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THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH MORE FAITHFUL THAN ISRAEL.

– OCT. 2. – 2 CHRON. 14:2-12. –

"Help us, O Lord our God: for we rest in thee." – 2 Chron. 14:11.

WITH this lesson commences a series of studies in the history of the Kingdom of Judah – the two-tribe kingdom, as distinguished from the ten-tribe kingdom, which, because of its greater area and numbers, held the name of Israel. In our studies of the course of the ten tribes, we intimated that the division of the kingdom had worked to the advantage of the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, known as the Kingdom of Judah, in that it had humbled them, drawn them nearer to the Lord, and made them more zealous of his worship, and more faithful in resisting idolatry of the surrounding nations: much of this, no doubt, resulted from the division of the empire, and the very wrong idolatrous course taken by the ten tribes.

The inspired record indicates that King Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, after he was deserted by the ten tribes, was considerably affected thereby, so that he and the people of Judah experienced a sort of religious reformation, as a result of which we are informed that not only the priests and Levites, but also the more religious of the people, Israelites indeed, deserted the ten-tribe kingdom, and allied and associated themselves with and made their home in Judah. "So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, strong, for three years: for three years they walked in the way of David and Solomon." – 2 Chron. 11:13-17.

Before long, however, Rehoboam, finding himself strong in the kingdom, became lax in respect to its religious conditions, so that he and the people became negligent of the divine law. (2 Chron. 12:1.) As a rebuke for this, and as a lesson, the Lord permitted the army of Egypt to come up against Judah, "because they had transgressed

against the Lord." The victories of the Egyptian army under Shishak brought Rehoboam and the rulers of the people to their senses, and caused them to seek unto the Lord for help. "The princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves, and they said, The Lord is righteous." Wherefore the Lord stayed the Egyptians, and did not allow them to overwhelm the kingdom, saying, "My wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem, by the hand of Shishak; nevertheless, they shall be his servants; that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms [R2362 : page 287] of the countries. So Shishak, king of Egypt, came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures [R2363 : page 287] from the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house; he took all: he carried away also the shields of gold which Solomon had made." Thus Rehoboam for a time was reduced to a subservient position. His kingdom had lost much of its wealth, accumulated under the reigns of Solomon and David, and all this was intended of the Lord to teach them an important lesson – that if the Lord let go of them they would be swallowed up of their enemies, and that the Lord, while demanding their obedience, always made that obedience profitable to them in their temporal welfare.

All this is very contrary to the Lord's present dealing with the house of sons – the Gospel Church. God's covenant with the twelve tribes of Israel was that he would give them earthly (temporal) blessings, as a reward for their faithfulness to him, and that he would give them temporal adversities as punishments for unfaithfulness to him. That was under the covenant made at Sinai. (See Lev. 26.) It is well that we should note that that covenant, with all of its arrangements, was confined to the natural seed of Abraham – to typical Israel (divided into Israel and Judah) and that a wholly different arrangement and covenant has been made by the Lord with the spiritual Israelites of this Gospel Age, under the terms of the New Covenant. The New Covenant does not promise earthly blessings, nor freedom from earthly tribulations, but it does promise to the faithful spiritual Israelite that all the tribulations permitted of the Lord shall work out some good, some blessing, as respects his new nature and his

preparation for future good things in the life to come, which God hath in reservation for them that love him. Natural Israel's promises were *all earthly*, while spiritual Israel's promises are *all heavenly*.

The lesson learned from Shishak's invasion seems to have profited Rehoboam and the people of Judah throughout the remainder of his reign of seventeen years, and it does not surprise us that his son and successor, Abijah, was a king who acknowledged the Lord. This is particularly shown in the war with the ten tribes of Israel, which speedily followed Abijah's succession to the throne of Judah. Addressing the ten tribes, drawn up in battle array, he sends them a message: "And now ye think to withstand the Kingdom of Jehovah, in the hands of the sons of David; and ye be a great multitude, and there are with you golden calves which Jereboam made you for gods. Have ye not cast out the priests of Jehovah, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and have made you priests after the manner of the nations of other lands?...But as for us, Jehovah is our God, and we have not forsaken him; and the priests which minister unto Jehovah are the sons of Aaron, and the Levites....And behold, God himself is with us for our Captain, and his priests, with sounding trumpets to cry alarm against you. O children of Israel, fight ye not against the Lord God of your fathers, for ye shall not prosper." – 2 Chron. 13:8-18.

Thus the three years reign of Abijah, altho a very short one, seems to have been a good reign in many respects. Nevertheless, his loyalty to the Lord did not lead him to make a thorough reformation, and to utterly put away the groves and high places devoted to improper worship, which began to be established in Solomon's day, and consequently he failed to have the Lord's approval, as it was subsequently pronounced upon his son, Asa. "Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God." "The heart of Asa was perfect all his days." – 2 Chron. 15:17.

Likewise to-day there are those who are on the Lord's side, and get a blessing as a result, who, nevertheless, fail to have the Lord's

hearty approval. It is not sufficient that we outwardly acknowledge the Lord to be our God: if we would have the fulness of the divine approval we must be zealous, not only in having the Lord on our side, but zealous also and faithful in serving his cause. Such faithfulness means activity in the cause of truth, and effort to bring others into full accord with the divine law.

Asa's course was approved more than that of his father, Abijah, because, as it is stated, *his heart was perfect*: he was not serving the Lord because it would be the most profitable course for himself and for the nation – not merely to obtain divine blessing – but he served from a heart that was in harmony with God, and which wished to accomplish the divine will. So a right heart made of Asa a great reformer: he destroyed the idols out of the land, and the groves and high altars, some of which were dedicated to false gods, and some to Jehovah, – the latter being, nevertheless, contrary to the divine instruction, which was that no other place of sacrifice should be recognized than the one – the Temple. Asa's fidelity to God laid him open to the charge of narrowness and bigotry on the part of those who at that day considered themselves broad-minded, liberal. Asa even destroyed the idol which his mother had set up; and because she was using her influence in favor of idolatry he removed from her the dignities of her position as a queen. All this showed a great loyalty to the Lord, and indicated that Asa's zeal for the Lord was a zeal from the heart, and not a mere caprice, nor from a selfish motive.

In harmony with the divine covenant, a great blessing rested upon Asa and upon his kingdom, and during the first ten years of absolute peace he fortified **[R2363 : page 288]** his country, and strengthened the kingdom. It was now twenty-five years since Shishak had his victory over Rehoboam, and carried away the gold and treasures of the kingdom: and now another Egyptian army came against Asa, probably intent upon getting more booty. But as God, according to his covenant with Israel, had prospered the Egyptians because of unfaithfulness on the part of Rehoboam and his people, so now the Lord, under the same

covenant, prospered Asa and his army, because of their faithfulness to him, and gave them a great victory over the Egyptians.

That Asa and the people might know assuredly that their victory was of the Lord, a prophet was sent to them, saying: "Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: The Lord is with you while ye be with him; and if ye seek him he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him he will forsake you....Be ye strong, therefore, and let not your hands be weak." This message, we are informed, encouraged Asa to still further prosecute the warfare he had been waging for some time against idols: the result was the utter abolishment of idols "out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken." More than this, as his zeal, and the zeal of his people increased, a great convention was held – a holiness convention – and "they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart, and with all their soul, resolving that whosoever should not seek the Lord God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman; and they swore unto the Lord [to this effect] with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets and with cornets, and all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire, and he was found of them; and the Lord gave them rest round about...and there was no more war unto the five and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa." – 2 Chron. 15:12-15,19.

Many Christian people, making the very serious mistake of not noticing the difference between the covenant which God made with fleshly Israel, and the different covenant and different regulations with spiritual Israel, have naturally fallen into the mistake of seeking to follow after the course of natural Israel, improperly. For instance, while it was perfectly right for Asa to interfere with the other religions in the land under his control, and to overthrow the false worship, and to burn the idols, and to destroy the altars and groves, it would be entirely wrong for any Christian king, president, governor, mayor, or one of any other position, to attempt to do similarly with the religious

arrangements of others of to-day, either in Christendom or in heathen lands. The duty of the spiritual Israelite is to worship the Lord according to the dictates of his own conscience, and to leave everybody else free to do the same – not molesting him, his institutions or arrangements in any manner whatever.

The only way in which he would be permitted to interfere with others would be by preaching, by making known to them the true God and the true worship; – and even in this he would have no privilege to intrude upon others contrary to their wishes, but may merely make known the good tidings to those who have "ears to hear" – to those willing to be taught. It was a wrong view of this matter, and a copying of Israel's doings, and of the things which God approved in Israel, which, misunderstood and misapplied, undoubtedly led to many of the religious excesses and violations of justice, as well as of love and mercy, during the Dark Ages. It was a failure to recognize the *different* law of this Gospel Age, over spiritual Israel, that led to much of the religious persecution of the dark ages, the burning of church edifices of so-called heretics, the burning of the heretics themselves, and of their Bibles, their persecution by Inquisitions, etc., etc. Christendom in general is outgrowing these false ideas, especially in Great Britain and the United States, where religious liberty for all denominations, all religions, and toleration for all creeds is recognized, demanded and enjoyed, in harmony with the enlightened judgment of their peoples. But those who thus recognize religious **[R2364 : page 288]** liberty as the proper thing now, very generally fail to see how or why anything else than religious liberty could have been proper at any other time. Such are inclined to look upon the Bible as not up to date – as countenancing bigotry, persecution, etc., and so long as they regard the matter from this standpoint they are in great danger of a growing agnosticism and infidelity. Let us understand clearly, therefore, why the course of Asa was approved of God, and blessed, while a similar course to-day, in any nation of Christendom, would be disapproved of the Lord, and of those who have his spirit.

The explanation of the difference is that Israel, as a nation, took upon itself a special covenant with God at Mount Sinai, by which every individual of that nation, including the children, became bounden nationally and individually, to God, to be his people; while God bound himself to them to be their God, their king, their protector. In the compact or covenant the people further guaranteed that they would neither have, nor make images of, nor worship any other god. That covenant constituted Israel God's peculiar people; they became his typical Kingdom; he was the recognized King amongst them, and so it is written, "Solomon sat on the *throne of the Lord*, as King, instead of David his father." (1 Chron. 29:23.) It was God's [R2364 : page 289] throne all along, and earthly representatives sat upon it. Hence, so long as that nation was preserved as a kingdom amongst the nations, it was bound by the will or law of its King, the Lord, which specifically demanded that all idolatry should be put away. And as we have previously seen, God separated this one nation from all the other nations of the earth, in order that he might make of them a typical nation or kingdom, foreshadowing in them the "holy nation" of spiritual Israelites which he is now gathering out of every kingdom, people, nation and tongue, and which shortly he will organize under Immanuel, to be the Kingdom of Heaven, and to rule and bless all the families of the earth. – 1 Pet. 2:9,10; Luke 12:32.

It would be wholly improper, now, for the people of the United States, for instance, to attempt to decide what is false worship and to abolish it; or to interfere in any manner or degree with absolute religious liberty; *because* the people of the United States are not God's Kingdom, as Israel was God's kingdom. God never did recognize any other nation than Israel (Amos 3:2); nor did he ever make covenants with other nations. On the contrary, the present governments of earth are all of them reckoned as "kingdoms of this world," in contradistinction to the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Anointed, – the "holy nation" now being prepared. While the heavenly Kingdom, the antitype of Israel's kingdom, is not yet set up in glory, as the holy nation, the peculiar people, the royal priesthood, nevertheless, in each

individual heart of this "elect" class this principle applies: each Israelite indeed has entered into a covenant with the Lord that he will have no other gods, and that he will render worship to no other, but will serve the Lord with all his heart, with all his mind, with all his being, with all his strength. And as the nation of Israel was obligated, by its covenant, to abolish all idols, so each individual Christian, of this new holy nation, is obligated, by his covenant, to destroy every idol from his heart, and to worship the Lord only, and in the beauty of holiness.

Altho Asa's heart was loyal to the Lord, his judgment was not always sound: for instance, when toward the close of his reign the king of Israel (the ten tribes) manifested some hostility, Asa sent a present of gold and silver to the King of Syria to obtain his aid against Israel. This ordinarily would be termed shrewd statesmanship, and would be a wise enough and proper enough course to take, as between nations – viz., the use of a little money as a peace agent, to thus avert war. Asa's statesmanship was successful, and did prevent the war and no doubt he congratulated himself on his wisdom; but it was an error on his part, as the Lord pointed out to him, through the Prophet Hanani, who after upbraiding Asa for his insufficiency of faith, and his forgetfulness of divine deliverances in the past, said to him, "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars." Asa even resented this criticism of his policy and thrust the prophet into prison. Thus we see that the statement that his heart was right before God does not at all signify that he was right in the sense that we would use the word in connection with the Lord's people of Spiritual Israel, during this Gospel Age. The expression that his heart was right evidently signifies merely that he honestly, conscientiously, sought to do the Lord's will, as the king of Judah, in the putting away of idolatry, and in the enforcement of the Mosaic law. The use of the same expression in respect to the Lord's consecrated people of this Gospel Age would

mean a great deal more – a full consecration in thought, and, so far as possible, of word and deed.

Much ado is made by some out of the statement that when Asa was subsequently diseased in his feet, "In his disease he sought not to the Lord but to the physicians. And Asa slept with his fathers." From this it is argued that it is a sin for anyone to make use of medical assistance, and that God's displeasure was manifested in Asa's death as a lesson to his people then and now. We will not attempt to controvert the claim that much of the medicine given by physicians does more harm than good, but we deny that there is any ground for using this case as a basis for such an argument as the foregoing suggested. We must not forget that God's covenant with fleshly Israel, made at Sinai, implied that he not only would be their Captain, and give them deliverance in the time of war, and that he would be their Law-Giver and King, to rule them for their best welfare, but also that observance of his laws would, under his providence, protect them from pestilences and the common diseases of life, so that, as expressed in one of the commandments, their "days should be long in the land" which the Lord their God gave them. This being the case, it is understood amongst scholars that the physicians here referred to were enchanters and magicians who affected to heal diseases, and who undoubtedly performed some cures, after the manner of clairvoyant physicians and Voodoo and black-art doctors of to-day, by Satanic power. Hence, altho it was a mistake on Asa's part to seek to the physicians of his day, and to neglect the divine covenant with his people, we see no intimation here that it would be wrong for mankind in general to make use of bona-fide medical skill and aid to-day.

We are permitted to select from nature's provisions **[R2364 : page 290]** such foods as we find to be most suited to our health and occupation; so also we may reasonably use anything from nature's laboratory which ourselves or others may be able to compound which would serve to correct or tone up our physical systems for greater usefulness in life. It is a mistake of some to suppose that God has

promised to keep spiritual Israel free from sickness, pain and trouble. On the contrary, we know that he permits the difficulties of life to afflict some of his most loyal children. What he does promise is that whatever he may permit to his people will work out something for their good, for their blessing, if they will be rightly exercised thereby, and seek for the blessings.

True, as we have frequently pointed out, those who live near to the Lord, and who are guided by his counsel respecting moderation in word, in thought, in act, are better prepared than others to withstand disease, or if attacked by disease are better prepared to recover from it, and on the whole we believe that the Lord's consecrated people enjoy much better health after than before giving themselves fully to the Lord, seeking to live according to his standard. But this, we take it, is generally the result of a better course of living, rather than the interposition of divine providence. Looking back to the days of the Apostles, we find that there is no record that the Lord or the Apostles ever healed the infirmities of the consecrated ones. Our Lord and also the Apostles healed the multitudes, but not the disciples. And the Apostle Paul, who sent handkerchiefs and napkins to the sick, far and near (Acts 19:12), sent no napkin or handkerchief or anointing oil to Timothy when he was sick. On the contrary, he advised the use of wine medicinally, and remarked that Timothy's ailment was not a trifling nor a temporary one, but rather a chronic disorder – "thine *often infirmities*." (1 Tim. 5:23.) We note the same thing in respect to Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:26) and Trophimas. (2 Tim. 4:20.) And the Apostle Paul had the same experience himself, and says, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my *infirmity*, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak then I am strong." (2 Cor. 12:7-10.) Our sicknesses and diseases from which we are wholly relieved by the value of the precious blood administered by the Good Physician are *soul*-sicknesses. We are now *justified* freely, made every whit

whole, and shall shortly be saved from (out of) death by him, through resurrection.
