

## ISRAEL'S OVERTHROW AND ITS CAUSE.

SEPT. 18. – 2 KINGS 17:9-18.

AS AMOS gave a prophecy of Israel's fall, and some of the reasons therefore, so this lesson, from the historical book of the Kings, gives a record of its fall and of its cause. In previous lessons we have seen Israel's tendency to copy after the nations round about. The people recognized the fact that God had chosen them to be his special and peculiar people: they were quite willing to be his special people, and to have his special favor, but seemingly they did not wish to be his *peculiar* people. They were willing to be peculiar, in the sense of having a peculiar deliverance from Egypt, and peculiar manifestations of divine favor, subduing their enemies before them, and bringing them into the land of promise, and dividing the land amongst them tribally, and so long as they were inspired with the hope that God would continue thus marvelously and miraculously to lead them, as his people, so long they were satisfied with their condition. They did not realize that the people who would be *fit* to be used of the Lord as his Kingdom, and through whom he would operate to bring the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant to all the families of the earth, must be not only peculiarly dealt with by divine Providence, but must also be peculiarly responsive to those providences.

When, therefore, they came to find that as God's people they were restricted and restrained, and that deviation from the divine program was punished, this *peculiarity*, this difference from the world, they did not relish. They rebelled against it; and in their desire for an excuse for rebellion they became skeptical, doubting that their experiences were in any sense or degree of or from the Lord. Their evil hearts of unbelief looked out upon the nations around them, and beheld greater national prosperity than their own amongst those who worshiped other gods, and for whom Jehovah had not declared special care. They came to feel that there were different gods, and that the God who had charge

of them as a people or nation, and who commanded their obedience, and who punished them for disobedience, must indeed be respected and placated; nevertheless, they hoped, evidently, to gain something of national greatness by the worship of the heathen deities, which they believed blessed other nations, with Jehovah, whose blessings upon their nation were thus far largely promises, yet to be fulfilled.

First they were dissatisfied with the divine arrangement respecting their government. True, they had liberty, more than the other nations surrounding them, but the very fact that this liberty was not common or general, but rather unusual, caused them to desire that they might have a king like the nations round about them. (1 Sam. 8:5.) God pointed out to them [R2359 : page 279] the advantages of their *peculiar* condition, under which he had placed them, yet nevertheless granted their request, and gave them kings, and with the kings, as we have seen, came in a spirit of "broadmindedness," or "public policy," on the part of King Solomon. And his desire to be popular with neighboring kings, and to be considered broadminded in a religious way, led him first to establish, for the benefit of the foreigners at his court, and for his foreign wives, the religious customs and ceremonies common to foreign nations. This, as we have seen, spread amongst the people, and led to a laxity of views respecting the worship of the true God: it led to the thought that everyone should have some kind of a religion, but that each should be at liberty to choose for himself, or to blend elements of the various religions. We saw how, for political reasons, Jeroboam (after the ten tribes had split off from Judah, the kingly tribe, and had chosen Jeroboam to be its king, and form a new dynasty) took advantage of the "liberal" religious views to thoroughly engraft upon the people a false worship. And this false worship is stated by the Lord in the lesson before us to have been the cause of Israel's further decline, and ultimate fall, as a nation.

The lesson states (vs. 9) that Israel favored the false religions, and practiced them secretly: by that we understand that they hypocritically built the altars of sacrifice to the false gods, and established the false

worship in all their cities and villages, under the pretence that they were doing this in the service of the true God. They were claiming, and probably to some extent deceiving themselves with the thought, that they were becoming more religious, more zealous, more holy, and that the evidences of this increase of religious zeal were to be found in these various altars of worship in every city, whereas formerly only the one city of Jerusalem had been the place set apart for divine worship, where the sinofferings and sacrifices for sin should be made, and to which they were to come at least once a year.

How this suggestion of Israel's secretly or hypocritically introducing a false worship corresponds with the tendency of the human heart to-day! How many there are to-day in Christendom who persuade themselves that in multiplying forms and ceremonies, in building of elegant churches, and in the engagement of finer choirs, and grander organs, and in the multiplying of meetings, and in publicly showing an outward display, they are increasing in godliness, holiness, and becoming more religious. How important that we should learn the lesson that "*obedience* is better than sacrifice" – that not by multiplying forms and ceremonies and emblems of holy things are we brought near to the Lord our God, but by taking strict heed unto his Word. Indeed, all these various efforts on the part of humanity to add to the divine plan are so many blemishes, so many injuries, so many things that are an offence to the Lord, instead of a thing of sweet odor. Moreover, every step taken contrary to the divine leading is a step away from the Lord, no matter how we may deceive ourselves or others with reference to the matter by sophistical arguments.

Israel's service of idols finds its counterpart at the present time, too, for altho we are not sunken to that degree of ignorance that would lead us to worship images, Christendom nevertheless is full of idols – every city, every village. The idols of the present time are known by different names, also, from those of olden times. One of the idols most worshiped to-day is "Popularity," another is "Wealth," another

"Fame," another "Self," another "Our Denomination." Few, very few indeed, have no other gods than the one true God.

As the Lord dealt with Israel, sending them repeated warnings and reproofs, through Elijah, Elisha, Amos and others, so to us he has spoken by a still higher authority, and in still more forceful language, "For God hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." Nevertheless, just as many who heard the prophets of old were careless, so to-day many are careless of the voice of the Son of God, and of his special messengers, the Apostles, and are failing to receive the blessing now due, failing to make their calling and election sure, as Israelites indeed, called under the New Covenant.

The particular seductions which hindered natural Israel from receiving the divine instructions are enumerated in verses 15-17. They sold themselves to do evil, that is to say, they loved the reward of unrighteousness, held out in the immediate present, more than they loved the reward of righteousness held out as a promise for the future. They sold themselves to do evil, in the sense of seeking and accepting the rewards of evil doing; as for instance, king Ahab was pleased to receive the vineyard of Naboth, altho it came to him as the result of dishonesty and murder. To him the Prophet Elijah said, "Thou hast sold thyself to do evil." He got temporarily the thing he desired, but it brought with it a curse which rested not only upon himself but upon his throne. And so with the humbler Israelites, there seems to have been a general desire to gratify self – self-will; and this self-gratification, with its unsatisfactory fruits, caused them the loss of divine favor. Further, they used divination and enchantments, we are told: they held intercourse with the fallen angels, operating through mediums, witches, wizards, necromancers, who affected to personate the dead, and to reveal the secrets of the future. **[R2359 : page 280]**

A disposition of wilfulness and dissatisfaction with the divine arrangements naturally leads people into these delusions – to seek to know of the future from some other quarter, to the intent that they

might *frustrate, if possible, the operations of divine Providence*, so as to the more thoroughly accomplish their own self-will. This same spirit is not lacking to-day, and in many instances is leading people in the same direction, to consult the same fallen angels, demons, who now, as then, attempt to personate the dead, through [R2360 : page 280] Spiritualist mediums. The result now, as then, is that those who are thus seeking in a wrong direction for light and leading, and because *discontented with divine Providence* and arrangements, are in danger of being led further and further away from the only true revelation, and the true prophets thereof.

In the fervency of their religious zeal, the Israelites, we are informed (vs. 17) caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire of Moloch – as sacrifices. Not that they were devoid of parental love, but that they esteemed it a part of duty to make such "religious sacrifices." And so to-day, many, misled by false teachings, and by mixtures of paganism with the divine revelation, have gotten to the place where they have similarly perverted ideas respecting the Lord and the sacrifice which would be pleasing to him. They have come to think of the Almighty as a ferocious deity, who would take pleasure in the everlasting torture of the children of men.

The modern Moloch, ignorantly worshiped by many professed spiritual Israelites to-day, is far more terrible than was the Moloch of olden times, for the children who were then burned did have an end of tortures, while, according to the theories now advocated by many in spiritual Israel, they worship a Moloch who will hopelessly torture his victims to all eternity. As such a worship of Moloch in olden times tended to degradation of the feelings and conduct – tended toward brutality and heartlessness, so the tendency of the modern Moloch worship is in the same direction. He whose idea of God is that of injustice and terrible ferocity cannot well have a life and feelings of his own directly the opposite of this. The tendency of all is to copy after the character and disposition of their ideal God. Hence, the fact that people of civilized lands are becoming more and more tender-

hearted and merciful can only be accounted for by supposing that the Moloch-teaching called "Orthodoxy" is losing its power – superstition and priest-craft are losing their power. And altho the Bible is losing its power also, with many, under the influence of Satanic "higher criticism," nevertheless, the spirit of its teachings – mercy, forgiveness, love – is recognized by its foes as well as by its friends.

The statement of verse 15 is particularly noteworthy, as indicating how Israel got into all these other extremes; *viz.*, (1) they rejected God's statutes – God's law, God's Word; (2) they lost sight of and neglected the covenant which he made with their fathers – they lost faith in the promises of God; (3) they lost sight of the testimony which he gave them respecting what would be the result of forsaking his counsel; (4) they followed vanity (foolishness, – they did not take the wise course) and became vain (foolish) and went after the heathen that were round them (copied after others, desiring to be not peculiar, but popular) concerning whom the Lord had charged them that they should not do like them.

Applying these various points to antitypical nominal Israel of to-day, we find that to the extent she has gone from the Lord, in theory and in practice, it has been very generally as the result of (1) not heeding the Lord's Word; (2) of being negligent of the promises which were set before spiritual Israel, the high calling, etc.; (3) of becoming foolish, in attempting to serve God, and to be his "peculiar people," and at the same time attempting to please and to copy the world, and to be popular therewith. The disposition to "do like them," to do like the world in general, is the seductive point at which the great Adversary would switch us off from being the Lord's peculiar people, Israelites indeed, heirs of the promises. Let us remember, in this connection, the Master's words, "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own, but now ye are not of the world, for I have chosen you out of the world; therefore the world hateth you." Our course in life, as new creatures in Christ Jesus, is to be along wholly different lines from the course of the world, and we must be prepared from the

outstart to know that the world's pathway and the pathway of elect Israel are different paths, as surely as they have different terminations.

The fall of the Ten Tribes of Israel for the above reasons reminds us of the fall of Papacy for similar reasons. As the faithful Israelites were sifted out and gathered into Judah, so the faithful of God's people were very generally gathered out of Papacy into Protestantism. But as Judah subsequently became similarly idolatrous and instituted Moloch worship, so Protestantism has failed of faithfulness to God and is to fall as Judah fell. The testing and sifting will go on to the full end of this age, for the Lord seeks individually the Israelites indeed and not by nations nor by denominations. Eventually he will gather in glory the "elect" out of all nations, peoples and tongues to be his glorious Israel – his holy nation, his peculiar people, his royal priesthood – to bless all the families of the earth as the true Seed of Abraham. – Gal. 3:16,29.

-----