years later, he gathered his fellow-conspirators about him, and told them: 'Behold, the king's son shall reign, as Yahweh hath said of the sons of David' (2Chron. 23:3). As high priest he was saddened at the growing influence of the Baal worship brought about by the energy of Athaliah, and determined he would play his part in bringing about the downfall of the wicked queen who now assumed full power in Judah. He probably communicated his intentions to his wife, Jehosheba, who nobly did her part to help her husband by stealing the little boy away from the wrath of Athaliah. For six years he was hidden out of sight of all in the House of God in Jerusalem."

"I shouldn't think that would be a very good place to hide him," commented Peter, "for surely the worshippers would learn that he was there, and it would come to the ears of the queen."

"Normally that would be the case, but in the time of which we are speaking, it was the safest of all places to hide him, for Athaliah had done her best to ruin the Temple and discourage its worship. Only the most faithful continued to gather there, and they would have no love for Athaliah, for during this time a bitter religious controversy continued between the adherents of Baal and of Yahweh (see 2Chr. 24:7).

Revolution in Judah "This continued for six years, and then Jehoiada the priest was ready to move. He brought others into the conspiracy. They were men upon whom he could rely, and their names are such that when joined together they form a sentence expressing the purpose of God at that time. Perhaps Jehoiada gave them these names as a code to encourage others to join the movement. The message of their names is as follows:

"Yahweh hath helped (*Azariah*), for He finds mercy (*Jeroham*) to those whom He heareth (*Ishmael*). Yahweh is gracious (*Jehohanan*), for He hath helped (*Azariah*) the true worshipper (*Obed*). The work of Yahweh (*Maaseiah*), He hath adorned (*Adaiah*), for He hath judged (*Elishaphat*) the famous (*Zichri*)."

"Where do you find those names?" asked Peter. "They are not in the chapter in Kings we read."

"No, they are found in 2Chronicles 23:1."

"What part did they play in the conspiracy?" asked Graeham.

"They went about gathering support for the child-king and the high priest (see 2Chron. 23:2). The Levites instantly responded for they were anxious to restore the influence of the Temple once again.

Many prominent men also joined Jehoiada, for they could see that under the influence of Athaliah the kingdom was drifting to ruin. Having won over the priestly class, he also secured the support of the military. At last, he judged that he had attracted sufficient to his cause. He called the principal men together, and presented to them the child-king. He made them enter into a covenant with him to restore the rightful king to power.

" 'Behold, the king's son,' he declared to the conspirators. 'He shall reign as Yahweh hath said of the sons of David' (2Chron. 23:3).

"Careful preparations were made for the success of the revolution," said Mr. Phillips as he continued with the story. "The Palace was not far from the Temple, and connection was made from the one to the other through three gates: the Palace Gate, the Temple Gate, and the Inner Court Gate. Jehoiada arranged that the Levites should be separated into three groups, and act as guards at these various gates, as they were in the custom of doing on the Sabbath Day. This was normally to conduct the king for worship, but, unfortunately, there had been no king prepared to do this for some time. He also arranged for a guard of soldiers to be with the Levites to assist them in case of any trouble."

"What does verse 6 mean: 'Ye shall keep the watch of the house that it be not broken down'?" asked Ann as her father paused.

"It meant that the Levites and Guard had to exercise the greatest care and vigilance in the duties to which Jehoiada had appointed them lest through their carelessness all his careful preparations should fail. Rotherham translates the verse: 'Ye shall keep the watch of the house by turns.' They were not to relax in guarding the route to be taken by the king when presented to the people."

"I suppose Jehoiada selected the sabbath for his purpose (2Kings 11:7) because that would be the best day for it," remarked Graeham.

"Yes, the congregating of people at the Temple would appear more natural on that day than any other," agreed Mr. Phillips. "Moreover, the arranging of the Levites in the fashion ordered by Jehoiada on that day would not attract undue notice, for it was the custom normally followed, though perhaps for a long time neglected. Athaliah might have thought it a little strange, but then she knew that Jehoiada was not friendly towards her and was anxious to restore the Temple worship. Little did she suspect that the boy-king was still living, and that his uncle was about to present him to the nation."

"Was Jehoiada the uncle of Joash?" asked Joan.

"Yes. Verse 2 says that his wife was sister to Ahaziah the father of Joash, so that would make him uncle to the boy-king.

"The guard of Levites and soldiers were commanded that they were to form two lines between which the king might walk safely along the route that led to the appointed position for the king (vv. 7-

8). Strict instructions were given that nobody was to be permitted within the 'ranges' that is, the ranks formed by these two columns. These columns led right to the altar itself, and to the king's stand that had been first erected in that place by Solomon (2Chr. 23:10; 2Kgs. 11:11). The body of Levites, armed with the spears and shields of David were commanded to surround the little king himself, as he marched along this route to take his place before the altar upon the king's stand.

"At last all was in readiness. The greatest secrecy had been preserved. The conspiracy had been carefully hid from the notice of Athaliah, the cruel and wicked daughter of Jezebel. When the sabbath dawned, the Levites and the Guard took their places as instructed. The people gathered together wondering for what purpose were all the careful preparations. At last the child-king was brought out surrounded by his personal guard of Levites. A thrill of excitement went through the assembled people when the secret was whispered about that this boy was the son of Ahaziah, that he had escaped the murder of the wicked Athaliah, that he had been preserved by Jehoiada, and that Judah was again to have a king of the family of David. The excitement grew as the people were caught up with the drama of the moment. The murmuring grew louder as they voiced their approval of the measures that had been taken. And when the boy-king had passed through the long ranks of the armed Levites and guards, had entered the court of the Temple, had ascended the platform where Solomon had stood on that day of glory when the dedication of the Temple had taken place, the shouts and applause of the people became quite unrestrained. It was heard all over the city. Others rushed towards the Temple to see what the excitement was all about, and they, too, were caught up with the general joy of the restoration of David's house over Judah.

"The people saw the boy-king upon the Altar-stand. They saw Jehoiada place upon him the crown of his office as king, and hand to him the copy of the Law, which was the charter between Yahweh and himself, and between him and the people. They saw the priest, assisted by his sons, anoint him with the holy oil consecrating him to his office, and their excitement grew beyond all bounds. They showed their approval with a tremendous shout that rent the air: 'May the king live!'

"By now most of the people had assembled at the Temple. The noise of shouting, of running feet, of the excited talk of the people, penetrated the palace itself. It was heard by Athaliah. She hastened outside to discover the cause. This brought her to the two lines of armed Levites and guards which formed a path to the Temple. Along this she hastened, wondering at the unusual sight. It brought her to the Temple. There she beheld a scene that must have amazed her. The

king stood upon the stand, Jehoiada and his sons were assembled before him. The armed guards and Levites were drawn up in measured ranks. The crowd was moved by the excitement of the occasion and continued to express its approval of all that was being done. The assembled trumpeters, musicians and singers were praising the king in the glorious songs of David, beloved by all true Israelites, but hated by such as Athaliah.

"The significance of the whole scene was instantly apparent to the queen. 'Treason! Treason!' she cried to the people, vainly appealing for some help to her cause.

"Her appeal was met with angry silence from the crowd. Given sound leadership by Jehoiada it showed only anger and contempt for this murderess who had sought by violence and bloodshed to destroy the worship of Yahweh.

"At the command of Jehoiada, she was taken from the precincts of the Temple and put to death. Thus the final act of judgment and justice was performed on the evil house of Ahab — a house that had brought great wickedness and suffering to both Israel and Judah, which had so weakened the attitude of both nations towards Yahweh as to lay the foundation for the ultimate destruction of both.

"Having overthrown Athaliah, and having crushed all opposition, Jehoiada called for a general gathering of the people. Acting as mediator, he joined them in covenant relationship with Yahweh and the king (2Chron. 23:18) that they should be His people. A great spiritual revolution took place. The people were anxious to show their zeal for Yahweh. They marched to the great temple of Baal that Athaliah had caused to be built in Jerusalem, and breaking it down, they destroyed the altars and images of pagan worship, and slew its priests. The worship of Yahweh was restored in its purity. The priests were established in their set positions, ministering according to the Law of Moses and the order laid down by David. The services were re-instituted in their fulness. The morning and evening sacrifices again were offered, the incense again ascended acceptably to Yahweh, the sound of music and the voice of singing each day was again heard, and the people were joined together as one in the glorious divine services of Israel's God.

"Thus a son of David again reigned in Jerusalem," continued Mr. Phillips in his discourse, "Yahweh had avenged His people against a wicked, persecuting, religious system that had sought in every way possible to destroy the Truth; the true worship, under a righteous high priest was again established in the land; and the Temple was fully restored, for later, Joash supervised the thorough repair of the House of Prayer in Jerusalem.

"This dramatic spiritual revolution is made all the more remarkable when we see how beautifully it typifies the work of God in Christ," continued Mr. Phillips. "It outlines in parable the two advents

of Christ, and the work he shall accomplish in that day."

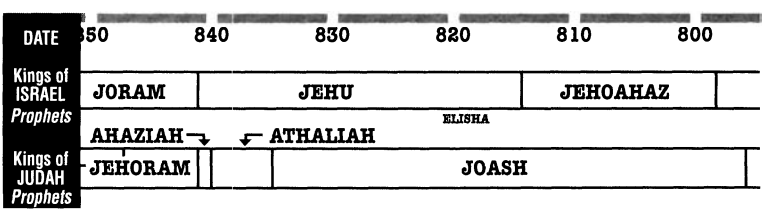
"In what way does it do that?" asked Graeham.

"We have not time to discuss that tonight," replied his father, "but we will do so on another occasion. Meanwhile, bear in mind that Joash was saved out of death; that his elevation as king was followed by a religious revolution and national revival of the Truth; that in Joash and Jehoiada there was a fusion of rulership and priesthood; that one of the first works of Joash was to restore the Temple as a centre of divine worship. This is typical of what Christ will do at his return. There are other matters also."

"Your application seems a little thin to me!" remarked Peter irreverently.

"Unfortunately we cannot deal with it tonight," said Mr. Phillips, "but we will revert to it on another occasion. It is a wonderfully dramatic story when it is considered in the light of Christ's coming."

"I have heard that word before," remarked Peter as he looked around at the other members of the family. "We will keep Dad up to his promise."



Chapter Twelve

JEHOAHAZ BRINGS ISRAEL LOW

We must interrupt Mr. Phillips at this point, to revert back to the House of Ahab. As we remarked in our introduction to this section of our story (see page 395), there were five kings which reigned of his house.

On the death of Jehu, his son Jehoahaz ascended the throne, to reign for 17 years over the northern kingdom (2Kings 13). He followed the example of Jeroboam, retaining the worship of the calves, and thus setting a bad example to the northern kingdom.

His reign, however, demonstrates the kindness of Yahweh to all who approach Him in repentant manner.

Hazael and his successor Ben-Hadad oppressed Israel, and brought the nation very low. A succession of attacks were launched by the Syrians against Israel (2Kings 13:3). City after city was captured, and the power of Israel so reduced, that Jehoahaz had but fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen to defend his realm (2Kings 13:7).

This adversity humbled Jehoahaz. He "besought Yahweh" (2Kings 13:4). The expression in the Hebrew literally means that he "stroked the face of Yahweh." He turned to him as a child to its father (see also Exod. 32:11; 1Kings 13:6), recognising his own helplessness, seeking aid from the true source of strength. And Yahweh looked with pity on the helplessness of His people. The record states that "he saw the oppression of Israel."

How merciful is God; how wonderful is His kindness; how important are these records that bring these matters out so clearly to us. He looked down from heaven, and saw the helplessness and oppressed state of His people, and full of compassion for them He promised to help them.

Thus Jehoahaz learned the value of prayer; he learned of the great reservoir of power any child of God can tap if he uses the great privilege and help that is available.

What influence was brought to bear on Jehoahaz to cause him to thus turn to God in his need? We are not told, but it could have been the work of Elisha who was living at the time and must have viewed with approval the overthrow of Baal-worship by Jehu. He was held in high esteem by Joash the son of Jehoahaz (2Kings 13:14), and probably was also highly respected by Jehoahaz.

So, in his time of need, Jehoahaz turned to Yahweh, and Israel received promise of deliverance through a saviour which God would provide.

The Bible declares: "Yahweh was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of His

covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast He them from His presence as yet" (2Kings 13:23).

Thus we see how that the influence of a good man can extend for a long time after his death.

The same is also true of bad men, unfortunately. In the reign of Jehoahaz, two men: one bad and one good, both long since dead, were profoundly affecting the nation. The policy of Jeroboam was followed by Jehoahaz for evil (2Kings 13:2), but the influence of Abraham still preserved the nation.

"Yahweh was gracious unto them." The Hebrew word (*vaiyachon*) signifies *tender affection* such as a husband has for his wife, or a father has for his child (see Isa. 54:5; Mal. 1:6). It expresses God's love for His people which is always available if they turn to Him for help.

But the Scriptures also state: "Yahweh had compassion on them." Here the word (*vairachamen*) expresses that He *deeply felt* for them. He looked with *pity* on their helplessness, even though their own folly had brought it about.

"Yahweh had respect unto them." The word (*vaiyiphen*) signifies that He *turned His face towards them*, thus implying that He took heed both to their condition, and in answer to their cry.

In their need He promised to help them by sending them a deliverer. Shortly after this, Jehoahaz died; a reign of 17 years of frustration ended with his death. The reigns of his son Joash, and his grandson Jeroboam, saw the promised deliverance and Israel rise to the greatest heights of power.

The House of Jehu Our chart on page 395 shows that during the reigns of Amaziah and Uzziah in Judah, three kings reigned over the northern kingdom of Israel: Jehoash, Jeroboam and Zachariah. These three kings were all of the house of Jehu, and as, in this section of our story, we are treating with this dynasty, we intend to tell the story of their reigns before reverting to those of Joash, Amaziah and Uzziah, who reigned in Jerusalem over Judah.

Reign of Jehoash Over Israel On his deathbed, Elisha had promised King Jehoash (known also as Joash), that he would have notable victories at the expense of Hazael, king of Syria. The king of Syria was anxious to extend his power, so that he might be recognised as the chief ruler throughout the land. He tried to dominate Israel, and this led to war. Battles were fought in Aphek, and Joash gained the victory. Gradually Israel, which had fallen so low, began to rise in power. Three notable victories were won by Joash, by means of which he recovered from Syria all the cities that his father had lost to Hazael (2Kings 13:25).

Kings of Judah and Israel

Our story has taken us to a very troubled time of Jewish history, when sometimes kings reigned for only short periods, and the incidents of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah become confused and difficult to follow. Many important and interesting things happened at this time, however, and the following table will help to keep the various events and reigns in their proper sequence.

Judah	*Period of Reign*	*Israel*	*Period of Reign*	*Prophet*
Rehoboam	17 yrs.	**Jeroboam I**	22 yrs.	Shemaiah Ahijah
Abijam	3 yrs.			
		Nadab	2 yrs.	
Asa	41 yrs.			Hanani
		Baasha	24 yrs.	Oded Azariah
		Elah	2 yrs.	
		Zimri	1 week	
		Omri	12 yrs.	
		Ahab	22 yrs.	Elijah
Jehoshaphat	25 yrs.			Micaiah
		Ahaziah	2 yrs.	Jehu
		Jehoram	12 yrs.	Elisha
Jehoram	8 yrs.			Eliezer
Ahaziah	1 yr.			Jahaziel
Athaliah	6 yrs.	**Jehu**	28 yrs.	
Joash	40 yrs.			
		Jehoahaz	17 yrs.	
		Jehoash	16 yrs.	
Amaziah	29 yrs.			Jonah
		Jeroboam II	41 yrs.	Hosea
Azariah or Uzziah	52 yrs.			Isaiah Amos
		Zachariah	6 mths.	
		Shallum	1 mth.	
		Menahem	10 yrs.	
		Pekahiah	2 yrs.	
Jotham	16 yrs.			Micah
		Pekah	20 yrs.	
Ahaz	16 yrs.			
		Hoshea	9 yrs.	
Hezekiah	29 yrs.	***Taken into captivity***		Nahum
Manasseh	55 yrs.			
Amon	2 yrs.			Zephaniah
Josiah	31 yrs.			Joel
Jehoahaz	3 mths.			Jeremiah
Jehoiakim	11 yrs.			Habakkuk
Jehoiachin	3 mths.			*Some of the prophets ministered during several reigns.*
Zedekiah	11 yrs.			
Taken into captivity				

Joash reigned 16 years, and at his death Israel was on the way to becoming a powerful nation.

Israel Becomes Powerful under Jeroboam II

The victories of Joash helped to lay the foundation for Jeroboam's reign. Under this king, Israel grew in power until its influence extended to the Euphrates in the north. Even Syria bowed to the strength of Jeroboam and of Israel at this time.

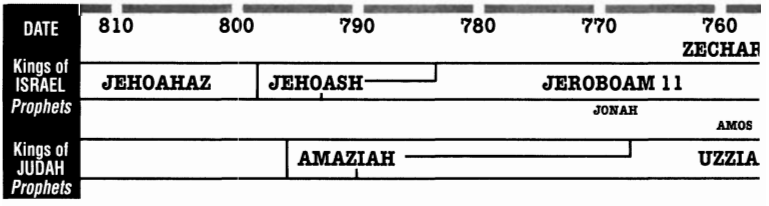
What was the cause of this rise in power?

Firstly, there was a political reason. The brutal, ruthless Assyrian nation which lay to the north-east of Israel, and which had exerted its influence over the nations of Palestine, had met with severe reverses. It was attacked by the Hittites, a powerful nation that lay even further to the north. The proud Assyrians found themselves humbled before their enemies, and had to fight for their very existence. Meanwhile, Judah found itself free from their oppressing influence.

This was Jeroboam's opportunity. His name means, "*The People Become Numerous*," and he lived up to its meaning. Encouraged by Jonah the prophet (2Kings 14:25), Jeroboam defied the enemies of Israel. He boldly invaded Syria, captured Damascus, and extended his rule to the Euphrates itself. He then turned to the south, and won victories over the children of Edom.

Thus Israel became a free, independent and powerful nation. In this we see the mercy of God who gave His people one last opportunity to repent. He "saw the affliction of Israel that it was very bitter, and that it was straiten in want, and destitute." He declared that He would not blot them out at that time, but would save them by the hand of Jeroboam (2Kings 14:26-27, *Septuagint*).

The prophet Jonah conveyed this message to the king. He hoped that the measure of security thus brought to the nation would provide sufficient time for the people to thoroughly repent before their God, and thus save themselves from the destruction that he, as a prophet, knew threatened them if they did not.



Chapter Thirteen

THE REMARKABLE SIGN OF JONAH

God had further work for Jonah to do. He was told to go to Nineveh and warn the people of Assyria that if they did not repent within forty days their city would be completely overthrown.

This was exciting news for the prophet. The Assyrians were Israel's greatest enemy, and Jonah knew that his people were not safe whilst they existed. Here was the possibility of them being destroyed if they did not heed the message. The only problem was that his preaching might cause them to repent and thereby they would be saved — and then their threat to Israel would continue.

But what if he avoided going to Nineveh? The nation then would be overthrown, for God would remain true to His word. But dare he disobey the command of God? Jonah knew the consequences of doing that, but was prepared to sacrifice even his own life to save his people. This sentiment was later expressed by the apostle Paul, who declared that he was prepared to "be accursed" if it would bring about the salvation of his people (Rom. 9:3).

Jonah decided he would not go to Nineveh. Instead he went down to the port of Joppa, and finding a ship about to depart for the far-distant land of Tarshish, he paid the fare, and went aboard as a passenger.

Soon the ship was loaded with cargo, the sails were set, and it was gaily sailing towards its destination.

In his cabin below, Jonah had fallen asleep. He imagined that he had escaped from his task of preaching to the Ninevites; but he overlooked the fact that when God declares a thing, He will perform it (Isa. 55:11).

Suddenly a violent gale swooped down upon the ship. The calm



sea became rough and stormy. Huge waves were thrown up and threatened to swamp the ship. The sailors became afraid. They were helpless in the face of such an unusually fierce and sudden storm. It was so much out of the ordinary that they felt it must have been sent by God. Each began to call out to his god for help. But in spite of their prayers, the storm became worse. The wind shrieked around the masts; the waves rose high above the ship; the sailors crouched in terror before such fury.

Suddenly the masts and tackling came crashing down upon the deck.* To save the ship, these were cut free and thrown overboard. The ship was now out of control, driven before the gale, helplessly tossed about by the wild waves.

And still the storm raged.

Suddenly the sailors remembered the strange man who had hurried aboard at Joppa, and who, as a passenger, had paid his fare to go to Tarshish. He was below, sleeping in his cabin. The captain hurried down and awakened him. "What do you mean by this, O Sleeper!" he shouted above the storm. "Come and call upon your God. Perhaps He will hear us and save us!"

Jonah came up on the deck to be met by a group of frightened and desperate men. He saw the disabled ship helplessly driven before the hurricane, he felt the sickening lurch as one moment the stormy waves lifted it up high, and the next moment threw it down into the depths below. The terrified sailors gathered around him. "This is an act of God," they declared. "Let us take lots and see for whose cause this has come to pass."

Lots were taken. They revealed that Jonah was the cause of the trouble.

The sailors looked at him with suspicion.

"What is the cause of this?" they asked him. "What is your occupation? Where do you come from? What is your country and your people?"

Jonah alone among them calm and unafraid, looked at the fear-stricken sailors. "I am a Hebrew," he declared. "I fear Yahweh, the God of heaven, Who made the sea and the dry land."

The word "Hebrew" means a "Crosser over." By using this word, Jonah indicated that he was different and separate from the group of sailors on the deck of the storm-tossed ship, who were now looking at him fearfully and with curiosity. By declaring that Yahweh made the sea and dry land, Jonah declared that the God of Israel is all-powerful, in contrast to the pagan gods which the sailors had besought in vain.

Jonah thus taught them the Truth. They were impressed by what they heard. They looked at him with respect, realising that he was a servant of this powerful God of whom he had preached to them.

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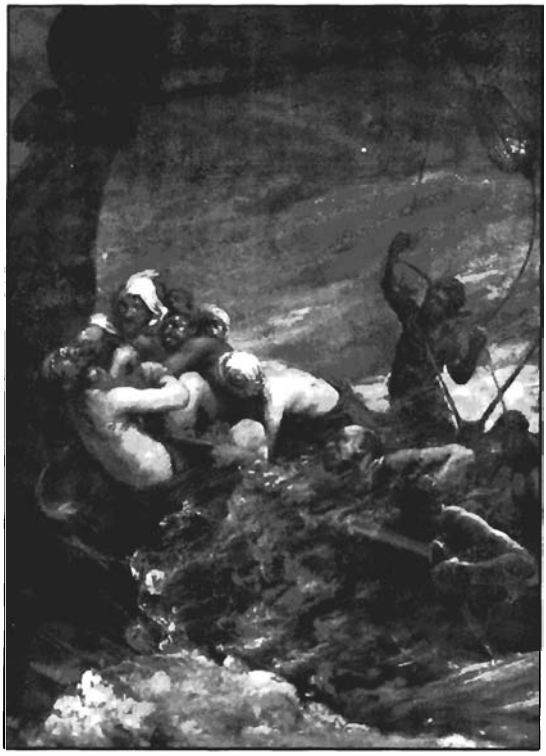
* The "wares" of Jonah 1:5 is literally "the tackling."

Meanwhile the storm was increasing in violence. The waves became more mountainous; the ship was violently tossed to and fro; it became in danger of sinking. In their dire need the sailors sought the assistance of Jonah. "What shall we do unto you that the sea might become calm?" they asked him.

"Take me up and cast me into the sea," answered Jonah, "for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you."

This meant death for Jonah, but he was prepared to give up his life to save the men on the ship. He did not know, at that time, that God would save him. He felt he was being punished because he had refused to preach to the Ninevites. But even if he lost his life, Jonah felt it was worthwhile, so long as Nineveh was destroyed and his people were saved.

But the sailors were shocked at his suggestion. They were frightened to treat the servant of such a powerful God in that way. Though the mast and tackling were gone, the large sailing boats of those times were fitted with long oars that the sailors could use in times of emergency. They decided to make one last attempt to bring the ship to safety, and bent their backs to the rowing. But the more they toiled, the greater became the storm. Their task was hopeless, and they could see that if they were to save their lives they must do as the prophet had instructed them.



They could only be saved through his death!

They prayed to Yahweh for forgiveness. They realised that their pagan gods could not help. They had been converted to the true worship, saved by the sacrifice of Jonah. But they did not want to be held accountable for his death. "We beseech Thee, O Yahweh, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay

not upon us innocent blood," they prayed, "for Thou, O Yahweh, hast done as it pleased Thee."

They then took up Jonah and cast him into the sea. As he disappeared from their sight, the wind ceased, the waves died down, there was a great calm. They had been saved by the sacrifice of the strange prophet in their midst.

Full of fear, they offered a sacrifice unto Yahweh, and vowed that they would serve Him.

How Jonah was Saved from Death

When Jonah sank beneath the stormy waters of the Mediterranean, he little realised the experience he was about to go through. He felt that his action had cut him off completely from God (v. 5). He sank down to the bottom of the ocean; he could see about him vast valleys in the depths of the sea; masses of seaweed were wrapped about him (Jonah 2:5); he felt that his lungs were bursting with the pressure of water; a terrible dizziness came over him; it seemed as though he must drown.

He could stand it no longer. On the point of death, he turned his thoughts towards the Temple in Jerusalem, as Yahweh had invited His people to do (1Kings 8:38), pleading the help of God in his distress, vowing that he would perform His will if only He would aid him (Jonah 2:9).

Help was not long in coming. God had prepared a great fish* which swallowed up Jonah. It swam towards the coast of Syria and vomited him out on the seashore.

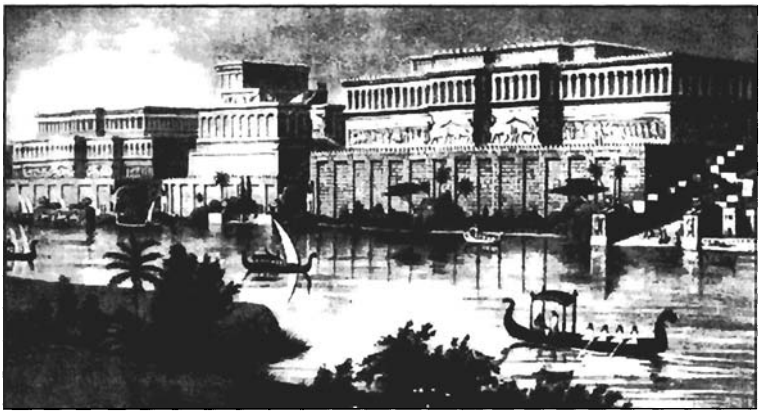
Full of gratitude, Jonah composed a beautiful Psalm of thanksgiving to God (Jonah 2), and made preparations to fulfil his vows.

Jonah Preaches to the Ninevites

Saved out of death, Jonah was told the second time to go and preach unto the Ninevites. This time he did not hesitate. Nineveh was a huge city, some 60 miles in circumference. Jonah entered the city a day's journey, or about 20 miles, and then, when he was in the very heart of it, he boldly proclaimed his message. "Within forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" he announced.

The appearance of the rough prophet, his harsh, uncompromising message, caused a sensation in that city. Nineveh had suffered some severe reverses; powerful enemies were threatening it; the once proud Assyrians had been humbled by difficulties they had experienced. They were in the frame of mind to listen to such preaching, for they

* The word in the Hebrew signifies a "sea monster" and not necessarily a whale. We are not concerned, therefore, with whether Jonah's experience is possible in normal circumstances (some claim it is; some claim it is not) for we are here in the presence of a miracle. God was overlooking all the circumstances, and guiding them according to His purpose.



were fearing some such calamity as the prophet warned.†

The prophet's preaching was harsh and bitter. He made no gentle appeal to the people. He did not plead with them. He hoped that they would reject his message, and that their city would be overwhelmed with destruction.

But this plain, forthright message was just what the people required. It made a great impression on them. They believed the prophet and sought to know what they should do to escape the threatened destruction. Even the king was impressed with the urgency of the times. A great day of national mourning was announced in which all were commanded to take part. The king laid aside his royal robes and came humbly dressed in sackcloth. The very animals were decorated in such a manner as to show that their owners respected the message of God. At the appointed time the people gathered together, and solemnly approached God in a great national prayer, beseeching Him to overlook their wickedness and save their city.

And God repented Him* of His purpose and saved the city.

Jonah's Disappointment

One man was bitterly disappointed at the success of the preaching: the Preacher himself. He had entered the city from the west, and in the course of proclaiming his message, had traversed the whole city.

† Archaeology reveals a complete blank of 51 years in Assyrian records between the reigns of Ramman-nirari II and Asshur-dan. It is suggested that Assyria was overtaken by some disaster, and the records were either lost by accident or destroyed by design. "It is probable that Assyria was overtaken by some unknown disaster... for at the beginning of this time we find the Assyrians taking tribute from the whole region of the Mediterranean, Judah alone excepted, whilst at the end of the blank period, we find that their power over this region had been lost, and that they were now engaged in a desperate struggle to regain it" (*Romance of Bible Chronology*, p. 40). This was the period of Jonah.

* The Bible word "repent" means to change one's purpose, not just to be sorry for something done. Yahweh's threat to destroy Nineveh was conditional: it would be destroyed if the people did not change their ways. They did so, and He turned from His intention.

going out by the east (Jonah 4:5). Outside the city he stopped to see the effect of his preaching on the people. When he saw them humbly repentant, pleading God for mercy, praying for forgiveness, he became angry.

"Oh, Yahweh," he prayed, "Was not this what I said when I was in my own country? Was it not for this reason that I fled unto Tarshish, knowing that Thou art a gracious God, merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of evil. Therefore, now, O Yahweh, take away my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!"

Thus Jonah explained why he had fled to Tarshish: it was because he feared that God would change from His purpose to destroy the city. For the prophet realised that there was no hope for his people so long as Nineveh remained. He knew that though Israel had grown powerful under Jeroboam, spiritually the people were as bad as ever, and time was needed to effect any lasting reformation.

The preservation of Nineveh left Jonah despondent. He knew what it meant; Assyria would rise to power to threaten Israel again. his life's work seemed completely in vain. Tired and dispirited he desired nothing but the rest of death.

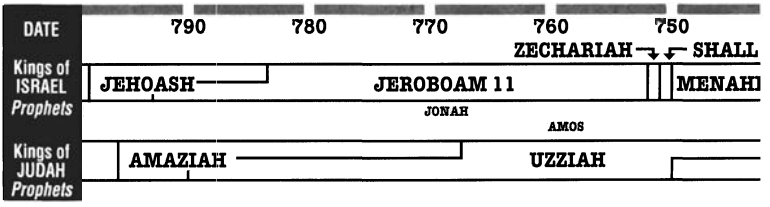
God Reveals His Purpose to the Prophet

On the eastern side of the city Jonah observed the reaction of the people to his preaching. The hot, bright sun of the east beat down upon him and made him feel faint. But overnight God provided him with some comfort. He caused a nice, shady tree, called "a gourd" to grow up and provide shelter for the prophet. Jonah was able to sit in the shadow of this tree, protected from the hot rays of the sun. He felt refreshed and grateful for the provision God had given him.

But the following night God caused a worm to gnaw at the gourd, so that it withered and died. The leaves fell off, and there was no shelter. Next day the sun shone stronger than ever. In addition, a dry, burning east wind from off the desert made conditions even worse; they became unbearable for the prophet.

The shade of the gourd no longer protected him.

The prophet felt faint and sick with the terrible heat, and wished himself to die. "It is better for me to die than to live!" he said.



The voice of God came to the prophet: "Do you well to be angry because of the gourd?"

As the prophet recalled the pleasure he had received from the shade of the tree God had provided, he replied: "I do well to be angry, even unto death!"

He would have saved the tree because it afforded him pleasure.

"You have pity for the gourd, for which you did not labour, nor make it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night," replied God. "Should I not spare Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than 600,000 ignorant people who do not know right from wrong?"

Thus Yahweh revealed unto Jonah the full extent of His great mercy. Up to that time this had not been appreciated by the prophet (1Pet. 1:10-12). The prophet had no answer to God's statement.

The Meaning of the Parable

The gourd grew up overnight; it afforded pleasant shade to Jonah; but to his disappointment it had been destroyed overnight. This taught the prophet an important truth. As God had caused the gourd to suddenly spring up and provide pleasant shade for the prophet, so under Jeroboam II, He had advanced the circumstances of Israel. This had been the cause of pleasure to the prophet. But as the gourd was destroyed overnight by a worm which gnawed its roots, so Israel would be overthrown by means that God provided if it did not change its ways. Even if Nineveh had been destroyed, God would have provided other means to that end.



Jonah had said he would have spared the gourd because it afforded him pleasure. In like manner, God was prepared to spare Nineveh. There were important reasons why God should do so. Firstly, there were some in Nineveh who would be

saved through the preaching of Jonah; secondly, it was necessary that Nineveh should be preserved in order that it should be the means whereby Israel would be punished for its wickedness as God intended (2Kings 18:9).

Jonah's view of the whole situation was limited to his own finite knowledge. He could only see that the preservation of Assyria would be at the expense of Israel, and therefore, being a lover of Israel, he preferred to see Nineveh perish.

But the time was to come when Jews were to learn to call no man "common or unclean" (Acts 10:28). God is "no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him" (Acts 10:34-35).

Jonah believed, in accordance with Truth, that salvation is of the Jews; any repentance on the part of the Ninevites could only be temporary and national, and therefore of no permanent value, whilst it would be to the hurt of Israel.

God's answer to that is that a true Jew "is one inwardly," whatever his nationality, and that Gentiles will be saved if they turn to Him in the way appointed (Rom. 2:28-29).

Jonah realised the spiritual weakness of Israel and feared for its future. But God revealed that it has ever been His intention that salvation should not be limited to Israel but should extend "to the end of the earth" (Isa. 49:6). As far as the righteous are concerned, whether Jew or Gentile, He had promised that "no weapon formed against them shall prosper" (Isa. 54:17). Jonah's fears, therefore, were groundless; whatever happened to the nation of Israel, the righteous therein would be preserved.

Like the Apostle Paul, Jonah preferred "to be accursed" for his brethren's sake if it meant preserving them, and thus sought to avoid the mission to Nineveh (Rom. 9:3). God used this attitude of the prophet to illustrate the work of His Son the Lord Jesus who also became accursed for his people (Gal. 3:13), so that this incident in the life of Jonah became a wonderful sign of God's mercy to all humanity — both Jew and Gentile.

Although Jonah realised that God's kingdom would be established in glory in the earth, in fulfilment of His covenant (Acts 26:6), he did not understand that the gospel had first to be preached to the Gentiles (Rom. 16:25-26).

God, however, had a purpose to be accomplished by Assyria that required the preservation of the nation for the time being. But as a just God, He could only tolerate them if they changed from the gross wickedness of which they had been guilty.

All this was taught to Jonah by the wonderful experience he had, and from the lessons thus taught, we can all benefit.

The Sign of Jonah Perhaps the most wonderful feature of the remarkable history of the prophet is found in the use that the Lord Jesus made of his miraculous experience. When the Pharisees came to the Lord demanding from him a sign that would demonstrate that he was the Messiah, or Christ, he told them: "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas!" (Mat. 16:1-4).

The Lord Jesus treated the book of Jonah as both parable and historical (cp. Luke 11:29-32; Matt. 12:38-42). He declared: "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

As we think over the events of Jonah's life we see what a complete sign it was of Christ's mission and future purpose.

Here are the facts:

1. Jonah was prepared to become a curse on behalf of his people by refusing the commission of Yahweh to preach to the Ninevites.	1. Jesus Christ became a curse on the behalf of his people to save them from their sins (Gal. 3:13).
2. Jonah was prepared to sacrifice himself for the sailors on the ship who were thus induced to turn from their pagan worship to serve Yahweh.	2. Jesus Christ offered himself in sacrifice to save his people, and in doing so turned Gentiles from paganism to serve the God of Israel (Isa. 49:6).
3. Jonah was overwhelmed by the ocean.	3. The Lord was overwhelmed with waves of affliction and a flood of wickedness (cp. Psa. 69:1-4).
4. Jonah descended into hell (Jonah 2:2).	4. So also did the Lord (Acts 2:31).
5. Jonah besought Yahweh to save him out of death (Jonah 2:7).	5. So also did the Lord (Heb. 5:7).
6. Jonah died a symbolic death and did not see corruption (Jonah 2:6).	6. The Lord died a literal death but did not see corruption (Acts 2:31).
7. Jonah experienced a symbolic resurrection when the sea monster spued him out.	7. The Lord experienced a literal resurrection from the place of death.
8. At the second time that Yahweh spake to him, Jonah went and preached repentance to the Ninevites (Jonah 3:1).	8. At the second coming of Christ, his teaching will be proclaimed to the ungodly.
9. The Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonah and turned to God.	9. The world will do likewise at the proclamation of the gospel at Christ's return (Isaiah 2:2-4).

The story of Jonah also teaches another wonderful fact. It shows that Jesus Christ has and will perform in perfection that which Israel was called upon to do. In fact, the Lord Jesus is called "Israel" in Isaiah 49:3, for Israel means "*Prince of God* or *Power*," and that is the position of authority that is held by the Lord.

See how the story of Jonah, and the work of the Lord illustrate what Yahweh will accomplish in His people, as set out in the following propositions:

1. Yahweh designed that Israel should become the medium of His glory and grace to all nations (Deut. 28:9-10; Jer. 13:11).

2. When they failed in this, He permitted them to be swallowed up of the nations (Jer. 51:34; Hos.8:8).

3. This political burial was to last for three prophetic days of 1,000 years each (see Hos. 6:2; 2Pet. 3:8), and as the nation of Israel went into captivity some 2,700 years ago (and in Jewish reckoning a part of a day is accounted as a day), that period of three millennia is now almost completed.

4. After their political resurrection and restoration, they will prove a blessing to the Gentiles, as Jonah did to the Ninevites (Zech. 8:13).

The Meaning of the Word "Jonah"

"Jonah" is the Hebrew word for "*dove*" or "*pigeon*." The dove was the only bird offered in sacrifice (Lev. 1:14). It was the offering of poverty, and at the birth of the Lord Jesus, his mother offered this bird in sacrifice (Luke 2:24). It was used for the cleansing of leprosy (Lev. 14:4, 22) which, in the Bible, is used as a symbol for sin.

The dove was a "clean" bird, but never eaten by Jews.

It was used by the Lord as the symbol to represent harmlessness (Mat. 10:16). It represented the principles of innocence and guilelessness. It approximated to the qualities of the lamb among bird life. It is used in the Bible to represent the multitudinous Christ (Song of Solomon 1:15; 2:14; 4:1, etc.). But like the sheep, the dove easily panicked, and then acted foolishly (Hos.7:11; Isa. 53:6).

Israel was represented as a dove (Isa. 60:8; Hos. 7:11; 11:11; Ps. 74:19).

If the word "Jonah" was translated into English, his book would read: THE BOOK OF THE DOVE.

When Jesus spoke of the "sign of Jonah," he spoke of the "sign of the Dove."

It is significant, that at the baptism of the Lord Jesus in the Jordan, when he came up out of the water, the heavens were opened unto him and "he saw the Spirit of God descending *like a dove*, and lighting upon him" (Mat. 3:16). Thus at the very inception of his ministry to the people God revealed that the sign of Jonah the prophet was about to be manifested in the midst of Jewry.

Thus, in dramatic parable, God set before Israel His purpose

through the prophet Jonah that would ultimately be achieved through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Many in Israel must have pondered the strange adventures of this man who had been through such a strange and remarkable adventure. Little did they realise that he was dramatising the mission of their Messiah and their nation.

How wonderful is the Word of God when we seek out its meaning.

Chapter Fourteen

HOW HOSEA WARNED THE PEOPLE OF COMING TROUBLE

There were few in Israel who heeded the warning message of Jonah. Israel was going through a period of prosperity and power, and the people were impatient of any suggestion that this could be cut short as quickly and as effectively as God destroyed the gourd with a worm.

Jeroboam's reign brought Israel to heights of prosperity never before attained by the divided kingdom. It created an atmosphere of ease and security dangerous to spiritual life. Israel wallowed in luxury, a luxury that destroyed all spiritual vigor, and called forth the anger of Yahweh in warning and rebuke through the voices of the prophets: Hosea and Amos (see Hos. 1:1; Amos 1:1).

Their stern, harsh language revealed the true state of the nation, and showed that the political stability of the times was a delusion and a snare. Hosea was a citizen of the northern kingdom, for he speaks of the land (Ch. 1:2), and "our king" (Ch. 7:5).

He viewed the life of the nation through the pure eyes of Yahweh, and reported what he saw. On all sides there was false swearing, lying, killing, stealing, immorality — a stream of wickedness and violence that he warned would swell into a mighty flood to submerge and destroy the nation (Hos. 4:1-2).

He warned the people not to view things from external appearances. From that aspect, the nation appeared religious. Holy days were observed, offerings were made, the smoke of sacrifices ascended, sabbaths were formally kept. But all this was an abomination to Yahweh. He hated it because the heart of the people was not in it (Hos. 2:11; Amos 5:21-23). The worship of Yahweh was intermixed with worldly, foreign worship, immoral rites were practised in the name of religion, at the groves, and on every high hill (Hos. 4:13; 7:4). Hosea condemned these things. His name means "salvation," and if the people had heeded his message they would have been saved.

But they did not heed, and so he warned that the time was at hand when the dynasty of Jehu would come to an end (Hos. 1:4), and Israel (the ten tribes of the north) would be scattered into all the world until the latter days when they would be gathered under David (*the Beloved* — Jesus Christ) their king (Hos. 3:5).

Thus this great prophet, as he went through the land warning the people of impending doom, also had a message of hope for the righteous among them. He gave them a vision of the time when God would restore Israel under the glorious Kingdom over which the Lord Jesus shall reign as king. Here is the wonderful message of hope with

which Hosea's prophecy concludes:

"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for Mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon. Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found. Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? For the ways of Yahweh are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein" (Hos. 14:4-9).

There were a few in Israel who mourned because of the prevailing wickedness of the nation, and who gained encouragement from the words of Hosea as he went throughout the land proclaiming his message.

Hosea commenced his work towards the end of Jeroboam's reign, and continued his labours until the days of Hezekiah. He must have died about the time the northern kingdom came to its end.

HOSEA'S PROPHECY (A SUMMARY)

Historical Background

He began his work in the days of Jeroboam (Ch. 1:1), when Israel was at the zenith of its power (2Kgs. 14), but lived to see its rapid downfall. Jonah preceded him, but he was a contemporary of Amos (Amos 1:1), and an older contemporary of Isaiah and Micah (Isa. 1:1; Mic. 1:1). During his ministry, the following kings reigned in Israel: ***Jeroboam,*** a reign of great prosperity; ***Zachariah*** (2Kgs. 15:8-11), reigned six months, murdered by Shallum; ***Shallum*** (2Kgs. 15:13), reigned one month, killed by Menahem; ***Menahem*** (2Kgs. 15:16-22), reigned ten years, was a puppet of Assyria, and ruled with unspeakable cruelty; ***Pekahiah*** (2Kgs. 15:23-26), reigned two years, killed by Pekah; ***Pekah*** (2Kgs. 15:27-31), reigned twenty years, slain by Hoshea; ***Hoshea*** (2Kgs. 17), reigned nine years, was taken into captivity by the Assyrians and the nation was destroyed.

Hosea's Ministry

Jeroboam and Uzziah were reigning contemporaneously during Hosea's ministry (Hos. 1:1), and they did so for fourteen years (2Kgs. 14:23; 15:1). Assuming Hosea commenced to prophesy within the last four years of Jeroboam's reign, and ceased about four years after Hezekiah came to power, it would represent a period of great violence and trouble which was as the death agony of

the nation. Gradually the people sank deeper and deeper into apostasy until the nation was completely overwhelmed.

His Theme

Is the guilt of Israel in general. He speaks of the disobedient, stubborn spirit of the people, of the heavy judgment that awaited them, their scattering among the nations, their ultimate conversion, their re-establishment in the Land of Promise when Christ shall reign on earth, their restoration to Yahweh's favour, and to a condition of the greatest national prosperity, and of high pre-eminence among the nations of the earth, under the rulership of Messiah (Ch. 3). Meanwhile, he warned: "Israel has cast off the thing that is good, his enemies shall pursue him" (Ch. 8:3).

His Style and Language

More than any of the other prophets, he writes in short sentences, darting suddenly from subject to subject. He abruptly turns from reproof to persuasion, from threatening to promise, from terror to hope. He often uses similes, and in the parable of the unfaithful wife he revealed to Israel what Yahweh thought of its unfaithfulness. With harsh, cutting words he denounces the rulers and the people, laying bare their iniquities, revealing their sins, calling upon them to repent whilst there was time. Though Israel was beyond redemption, he stated that there was still hope in Judah (Hos. 4:15; 11:12).

His name epitomised his message. He was Hosea Ben-Beeri, or *Salvation from the Well* (Ch. 1:1). His ministry was a well of life-giving water to Israel (cp. John 4:10), if only the people had taken heed.

It is a tragedy of history that Yahweh's mercy expressed through the ministry of the prophets went unheeded.

Amos the Shepherd Warns Israel

Down in the wild, hilly country of Tekoa, about six miles south of Bethlehem, a number of shepherds used to gather with their flocks. Among their number was Amos whose name means "*burden-bearer.*" He was very poor, and used to add to his earnings by gathering wild figs (Amos 1:1; 7:14). He was not a member of the companies of prophets that had been established by Samuel and Elisha (1Sam. 10:5; Amos 7:14), but a humble though earnest worshipper of Yahweh.

One day, as he was following the flock, the divine call came to him suddenly and unexpectedly, separating him from the rest of the herdsmen, calling upon him to go north to Samaria to testify against both high and low in that wicked nation (Ch. 7: 14-15).

The humble prophet walked from Tekoa to Israel and Samaria. He was used to the simplest of living, used to the hardships and sacrifices of a shepherd's existence, used to rough clothing, the plainest of foods, to outdoor living with the sheep as his companions and the sky as his roof.

As he crossed the border from Judah to Israel, he beheld with indignation the character of the people. He saw evidences of demoralising luxury and abandoned life in all directions. He gives a terrible picture of an apostate, immoral and decadent people:

"Lying on ivory beds, sprawling on couches;
Eating lambs from the flock, and calves from the stall;
Singing their wanton songs to harps such as David contrived;
Drinking wine by the bowful, soothed with fine lotions;
They feel no smart though their nation be broken" (Amos 6:4-6).

As he saw these things, the spirit of Yahweh came strongly upon him. In a series of warning messages against Damascus, Gaza, Tyre and others, he showed how the land would be invaded by a conqueror who would lay them all low, and Israel with them.

He spoke of terrible visitations from God: of earthquake (Amos 1:1), failure of crops, plagues of locusts (Ch. 4:6), drought and famine (Ch. 4:7-8). He told the people that these were acts of a merciful God Who was trying to awaken His people to the folly of their ways.

Though the kingdom was powerful, Amos showed that it was really weak. It was full of oppression (Ch. 2:6), immorality (v. 7), dominated by a callous materialism so that the wealthy flaunted their luxury in the faces of the poor (Ch. 3:12). They had their summer and winter houses, their palaces of ivory (Ch. 3:15). Haughty matrons in Israel called upon their husbands to make more money so that they might give themselves over to the most abandoned pleasures (Ch. 4:1). Bribery, oppression, general injustice were common (Ch. 5:12); dishonesty, hypocrisy, intemperance was rife. No one was exempt. The highest in the land to the lowest were guilty. The very seat of royal power was the seat of transgression (Ch. 7:13; 3:14; 4:4; 5:5).

As the prophet walked further north towards the capital he became filled with a fiery indignation against all that he saw and heard. The spirit of Yahweh found expression in bitter words of rebuke and warning to all who would listen. He told the people that they had experienced the goodness of God, and that brought grave responsibility. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore will I punish you for your iniquities," was the message he delivered them. He plainly told the people that the judgments of God would fall heavily upon them. As for the house of Jeroboam, Yahweh would rise against it with the sword (Ch. 7:9).

Amos was at Bethel when he proclaimed this message. Bethel was one of the headquarters where the false worship in the northern king-

THE BOOK OF AMOS

Historical Background

He prophesied in the days of Jeroboam and Uzziah (Ch. 1:1). These two kings reigned contemporaneously for about 14 years (2Kings 14:23; 15:1), and it was during that period that Amos was sent north on his mission. This was a period of national greatness for Israel, Syria and Edom were subdued, the borders were extended in all directions, and Israel appeared as an independent and powerful nation. But this period of political stability was a delusion and a snare. It hid the grim reality which was revealed by the words of the prophets of this period. Israel was living on borrowed time ; it was only the weakened state of Assyria and the ambitious leadership of Jeroboam and Uzziah that gave a temporary appearance of greatness. A little over 41years after Zechariah the son of Jeroboam ascended the throne, Israel was no more; it was destroyed by the victorious Assyrians.

Amos' Ministry

His name means "burden-bearer," and he was a shepherd. Thus he is typical of the "good shepherd" who also bears our burdens (John 10). Used to the rough life of the shepherd, he was contemptuous of the ease and luxury of Israel. A native of Judah, he was sent into the northern kingdom to perform an unpopular and thankless task.

His Theme

He proclaimed the judgment of Yahweh upon a disobedient people. Notice the definite declaration constantly repeated: "I will" (Ch. 1:3,4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, etc.). All the nations surrounding Israel rejoiced at the reverses that had fallen on Assyria, but the Assyrian would arise to punish and destroy all nations, and particularly guilty Israel and Judah whose sin was greater than that of others, because of their privileged position (Ch. 3:2). He spake of Yahweh's love for His people (Ch. 2:9-11), their ingratitude, the destruction that would fall upon their holy places (Ch. 3:14), and appealed to them to turn to God (Ch. 5:8). He showed how God would overthrow the nation and force it into captivity, but how that in the last days the "tabernacle of David would be set up 'over a united nation' as in the days of old." Then great prosperity would be the lot of the nation as they turned to God in truth. The message of the ultimate triumph of the tabernacle of David would not be very popular in the northern kingdom which had turned from the house of David! Meanwhile, he warned: "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!" (Ch. 4:12).

His Style

It is blunt and forthright, as may be expected from a shepherd suddenly impelled into the midst of luxury, ease and wickedness. He rapidly passes from subject to subject, dealing vigorously in turn with nation after nation that comes under the lash of his censure. His similes are beautifully expressed and vividly portray the sorrow of Deity at the impiety of His people (Ch. 2:13), the callous haughtiness of the wealthy matrons (Ch. 4:1), the sorrow that would overtake a people contemptuous of its God (Ch. 5:16-19). His words express the fiery indignation that the shepherd-prophet felt against a nation that so flagrantly abused the privileges it had received from God; they are tempered with the constant hope of the ultimate regeneration of the people in Messiah's times.

dom was set up. His words caused quite a stir among the people. They came to the ears of the false priest, Amaziah, who sent a message to King Jeroboam accusing Amos of sedition. "Amos has conspired against you among all the people," he declared. "The people will revolt if he is permitted to continue to speak in this way, for he is saying that Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel will be led away captive out of the land."

These words were not true. Amos had not said Jeroboam would be slain with the sword, but that his house would be destroyed by it. As far as we know, Jeroboam did not suffer a violent death.

Fiercely Amaziah opposed Amos. "Amos, thou seer, go flee to the land of Judah, and there eat bread and prophesy," he said, "but prophesy not again any more at Bethel; for it is the king's chapel and it is the king's court!"

However, the hatred and opposition of the cultured priest meant nothing to the rough shepherd prophet of Judah. "I was no prophet, nor the son of a prophet," he sternly replied. "I was an herdsman, and a gatherer of wild figs; and Yahweh took me as I followed the flock, and said unto me, 'Go, prophesy unto My people Israel; Now you hear the word of Yahweh, Amaziah! You have said, Do not prophesy here! Because you have rejected the words of Yahweh, your family shall suffer, Israel shall be overthrown, and you will die in dispersion, for Israel shall be taken into captivity!"

Amos' message was not all condemnation, however. He had a vision of hope that looked beyond the troubles of Israel to the time when Messiah shall rule, and Israel will be made great in the earth because they will, at last, turn to God. The shepherd-prophet's words end on this hopeful note: "I (God) will bring again the captivity of My people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall

also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith Yahweh thy God" (Amos 9:14-15).

The House of Jehu The might and glory of Jeroboam's reign gradually faded and became lost in obscurity. It lasted for 41 years, but was followed by a period of 22 years of confusion and anarchy, during which the violence of opposing factions caused the throne to remain vacant, and brought the fortunes of Israel to a low ebb.

Nothing is told us in the Bible of this time. All we know is that during the reign of Jeroboam, Israel reached a greatness in political power exceeding any other, whilst by the time Zechariah, his son, ascended the throne 22 years after the death of his father, it was weak and divided. Neighbouring nations that had feared the might of Jeroboam had since cast off the yoke of Israel and recovered their independence.

Meanwhile, the voices of the prophets Amos and Hosea had been raised, warning the people of the folly of their ways, issuing dark prophecies of dire impending trouble upon the House of Jehu. Amos had proclaimed the purpose of God, thus: "The high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."

Murder of Zechariah: Last King of Jehu's Dynasty At the close of this 22 years of obscurity, chaos and trouble*, Zachariah, the son of Jeroboam, ascended the throne of Israel. His name is significant: it means "*Yahweh hath Remembered.*" But what had Yahweh remembered? He remembered the wickedness of the House of Jehu, and the dire warning He had issued to its founder. Jehu had been told: "Because you have done well in executing that which is right in God's sight, your children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel" (2Kings 10:30). If the House of Jehu had proved righteous, its power would have continued even longer, but it had been rebellious against God. And now Zachariah, the fourth generation of this dynasty, had ascended the throne. The time had come that

* The Bible shows that there were periods of confusion in both the kingdoms of Israel and Judah about this time, during which both thrones were vacant. In the case of Judah, we learn that Amaziah was slain in 15th of Jeroboam (2Kings 14:17-22), and Uzziah, his successor, did not ascend the throne until 11 years later in the 27th of Jeroboam (2Kings 15:1). Thus for 11 years the throne of Judah was vacant. Then, for 15 years, Uzziah and Jeroboam reigned as contemporaries. Jeroboam reigned for 41years (2Kings 14:23), and thus died in the 15th year of Uzziah, but Zachariah did not commence to reign until 38th year of Uzziah, 22 years later (2Kings 15:8). This period of 22 years was a period of confusion and trouble during which the throne apparently lay vacant.

Yahweh should remember His warning.

Zachariah proved a weak king. He was incapable of guiding the people for good. The nation seethed with trouble and dissatisfaction. The king was far from popular with his subjects. A man called Shallum seized upon the prevailing conditions to advance his own ambitions. He organised a popular revolution against Zachariah. The king had arranged for a public assembly in which he would appear before the people. It was the opportunity for which Shallum had been waiting. When all the people were gathered together, and the king made his appearance in state, Shallum and his fellow conspirators acted. The king was publicly murdered, and Shallum proclaimed himself as successor.

His name means "*Retribution*," and he brought divine retribution upon the House of Jehu because of its iniquity. God had warned the royal house through Hosea His prophet: "I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel" (Hos. 1:4).

Shallum's treachery rebounded upon himself. He had gained the throne by bloodshed, and he lost it the same way. He had only reigned a month, when he was murdered by another man seeking power: Menahem, the son of Gadi.

Thus God used the schemes of wicked men to further His purpose. They were as "His sword" in executing His vengeance (Psa. 17:13). But that was not their intention; they were not working for Him, but were trying to oppose Him. Because their motives were evil in that work, He punished them as they deserved after they had accomplished His purpose (see Isa. 10:5-15).

Thus the House of Jehu ended in violence and tragedy, and with the rise of Menahem to power, Israel entered upon a period of complete apostasy from God that shortly afterwards brought about the complete destruction of the nation.

