

THE DOWNWARD COURSE OF SIN.

– I KINGS 16:23-33. – JULY 31. –

Golden Text: – "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." – Prov. 14:34

APREVIOUS lesson showed us the start of the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam as a split-off from the king of Judah. We noted Jeroboam's changes of the religious customs, so as the more effectually to separate the two peoples and thus to establish himself in power. We notice that although at first the holy places he established and the images he set up were to represent the true God, nevertheless these symbols led the people more and more to the general idolatry of the surrounding heathen nations. Jeroboam reigned twenty-two years, and was succeeded by his son Nadab, who reigned only two years and was assassinated. The assassin, a general named Baasha, became king and reigned twenty-four years, continuing in the course of Jeroboam and warring with the king of Judah. He was succeeded by his son Elah, who in turn was assassinated, after two years' reign, by Zimri, one of his generals. The latter ruled for only a week and suicided, chagrined that he did not have the support of his army. A civil war ensued, as the result of which Omri came to the throne, as stated in the first verse of our lesson.

Omri was evidently a shrewd king, and unscrupulous respecting the divine will and the covenant obligations of the nation to Jehovah. He followed the course of Jeroboam in seeking to alienate the people from the true religion, and went still further in the matter of introducing idolatry and licentious practices connected therewith. He was, nevertheless, what would be termed a successful king from the worldly standpoint: he strengthened his hold upon the people by the building of a new capital city, Samaria, and was generally reputed amongst the outside nations as a powerful king. Had his executive

abilities been combined with reverence for the Lord and a consecration to do his will, Omri would have been a great ruler in the true sense of the word. But, instead, he led Israel into what our lesson terms displeasing "vanities" – vain religious ceremonies, that not only amounted to nothing good, but on the contrary were provocative of greater evils.

"HE SLEPT WITH HIS FATHERS."

Omri died after eight years' reign, the record being that "he slept with his fathers." This was the common form of expression in noting the death of all prominent people, whether good or bad. The Grecian theory, that when people die they become more alive than ever before, had not yet been introduced. The Israelites held the matter in its true and simple form – that death is a cessation of being, but that God had intimated a future re-living by a resurrection. In view of this hope those who died were figuratively spoken of as falling asleep – to await the resurrection morning. Abraham slept with his fathers as did Omri; and so the Scriptures teach that, when the awakening time shall come at the Second Advent of the Redeemer, all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man and shall come forth – those approved of God and those disapproved of him, the just and the unjust. Omri will evidently be amongst the latter class, of whom the Prophet declares that they shall come forth to "shame and lasting contempt." (Dan. 12:2.) Abraham as evidently belongs to the former class, and will be amongst those who will come forth unto the resurrection of life.

Abraham's trial is past, and we have the testimony that he pleased God. Omri, on the contrary, has the record that God was not pleased with him; but since Christ has redeemed all, Omri is to have a full and impartial knowledge of God's grace that he may thereby be tested and proven – whether, with a clear knowledge of the divine character and will, he will accept the opportunity and come into harmony with the Lord, and during the Millennial age will by obedience gain life

everlasting or whether he will, with full light, still choose an evil way. If so, "the end of that way is death" – the Second Death – extinction. The measure of Omri's knowledge of right and his perversion of that knowledge will proportionately measure disadvantage to him when he comes to trial during the Millennial age; and so it is with every human being. In proportion as right and conscience are obeyed, character for good is formed that some day will be helpful; and in proportion as sin and wilfulness in wrong doing have control, in that same proportion will character be undermined and the course of repentance and reformation in the future be difficult.

JEZEBEL AND HER HUSBAND.

Omri was succeeded in his kingdom by his son Ahab, the notorious. He also was an able man, skilled in state-craft and unscrupulous. He was helped along in the downward way of his father and predecessors by marrying the daughter of the king of Tyre, Jezebel, who in the Scriptures is noted as a desperate character, and in the book of Revelation is used to symbolize the great mystery of iniquity which persecuted spiritual Israel during the dark ages. Jezebel's father was a priest of Baal, who murdered his father, the king of Tyre, and then succeeded him. **[R3399 : page 218]** Thus Jezebel inherited in a natural way her perverse and idolatrous disposition, and in marrying her Ahab secured an able accomplice in evil. Indeed, the woman may be said to have been the prime mover and instigator of much of the evil later developed in that kingdom.

Ahab built a temple to Baal at Samaria, and established in it an altar where sacrificing was done. Four hundred and fifty priests of Baal attended the altar and services, clothed in special priestly vestments. Thus was the true Temple at Jerusalem, the true altar of God, and the true priesthood appointed of God in connection with the same, counterfeited by Ahab at the instigation of Jezebel. Similarly we have in nominal Spiritual Israel a great counterfeit system

misrepresenting the true on a gorgeous scale. We shall say more along this line in succeeding lessons.

The Golden Text is the pith of this lesson, illustrated on all the pages of history. The kingdoms of this world are not the kingdoms of our Lord – he is not their ruler; nevertheless the general principle expressed in the Golden Text prevails. In proportion as any nation conforms to principles of righteousness, justice, in that same proportion the nation is exalted; while in proportion to the prevalence of sin in any nation will be its tendency to downwardness in every respect.

When we look about us in the world and perceive that national policies are shaped by absolute selfishness, and that the rulers amongst men are very generally consecrated to doing their own wills so far as possible, we may well be astonished to see to what extent the influence of the righteous, the salt of the earth, exercises a preservative effect upon them. So far from wondering why the kings of earth are not better than they are, we are inclined to wonder that the laws and regulations of Christendom are anything like as good as they are. Undoubtedly there is in the great majority of the human family, at the bottom of their hearts, a respect for righteousness and truth and goodness; and were it not that this is overbalanced at the present time by prevalent selfishness and evil influence from every quarter, we might have hope for such reforms as many seem to expect, but which the Scriptures do not warrant us in expecting. Our hope, on the contrary, is that the Lord, according to promise, will establish his own Kingdom in power, superhuman power; that the great King Immanuel will subdue all things unto himself; that thus released from present bonds of selfishness, evil surroundings and Satanic deceptions, the great majority of mankind will choose righteousness – choose obedience to the Lord – that their experiences under the blessings of the Kingdom shall, in the majority of cases, fix character in accord with the principles of righteousness.

All of the Lord's people, in proportion as they see the downward and degrading influence of sin, become more and more strong in their determination to uphold righteousness in their every thought, word and act, and to throw their influence upon that side of every question in every appropriate manner. In so doing they will be seeking first, primarily, the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, and be in process of training for the great privileges of the Kingdom time, that they may be associated with the Lord in the bestowment of the blessings of that Millennial Kingdom upon all the families of the earth.

