

JEHOSHAPHAT'S GOOD REIGN.

– OCT. 9. – 2 CHRON. 17:1-10. –

"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

– Prov. 3:6.

JEHOSHAPHAT succeeded his father, Asa, as King of Judah, following well in his footsteps and "in the first ways of his father David," copying after David's earliest course of devotion to the Lord. He sought not unto Baalim (plural of Baal), the various forms of Baal-worship which, as we have seen, had become the worship of the ten tribes, as it was the worship also of the various nations about them. The spectacular features of Baal-worship and the licentious orgies connected therewith were evidently strong attractions to the depraved heart, and must therefore have exercised continually a seductive influence upon the people of Judah, who worshiped the unseen God, of whom no images or idols or sensual worship were permitted.

The result of this course on the part of the king and the kingdom was the divine blessing, according to the covenant, resulting in peace with the nations round about and prosperity in temporal things – "riches and honor in abundance." Rightly exercised by these blessings, the king's heart was "lifted up," not in pride and self-adulation, but with encouragement, as recognizing the fulfilment of the divine promises in the blessings enjoyed. This stimulated the king to still further energy in the Lord's service, and to a still further movement in the putting away of the "groves and high places." These had been prohibited and destroyed by his father Asa, but apparently some had still been preserved by the people in a kind of secret way, or had sprung up again, like thrifty weeds, so as to need continual attention and removal. We may suppose that these were not all high places and groves of Baal, but that some of them were attempted modifications or "improvements" in the worship of Jehovah. So amongst Christians, there are some who are continually seeking

innovations, variations from and additions to what the Lord instituted, in which they take pleasure, to the neglect of the Lord's wishes and regulations. It is hard for such to learn that "obedience is better than sacrifice," that the following of the Lord's will is far better and more acceptable in his sight than any amount of unauthorized denominational contrivance and "machinery." Every alteration of the divine arrangement must eventually prove injurious.

Perceiving the necessity of knowledge, as a basis for faith and obedience, the King Jehoshaphat very wisely instituted a general system of instruction throughout [R2365 : page 291] his kingdom, so that the people in general might become intimately acquainted with the Word of the Lord. Thus he was laying the ax of truth at the root of the evil tree of idolatry and disobedience, and preparing the people for a more hearty obedience to the demands of the Lord and the worship of the one God, Jehovah, with all their heart.

GOD'S WORD THE LAMP OF LIBERTY.

Christian experiences are in full accord with the course which Jehoshaphat followed. We find that in proportion as the Word of the Lord has free course amongst his people, in proportion as they are intimately acquainted with it – its instructions, its promises and its threatenings – in that proportion are they made free indeed, as respects earthly affairs, and in like proportion do they realize their obligations to the King of kings and Lord of lords. The "Dark Ages" was the period in which the Bible was hidden from the people, under a foreign language, and the Reformation movement started with and accompanied the translation of the Scriptures into the living languages of the people, and the progress of the Reformation and of civilization has kept pace with the study of the Scriptures. As the influence of the Lord's Word in Israel's day extended doubtless far beyond those who heard it taught, so likewise the influence of the Scriptures extends far beyond those who study the Scriptures: the spirit of the truth is a spirit of liberty and of civilization, even amongst

those who receive it not in the love of it, and who do not obey it, nor walk according to its spirit of love.

The question may arise, Why is it that with the greatly increased circulation of the Scriptures in civilized lands – millions of copies every year – that a still greater blessing does not go with it, to lead all mankind into the right ways of the Lord, into appreciation of his grace and truth, and to obedience to his requirements, instead of bringing, as we see it is bringing, and as the Scriptures forewarn us, a time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation? We answer that this can be accounted for in two ways: –

(1) The *study* of the Scriptures is handicapped by the many and variously conflicting false theories, human traditions, creeds, which, handed down from the Dark Ages, still fetter the minds of the vast majority, and are an agency in the Adversary's hands of blinding the eyes of many, hindering them from seeing the grand simplicity and beauty of the divine plan of the ages. Many who are helping along the circulation of the Scriptures, are likewise helping along the misunderstanding of them, and thus hindering the truth of the Lord's Word from having its full and designed effect. As our Lord said at the first advent, so it might be truly said now of the majority of religious teachers, "Ye do make void the law of God through your traditions" – the traditions of the ancients, the creeds and dogmas of the Dark Ages.

(2) Many of those who "seem to be religious" to the extent of attending religious meetings and having Bibles in their homes, are not religious at heart, but the contrary – are seeking not to know and to do the will of God, but selfishly seeking to do their own wills, and merely using the cloak of religion hypocritically to further their selfish schemes and purposes in life. Upon such the influence of the Bible, with the liberty which it inculcates, and the release of superstition which it gives, is really injurious in one sense of the word: release from the bondage of fear and superstition by the light of divine

truth reflected from those whom Christ has made free indeed, merely makes them the more free to do evil, and hardens their hearts. They use the liberty for an occasion of the flesh (along lines of selfishness); and it is along these lines, which are the prevailing ones, that the great time of trouble is approaching, in which liberty will run riot in those who have received from the divine Word merely the breaking of the shackles of superstition, and whose hearts are not thereby brought into captivity to the will of God in Christ.

The result of Jehoshaphat's course in increasing intelligence amongst the people led to a greater respect for Jehovah, not only amongst the people of Judah, but also amongst the nations surrounding. The nations in the vicinity of Palestine evidently considered that each nation had its own God; but apparently they knew that Israel's God, Jehovah, was a God of gods, the Almighty God, superior to their own. Some of the heathen kings even seemed to grasp the situation so clearly as to say to themselves, If we can cause the people of Israel to reject Jehovah, and to commit idolatry, then Jehovah, their God, who has hitherto given them marvelous success, will work against them, and we shall have victory over them in battle. We remember that this was exactly the course of Balak, who tempted Israel to sin in order that he might defeat them in battle. Thus it was that when the nations round about saw the growing devotion to Jehovah amongst the people of Judah, they correspondingly feared them, and the power of the Lord amongst them, as it is written, "The fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, so that they made no war with Jehoshaphat."

So it is often with the world in respect to spiritual Israel: the world recognizes in a general way that there is some truth in Christianity, and the worldly fear to do injury to those whom it recognizes as humble, faithful, true and obedient children of God. They know, and so does the great Adversary, Satan, "the god of this **[R2365 : page 292]** world," that greater is he that is on our part, than all that be against us. Hence his effort and that of his willing

servants is to lead us into temptations of pride and fond desire, selfishness, and thus to raise earth-born clouds between us and our Lord, as the beginnings of a course of evil.

EVIL COMPANIONSHIP BANEFUL.

The record of Jehoshaphat's reign seems to show only three serious mistakes, and the implication is that none of these was recognized by the Lord as being wholly intentional, but as being partly errors of judgment.

(1) His prosperity brought to him the friendship of the king of Israel, the weak and wicked Ahab, and with a desire to seem courteous, and possibly with the thought of re-uniting the separated ten tribes at some future time, Jehoshaphat accepted the friendly advances of Ahab, and visited him, with some of his troops, and out of courtesy, and with a desire to cement the friendship, he joined with Ahab in battle against the Syrians. And notwithstanding the fact that he suggested inquiry of one of the prophets of Jehovah what would be the Lord's will respecting the battle, yet when the one prophet of the Lord, Micaiah, foretold the disaster of the battle, in opposition to the testimony of four-hundred false prophets, Jehoshaphat nevertheless yielded, and went with Ahab to battle. In the defeat which followed the declaration of the Scriptures is that the Lord spared the life of Jehoshaphat, while Ahab was killed. On his return home the Lord sent to him one of the prophets, saying, "Shouldest [R2366 : page 292] thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord. Nevertheless, there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God." (2 Chron. 19:2,3,7.) That the lesson was not lost upon Jehoshaphat is evidenced by the fact that shortly after this, when appointing judges throughout Judah, he instructed them, saying, "Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man but for the Lord, who is with you in judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of Jehovah

be upon you; take heed and do it, for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts."

Jehoshaphat's desire to be upon friendly terms with Ahab, and the wrong course to which this led him, contains a lesson for spiritual Israelites who are seeking to follow the Lord's counsel. If it was improper for the king to "help the ungodly and to love them that hate the Lord" it would be still more improper for spiritual Israelites to follow such a course. How many have been led into disobedience and various improprieties by neglect of the admonition that "evil companionship corrupts good conduct!" Let us learn the lesson of keeping company with those that love the Lord, so that all of our special friends and companions, in business or in pleasure, shall, so far as we are able to control the matter, be the Lord's friends who honor him with their lips and serve him from the heart. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." – Psa. 1:1-3.

(2) Subsequently, Jehoshaphat joined in partnership with Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, in the construction of a fleet of vessels, to trade as Solomon had done, in the gold of Ophir; but the Lord sent a rebuke to him, through the prophet, saying, "Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah the Lord hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish." (2 Chron. 20:37.) Here is another lesson for the Lord's people not to choose for their associates those upon whom the Lord's blessing might not reasonably be expected, especially not to make such an alliance with those who are the *enemies* of the Lord.

(3) Jehoshaphat's third mistake was in arranging a marriage between his son and the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. No doubt his thought was to thus possibly re-unite, in the hands of his son, the divided kingdom. He seemed to forget that the Lord was abundantly able to re-unite the kingdom, if he saw fit, and that any union not of

the Lord's approval would be a disadvantageous one. The wickedness of the daughter of Jezebel, who subsequently became the queen of Judah, rivaled her mother's and is a further illustration of how baneful an influence may be exercised by an ambitious and bad woman, as we have many instances of how good an influence may be exercised by a humble and godly woman.

There is a lesson in this for all of the spiritual Israelites, that they should not seek advancement of the interests of their children through ungodly alliance, marriage. How many Christian parents allow the lessons of their own experience to go for naught and allow pride and ambition and selfishness to influence their counsel of their children so that they consent to and aid their marriage with the unconsecrated. How often these find subsequently that they have sown thorns in their pillows and in the pillows of their children. The difficulty is one or both of two: *(a)* Either they are not fully and faithfully consecrated to the Lord, and possessed of faith in his wisdom and power to guide their affairs, and hence attempt to shape their own affairs; or *(b)* they have not learned that the Lord's will by which we are to regulate our course in life on every subject, is found in his Word, and is to be followed implicitly, leaving [R2366 : page 293] all results to his providence, and trusting absolutely to his Wisdom, Love and Power. With the Lord's people the rule of life in everything should be to seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness, trusting that under divine providence all things will work together for good to those who love God.
