

TALKS TO YOUNG PEOPLE.

# JEHOSHAPHAT

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# JEHOSHAPHAT.

## II CHRONICLES XVII.

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Jehoshaphat was the son of Asa, who was a man of many good points, and to read his story will be profitable, as I think in some measure Jehoshaphat's character was influenced by his father's.

It has for many years seemed to me that Jehoshaphat did not know how to be prosperous, for when he was, though zealous for God, yet he sought to do as he thought. He was not guided by the Word, and the result was disaster. But when in trouble he shines out as a very grand saint of God. The result was joy and safety. I trust we shall all be able to sing, "Christian, walk carefully, danger is near."

*Verse 1.* "And Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead, and strengthened himself against Israel."

The trouble Asa had with Baasha, king of Israel, had evidently made a deep impression on the mind of Jehoshaphat.

He evidently learnt that the trouble with apostate Israel was with the worst enemy his father had, but he, alas, adopted a wrong method. Had he continued in the right course, he would have done well, for verse nine of chapter fifteen says, "For they fell to him out of Israel in abundance when they saw the Lord his God was with him." Here was the true method for reconciliation, but his folly did not attract; it did the reverse. We can be sure that Baasha's plan to prevent the Israelites from rejoining Judah would have been ineffective against the power of God's manifest favour.

"So he strengthened himself against Israel." It is very sad to read this. God's people were divided, and were bitter enemies. We see the same thing in this church dispensation, and the same principle is our only hope to-day. Blessed God and Father, we do pray Thee that the Holy Ghost will so enable us to walk that Thy favour will be manifest, for we are sure that this is the only attractive power, and only so shall we exalt Christ.

*Verse 2.* "And he placed forces in all the fenced cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah, and in

the cities of Ephraim, which Asa his father had taken.”

Truly he armed the nation to the teeth. He knew (see Numbers i. 3) that as a nation God gave instructions that every man was to be a soldier, and that God's instructions were to be strong, just, and not to remove their neighbour's landmark. The same principle is true of the Church dispensation, for the whole church is to be built up with that which every joint supplieth.

It is interesting and instructive to note that he included in his care all that his father had regained from Israel.

Surely this has a lesson for us in our dispensation ; many of the great truths recovered at the Reformation and since, from the ecclesiastical darkness, are being lost sight of. The danger of this for the present day appears to me to be this, that as education (secular) advances and the franchise becomes extensive, the direction of the masses is against long hours of labour, and they also want as large a share of the good things of this life as they can get. As soon as they have a revolution they turn against religion as they term it, for they have the notion that it is this that has kept the

people down. Personally, as I read the history of the Greek and Roman churches, I can quite understand it. They cannot discriminate, and they confound them with those who delight themselves in being brethren. I personally think that all true Christians must sympathise with them, but the trouble is they turn to political agitators who, as a class, (note this word) are the greatest obstacles in attaining their desire. If they will keep their eyes open, they will see that generally Christians have comfortable homes. If they would allow us to instruct them, nothing would please us better.

*Verse 3.* "And the Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto the Baalim."

This is a verse that can do with much meditation and prayer. Can we imagine anything more desirable on earth than to know the Lord is with us? It is this that makes the thought of heaven so delightful here ; it is what we may have here on earth. By the way it is put, it suggests to me that God is not only with us, but in agreement with us. Here, in this verse, we have two things that are required to bring so desirable a

result. The first is, how he walked. It is most important that like Enoch of old we must please God by the way we walk and keep free from idolatry. I have pointed out more than once that idolatry takes four directions. Personally I think the coarsest kind is in connection with images.

*Verse 4.* “ But sought to the God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel.”

This is wise. With all his care, God and the knowledge of Him was his chief quest, and he proved his love by keeping His commandments, and not following after the doings of Israel. This I think means that he not only did God’s commandments, but avoided the things that were opposed to His will.

*Verse 5.* “ Therefore the Lord stablished the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents : and he had riches and honour in abundance.”

We are told that if we honour God He will honour us. This was so very speedily with Jehoshaphat, His kingdom was established. By reading I gather that a new king received valuable presents, and this was so here in abund-

ance. Jehoshaphat was so encouraged that we read *verse 6*. “ And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord : and furthermore he took away the high places, and the Asherim (groves) out of Judah.”

Here I think the expression means that as he proceeded with his reforms he was so encouraged that furthermore he took away the high places and the Asherim, places used for idolatry.

*Verse 7*. “ Also in the third year of his reign he sent his *princes*, even Ben-hail, and Obadiah, and Zechariah, and Nethaneel and Micaiah to teach in the cities of Judah.”

*Verse 8*. . “ And with them the *Levites*, even Shemaiah, and Nethaniah, and Zebadiah, and Asahel and Shemiramoth and Jehonathan, and Adonijah and Tobiah and Tob-adonijah the Levites, and with them Elishama and Jehoram, the *priests*.”

It is most instructive to note the progress of this successful man. He certainly believed in safety first. He armed the nation to the teeth, and he certainly found safety in this. It is ever true that, as the Lord said, a strong man armed keepeth his goods and warns.

He is secure unless one that is better armed comes up against him.

Coming to present times, we saw how Britain and France came out of the war. Germany and Italy were not much. England started to dis-arm, foolishly thinking others would do the same. These two countries did the reverse, and are the fear of the world till even Russia and Japan would be careful how they offended them. In the League about fifty nations banded together for peace. They were afraid to carry out their plans to preserve it, because they feared war, and because they knew of these factors.

Jehoshaphat knew other things that must go with strength. He knew he must be strong, but the nation must be just. Note that he begins with self, wise man ! He knew of God's hatred of idolatry, so he puts that down. His next step is to make his people right, so he employs Princes, Levites and Priests in this work of education. The names mentioned are the best known and likely to inspire confidence.

*Verse 9.* " And they taught in Judah, having the book of the law of the Lord with them, and they went about through-

out all the cities of Judah and taught among the people.”

I have no doubt that they taught the useful things that people go to school to learn, but it is the Bible that is emphasised here. This is far above everything put together, for importance. We are now to have revealed to us the effect of such conduct.

*Verse 10.* “ And the fear of the Lord fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat.”

Man is really afraid of God, let them say what they will. We have only to exercise observation, to be satisfied on this point. These people saw two things ; one was, that he trusted in God, and that he made himself strong. This will ever produce a like result. This was indeed a tiny kingdom, yet he will be respected by the strongest nation, because to molest him would not pay them. I have noticed that people are very careful not to interfere with a little dog if they know he is likely to bite. These other lands will not only not interfere but will spend a bit to secure Jehoshaphat's good will.

*Verse 11.* “ And some of the Philis-

tines brought Jehoshaphat presents, and silver for tribute ; the Arabians also brought him flocks, seven thousand and seven hundred rams, and seven thousand and seven hundred he-goats."

Jehoshaphat appears to have been well satisfied with the result of his labours. We read :

*Verse 12.* " And Jehoshaphat waxed great exceedingly," that is, he still kept on adding. He did not rest if there was anything else to be done. " And he built in Judah castles and cities of store."

*Verse 13.* " And he had many works in the cities of Judah ; and men of war, mighty men of valour, in Jerusalem."

Castles were necessary but useless unless there were store-cities. Joseph, when he knew that famine was coming, prepared store-cities. After our experience of four years war, it will be folly not to have stores of all that is needful, for by what Scripture teaches, and by the conduct of other nations, we are clearly shewn what a bad thing it will be for the unprepared.

Verse 13 tells me of industrial works for war, and men fully trained and

equipped. Verses 14-19 shew us that even a small country can become formidable.

*Verses 14-19.* “ And this was the numbering of them according to their fathers’ houses : of Judah the captains of thousands ; Adnah the captain, and with him mighty men of valour three hundred thousand ; and next to him Jehohanan the captain, and with him two hundred and four score thousand ; and next to him Amasiah the son of Zichri, who willingly offered himself unto the Lord ; and with him two hundred thousand mighty men of valour ; and of Benjamin Eliada a mighty man of valour, and with him two hundred thousand armed with bow and shield ; and next to him Jehozabad, and with him an hundred and fourscore thousand ready prepared for war. These were they that waited on the king *beside* those whom the king put in the fenced cities throughout all Judah.”

These were large numbers for so small a nation, but as I read carefully I see that all were trained as instructed (Numbers i. 3). The standing army appears to be one hundred and four score thousand ready prepared for war

(verse 18) in addition to those in garrison (verse 19).

### *Chapter XVIII.*

*Verse 1.* “ Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance, and he joined affinity with Ahab.”

Here we have another sample of the danger of prosperity. We become a desirable person to know even by those who differ from us on the one thing that matters, namely, our attitude towards God. Any thing that interferes with our walk with God may become a snare to us. We see this constantly in the Word of God, and it is confirmed by our experience if we but keep our eyes open as we proceed through life. Things that God has given us to bless us do just the very reverse, unless we can enjoy them with God.

We are told that Jehoshaphat joined affinity with Ahab. We ask how he did this. I cannot but think that the marriage of his son Jehoram to Ahab's daughter must have been one of those political marriages which have been through the ages. We ask why he did this. It is so opposite to the mind of God to mix the seed. I think probably it came from two directions at least.

I can imagine that as he strengthened himself against Israel he, being a godly man, must have often thought what a sad thing it is to think that God's people should fight each other, and thought that friendly relations would be probably a more sure defence than the provision he had made.

The second direction probably was that if this marriage took place, their eldest son might come in for both kingdoms, and so bring about the union of both nations. If he did, it shews, after the plain way God shewed Asa how the union could come about (II Chron. xvi. 9), how our own ideas may blind us. The marriage did come off, but, alas, Jehoram killed his brothers and would have destroyed Judah by his folly, but the grace of God for David's sake still preserved it, though greatly impaired.

*Verse 2.* "And after certain years (third, see I Kings xxii. 2) he went down to Ahab to Samaria. And Ahab killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people that were with him, and moved him to go up with him to Ramoth-Gilead."

Now the families had been united

by the marriage of their children. It brings perhaps some advantages, certainly it has snares. I have had a long life of church fellowship, and for over thirty years I have been the responsible brother in an assembly of two hundred and fifty (about) in fellowship. I am quite aware that though all are professed Christians, there is a great difference in their outlook and habits of life, so that even within the assembly there is a need for caution and much prayer. But for a Christian to marry one that is not, is to invite trouble and disaster. What dreadful stories I could tell about this. It will be well to read with this chapter I Kings xxii.

Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, " Know ye that Ramoth-Gilead is ours, and we be still and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria? " It would have been interesting reading, had they captured Ramoth-Gilead, to see how much Ahab would agree to let Jehoshaphat have.

Our verse says Ahab moved Jehoshaphat to go up against him. I have considered this, and think that he would bring before Jehoshaphat that Ramoth-Gilead was a refuge city. I think that

he would know how dear such a city would be to such a man as Jehoshaphat. The trouble was that it was Ahab, not God, that moved Jehoshaphat.

This brings before us a large and serious question, and it meets us in all we do. We often talk glibly about a God-led life. Let us see to it that we are God-led in our life in things both great and small, for the happy result of our life depends on this.

*Verse 3.* “And Ahab king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat king of Judah, Wilt thou go with me to Ramoth-Gilead? And he answered him, I am as thou art, and my people as thy people, and we will be with thee in the war.” In I Kings xxii. he adds, “and my horses as thy horses.”

When he told Ahab, “I am as thou art,” he probably meant nothing more than that he would be one with him in the war, but God does not take so light a view as we do, as we shall see. My experience is that God has made these two to differ. But the man who will give his son in marriage to a daughter of Ahab, probably for the view of bringing about the union of the countries, would think that this would be a splendid

example to both nations. There is also this lesson for us, that if a Christian is disposed to go to a feast with the ungodly (I Cor. x. 27) he will need much wisdom in order to preserve a proper balance as to what is due to his host and to his position as a Christian. We shall see that Jehoshaphat lost his balance. It would be good practice to consider the various reasons or ways that in our own lives this may come about.

*Verse 4.* “And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Inquire, I pray thee at the word of the Lord to-day.”

This verse is full of suggestion. We may make several conjectures, but one fact is at least clear. In all the preparations he may have made in going to Samaria he did not in his retinue include a prophet of the Lord. Yet it must have been clear to Jehoshaphat, in the various problems that might arise, that unless he could have the advice of a well-known prophet of the Lord, he ran a great risk, probably as much as a Christian who goes anywhere without his Bible and the conscious presence of the other Paraclete that the Lord sent to us in His absence.

*Verse 5.* “Then the king of Israel

gathered the prophets together, four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall we go to Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for God shall deliver it into the hand of the king."

Here we see Jehoshaphat being entertained in royal fashion, made much of by Ahab and Israel, both seated on thrones. He now sees himself waiting for the decisions of an idolatrous priesthood.

We can see the same sort of thing all over the world. I have often thought of some of the Governors of dependencies having all sorts of faiths or no faith. I can understand that a man cannot be said to be a man unless he has liberty of conscience, but to be mixed up with it is another thing. Ahab wants Ramoth-Gilead. He consults these. He knows this sort are time-servers, just seeking to use their influence with their people to serve their king.

*Verse 6.* "But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here besides a prophet of the Lord, that we might inquire of him."

Jehoshaphat now asks that WE might consult a prophet of the Lord. He does not discredit the other prophets, but his

conscience will not let him be at peace. This is a lesson for us, boys and girls. Let us ever remember that unless we are at peace with God we have missed our way. As Jehoshaphat is to find, to involve his country in war unless directed by the Lord, is a most serious matter. Truth can never compromise.

*Verse 7.* “And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord ; but I hate him ; for he never prophesieth good concerning me but always evil : the same is Micaiah the son of Imla.”

“The king said, There is YET one man.” Ahab and Jezebel have been seeking to put down all worshippers of Jehovah. His wife, because she was given to idolatry ; Ahab, because his fear was that his people would go over to Judah. He could not forget the experience of his father, Baasha, xvi. 11.

We know that God had seven thousand in Israel, some hiding, some doing service as the Lord directed. This one was still available.

“But I hate him.” My dear reader, never let us think that we shall please everybody. The Lord knows this, so

He makes our path simple. We have to please but one, that is Himself. We know that our beloved Lord was despised and rejected of men, and I am sure we should not feel surprised when we find His followers served the same way. All that we should really want is to live quietly, peaceably and in humility, thinking it our greatest privilege to walk in His steps. Alas ! I think that Jehoshaphat wanted Ahab to think that he was liberal-minded. He however did make a protest. " Let not the king say so."

*Verse 8.* " Then the king of Israel called an officer and said, Fetch quickly Micaiah the son of Imla.

*Verse 9.* Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah sat each on his throne, arrayed in their robes ; and they sat in an open place, at the entrance of the gate of Samaria ; and all the prophets prophesied before them."

As Jehoshaphat was a guest we can be sure that all the arrangements were from Ahab's side. If we ponder over this show, we cannot fail to see how impressive it must have been. There are some shows that are arranged just to please the people ; others are like this one, designed to further a purpose

that they may have in their mind. As we read history and ponder over those things we have seen, we see that we must be careful where shows are concerned. We must take care that they do not influence our decisions, else we shall find ourselves the dupes of designing people.

Now let us seek to enter into the grandeur of this scene. The way had been prepared by feasting and social functions. Now God is to be consulted as to whether they are to go up against Ramoth-Gilead. The best spot is chosen, an open place outside the gate of the city. There are four hundred prophets. Most ecclesiastics are past masters in the art of the use of robes and millinery. Added to these, are the great crowds of people, on the outside of the circle. It must have been a fine display.

*Verse 10.* “ And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made him horns of iron, and said, Thus saith the Lord, With these shalt thou push the Syrians until they be consumed.

*Verse 11.* And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, ‘ Go up to Ramoth-Gilead, and prosper ; for the Lord

shall deliver it into the hand of the king.' ”

Zedekiah uses a figurative method to make a greater impression on the minds of the people. This method has been used by the Lord's prophets in the Word. It only goes to shew that none of these shows which are figures are necessarily true. The effect upon the people can be imagined, when they see four hundred prophets whom they regard with varying measures of awe, all of one mind. Though these were able to deceive others, personally I cannot think that they deceived themselves. They were out to please their king. As Jehoshaphat was well armed, and probably Ahab was well prepared also, they would think they were safe. Should it have meant a real victory, how they would have made capital out of this incident to enhance their reputation as prophets !

*Verse 12.* “ And the messenger that went to call Micaiah spake to him, saying, Behold the words of the prophets declare good to the king with one mouth ; let thy words therefore, I pray thee, be like one of theirs, and speak thou good.” Here we see that the messenger appealed

to the will of the prophet and requested that he might give a good word. This is clearly an evidence that the man that lives under the sun can never see the view-point of the man that lives above it. Their ideas as to what is a good word are as far asunder as the poles.

*Verse 13.* “ And Micaiah said, As the Lord liveth, what my God saith, that will I speak.”

Dear reader, from time to time we get this very important sentence, “ As the Lord liveth.” Gehazi used it. It had no meaning to him, but what a meaning it had to Elisha, Micaiah, etc. ! What meaning has it to us ? It is the very basis on which our business with God rests. What happiness is based upon it ! I have heard men say that they can see no room for a personal God. Will you bow your head with me, dear reader, as we ask the Lord that in His grace the Holy Ghost will give us the desire of our heart, that we may never lose the consciousness of His presence.

We know then how safe and happy we shall be.

The Lord did not want four hundred prophets. As I write I cannot recollect that the Lord ever wanted more than

one. One has ever been enough for the Lord. However we see that Micaiah's reply shewed that he recognised the importance of being guided by God, and of being loyal to Him. This other sort who have no knowledge of God are led by various motives. I was told a few days ago that one of our leading ecclesiastics had said : " What is this new birth ; I know nothing about it." I replied that that has been our opinion for years. We are quite sure that Micaiah knew all about it, as we generally say, for potentially the whole estate is ours.

*Verse 14.* " And when he was come to the king the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall I forbear ? And he said, Go ye up and prosper ; and they shall be delivered into your hand."

Here is a plain question and a plain answer. Yet we note that the king did not believe him, neither did Micaiah intend him to. It is clear that he spoke derisively. We have to take account of the manner in which a thing is said, and sometimes of when and where.

*Verse 15.* " And the king said to him, How many times shall I adjure

thee that thou speak unto me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord ? ”

The king knew that Micaiah treated him with contempt. We can see the reason as we read on. “ How many times ? ” There must have been a fairly large experience between Ahab and Micaiah, to make the king say this.

*Verse 16.* “ And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd : and the Lord said, These have no master ; let them return every man to his house in peace.”

Here Ahab is plainly told that he will be killed in battle. I think that we shall see that Ahab really believed Micaiah. We see here a trait in the human mind that needs our careful attention. He wanted to go up to Ramoth-Gilead and prosper, as foretold by Zedekiah and the prophets. This brings us to the crucial question : What is it we want or desire ? The Lord knows this, hence His invitation is to the man that is thirsty. “ Ho, everyone that is thirsty, come, etc.” Isaiah lv. The other sort think that they can avoid the evil. It is pleasant to note that the

Lord thought of the army and told the people to go home in peace.

*Verse 17.* “ And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil? ”

How frequently do we see that men confound the message with the messenger.

*Verse 18.* “ And he said, Therefore hear ye the word of the Lord : I saw the Lord sitting upon His throne, and all the host of heaven standing on His right hand and on His left.”

They have asked for a word from the Lord. Now they are invited to hear it. A word from the Lord carries with it the thought of obedience, for we cannot, from God's point of view, be said to hear unless we obey. We can be sure that God's word always contains something more than sound.

This verse appears to me to add another side to Job chapter one, verse six. See my note on that verse. The verse is : “ Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them.” I gained the thought that in heaven, though kept busy, we have the

privilege from time to time of giving an account of our work, which indeed will be a great pleasure, for there will be no fault or failure there. Here we get an increased delight ; God consults us beforehand on the work, and we note that we do not lose our individuality.

The following, to many, may appear to be strange reading, especially to boys and girls. The learned will possibly think they can answer any question that may arise in their minds.

*Verse 19.* “ And the Lord said, Who shall entice Ahab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead ? And one spake saying after this manner, and another saying after that manner.

*Verse 20.* And there came forth a spirit and stood before the Lord, and said, I will entice him ; and the Lord said unto him, Wherewith ?

*Verse 21.* And he said, I will go forth and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And He said, Thou shalt entice him, and shall prevail also ; go forth and do so.

*Verse 22.* Now therefore behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of these thy prophets ; and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee.”

This was indeed an unpalatable message, and needs a man of a bold spirit to deliver it. Micaiah proved himself to be such. We must remember that God has two sides to His will. If I may so put it, there is the decisive side and the permissive side. The one is certain and absolute, the other is contingent. Take this one here. Had they accepted the prophet's message and acted upon it, we should probably have got some such expression as that the Lord repented of the evil He proposed to do. I was taken to task by one concerning the same subject from another part of the Word, and also by another who could not approve of my explanation. I said, Do you believe that God is Almighty? "Yes," was the reply. I said, "In our country, if a man sees a murder done, and it was clear that he could have stopped it, he would share the same fate as the one that did it."

God takes the responsibility for the good and the evil deeds. I will quote one or two scriptures that confirm this. "And I will give over the Egyptians into the hand of a cruel lord ; and a fierce king shall rule over them, saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts." Isaiah xix. 4 (R.V.).

“ If the prophet be deceived and speaketh a word, I the Lord have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him and will destroy him from the midst of My people Israel ” (Ezek. xiv. 9, R.V.).

There are other scriptures with like words.

Do not in your mind run away from this. If you will take a book of Scripture and study a verse at a time, you will gradually see how grand it is to get to know that a thrice-holy God is working all things for good to them that love Him. After reading a few books so, then the book of Revelation, quietly read and meditated upon, will fully satisfy heart and mind. It is a grand thing, dear reader, to know that we have a just God and a Saviour. One that is too wise to err. Every creature can be sure of justice. The repentant sinner can, through the Cross of Christ, be equally sure that God in His grace will abundantly pardon, and bestow upon him every blessing.

*Verse 23.* “ Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near and smote Micaiah upon the cheek, and said, ‘ Which way

went the spirit of the Lord from me to speak unto thee ? ' ' "

We can quite understand that to a natural man whose one aim appears to be to become a person of consequence, and who had attained to the high position of leader of five hundred prophets, and had just had a brain-wave, as some would say, and found that the horns of iron had been most successful, the effect was apparent. When he is called a lying prophet in this public way by a despised prophet of the Lord, who probably had no powerful friends, it is no wonder he smote Micaiah on the cheek and, taunting him, asked : Which way went the spirit of the Lord to speak to thee ?

*Verse 24.* " And Micaiah said, Behold, thou shalt see on that day when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself " (M. or from chamber to chamber).

After the total defeat, the people as usual turn to wreak their vengeance on someone. They cannot turn to the king ; he is dead. They turn to Zedekiah the chief of the prophets, as he certainly used all his influence to stir the king up. So, like many a man who wants to be somebody, when trouble comes, he

becomes the object of the wrath of the people. Apparently the crowd clamoured for his blood and he had to flee into an inner chamber to hide himself, and, as the margin suggests, in his terror he kept shifting his hiding-place. The probability is that he was caught by the mob and killed.

*Verse 25.* “ And the king of Israel said, Take ye Micaiah and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king’s son ;

*Verse 26.* And say, Thus saith the king : Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with the bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I return in peace.”

The king, who is now thoroughly angry, cannot see his plans interfered with by a man that never spake a good word for him. He orders him back to the prison with the command that his existence there may be made yet more intolerable.

Note Micaiah’s grand reply.

*Verse 27.* “ And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me.”

This attitude of Micaiah’s, one would think, would be enough to check Ahab

in his plans. The prophet is quite prepared to accept the consequences of his message.

Two godly men were there. Micaiah who was smitten on the cheek and sent back to prison. (His treatment reminds us of the treatment of our beloved Lord.)

The other, who was making affinity with the ungodly, finds himself in an unpleasant position, and cannot help himself. He has to see a faithful believer treated thus.

Poor Jehoshaphat. Grand Micaiah.

*Verse 28.* “ So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, went up to Ramoth-Gilead.” I cannot see that either can say that they were God-led, but note as we read the way the Lord deals with both.

*Verse 29.* “ And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself and go into the battle ; but put thou on thy robes. So the king of Israel disguised himself ; and they went into the battle.”

This king of Israel is worth considering, for he is a useful beacon-light. He was a man labouring under two factors at least which clouded his vision. If ever there was a man that needed to buy of

the Lord, the ointment that he may see, Ahab was this man.

He had a determined and idolatrous wife ; he had not the strength of character to oppose her. He was all for self, and, alas, he had not the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom.

And yet we see him taking precautions, such as the superstitious and ungodly do. His selfishness would not allow him to take risks, so he disguised himself. Could anything be more ridiculous ? Yet this is the sort of folly that leads us on to secret sins. Let us ponder over this, till we learn thoroughly that all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Heb. iv. 13. He did not wish Jehoshaphat to protect himself, but said, " But put thou on thy robes."

*Verse 30.* " Now the king of Syria had commanded the captains of his chariots, saying, Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel."

This must have been unwelcome news to Ahab. I remember hearing during the war that the Kaiser said that he could afford to lose a million men.

However, whether this was actually true or not, he certainly was glad to give up his throne and flee for his life.

In the present time, air warfare spreads the danger over all the nation ; kings, leaders, statesmen, are more on a level, so that this, if it is to be among the all things that work together for good, may probably mean the ruin of both sides. All a nation will have to do is to “ Be strong ” and ruin follows both.

Many plans are being made, but the only effective one that can answer, in the absence of Christ, is to accept His word and let Christ rule our lives.

*Verse 31.* “ And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat that they said, It is the king of Israel. Therefore they turned about to fight against him, but Jehoshaphat cried out and the Lord helped him ; and God moved them to depart from him.”

I cannot think that a godly man like Jehoshaphat could in his heart think very much of Ahab. In his mind I think he would despise him. Jehoshaphat was carried away by his politics. I have noticed some believers who are so inclined that way, that they often get

into strange company and they have to assume the attitude of friendship that they cannot really enjoy. But even under this peculiar circumstance, it must have been anything but a pleasant remembrance for Jehoshaphat in after times to remember the experience of this visit. We see a similar sad story in varying spheres. It is always a sad result whether it is for political fame, advance in business, social benefit or anything else, if we are led away from the full fellowship of the saints which surely is our heritage. One of the greatest privileges we have down here is that He has placed us among His people. We note that Jehoshaphat cried out and the Lord helped him, and God moved them to depart from him. He is Lord to His people, God to the world. Jehoshaphat knew who helped him. The Syrians knew not who moved them.

One of the most absurd theories I think I ever came across from the learned, is the theory of the Jehovistic and Elohist records. It begins at Genesis and runs right through the Bible. A reading of the Bible, and separating these, is enough, I think, to make any person that has been born

from above agree with what I say.

However, these things teach us the value of the provision the Lord made for us when He was about to leave this scene. He promised not to leave us orphans, and kept His word by sending another Paraclete, even the Holy Ghost, to teach and guide us, so that we can cease from man, whoever he may be.

*Verse 32.* “ And it came to pass when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him.”

And thus we are told how the Lord moved them to depart. It was all very simple. They simply were led to see that it was not the king of Israel, and then followed the order of the king of Syria.

*Verse 33.* “ And a certain man drew his bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness, wherefore he said to the driver of the chariot, Turn thine hand and carry me out of the host, for I am sore wounded.

*Verse 34.* And the battle increased that day ; howbeit the king of Israel stayed himself up in his chariot against the Syrians until the evening ; and about

the time of the going down of the sun he died."

A certain man, probably one of the rank, drew a bow at a venture. (M. states Hebrew says, in his simplicity.) He only knew he was shooting at the enemy. The prophecy of Micaiah compels me to believe that God guided that arrow. Ahab's first thought was to retire to be attended to, but he could see the evil effect his retiring would have. Men seem to be strong when being led ; they are probably a rabble else. Seeing how desperately he was wounded, it would naturally follow that some would assist him in his courageous act. Possibly immediate attention may have saved his life. Probably, like Saul, he realised that defeat was a worse fate than death. Howbeit the words of the prophecy came true.

### *Chapter XIX.*

*Verse 1.* " And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem."

This verse, which states that he returned in peace, suggests two or three thoughts. The one I favour is this : I feel that the incident and treatment

of Micaiah must have made a man like Jehoshaphat realise that he had been entangled in an unholy business, and though, to him it ended in defeat, the consciousness that God had preserved him and most of his army, for the Syrians only fought against Israel's king, made him feel that he was well out of it, especially as he must have been at peace with God. Otherwise there could have been no peace.

*Verse 2.* "And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to King Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the wicked, and love them that hate the Lord? For this thing wrath is upon thee from before the Lord."

This is plain language, but it is the truth, and I am sure, dear reader, that at whatever age we may be, it is very important that we face it. It is clear that when God sanctified us (*i.e.*, separated us) that He meant it. It is equally clear that if we combine in partnership, the Lord regards it as helping the wicked, and loving them that hate the Lord. Further, He does not spare us. We, however, must remember the balance of truth, as the apostle Paul tells us in

I Cor. v. 10. "For then must ye needs go out of the world."

Three of the four employers I had were anything but Christians. I had no desire but to give them honest service, and I believe God blessed it. But had I become partners with them, I should soon have known that I displeased the Lord. It was the same with my fellow-workers. We worked and talked happily together. The moment the time of labour was finished, I went to my own company. I never remember tarrying with them. So I could go on. The Lord will surely guide us, but He will not put us in the position to lord it over anyone else. I cannot think the Lord ever transfers His lordship to anyone.

*Verse 3.* "Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast put away the Asheroth out of the land, and hast set thine heart to seek God."

What a pleasure it is to read a verse like this! Even when putting any of His children under discipline, which in itself yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness, if we are exercised thereby whilst doing this, He is sensible of any good feature that may be found in us.

As to public testimony, He remembered

that Jehoshaphat had put away the Asheroth out of the land. As to his private character, He knew that Jehoshaphat had set his heart to seek Him.

Our hearts can go up to Him in praise for the way He deals with us.

*Verse 4.* “ And Jehoshaphat dwelt at Jerusalem : and he went out again among his people, from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim, and brought them back unto the Lord, the God of their fathers.”

He now sees the folly of his ways, and takes the only sensible course. Punishment for wrongdoing must have its place, but it all amounts to little. If restitution is not made, the offender must put right the damage he has done. It is an inducement to go to prison if one still retains a comfortable income after it.

*Verse 5.* “ And he set judges in the land throughout all the fenced cities of Judah, city by city.”

*Verse 6.* “ And said to the judges, Consider what ye do ; for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord ; and He is with you in the judgment.”

We can be confident that for the political welfare of a country the quality

of its judges must be of the first importance, not only as regards their ability, but what is of perhaps more importance, their integrity. Their private lives should be beyond reproach. So important is this that we have special instructions for them.

Jehoshaphat had a bitter experience. To avoid trouble we have, (a) "To consider what ye do." I have noticed that most persons have a tendency to laxity in this respect; it need not necessarily be unlawful; there should be no difference of opinion on this point, but to search out a matter needs great care and labour. It must ever be kept in mind that a judge in a subordinate capacity is not doing it for man. Kings, rulers, etc., are in a like position; they do it for God. If this is realised and acted upon, guidance is promised.

*Verse 7.* "Now therefore let the fear of the Lord 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."

The exhortation to one in this capacity is to be guided (b) by "the fear of the Lord." I am quite of the opinion that if a judge is not guided by the fear of

the Lord, I personally cannot trust him ; and if he does not say what the unjust judge said, the fact will be more or less manifest, neither will he regard man. It is essential that we take heed and do it. It is good to agree to this, but it is essential that we take heed and do it. We are reminded (c) that “ there is no respect of persons with God.” All classes, rich, poor, learned or simple, all have an equal right, and God is incapable of iniquity. (d) “ Nor the taking of gifts.” The tendency of gifts is to blind the eyes, so we must be very cautious. If my friends or relatives make me a present, I am glad proudly to show it. I have noticed at weddings, how delighted they are to invite the friends to see the gifts. I think caution is very much required, if we do not desire it to be known.

*Verse 8.* “ Moreover in Jerusalem did Jehoshaphat set of the Levites, and the priests, and of the heads of the fathers’ houses of Israel, for the judgment of the Lord, and for controversies. And they returned to Jerusalem.”

Here we see that all classes that had authority among the people are also brought in to help in the work of seeing that every man had justice secured to

him. The Levites would, I think, act as the lawyers. The priests were brought in, so also were men who were the heads of the fathers' houses. It is very interesting, whenever a trial is brought before such, to note the attitude of each of these sections, see Jer. xxvi. 11.

At the trial of our Lord, having received their instructions, they returned to Jerusalem.

*Verse 9.* "And he charged them saying, Thus shall ye do in the fear of the Lord, faithfully, and with a perfect heart."

We see here how important it was in Jehoshaphat's eyes to have the fear of the Lord before them (compare with verse 7) in order that whatever judgement they gave, it should be faithfully done, and further, that their motives should be sincere, so that no fault could be found.

*Verse 10.* "And whensoever any controversy shall come to you from your brethren that dwell in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and judgments, ye shall warn them that they be not guilty before the Lord, and so wrath come upon you and upon your brethren : this do and ye shall not be guilty."

“ Between blood and blood.” In Deut. xvii. 8 this appears to mean that they must be careful to judge so as to decide if it is murder or manslaughter. Further, this care is to extend to all cases, in order that the judgement may be correct. Further, note that those who are being tried are to be warned, and the nature of the guilt explained, or they themselves are likely to be guilty. This reminds me in principle of Ezek. xxxiii. 1-9.

*Verse 11.* “ And behold, Amariah the chief priest is over you in all the matters of the Lord ; and Zebadiah, the son of Ishmael, the ruler of the house of Judah, in all the king’s matters, also the Levites shall be officers before you.”

Naturally the chief priest would preside in all spiritual matters, whereas the tribal prince was to preside in civil or “ the king’s matters.” “ The Levites shall be officers.” This word “ officers ” means those such as scribes and notaries.

Here a well-planned system of government is arranged ; to make all this effective they have to “ deal courageously,” or, as the margin says in Hebrew, “ Be strong and do.”

And the prayer of the writer is, “ And the Lord be with the good.” To which

we readers can say Amen, especially for our own days.

### *Chapter XX.*

*Verse 1.* “ And it came to pass after this that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them some of the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle.”

“ After this.” Probably after the defeat of Israel and Judah they became emboldened to see what they could do. This is an important point to remember. We may repent and become at peace with God, but sin grows a crop after its own kind. A vicious life frequently impairs our physical constitution, which may take years to repair and may perhaps never wholly repair.

“ And some of the Ammonites.” This reads rather strange. I think it probably means some Ammonites settled in Mount Seir who became a different kingdom from the Ammonites. These united against Jehoshaphat, who appears to have saved much of his wealth and, alas, these appear to have wanted it.

*Verse 2.* “ Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from

beyond the sea from Syria : and behold, they be in Hazazon-tamar (the same is Engedi).”

This great host had turned round the Dead Sea and got on to its West side, arriving at Engedi, which is about thirty miles south-east of Jerusalem.

*Verse 3.* “ And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek unto the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast through all Judah.”

Now Jehoshaphat is afraid, and, like David, his ancestor, he can now say, “ What time I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee ” (Ps. lvi. 3).

Hostility of the world should always drive us to God, not unite ourselves with it. What a joy it gives us, does it not, dear reader, to note that notwithstanding what had recently happened, though again in trouble, this time God did not refuse to help. The Lord’s behaviour to us is marvellous, and we shall see how true are the Saviour’s words, “ Seek and ye shall find ” (Matthew vii. 7). Let us note how Jehoshaphat sought. The first thing that he did was to proclaim a fast through all Judah. The purpose of a true fast is to bring ourselves into a right attitude of mind, and this was for the

whole nation. In Matt. vi. 18 we are told that we should not be seen of men to fast. It will be well for us to compare public with personal fasting. I think it will be seen that personal fasting, if made public, will tend to fill us with hypocrisy. Nor must we forget what the fast is that God hath chosen. See Isaiah lviii. 6.

*Verse 4.* “ And Judah gathered themselves together, to seek help of the Lord : even out of all the cities of Judah.”

It must indeed have been an impressive sight, to see probably all that was possible gathered together to wait upon the Lord. What an inspiration this must have been ! How it must have led them to see that their hope was in God !

*Verse 5.* “ And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord, before the new court.”

We should read carefully II Chron. vi. and carefully study Solomon's prayer at the dedication of this house, and we shall see how Jehoshaphat led the people along in the spirit of the prayer.

*Verse 6.* “ And he said, O Lord, the God of our fathers, art not Thou God in heaven ? Art Thou not ruler over all

the kingdoms of the nations? and in Thine hand is power and might, so that none is able to withstand Thee? ”

Here Jehoshaphat reminds God of *what He is*. Three factors he reminds him of. The first is that He is not only their God, but of their fathers also. This means that God has given them this privilege through the centuries, so that they could sing, as we do, “ O God our help in ages past, Our hope for years to come.” This, of course, gives us the habit of counting on God, especially as we remember his second point, namely, that He is God in heaven. The archangels and every other kind of spiritual being are His servants, and ready to do His will. Thirdly, whatever the nations may think, God also over-rules them, and whatever plans they may make, God can easily blow upon them, for in His hand is power and might, so that none is able to withstand Him.

It is clear that just as Job would not take his troubles from the Sabeans, the Chaldeans, or the fire or the wind, neither could they take theirs from the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir. It is indeed a grand thing, dear reader, when we can say, “ In the centre

of the circle of the will of God I stand ; there can be no second causes ; all must come from His dear hand.”

Here Jehoshaphat reminds God of *what He did*.

*Verse 7.* “ Didst not Thou, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before Thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham Thy friend for ever ? ”

This is indeed a very powerful argument. Their present position is a consequence of God's kindness to Abraham. To me it is clear that he means to present his case in such a way, if I may put it so, that God has no alternative but to answer his prayer favourably. I believe God loves this method of reply.

As an illustration, my father died when I was ten, and the incident happened some time before : I had a brother two years younger than I. He must have been a very charming little fellow ; the neighbours and others gave him presents. I never remember receiving any, except from my parents on my birthday. If we quarrelled, as children will, I was always wrong, and dealt with. We quarrelled over a humming-top. He used his usual

argument of crying as loudly as possible. In came mother, and said, "Now, Harry, let Wally have that top." I replied, "But, mother, father gave me that top for my birthday." "Wally, let Harry have that top ; it is his." Mother could make no other reply to such an argument.

This is why I have always, since I accepted Christ as my Saviour, delighted in sovereign grace, for though God is wisdom, yet I have never been able to see that He could ever find a reason for taking away anything that He has given in sovereign grace.

Further, it is important to note that the land was not given to the children of Israel, but to the seed of Abraham, "Thy friend for ever." It is true they got it, but the reason why they got it was that they were the seed of God's friend, Abraham. What a wonderful Old Testament picture this is of our position in Christ. Every gift that we have is because we are of Christ. It reminds us of a song we sing :

"What will He not bestow,  
Who freely gave the mighty Gift  
unbought,  
Unmerited, unheeded, and unsought,  
What will He not bestow ? "

He now proceeds to remind God of *what they did*.

*Verse 8.* “ And they dwelt therein, and have built Thee a sanctuary therein for Thy name, saying : ”

Here Jehoshaphat reminds God what they did in response to His kindness toward His people in giving the land. Their minds go back to Solomon, when, in obedience to his father David, he built this temple for the worship of Jehovah.

*Verse 9.* “ If evil come upon us, the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house and before Thee (for Thy name is in this house), and cry unto Thee in our affliction, and Thou wilt hear and save.”

Here they are doing the very thing which (under the grace of God) the house was built for. As we read carefully the wonderful prayer of Solomon, we marvel at his faith, but at present I cannot see that he ever attained to the faith of Jehoshaphat. “ Thou wilt hear and save.” I have pondered over the secret of it, and how it was that he could attain to this position. The clue, I think, is in chapter vii. 1. “ Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire

came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt-offering and the sacrifices : and the glory of the Lord filled the house."

His faith was very bold ; he would see that as the glory filled the house it would mean that God would fulfil the obligations that He had accepted. It is well to keep in mind, as we read, that the enemy is gradually drawing nearer, and that no other effort is being made to meet them. He now, having laid the foundation so solidly, proceeds to show God, by historical facts, the responsibilities that He had accepted. He says :

*Verse 10.* " And now behold, the children of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom Thou wouldst not let Israel invade when they came out of Egypt, but they turned aside from them and destroyed them not."

The word " behold " I have for many years regarded as an Anglo-Saxon word which means to hold with a look. So practically he said to God, " Take a steadfast look, and Thou wilt see the result of turning Israel away and not allowing Israel to invade them. If Thou hadst permitted this, we should not have had this trouble." He now says again :

*Verse 11.* “ Behold, how they reward us, to come and cast us out of Thy possession, which Thou hast given us to inherit.”

Ingratitude is a sin that God abhors, and, generally, so does man. How indignant do we become when up against it. Further, there is sacrilege, for this is Thy possession ; this is no ordinary land. And yet again, it is an affront to Thyself, to seek to thwart Thy will, for it is Thy intention that, having given it to the seed of Thy friend Abraham, they are to inherit it. Now we get what appeals to me as the best argument that he can use. He throws them all, self included, upon God’s compassion.

*Verse 12.* “ O our God, wilt Thou not judge them ? For we have no might against this great company that cometh against us ; neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee.”

What did God see ?

*Verse 13.* “ And all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children.”

All were unarmed. No effort was made to resist. But they had faith ; their eyes were upon God. They could see

their helplessness, and so threw themselves wholly upon God.

Dear boys and girls, we are told that all these things in the Word are written so that we may be well informed of our own position and its needs. We know that our home is above with the Lord, but we know potentially we have the inheritance now and here. Our enemies are the world, the flesh, and the devil, and all seek to do their best to cast us out. Let us prayerfully ponder over the lessons we learn here, for we shall need them.

We know that all our blessings are given us because we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. What an argument ! How can God withhold our request on this ground ?

Have we learned that we have no might against these foes, or do we think that we are able to overcome them ? Let us learn that our sufficiency is of God. If we keep our eyes upon Him, our helplessness will be just as powerful an appeal.

*Verse 14.* “ Then upon Jahaziel, the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, the Levite, of the sons of Asaph, came the

spirit of the Lord in the midst of the congregation.”

“Then.” Just at the right time. Jehoshaphat was in great danger ; he was afraid, he cast himself upon God. The Lord comes to his assistance, and begins by sending one of the sons of Asaph, who was a musician and leader of the Temple choir. His sons inherited his office. It will be abundantly clear, as we proceed, what an important part music played in his restoration. Indeed we can all appreciate what a powerful aid, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, music may be.

*Verse 15.* “ And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat : thus saith the Lord unto you. Fear not ye, neither be dismayed by reason of this great multitude ; for the battle is not yours but God’s.”

He brings a message from the Lord which is of great cheer. The first thing, as we see, is that he is not to fear. Nothing can be done for a saint when he is in fear. Neither is he to be dismayed. The situation was calculated to fill anyone with dismay, whilst he had the idea that he was to meet such a well-

equipped foe. But the consciousness that this was God's battle, not his, made all the difference. So with ourselves ; God began the good work in us, and does not require our help. We have been delighted with what He has done, and whilst we keep in this happy state we can safely leave in His hands our conformation to Christ, and our safe arrival home to Him, for that is His business. It is ours to trust and obey.

*Verse 16.* "To-morrow go ye down against them : behold, they come up by the ascent of Zig ; and ye shall find them at the end of the valley, before the wilderness of Jeruel."

This is very interesting. They were to go down, and "behold." Jehoshaphat told God in his prayer to "behold" twice—in verses ten and eleven. This is a very important point for us to remember, for leaving our deliverance to God. Instead of being the first person we become the third.

I have indeed found this very profitable when in trouble, and when there was nothing I could do. I have watched to see how God would get me through, and I have marvelled to see how naturally and easily I have been delivered.

*Verse* 17. "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle ; set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you, O Judah and Jerusalem : fear not, nor be dismayed : to-morrow go out against them ; for the Lord is with you."

So we see that these had but to stand still and see how God saves, without fear and dismay. They could do this because the Lord was with them. We have met these instructions before. When the Israelites were on their way to enter the Promised Land they came to Pihahiroth (Ex. xiv. 13). God's people had been delivered from Egypt and were on their way to possess their inheritance. The Lord told them to encamp there : Pharaoh heard of it and he was tempted to go after them, as he said, " They are entangled in the wilderness." As far as I can gather, it was a place of marsh, swamp, and sedges, with the sea in front. When Pharaoh came, God told His people to stand still, etc.

And without question, in due time they came into their inheritance. Here they had possessed their inheritance many years ; now the enemy is seeking to dispossess them. They could no more

maintain themselves in their inheritance than they could win it.

*Verse 18.* “ And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground ; and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the Lord, worshipping the Lord.”

This is indeed faith of the kind that pleases God. The enemy were getting nearer and were now not very far away, yet faith in God enabled king and people to fall down before the Lord and worship Him.

We see that worship leads on to praise.

*Verse 19.* “ And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites and of the children of the Korahites, stood up to praise the Lord, the God of Israel, with an exceeding loud voice.”

How marvellous this scene becomes to us, as we quietly contemplate this sight ! We cannot fail to see that there is no fellowship with the world now. Praise to God, if we are of the sincere kind, we can have no fellowship with the world.

*Verse 20.* “ And they rose early in the morning and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa ; and as they went forth Jehoshaphat stood and said, “ Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of

Jerusalem : Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established ; believe His prophets, so shall ye prosper."

If there is anything to be done, how often the spirit of God reminds us in the Word of the importance of beginning early. We cannot easily overtake lost time. They were to go forth to the wilderness of Tekoa. This word means that when people were there they dwelt in tents, as there were no towns or villages, which suggests it was indeed a wild place.

How lovely was this act of Jehoshaphat ! Before the start the king stands before them, just to give them an encouraging word, and a wonderful word it was, and one that is for all time. It goes to the very foundation of everything of value. " Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established." How much does this statement contain ! Confidence in God is all we need, for it gives value to everything else. It enables us to do exploits or to suffer calmly. There is no limit to its value. How can it be obtained ? " Believe His prophets (*i.e.*, the Word of God) so shall ye prosper." It is no wonder that we sing, " Thank God for the Bible," for faith in His

Word is the richest treasure we can have, beyond all that the natural man can value.

*Verse 21.* “ And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed them that should sing unto the Lord and praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army; and say, Give thanks unto the Lord, for His mercy endureth for ever.” It is very nice to see how Jehoshaphat took counsel with the people. What can be more valuable than unity in the things of the Lord ?

Then he appoints them to sing unto the Lord. This expression demands our closest attention, for if one can speak for others, I find that much of our singing is not consciously to the Lord. We sing because the hymn is given out, and we sing as a matter of course. I quite think that this may have a beneficial effect upon our own hearts. But we can be certain of this, that the real sweetness of praise is gone, and we have but music to cheer. Further, I cannot but feel that it is question if God can be said to hear it. Blessed God and Father, we are conscious in our hearts what an immense difference it makes to our

happiness when we note what we sing and consciously realise that we are really talking unto Thee in song. Further, we can see that this is a very important factor to us, because we can be assured that we are pleasing Thee. Grant that we may ever avail ourselves of the mighty help of the other Paraclete. Amen.

Further, we note that our praise is the beauty of holiness, or, as the margin puts it, in the beauty of holiness. I do not know Hebrew, but I should expect to find that both are contained in the expression. The Holy Ghost makes it very clear to us in His Revelation, that above, the songs that we shall sing, every time we sing, the first impression we get (even when in the presence of His judgments) of God, is the holiness of His character. It is always Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord God Almighty, and Worthy is the Lamb, hence our first desire should be to long to be holy personally.

We then note that as they went forth before the army, in their song they were to say, "Give thanks to the Lord, for His mercy endureth for ever." It is clear that both in prayer and praise we must abound in thanksgiving, because

we realise how permanent the mercy of the Lord is to us.

*Verse 22.* “ And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set liers in wait against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.” Here we get a confirmation of such scriptures as “ The joy of the Lord is your strength.” There are scriptures that we can prove by our own experience. They make us happy now. This joy begins when we begin to praise, and continues whilst we praise. The best of it is—and there can be no doubt of it—it makes others long to have what we have because, sooner or later, those who are not Christians discover how unsatisfactory are the pleasures of the world, whereas the pleasures that a believer has are ever new and are among some of the things that we can praise God for.

*Verse 23.* “ For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them ; and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another.”

This shows us how the Lord set liers

in wait. We have realised that the Lord can be a promoter of discord. Here we are shown another sample of His permissive will. It is clear that if we allow greed, pride, jealousy, etc., and such ugly things to abound in the world, each produces fruit after its kind. It is only the Holy Ghost that can restrain evil. Alas ! for them in whom He does not dwell. In His own way He makes even the wrath of man to praise Christ.

James the Apostle reveals the truth to us, as to sin. James i. 13-16. " Let no man say when he is tempted of God : (from God. Greek) for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempteth no man : But each man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust (desire) and enticed. Then the lust (or desire) when it hath conceived, beareth sin ; and the sin, when it is full grown, bringeth forth death. Be not deceived, my beloved brethren."

We see here that tempted means enticed. It does not always bear that meaning. God tries ; sin or our desires entice. What is brought before us here is that we may see the accumulative effect upon men who are not content with what they have, and desire what

others have. John the Baptist told the soldiers to be content with their wages. I expect Trade Unions would regard this as folly, but is it?

When God sees His own in trouble, in His own way and time He makes the wrath of man to praise Him.

We can be quite sure that if God is with us, none can make us afraid. Mad nations in their jealousies destroy each other. Spiritism destroys materialism; they are foes, and so on.

*Verse 24.* "And when Judah came to the watch-tower of the wilderness, they looked upon the multitude; and behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and there were none that escaped."

This watch-tower appears to be a point of vantage, which gives a vision of the whole of the valley. I remember that there is such a place in the pass of Glencoe. If my memory is correct, it is, or was, called the library.

In all parts of the world there are always points of advantage for observation, that may be called watch-towers. To me it is a figure of the Word of God, for if we are familiar with its pages we are in a truly wonderful Watch-Tower.

In the present times many of my friends almost live there, for if we look at Russia, Germany, Italy, Ethiopia, in fact, all parts of the world, it makes us see that things are heading up. How frequently do we hear our politicians say that there must be no more war ; that if we have another war it will put an end to civilisation. I met at a friend's house this week a young German lady, and she says that Hitler says just the same. Men's hearts are filled with fear, and they say, " Let us disarm." It is just the reverse that God tells us. " Be strong." Enemies would arm secretly, as Germany has done. We partially disarmed, and they increased their strength till we became seriously afraid. Cromwell's advice will always stand true.

" Trust God, and keep your powder dry." The trouble is not in being strong, but in failing in the other directions. Be just, and remove not your neighbour's landmark. Germany, and even Italy are at it. Britain, by God's grace, learnt the lesson with the loss of the American colonies. All of our colonies are taught to govern themselves, and when capable, if they desire it, to be on their own. At present there

appears to be no desire. We shall see, if the Lord does not come first, how the method will answer with India and the Irish Free State. We, however, see from our Watch-Tower that the end will be as with the children of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir.

We can praise God that the end will be all right, for, from our Watch-Tower, when man learns the lesson that he cannot rule himself, we see that the Lord will come in mighty power and put things right. He can do this because He is strong ; in fact, we know that He is almighty. He will do this, for He has promised it. Hallelujah !

From the watch-tower we read that they looked upon the great multitude that came up against them, and behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth.

In II Kings xix. 35, when the angel of the Lord came to deliver Israel He smote one hundred and eighty thousand Assyrians, and when the men went out to see them, we read " Behold, they were all dead corpses." I have smiled, and seen others do also, at the idea of dead corpses. As I have grown older I have noted the way many are inclined to twist the scripture from its plain and

obvious meaning, probably to support some meaning they give to another scripture. We know what an ambiguous word "dead" is, but these words, bodies, corpses, carcasses, I think, must prevent the twisting of the meaning.

They are said to "behold." What they clearly saw was that there were none that escaped. What a comfort to the Lord's people this must have been ! We can be sure that in the final treatment of the ungodly it will be equally thorough.

If there should be one reading this who has not fled to Jesus for refuge, let me plead with him to escape for his life, for it is, as Bildad said, "The hope of the godless shall perish." Job viii. 13.

*Verse 25.* "And when Jehoshaphat and his people came to take the spoil of them, they found among them in abundance both riches and dead bodies, (M. I think, is clearer, *i.e.*, garments) and precious jewels, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away : and they were three days in taking the spoil ; it was so much."

This abundance of wealth they had with them is thought by some to be an evidence of their intention to make a permanent settlement, so they brought

all their goods with them. Jehoshaphat evidently had heard of this, see verse 11. Psalm lxxxiii. 12 appears to be the same in Gideon's time.

It is but according to the uses of war to take the spoil from the enemy. In this case, the enemy, instead of robbing Judah of their goods, lost all they took with them. With the complete Word of God before us, I have wondered what would have been the effect had they carefully collected the goods and forwarded them on to the countries from whence they came, and decently buried their dead. What effect it would have had !

There appears to be among the nations an hallucination of mind that it is desirable to possess the goods and land of other nations. I think the evil generally comes from the leaders. As far as I can gather, the nations that possess no colonies are able to live in comfort. The root, I think, springs from the leaders through their love of power. They want to be somebody of importance, and they make their appeal to the vanity of the people, and to their greed.

I quite see that having food and raiment we can afford to be content,

as all else are but toys. We have certainly learnt that war impoverishes victors and vanquished, and breaks the hearts and the bodies of both countries, in its dead and wounded. There are several questions that we can ask here, but the replies can be but conjectures, though each will find them very interesting and profitable.

*Verse 26.* " And on the fourth day they assembled themselves in the valley of Beracah, for there they blessed the Lord. Therefore the name of that place was called, The valley of blessing, unto this day. (Blessing—Beracah.) "

When God blesses, He gives. When we bless, we receive with thanksgiving. How pleasant must the sound of praise have been to the Lord. His people had so recently come into His presence with the voice of prayer and supplication for deliverance from the enemy, and now in the valley they are blessing the Lord.

It is easy to please the Lord, and we must avoid murmuring and complaining. The Lord, according to the Word, appears to have no time for murmurers and complainers. How often have I seen those who attend on some of this sort

discouraged, because whatever they do for them is all taken as a matter of course, and they are never grateful. God appears much the same. It is well to remember that the psalmist says, "Say so." A smile and a thank you does not cost much. God loves a thankful heart more than we do. I have read that the best place to live in is Thanksgiving Street.

"Therefore the place was called Beracah, unto this day." This expression arrested my attention. I have no doubt that the name was given because ever with grateful hearts they wished to be reminded of God's mercy constantly.

All through the Word we see days set apart for the remembrance of a special blessing. Yet the apostle Paul says in Galatians iv. 11. "Ye observe days and months and seasons and years : I am afraid of you lest by any means I have bestowed labour upon you in vain."

This is really a good scripture to get clear notions upon so as to know what God intended us to understand by it. We must ask ourselves and our friends

(if believers) a few questions. I give two or three as a sample.

(1) Are days and places in the present not according to the mind of the Holy Ghost ?

(2) Is it because the place or day has become such a matter of course, that the emotions of gratitude that set up these things have ceased to be ?

(3) Is it that later events have removed the need for it.

*Verse 27.* "Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat in the forefront of them, to go again to Jerusalem with joy : for the Lord had made them to rejoice over their enemies."

What an experience this return walk home must have been to these people ! What jubilation must have filled their hearts ! What a joy to see their beloved king walking in front ! Truly, the Lord had made them to rejoice. Not only do we see the procession, but note that it has to be with music.

*Verse 28.* " And they came to Jerusalem with psalteries and harps and trumpets unto the house of the Lord."

We can quite believe that their object

was to express their praise in the very place wherein their prayers ascended.

*Verse 29.* “ And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of the countries, when they heard that the Lord fought against the enemies of Israel.”

*Verse 30.* “ So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet : for his God gave him rest round about.”

In verse 28 we note that they came with psalteries, *i.e.*, stringed instruments which were used. There appear to be several kinds. The harps had their own shape, but any other sort of stringed instruments, such as guitars, banjos, would have been used. I have seen a picture of a three-cornered one, hence the word *psallo*, which really means to sing to a stringed instrument. The psalmist, in its first meaning, signifies the author of it, though from dictionaries I read that in the Jewish Church, the priest that led the singing was also called the psalmist. I feel sure that with men of God these instruments were used to aid the singing, not the reverse. I think so, because the leader called their attention to the song, and his instructions are very suitable for all time. The psalmist said to them, “ See that thou

believest in thine heart what thou singest with thy lips, and manifest in thine actions what thou believest in thine heart." Though very ancient, I think we must all admit it is good sound doctrine.

In verse 29 we see what different behaviour the Jews had to the children of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir. In their prayer, they cast themselves wholly on God, and after the victory they gave God all the praise and glory. It is no wonder that the fear of God fell upon all the people, and as verse 30 says, "God gave the people quiet."

I am sure, whether nationally or individually, the effect on others is better when we do not magnify self but God. Blessed God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, we do pray Thee even to enable us to exalt Christ by the power of the indwelling Spirit.

*Verse 31.* "And Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah ; he was thirty and five years when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty and five years in Jerusalem : and his mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi."

It does appear to me that this would follow on better after verse 37, I have

found that as I have read my Bible, that the wisest way is to take the Bible as we find it, for it comes about that we find the reason for these things unexpectedly very often, and we can wait till we do. We are told that he was thirty-five when he came to the throne ; this tells me that with the training that the heir to the throne would probably have at this age, that he also was as blind as his father Asa as to the meaning of chapter fifteen, verses eight and nine ! It is clear that Asa captured several cities of Israel and the Israelites ; also that there were many from Ephraim and Manasseh and Simeon. “ For they fell unto him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that the Lord his God was with him.”

Instead of turning to Benhadad against Baasha, who tried to stop the exodus of the Israelites to Judah, as Hanani the seer reminded in xvi. 9 he should have left it to the Lord. He would have had Israel and Judah as one, I have no doubt, whereas all Benhadad could do for him was to see that he got the stones that Baasha built Ramah with.

We are told that he reigned twenty and five years, so that he died at sixty

years of age. It is not a very great age, for much useful work can be done after that age. The great mistake he made was joining affinity with Ahab. This, as we have seen, led to a life of compromise.

*Verse 32.* “ And he walked in the way of Asa his father, and turned not aside from it, doing that which was right in the eyes of the Lord.”

As a king, this was true. Internally, he laboured to make his people strong and well taught in the way of the Lord, but this great false step (He did not live to see the final result, which we see recorded in xxi. 4) kept on bearing bad fruit.

*Verse 33.* “ Howbeit the high places were not taken away ; neither as yet had the people set their hearts unto the God of their fathers.”

Some think that in xvii. 6, where we have the statement of the Asherim being taken away, that Jehoshaphat removed the heathen groves, but by this verse he did not remove the practices that were not scriptural. This word “ howbeit ” gives me the thought that in the state of soul that he was in xvii. 6 he started the work, fully intending to

be thorough, but having joined affinity with Ahab, to be zealous in this direction might compromise that happy state of things he hoped to see between Israel and Judah. As a result the people were not wholehearted towards God. This is a very solemn fact for any that have any position of influence among God's people. I have noticed when a church is what we call a worldly church, it is very evident to me that the root of the trouble is laxity in the habits of the leaders.

Blessed God and Father, we do pray Thee that we may indeed "take heed what we do," as it is often said that what we are speaks so loudly that people cannot heed what we say. The result is that instead of honouring Christ, we dishonour Him. Amen.

*Verse 34.* "Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold they are written in the history (Heb. words) of Jehu, son of Hanani, which is inserted (M. mentioned) in the book of the Kings of Israel."

This is a very interesting verse, as it gives an idea as to how the historical books were written. I remember, when a young man, attending a course of

lectures given by one of the most learned Doctors of the Church of England. When we came to Kings and Chronicles, I remember that he said that we do not know who wrote Kings, but he was assured that he was an honest man, whereas the Chronicles were written by the priests, which did not give him much assurance. We can see that these historical records were compiled in a similar way to those of the officials of every civilised country, the difference being that the Holy Ghost moved these men, so that whether priests or not, they were selected men. I do not propose to take up the incidents in Kings, but we have the incidents referred to, so we see that to take them in order, Jehoshaphat joined Ahaziah, the eldest son of Ahab, to go to Tarshish, west of Spain ; whether for trade or war, as far as I know, we are not told. The Lord destroyed them (probably He blew upon them). This wicked king died through an accident in the second year of his reign. If we turn to what Jehu, the son of Hanani, tells us, we see that Jehoshaphat goes up to war against Moab with Jehoram, and that but for the intervention of Elisha, his army

would have been destroyed. We have only to see what sort of man Jehoram was to make it clear that he was disobeying God. Jehoram was indeed a very wicked king.

As far as I can see, all these troubles came upon Jehoshaphat through joining affinity with Ahab. When we consider the internal management of the kingdom, all seems as well done as it could possibly have been done.

Even though Jehoshaphat was but sixty years of age it is a relief to read that Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers. Alas ! the evil effect of our actions down here frequently bear fruit, as it did in his case.

We read that Jehoshaphat left six other sons. He gave them great riches and precious things. Jehoram, when he had power, slew all his brothers and some of the princes of Israel. The reason given for this is that Jehoram had the daughter of Ahab to wife. It is all a terrible story, but we learn this from it, that though God permits much evil, there is a point beyond which He will not pass. Then He deals with the evil men in a punitive way. The rest of the evil that men do is dealt with in

three different ways, which can be discovered by reading I John i. and Hebrews, if God's people, and Jeremiah, who tells them their own folly will correct them. This may apply to rebellious believers, certainly to unbelievers.

Blessed God and Father, we thank Thee for the relief it gives us to see that all Thy people will learn that Thou art holy. We pray Thee that we may by these things learn this lesson now, so that the Holy Ghost may lead us to walk so carefully that our lives may redound to Thy honour, glory and praise. We bless Thee for the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who dealt so effectively with our sins on the Cross, that if we repent and believe in the Lord Jesus, our sins will never need to be dealt with any more.

We realise increasingly what an immense work the Lord did for us on the Tree. It is the ground upon which Thou canst build all Thy intended blessings for us. Amen.

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