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THE KINGS OF ISRAEL

***Second series: From Jeroboam to
Hoshea***

Kings of the ten tribes

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JEROBOAM (1)

“The man Jeroboam was strong and valiant; and Solomon saw the young man that he was industrious, and he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph...Thus sayeth Jehovah the God of Israel...I will take thee, that thou mayest reign over all that thy soul desireth, and thou shalt be king over Israel.”

1 Kings 11:28,31,37

Jeroboam, the first king of the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel, was the son of a widow and a promising young man. From the human standpoint he had everything going for him. When Solomon was busy fortifying Jerusalem he noticed Jeroboam's industrious ways and promoted him to be in charge of the work crews from Ephraim and Manasseh. But we see that the king was not alone in taking note of this young man. God also took note of his industry and ambition. God's eye is upon the ways of man and, more than that, He knows the thoughts and desires of every man's heart.

God sent the prophet Ahijah to announce to Jeroboam that because of His people's unfaithfulness under Solomon, He would rend the kingdom out of Solomon's son's hand and make Jeroboam king over ten tribes. Yet because of His promises to David He would not entirely take the kingdom from David's family nor do this during Solomon's lifetime. While God is ever faithful to His word, He is never in a hurry to execute His righteous judgments.

Jeroboam's industriousness was commendable, but God looks for more than merely commendable human character traits. He looks at the heart and wants hearts wholly committed to Him. Thus He told Jeroboam, “If thou wilt hearken unto all

that I command thee, and wilt walk in My ways, and do that which is right in My sight, in keeping My statutes and My commandments, as David My servant did, that I will be with thee, and build thee a lasting house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee" (v. 38).

JEROBOAM (2)

“Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David. If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of Jehovah at Jerusalem...they will kill me, and return to Rehoboam king of Judah. And the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold.”

1 Kings 12:26-28

God who searches the hearts and who is the heart-knowing God here reveals the inner workings of Jeroboam's heart. Jeroboam did not trust God, the goodness of God, and God's word to him with all his heart. Instead, he made the mistake of leaning on his own intelligence. Scripture tells us that “he who trusts in his own heart is a fool” (Prov. 28:26 NASB).

Satan implanted doubt in God's goodness in our first parents and quickly convinced them that what he was suggesting was far better for them. Ever since then, man has sought his own advantage. He shortsightedly trusts his own heart and leans on his own understanding. He seeks counsel from other men who think just like he does. He either ignores God or deceives himself into feeling he can get away with disobeying God. Because God is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy unto thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,” man conveniently forgets that God is also a God “by no means clearing the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation” (Ex. 34:6-7).

Jeroboam instituted his own religion. It became the downfall of every king that succeeded him in Israel. He made two gold calves, built high places, made non-levitical priests,

and ordained a feast “like the feast that was in Judah.” Beware of changing, even of modifying the instructions God has given us in His Word!

JEROBOAM (3)

“It is the man of God who was disobedient to the word of Jehovah; therefore Jehovah has delivered him to the lion, which has torn him and slain him, according to the word of Jehovah.”

1 Kings 13:26

“It is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”

1 Peter 4:17 NASB

Jeroboam, like Cain, had instituted his own religion, a religion “he had devised of his own heart.” As he was burning incense on the altar he had made in Bethel, the “house of God,” a man of God from Judah cried against this altar by the word of Jehovah, predicting the ultimate doom of Jeroboam’s system of worship. When he attempted to arrest this man of God, Jeroboam found himself powerless to harm him. His folly became openly evident.

However, God had given his servant explicit instructions how he was to conduct himself while in Jeroboam’s domain. The man of God conscientiously declined the king’s offer of refreshment and reward. But en route back to his home he sat down to rest and an old prophet persuaded him to come home with him and eat bread. Lying to the man of God, he told him that an angel had told him to do this. No angel of God has authority to change what God has said. Any contradiction or attempt to update what God has said is a grave offense against our unchanging God who cannot lie. A lion soon killed the man of God in most extraordinary manner.

God looks for His servants to be examples of obedience to His Word. Before bringing judgment upon Jeroboam's unfaithfulness He dealt in judgment with the disobedience of the servant whom He had used to pronounce this judgment. May we never forget how solemn a responsibility it is to represent God in this world!

JEROBOAM (4)

“At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam was sick. And Jeroboam said to his wife, Arise...and disguise thyself, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam; and go to Shiloh: behold, there is Ahijah the prophet, who told me that I should be king over this people...he will tell thee what shall become of the lad.”

1 Kings 14:1-3

Although Jeroboam had instituted a religion of his own invention for his people, it is evident that he had no real confidence in it himself. When his stretched-out hand had been dried up he had asked the man of God from Judah to pray to “Jehovah thy God” that his hand might be restored to its normal use. Here too, when his son Abijah was sick, he sent his wife to the aged, now blind prophet Ahijah to find out what would become of him. His own religion might be useful for his political goals, but not when his body’s functioning or his son’s life was at stake! This same principle holds true of all religions that men have invented.

Yet there was no repentance with Jeroboam. He would maintain his deceitful front. His wife was to disguise herself and go with presents to inquire of the old prophet Ahijah. Neither the blind prophet nor the people were to know her errand. But God knew and gave Ahijah clear instructions what would happen and what to do.

The Lord had found something good toward Himself in this boy. He took him home to Himself before the day of judgment burst upon the rest of the house of Jeroboam. This boy was the only member of Jeroboam’s family to receive a proper burial and have Israel mourning his death. In His wrath against the ten-tribe kingdom God nonetheless remembered mercy with regard to this boy. “The righteous is taken away

from before the evil” (Isa. 57:1). Yet how heavy his mother’s burden must have been! For as soon as her feet entered the city her son died. God ever keeps His Word.

NADAB

“Nadab the son of Jeroboam...reigned over Israel two years. And he did evil in the sight of Jehovah, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin with which he made Israel sin.”

1 Kings 15:25-26

Nadab is the first of Jeroboam's 18 successors as kings of the northern tribe kingdom of Israel. Every one of these kings did evil in God's sight and walked in the way of Jeroboam and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin. What a sad, sad record!

What pattern do we set for our children? For others at our place of employment? For the next generation in the assembly? For our successors whoever they may be? Just as water by nature runs downhill, so it is easier and more natural to set a bad example than a good one. We can trace the bad pattern so natural to us all the way back to our first father. “Even as by one man sin entered into the world, and by sin death; and thus death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned,” Romans 5:12 tells us.

However, we cannot excuse our sin by blaming it on the pattern that has been set for us. We have all actively walked in the lusts of the flesh, doing what the flesh and the thoughts willed to do (Eph. 2:3). But when we accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we were made “partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:4). The Lord Jesus Himself is the perfect pattern for our lives. He wants us to look to Him and to learn of Him.

Nadab reigned over Israel two years. God allotted him sufficient time to make plain whether he would follow his father Jeroboam's ways or whether he would follow the Lord. God's

judgment pronounced on Jeroboam and his family fell upon Nadab as he led his people in besieging the Philistine city of Gibbethon.

BAASHA

“The word of Jehovah came to Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha, saying, Forasmuch as I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over My people Israel, and thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam, and hast made My people Israel to sin, provoking Me to anger with their sins; behold, I will take away Baasha and his house, and will make thy house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat.”

1 Kings 16:1-3

Although God had dealt with the house of Jeroboam in severest judgment, this did not change the hearts of the people. Baasha of the tribe of Issachar had been God’s instrument to smite “all the house of Jeroboam; he left to Jeroboam none that breathed; until he had destroyed him...because of the sins of Jeroboam which he sinned, and wherewith he made Israel to sin” (1 Ki. 15:29-30).

Israel had turned away from the Lord. But the Lord did not write them off. Though rebellious and wayward, they were still His people. Many years later He uses the prophet Hosea to express His feelings and detail His dealings with them in touching manner. “How shall I give thee over, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee up, Israel,” He laments (Hos. 11:8). He goes back to Israel’s earliest history, to Jacob’s struggling with Esau in their mother’s womb and his wrestling with God at Peniel (Hos. 12:3-4). Again and again He had been provoked to anger with His people’s sins. Yet they were His people. He still loved them.

Baasha, God’s instrument of judgment to exterminate the house of Jeroboam, was now to face the same judgment he had meted out. It is easy, we find, to condemn others and deal

harshly with them for their sins. How solemn when we then go ahead and repeat the same sins ourselves! This is no trifling matter before God.

ELAH

“Elah the son of Baasha began to reign over Israel in Tirzah for two years. And his servant Zimri, captain of half his chariots, conspired against him; and he was in Tirzah, drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza, who was the steward of his house in Tirzah; and Zimri went in and smote him, and killed him.”

1 Kings 16:8-10

How tragic! King Elah indulging his fleshly desires, drinking himself drunk! His steward Arza contributing to his master's delinquency! All this while the people were encamped against the Philistine city of Gibbethon! No wonder one of his top military officers takes advantage of this to assassinate him! Wrong as this was and ever is, we tend to sympathize with Zimri rather than with drunken Elah. Nor can we forget that the wrath of man shall praise the Lord, and the remainder He will restrain (Ps. 76:10). Thus God's judgment overtook the house of Baasha.

Self-indulgence is a vice common to man. Whether we look at the long list of works of the flesh in Galatians 5 or the depravity characterizing men in the difficult times of the last days in 2 Timothy 3 — times in which we live — self-indulgence is plainly evident and is accompanied by many a kindred sin.

What a contrast we have in the Lord Jesus. “For the Christ also did not please Himself,” we read in Romans 15:3. He alone could say, “I do always the things that are pleasing to Him [that has sent Me]” (Jn. 8:29). No one could challenge this, but rather, “As He spoke these things many believed on Him” (v. 30). Self-control is also one of the fruit of the Spirit's nine

delicious flavors in Galatians 5. “Against such things there is no law.”

David (2 Sam. 11), Belshazzar (Dan. 5) and Elah all indulged their fleshly appetites while their people were at war. For each of them and for many others like them the results proved tragic.

ZIMRI

“It came to pass when Zimri saw that the city was taken, that he went into the citadel of the king’s house, and burned the king’s house over him with fire; and he died for his sins which he sinned in doing evil in the sight of Jehovah, in walking in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin which he did, making Israel to sin.”

1 Kings 16:18-19

Zimri, who had conspired against Elah, son of Baasha, and had killed him, did a quick but thorough job of wiping out the house of Baasha, even to killing all his friends. But his effort went only that far. He made absolutely no effort to repent, to turn to the Lord, or to walk in His ways. His brutality was totally self-seeking and led to swift disaster for himself and Israel.

Zimri had led a conspiracy but did not have the people on his side. This led to an extended civil war. The first moves were against Zimri himself. Besieged in his capital city, Tirzah, when it fell he committed suicide, burning the citadel of the palace over his own head. If he could not have it, no one else could have it either! What a frightful end to the life of this rash, impulsive man! But the flames he kindled, in which his life came to its fiery end, were nothing compared to those in which he will suffer throughout eternity in the torments of hell.

The heart-knowing God knew Zimri’s heart well. He owes us no apologies. Zimri “died for his sins which he sinned in doing evil in the sight of Jehovah.” God had seen them all. The Judge of all the earth will ever do right. Whether He allows man to go on in his sins for many years or only a week, as in Zimri’s case, is immaterial. All His ways are right and not to be

questioned. Thankfully, today His offer of salvation is still open. Accept it while you can. Tomorrow may well be too late.

OMRI

“The people that followed Omri overcame the people that followed Tibni the son of Ginath; and Tibni died, and Omri reigned...He bought the hill Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver; and built on the hill, and called the name of the city that he built, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill, Samaria.”

1 Kings 16:22,24

Omri was Elah's commanding general. Upon Elah's assassination by Zimri he left off fighting against the Philistines at Gibbethon and besieged Tirzah, the capital. Did it get destroyed along with the palace? Zimri was soon defeated, but now the people were divided in their loyalties between Omri and a rival, Tibni. The civil war that ensued seems to have lasted at least four years before Tibni was dead and Omri secure on Israel's throne. Omri, a powerful and ambitious man, purchased a hill and built a new capital city upon it, Samaria. This city figures largely in the subsequent history of the northern tribe kingdom, and in the prophets the northern kingdom is often called Samaria. Omri must have made quite an impression on neighboring nations, for in the records of the enemy Assyrians after this time Israel is called the house of Omri even after his dynasty was gone from power.

How tragic to see Israelites fighting their fellow Israelites! The warfare against the Philistines, the real enemies of God's people, was now suspended while the people of Israel followed leaders they chose for themselves. No mention is made of any efforts to ascertain the will of God in the matter. Sad to say, don't we often see similar things among God's people today? The highly gifted Corinthians were choosing sides among those whom God was using in that day. "I am of Paul, and I of

Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ," were their battle cries (1 Cor. 1:12). Our real battle is abandoned while we fight one another!

AHAB (1)

“Ahab the son of Omri wrought evil in the sight of Jehovah more than all that were before him...he took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. And Ahab made the Asherah; and Ahab did more to provoke Jehovah the God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.”

1 Kings 16:30-33

Israel's kings rapidly went from bad to worse. Omri “did worse than all that were before him” (ch. 16:25). Now Ahab does still worse. As God details his history before us, He keeps returning to this sad theme: “Thou hast sold thyself to do evil in the sight of Jehovah...Surely there was none like to Ahab, who did sell himself to do evil in the sight of Jehovah, Jezebel his wife urging him on. And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites did, whom Jehovah had dispossessed before the children of Israel” (1 Ki. 21:20,25-26).

Egged on by his wife, Jezebel, a heathen princess from nearby Zidon, Ahab challenges Jehovah again and again. He adopts her religion. Israel had often been unfaithful to God in the past, following these abominable fertility idols. Bitter consequences had been the result. Now Ahab officially embraced these heathen gods, building a temple and erecting an altar for Baal in his new capital, Samaria. Jezebel, we find as we go on in the story, killed many of Jehovah's prophets and sustained and supported at least 850 idolatrous prophets. Light and darkness can never dwell in harmony side by side. They are absolutely incompatible!

Ahab's challenge to Jehovah led one of his subjects to rebuild Jericho in defiance of God's word through Joshua. In consequence his oldest and youngest sons died. It is never safe to defy God.

AHAB (2)

“When Ahab saw Elijah...Ahab said to him, Is it thou, the troubler of Israel? And he said, I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father’s house...now send, gather to me all Israel to Mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal...So Ahab sent...and gathered the prophets together unto Mount Carmel.”

1 Kings 18:17-20

In instituting the worship of Baal and the Asherah in Israel, Ahab had defied God and troubled Israel. Elijah, a prophet from east of the Jordan, had prayed earnestly that God would withhold rain and dew from the land until the people would acknowledge Jehovah to be God. He had then boldly confronted Ahab with this pronouncement. Thereupon at God’s command he had gone into hiding. God had miraculously preserved him during the 3½ years of drought and now sent him to again confront this wicked king.

“The righteous are bold as a lion,” Proverbs 28:1 tells us. We see this verse well illustrated as Elijah meets King Ahab head-on. This prophet who had boldly asserted, “As Jehovah liveth, before whom I stand” (1 Ki. 17:1), once again fearlessly stands before the king. At Elijah’s summons, the king goes to meet him. Elijah refuses the charge of troubling Israel, hurling it right back into the wicked king’s face with convicting evidence for its appropriateness. Then he tells the king to gather all Israel to him, and specifically the 850 idolatrous prophets of Baal and the Asherah under Queen Jezebel’s patronage. He, Jehovah’s prophet, takes full command of the entire situation and by faith, obedience, and prayer gains a glorious victory.

Doesn't this remind us of our Lord Jesus? Falsely and wickedly accused and maligned, He, not His foes or His weak-willed judge, was fully in control. Yet, wonder of wonders, in His great love He willingly surrendered His life for us and won the victory!

AHAB (3)

“Behold, a prophet drew near to Ahab king of Israel, and said, Thus saith Jehovah: Hast thou seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into thy hand this day; and thou shalt know that I am Jehovah.”

1 Kings 20:13

How great is God’s longsuffering patience! Despite Ahab’s immense wickedness God promised him victory over the army of Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, which had invaded the land. Seeking an occasion for war, Ben-Hadad first demanded Ahab’s silver, gold, wives, and children. When Ahab would have surrendered these to him, the enemy king demanded more. He demanded the right to send his servants to search Ahab and his servants’ houses and take away all their most-cherished possessions. The elders of Israel advised Ahab not to yield to this outrageous request, and the weak-willed king sent word to Ben-Hadad that he could not do so.

Prior to this, on Mount Carmel God had sent down fire to consume Elijah’s sacrifice, and the people had cried out, “Jehovah, He is God! Jehovah, He is God!” The Lord now promised to give Ahab, who had witnessed that scene and had seen his 850 idolatrous prophets destroyed, victory over the Syrian foe. It was not that Israel deserved it. No, God told Ahab, “Thou shalt know that I am Jehovah.” The Lord would prove Himself in this manner too. Would Israel, would Ahab, repent and turn back to Him? “The goodness of God leads thee to repentance,” Romans 2:4 tells us.

While God kept His word and enabled Ahab to slay “the Syrians with a great slaughter,” the Syrians did not give up their ambitions. Saying that “Jehovah is a god of the mountains, but

He is not a god of the valleys," they again joined battle with Israel. God knew their reasoning. Again He gave Ahab a mighty victory over them, saying, "Ye shall know that I am Jehovah."

AHAB (4)

“Thus saith Jehovah: Because thou hast let go out of thy hand the man that I had devoted to destruction, thy life shall be for his life, and thy people for his people. And the king of Israel went to his house sullen and vexed.”

1 Kings 20:42-43

The Lord had twice given Ahab wonderful victories over the Syrians. Their king Ben-Hadad, who had called Jehovah a god of the mountains but not of the valleys, had had to flee in shame and defeat. But Ahab spared his life and had even called him his brother. He made a covenant with him, caused him to come up into his chariot, and had sent him away in peace.

It may have seemed like good politics to treat his enemy so magnanimously, but the Lord sent a prophet to face Ahab with his failure. He let him know God's displeasure with what he had done and acquainted him with the consequences that would follow. The Syrian king had affronted the Lord, and in turn the Lord had given him over to destruction. Ahab, like King Saul with the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15, had failed to carry out God's purpose against this wicked king. Just as with Saul, there would be a price to pay: Ahab would one day die at the hand of the Syrians. “Cursed be he that doeth the work of Jehovah negligently, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood!” the Lord would later declare through the prophet Jeremiah.

What about us? Do we waste our God-given opportunities? Do we obey God's directions implicitly, or do we justify disobedience with excuses of all kinds? And what attitudes do we display? In present-day society many consider

tolerance the greatest virtue of all — except that in their eyes Christians who stand clearly for biblical convictions should not be tolerated any more than their Master was when here on earth! May we be zealous to obey!

AHAB (5)

“Ahab spoke to Naboth saying, Give me thy vineyard...and I will give thee for it a better vineyard [or] I will give thee its value in money. And Naboth said to Ahab, Jehovah forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to thee!”

1 Kings 21:2-3

At first glance Ahab's offer to purchase Naboth's vineyard seems both reasonable and fair. His father, Omri, had purchased a hill and built his capital, Samaria, upon it. Ahab wanted Naboth's land for a vegetable garden convenient to his palace kitchen. But the land was God's and He had forbidden His people to sell it on an absolute basis. Moreover, the land was to remain within the tribe to which God had assigned it. So Naboth's refusal to give up his inheritance was a matter of simple obedience to God. His faithfulness cost him his life through Jezebel's conniving.

God has given us Christians even more than the incorruptible and undefiled and unfading inheritance reserved in heaven for us mentioned in 1 Peter 1:5. Already in this life we can enjoy a precious heritage, an inheritance among all the sanctified (Acts 20:32). Its components are set forth in the Word of God. Paul admonished the Thessalonians, “Brethren, stand firm, and hold fast the instructions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our letter” (2 Th. 2:15). Telling them to imitate him, he praised the Corinthians “that in all things ye are mindful of me; and that as I have directed you, ye keep the directions” (1 Cor. 11:1-2). The Old Testament repeatedly warns us against removing the ancient landmark which the fathers have set.

Satan loves to rob us of our spiritual heritage. If he cannot do so outright, he gladly offers something in exchange — influence, money, popularity, even greater opportunities for service! Let's be faithful and obedient to the path God has entrusted to us.

AHAB (6)

“It came to pass when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, Is it thou, the troubler of Israel?...Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, mine enemy?...And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of Jehovah; but I hate him, for he prophesies no good concerning me, but evil: it is Micah the son of Imlah.”

1 Kings 18:17; 21:20; 22:8

Wicked King Ahab, as we might well expect, had no love for Elijah or any other of Jehovah’s faithful prophets. “Troubler of Israel,” “Mine enemy,” he calls Elijah. “I hate him,” he frankly says of Micah the son of Imlah. Through Elijah’s prayers rain and dew had ceased for 3½ years in Israel. Nor did Elijah hesitate to rebuke Ahab and pronounce God’s judgment upon him. Micah the son of Imlah was cut out of the same material. Though he was told that “the words of the prophets declare good to the king with one assent,” and counseled to fall in line with them, he flatly refused. “As Jehovah liveth, even what Jehovah shall say to me, that will I speak,” he resolutely replied.

Many of God’s prophets have sealed their ministry with their lives. They have been hated, maligned, and persecuted because of their fearless, uncompromising denunciation of evil backed up by their godly lives. Think of John the Baptist, the Elijah of the New Testament! And our Lord Jesus Himself could say in prophetic language, “They that hate Me without a cause are more than the hairs of My head; they that would destroy Me, being Mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty” (Ps. 69:4). When the Jews took up stones to stone Him, He said, “Many good works have I shown you of My Father; for which work of them do ye stone Me?” (Jn. 10:31-32). As evil increases in the

world, we can expect wicked men to show their hatred for God and His true servants ever more blatantly.

AHAB (7)

“When Ahab heard these words...he rent his garments, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly. And the word of Jehovah came to Elijah...saying, Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before Me? Because he humbleth himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days: in his son’s days will I bring the evil upon his house.”

1 Kings 21:27-29

How gracious is our God! Ahab’s career had been consistently wicked. His wife Jezebel had spurred him on. She had engineered Naboth’s judicial murder and Ahab had gone to take possession of the vineyard he had coveted. God’s servant Elijah was now sent there to pronounce God’s impending judgment upon them both.

To our astonishment, perhaps, we now see Ahab humbling himself before God. Even more astonishing to us, God accepts Ahab’s humbling of himself, calls Elijah’s attention to it, and stays the execution of His judgment until the next generation. Judgment is God’s strange work, we read in Isaiah 28:21. And in Ezekiel 33:11 God tells us, “As I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?” God is still reaching out to even the greatest of sinners. None are too wicked for Him to forgive. “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 Jn. 1:7)! On this righteous basis God can forgive.

We see as we go on that Ahab’s humbling of himself was not that “grief according to God” which works “repentance to salvation, never to be regretted” that God so delights to see. He

did not prove himself pure in the matter (2 Cor. 7:10). Nevertheless, we can be thankful for even this humbling of himself, for it makes us appreciate the greatness of the heart of our forgiving God.

AHAB (8)

“The king of Israel disguised himself, and went into the battle...And a man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the fastenings and the corselet. And he said to his charioteer, Turn thy hand and drive me out of the camp; for I am wounded...And the king died, and was brought to Samaria.”

1 Kings 22:30,34,37

God had determined that Ahab would die at Ramoth-Gilead, the city he was trying to retake from the Syrians. Ahab had induced Jehoshaphat to go with him on this campaign. Micah the son of Imlah had prophesied Ahab's death. While Ahab hated Micah, yet at the same time he now feared for his life and took dastardly measures to try to keep Micah's prophecy from being fulfilled. The Syrian king, whose life Ahab had spared a short while before, ordered his captains to fight with the king of Israel only. So Ahab asked Jehoshaphat to go into battle in his royal robes, seemingly in command, while Ahab would go in disguise.

But man only deceives himself if he thinks that he can frustrate God's purposes by such cowardly stratagems. When Jehoshaphat cried out to the Lord, God diverted the attackers away from him. But an arrow shot at random, perhaps even against orders, struck Ahab in a vital spot between the joints of his armor. Wounded and bleeding, he was propped up in his chariot facing the Syrians, but died that same evening and was brought to Samaria.

Ahab's character is certainly anything but admirable. Twice previously God notes that he went to his house sullen and vexed, one of these times lying down on his bed, turning

away his face and refusing to eat. By God actions are weighed. While men might make much of “the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, and the ivory house that he built, and all the cities that he built” (ch. 22:39), God shows us this wicked man as He saw him.

AHAZIAH (1)

“Ahaziah fell through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria, and was injured; so he sent messengers and said...‘Go, inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury.’ But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah...‘Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them, “Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?” Now therefore, thus says the Lord: “You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.””

2 Kings 1:2-4 NKJV

Ahaziah, Ahab’s son and successor, quickly showed that he had no regard for the Lord. Of him we read that he “did evil in the sight of Jehovah, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin” (1 Ki. 22:52). The main focus God gives us on this king’s life relates to what he did about an injury he suffered in a fall, an injury that was to prove fatal. God often tests us in seemingly little things, but these things reveal the true condition of our hearts. Totally ignoring the painful lessons his father Ahab had had to learn, Ahaziah left Jehovah completely out of his thinking — something both foolish and dangerous to do. He sent his messengers to inquire of the “lord of flies,” Baal-Zebub, the god of the Philistine city of Ekron associated with healing. Jehovah had Elijah intercept the messengers and send word by them of the king’s impending doom. Where do we place our confidence when we are sick or injured? We can truly be thankful for doctors and other practitioners of the healing arts, for medicines, medical equipment and tests of all kinds. We are free before God to

make full use of them. But our trust must not be in things or in people, but in the Lord alone!

AHAZIAH (2)

“He said, It is Elijah the Tishbite. And he sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him, and behold, he sat on the top of the mount. And he spoke to him: Man of God, the king says, Come down! And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, And if I be a man of God, let fire come down from the heavens and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from the heavens, and consumed him and his fifty.”

2 Kings 1:8-10

King Ahaziah recognized from his messengers' description that it was Elijah who had told them that he would not recover from his injury but would die. He and all Israel knew who Elijah was, a man of God. The king now sent a detachment of soldiers to arrest him. Their captain rudely demanded, “The king says, Come down!” Down through the years many men of God, male and female, have been confronted with a “Come down” from the authorities. To this day the militia or police in many lands still harass Christians and haul them off to torture, fines, and imprisonment. Where the enmity of godless authorities is not so crass, their opposition still makes itself felt. The state wants to rule supreme. Pilate told our Lord, “Dost Thou not know that I have authority to release Thee and have authority to crucify Thee?” (Jn. 19:10).

But God rules supreme. Elijah called down fire from heaven upon this insolent captain and his fifty, and a little later upon a second, even more insulting one. What he did was right — wicked Ahaziah was really challenging God. God is no less able to act to protect His own today. But we live in a day of grace and are to show the spirit of our Lord Jesus who endured griefs, insult, and injury, suffering wrongfully. He, “when reviled,

reviled not again; when suffering, threatened not; but gave Himself over into the hands of Him who judges righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23).

JEHORAM (1)

“The king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom, and they made a circuit of seven days’ journey. And there was no water for the army, and for the cattle that followed them. And the king of Israel said, Alas! that Jehovah has called these three kings together, to give them into the hand of Moab!”

2 Kings 3:9-10

Jehoram, another of Ahab’s sons, succeeded his brother Ahaziah, who had no son, on the throne of Israel. God notes that he did evil in the sight of Jehovah, but not like his father and his mother. While de-emphasizing Baal-worship, he did not depart from the idolatry introduced by Jeroboam, but persisted in this.

When Ahab died, Moab, which had been subjugated by David nearly 1½ centuries earlier, rebelled against Israel. Nothing had been done against this during Ahaziah’s brief reign, but now Jehoram sought the king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, and the king of Edom, tributary to Judah, to help him fight against Moab. Taking the roundabout route through the Wilderness of Edom, these kings encountered a great problem: no water. Jehoram’s response is one typical of him. We shall see it on subsequent occasions also: blame Jehovah! He had asked Jehoshaphat’s help, but he now charges Jehovah with bringing the three kings together, as he puts it, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!

Isn’t this a typical reaction of unsaved men and women when they face problems? They get themselves into trouble, and then blame God for the trouble. Even problems they may not be personally involved in are ascribed to God, often with the

protestation, If God is a God of love, why does He do this, or allow so-and-so? While holy and righteous, God is a God of love. The next morning He miraculously provided water for the three armies in their distress and then also gave a great victory over the Moabites.

JEHORAM (2)

“When Elisha...heard that the king...had rent his garments...he sent to the king, saying, Why hast thou rent thy garments? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.”

2 Kings 5:8

The king of Syria had sent his army commander Naaman to the king of Israel with a letter demanding, “Behold, I have sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest cure him of his leprosy.” Naaman’s wife’s maid, a captive Israelite girl, had spoken of the prophet in Samaria, saying that he would cure her master of this dread disease. Jehoram of course knew nothing of all this, but was distraught by the impossible demand being made of him. Deeply agitated, he tore his clothes, seeing in this impossible demand the excuse his Syrian enemy would use to renew the war that had raged intermittently for decades between their two lands. “Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends to me to cure a man of his leprosy?” He knew God, knew the power of God, but had absolutely no relationship to Him and certainly no thought of turning to Him for help in his predicament.

King Jehoram has many present-day successors. They get upset about a problem, often of colossal proportions, and recognize that it is beyond their ability to resolve. They then mention God; in fact, they may even use His name in their imprecations. But He means nothing to them, for they neither know Him nor have a relationship with Him. Like Jehoram, they would not think of turning to Him for help in their need, far less for salvation! Yet God mercifully intervened. Naaman went to God’s prophet Elisha’s home and learned how he could be cured of his leprosy. Though angrily rebelling at first, he did go

down to the Jordan, dipped seven times and was totally cleansed. Then, unlike King Jehoram, he entered into a true relationship with Israel's God.

JEHORAM (3)

“The king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and he was on his guard there...The king of Israel said to Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite? Shall I smite them? And he said, Thou shalt not smite them...He said, God do so, and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall remain on him this day!”

2 Kings 6:10,21-22,31

The story of the prophet Elisha is closely associated with the history of King Jehoram. In 2 Kings 6 we see three very different instances of their contact with each other, instances that have their present-day applications as well.

In the first, Elisha repeatedly warned Jehoram of traps that the enemy king of Syria was setting for him. Jehoram took these warnings seriously and was spared many a problem. How God was trying to reach out to him! Today too God may place His servants in places where they can offer helpful counsel to political leaders. Oh, that such advice might be gratefully acted upon!

In the second portion, God had protected Elisha when the Syrian host foolishly attempted to capture him. Instead, God's prophet had captured the whole host of the enemies after God had blinded them according to Elisha's request. Elisha led them to Samaria and prayed that God might open their eyes. Jehoram would have taken advantage of the situation, but first sought the prophet's direction. Oh, that leaders today might seek God's direction from His servants, especially where it involves moral decisions!

Yet in a situation of deep distress, the third case, Jehoram is quick to blame his problems on God's prophet and by implication, on God. How fickle is man's heart! Human leaders are seldom like Job, who said, "We have also received good from God, and should we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10). Rather, man rants against God!

JEHORAM (4)

“The king was talking with Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha has done. And it came to pass as he was telling the king how he had restored a dead body to life.”

2 Kings 8:4-5

It is sadly interesting, but yet a real warning to us to see how interested a person can be in spiritual things without ever making a spiritual commitment. We see a good example of this in the story of Jehoram. Again and again he had had contact with Elisha and had seen the effect of this prophet's ministry. Now he is asking Gehazi, once Elisha's servant who had been stricken with leprosy for trying to make personal gain from Naaman's cleansing, to recount all the great things Elisha had done.

Just as Gehazi is telling about the woman whose dead son Elisha had restored to life, she and the son show up to petition the king to have their property restored. She fully corroborates Gehazi's account. The king orders that her land be restored to her, along with all its income during the years she had been away from it. We appreciate his fairness, but oh, we would like to see more. Is this all the impact Elisha's deeds have on him?

Many people today have heard of the great things that Jesus has done. They know something of His birth, His holy life, His parables and teachings, and they've heard how He was crucified, died, and rose again. They may even have personal contact with others to whom He has given life, eternal life, and marvel at their changed lives; for becoming a Christian involves a new birth and a new life altogether. But that's as far as their

interest goes. They know about Christ, but they do not know Him! This is not enough. Nor is it sufficient to be fair or kind or good. Where do you stand in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ?

JEHU (1)

“He said, Thus and thus spoke he to me saying, Thus saith Jehovah: I have anointed thee king over Israel. Then they hasted and took every man his garment, and put it under him on the very stairs, and blew with trumpets, and said, Jehu is king! And Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat, son of Nimshi, conspired against Joram.”

2 Kings 9:12-14

Years before, God had told Elijah to anoint Jehu king of Israel. But God in His longsuffering had deliberately postponed the execution of His judgment against Ahab when Ahab had humbled Himself before Him. Now the time had come. Elisha sent a young prophet to anoint Jehu, commission him to destroy completely the house of Ahab, and then flee. Judgment is not pleasant or a joy!

Jehu was the man for the job. He did not equivocate. He was well known for his furious driving, a man of action, thorough, and a leader among his fellow army captains. As soon as they learned he had been anointed they spread their garments for him to walk on and blew the trumpet, proclaiming him king. They immediately started out for Jizreel, where King Joram was recovering from wounds sustained in battle. No one was to get ahead of them to spread the alarm. Those who met them were made to join them.

The king himself, accompanied by his nephew Ahaziah, the young king of Judah, went to meet Jehu. Jehu shot his royal master with an arrow, killing him immediately. Ahaziah fled, but was killed also. With the help of some eunuchs Jezebel was killed. Then it was the turn of Ahab's 70 sons who were being

brought up and were now killed by the leading citizens of Jizreel. On and on!

Judgment against wickedness is a sad necessity. Yet God calls it His strange work. Jehu proved expert and thorough in executing judgment upon Ahab's house. There are those today who are glad to walk in his footsteps. Beware lest you be glad to be a Jehu!

JEHU (2)

“Jehu...found Jehonadab...and he greeted him, and said to him, Is thy heart right, as my heart is...? And Jehonadab said, It is... and Jehu took him up to him into the chariot, and said, Come with me, and see my zeal for Jehovah...But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of Jehovah the God of Israel with all his heart; he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin.”

2 Kings 10:13-16,31

Jehu had been zealous and thorough in exterminating the house of Ahab. God commended him for this and promised that his children of the fourth generation would sit on the throne of Israel. He proved equally thorough in rooting out the worship of Baal.

Jehu thought highly of himself and of his zeal for Jehovah and boasted of himself to Jehonadab. In the New Testament we are told: “But he that boasts, let him boast in the Lord. For not he that commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends” (2 Cor. 10:17-18). God’s verdict as to Jehu’s heart being right and his zeal for the Lord reads quite differently from Jehu’s self-commendation. Hundreds of years earlier God had told Samuel that man looks on the outward appearance, but God on the heart.

Jehonadab, to whom Jehu boasts about himself and whom he invites to go with him to see his zeal for the Lord, is also mentioned in 2 Chronicles 2:55 and Jeremiah 35. He was not an Israelite but was of Kenite background, living among the Israelites. He was a true stranger in the land. Hundreds of years later his descendants were still obeying what he had commanded them: not to drink wine, build houses, sow seed,

plant or have vineyards, but to live in tents as sojourners. They win God's commendation and promise of blessing for their obedience to the command of their forefather. Oh, that we too might learn to be strangers and pilgrims on this earth, obeying God's Word from the heart!

JEHOAHAZ

“The anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel, and He delivered them into the hand of Hazael king of Syria, and into the hand of Ben-Hadad the son of Hazael, all those days. And Jehoahaz besought Jehovah, and Jehovah hearkened to him; for He saw the oppression of Israel...And Jehovah gave Israel a savior, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians.”

2 Kings 13:3-5

During the reign of Jehu's son Jehoahaz we come to a low point in Israel's history. Already in Jehu's day “Jehovah began to cut Israel short” so that they lost the territory east of the Jordan to the Syrians under Hazael (2 Ki. 10:32-33). Matters got even worse until Jehoahaz's army was down to a pitiful 50 horsemen, 10 chariots, and 10,000 footmen. God's Word attributes this predicament to Jehovah's anger being kindled against Israel. Well might it be, for they still followed the sins of Jeroboam.

What to do? Archeologists have unearthed Assyrian inscriptions showing Jehu bringing tribute to Assyria, seeking help against his Syrian enemies. Scripture says nothing about this. Assyria would later overrun Israel and lead its people into captivity. God warns us in His Word, “Cursed is the man that confideth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from Jehovah” (Jer. 17:5). We find similar warnings again and again. Jehoahaz gives us a better example. He “besought Jehovah” and we read that “Jehovah hearkened to him.” Through the psalmist Asaph He had invited, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me” (Ps. 50:15). Whether Jehoahaz ever glorified Him we don't know, but God is faithful. He heard Jehoahaz's pleading, but

more than that, He pitied His people and gave them a deliverer from the Syrian oppression. Who this was we don't know, but thank God for the Savior we do know!

JOASH, OR JEHOASH (1)

“Elisha fell sick of his sickness in which he died. And Joash the king of Israel came down to him, and wept over his face, and said, My father, my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof! And Elisha said to him, Take bow and arrows.”

2 Kings 13:14-15

Elisha lay on his final sickbed. He was a much-respected man of God who had faithfully served the Lord for close to 60 years among a people who had, at best, paid only lip service to Him. King Joash himself came down to pay his respects to the old prophet. He wept. Elisha would be missed in the days to come. His presence in Israel had been a constant reminder of Jehovah's presence with and protection of His people.

But what was this? The man of God gave a series of commands to the king: “Take bow and arrows...Put thy hand upon the bow...Open the window eastward...Shoot.” Step by step the king did as he was told. The old prophet explained, “An arrow of Jehovah's deliverance...from the Syrians. Thou shalt smite the Syrians... till thou has consumed them.” Now he went on, “Take the arrows... Smite upon the ground.” The king did so, but only three times. Rather than demonstrating faith he was humoring the old prophet. The man of God was angry with King Joash: “Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then wouldest thou have smitten the Syrians till thou hadst consumed them, whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice.” Whatever Joash's thinking may have been, he had just demonstrated his lack of faith and lack of obedience from the heart. He had gone through the motions of doing what the prophet said, but had not entered into the earnestness of the commands given him.

When God speaks to us through His Word, He means what He says. Let's take Him seriously and in faith obey Him and act!

JOASH, OR JEHOASH (2)

“Jehoash king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah...and came to Jerusalem, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem from the gate of Ephraim to the cornergate, four hundred cubits. And he took all the gold and the silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of Jehovah, and in the treasures of the king’s house, and hostages, and returned to Samaria.”

2 Kings 14:13-14

What a sad picture before us here! We have seen conflict between Israel and Judah at other times, too, but this conflict goes beyond all that had been before. Joash (Jehoash), Jehu’s grandson, defeats Amaziah, king of Judah, captures Jerusalem his capital, breaks down a large portion of its wall, and takes away its treasure. It is true that Amaziah, flushed with pride at having smitten Edom, had challenged Joash to battle. Joash had replied, warning Amaziah of the consequences of his rash challenge, but Amaziah would not hear. God then had allowed him to be routed before Israel. Pride still goes before a fall and a haughty spirit before destruction. We have many examples of this in God’s Word, all in evident contrast to that One who humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

There is nothing new under the sun. Today, sad to say, believers also challenge one another to combat, forgetting that we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against mighty satanic hosts of spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies. Rather than praying for the peace of Jerusalem, they break down its walls, making it difficult to maintain godly separation and protection from evil. The precious vessels of God’s house are taken, just as was later done by Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king. And hostages — we try to force our brethren’s

good behavior through such pressure! What a loss for God when we believers treat one another thus!

JEROBOAM II

“Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, began to reign in Samaria, for forty-one years. And he did evil in the sight of Jehovah...He restored the border of Israel...according to the word of Jehovah the God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah the prophet, the son of Amittai, who was of Gath-Hepher. For Jehovah saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter.”

2 Kings 14:23-26

The reign of this second Jeroboam was longer than that of any other king of Israel. Outwardly it was a time of prosperity, but there were deep-rooted problems. Jeroboam walked in the sins of his predecessor Jeroboam I and like him did evil in the sight of Jehovah. The prophet Amos, who lived at this time, denounced the luxury of Israel's well-to-do upper class in no uncertain terms. For this, Amos was told to flee the country and go to Judah. The sanctuary at Bethel, he was told, was the king's sanctuary, and he was not to prophesy there. Today too in many countries believers are persecuted and told what they are to preach and teach, and what topics they must avoid. In some places attempts are even being made to have the Bible classified as hate literature because of its uncompromising presentation of God's holy standards and its stern denunciation of sins such as homosexual behavior. Sinful man is quite ready for a religion that he himself can devise and control but he refuses to submit to God's standards.

Jonah's prophecy mentioned here was doubtless far more to his liking than the message of impending judgment God used him to bring to the people of Nineveh in the book called by his name. Both messages were equally of God and manifest His loving heart. Whether He uses a wicked king to deliver His

undeserving people or turns a wicked nation to repentance, He is God and sovereign.

ZECHARIAH

“Zechariah the son of Jeroboam reigned over Israel in Samaria, six months. And he did evil in the sight of Jehovah, according as his fathers had done...Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him, and smote him before the people...This was the word of Jehovah...to Jehu saying, Thy sons shall sit upon the throne of Israel unto the fourth generation. And so it came to pass.”

2 Kings 15:8-12

Comparing the accounts of the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah at this point in history we find an apparent gap of about 11 years between the end of Jeroboam II's reign and the start of his son Zechariah's reign. These were turbulent times in Israel. Scripture does not give us details about all that happened then. It does show us that despite all that may happen in political affairs to earthly rulers, God is in ultimate control, and He keeps His promises. Zechariah, Jehu's great-great-grandson, comes to the throne and reigns for six months.

What kind of a king was he? Scripture tells us three things:

- (1) He did evil in the sight of Jehovah;
- (2) according as his fathers had done;
- (3) he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin (v. 9).

God's eye is on us:

- (1) He assesses whether we are doing good or evil, right or wrong.

- (2) Others may previously have done what we are now doing. This is no excuse for us to do the same. We need not follow their bad pattern.
- (3) Such patterns can often be traced far back. God's Word traces our sin all the way back to Adam. And sin does not become better or more acceptable to God as it grows older. It is just as repugnant to God as when it began.

Zechariah did not use the time allotted him to repent! His time was soon up. After six months he was openly assassinated "before the people," by Shallum who had "conspired against him."

SHALLUM

“Shallum the son of Jabesh began to reign in the thirty-ninth year of Uzziah king of Judah; and he reigned a full month in Samaria. And Menahem...slew him, and reigned in his stead. And the rest of the acts of Shallum, and his conspiracy which he made, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.”

2 Kings 15:13-15

After the death of Jeroboam II the story of Israel's kings quickly degenerated into a series of conspiracies accompanied by civil warfare and violence. Shallum conspired against Zechariah and overthrew him. He in turn reigned only one full month before Menahem overthrew him. He seems to have been so busy attaining the throne and then trying to defend himself against his cruel successor that God does not mention his walking in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Perhaps he had no time for matters of religion. At any rate, God, who notes even a cup of cold water given for the Lord's sake, has nothing good to record about him!

Our Lord Jesus enunciated the principle that “every one that exalts himself shall be abased” (Lk. 14:11). This principle is well illustrated in the lives of these kings. The converse, “He that abases himself shall be exalted,” is most beautifully seen in the life of our Lord Jesus. Philippians 2:5-11 shows us how deeply He humbled Himself and how highly God has exalted Him.

Another principle the Lord laid down is that “all who take the sword shall perish by the sword” (Mt. 26:52). We see this as we look at these kings also. How sad it is for a Shallum to be distinguished in God's records only for the conspiracy which he

made and for how he openly assassinated his predecessor, reigned in his stead, and then a month later suffered the same violent end himself! May we be warned and turn from this king's example!

MENAHEM

“Then Menahem smote Tiphseh, and all that were therein...because they did not open to him; and he smote it: all the women in it that were with child he ripped up...Pul the king of Assyria came against the land; and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to establish the kingdom in his hand. And Menahem exacted the money of Israel, of all those who were wealthy, of each man fifty shekels of silver.”

2 Kings 15:16-20

The story of cruel Menahem takes us another step downward in the history of Israel. God emphasizes the self-seeking character of this wicked king. Because they did not open their gates to him, he attacked Tiphseh and everyone in that city and its vicinity. He sacked the city and in his cruelty went so far as to rip open all the pregnant women. What a contrast to that One who “will come with might, and His arm shall rule for Him...He will feed His flock like a shepherd: He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead those that give suck” (Isa. 40:11). What a glorious day to look forward to!

When threatened by the even stronger might of the Assyrian king, Menahem bought him off with a huge quantity of silver, intending thereby to strengthen his own hold on the kingdom too. Yet, just as with politicians today, the money did not come out of his own pocket. Scripture points out that he “exacted” the money from Israel, forcing every wealthy man in Israel to contribute. What a contrast to the One of whom the psalmist prophesied, “I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her needy ones with bread” (Ps. 132:15). Reading of such callous, cruel treatment of his subjects, we are not

surprised to read that Menahem did evil in Jehovah's sight and that he departed not all his days from the sins of Jeroboam.

PEKAHIAH

“In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekahiah the son of Menahem began to reign over Israel in Samaria, for two years. And he did evil in the sight of Jehovah: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.”

2 Kings 15:23-24

Although we are now at the seventeenth king of Israel, all of them evil in varying degrees, we see that God has not changed His standards. Sometimes as human beings we feel that age and long usage can make good and acceptable that which God terms bad or unacceptable in His sight. The norms of society change, and with them even the rulings of our court systems. But God does not change. Nor will He ever alter His standards to accommodate our ever-changing ideas. He is absolutely holy and righteous.

Pekahiah did evil in the sight of the Lord. He departed not from the sins of Jeroboam. In presenting His divine assessment in these words, God shows that He was looking for Israel's kings to actively turn away from the sins of their predecessor, Jeroboam. “Cease to do evil, learn to do well” (Isa. 1:17) is the divine principle by which He expects us to act. So in the New Testament also, we are each called upon to withdraw from iniquity, to purify ourselves away from vessels to our Lord's dishonor (2 Tim. 2:19-21 marg.) if we would be vessels to honor, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work. Non-participation in evil is not enough. God demands clear-cut separation from it.

Pekahiah, as so many before him, is assassinated by one of his captains. Pekah the son of Remaliah with fifty Gileadites

conspires against Pekahiah and kills him in the very citadel of the royal palace at Samaria. In 1 Chronicles 5:26 we see that the tribes who had chosen their possession in Gilead, despite being mighty men, are the first to be carried into Assyrian captivity.

PEKAH

“Pekah the son of Remaliah began to reign over Israel in Samaria, for twenty years...In [his] days Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came and took [5 northern cities], and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria...Then Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah son of Remaliah, the king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to battle; and they besieged Ahaz, but were unable to conquer him.”

2 Kings 15:27,29; 16:5

During the twenty years Pekah reigned there were major changes in Israel's situation. Assyria's mighty warrior kings conquered the northern and eastern parts of the land and deported their people to Assyria. Threatened by Assyria, Israel and Syria were allies and sought to overthrow the house of David in Judah, for Ahaz, the wicked king of Judah, had become tributary to Assyria and was leaning upon its king for help against these enemies.

In 2 Chronicles 28 we learn that the Lord allowed Pekah to win a great victory over Judah. Several of the highest ranking men of Judah plus 120,000 valiant men were slain in one day and 200,000 women and children plus much spoil were taken captive. The Lord sent the prophet Oded to rebuke the men of Israel and to tell them to send back their captives. We do not read of any response on the part of Pekah, but four of the heads of the children of Ephraim openly acknowledged their nation's guilt before the Lord. They then fed, clothed, shod, and anointed their captives from the plunder, put the weak on donkeys, and returned them to their brethren. It is good to see, even at this low point in Israel's history, a remnant responding to the word of the Lord.

Syria fell to the Assyrian king. Pekah, like so many of his predecessors, met his end as a result of a conspiracy against him. He was attacked, killed, and succeeded by his assassin.

HOSHEA

“In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea the son of Elah began to reign in Samaria over Israel, for nine years. And he did evil in the sight of Jehovah, but not as the kings of Israel... before him. Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria, and Hoshea became his servant and tendered him presents. But the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea.”

2 Kings 17:1-4

Hoshea, the nineteenth and final king of the northern kingdom, Israel, had conspired against the previous king, Pekah, and had put him to death. Scripture tells us that he reigned in his stead, but gives us two different dates as to when Hoshea began to reign. Apparently he had problems consolidating his hold upon the now rapidly sinking kingdom, or perhaps he had to have his credentials to rule approved by the powerful Assyrians. At any rate, his rule was only that of a vassal to the Assyrian king.

It is interesting to see the Lord noting that while Hoshea did evil in His sight, it was not as the kings of Israel that had been before him. The Judge of all the earth ever does right. He knows the heart and weighs with the balances of the sanctuary.

His Assyrian overlord now imprisoned him and overran the land with his armies, besieging Samaria for three years till it fell. He had found treachery in Hoshea, for Hoshea, instead of paying his normal tribute, had sent envoys to the king of Egypt, to enlist his help. Our Lord Jesus plainly declares that no man can serve two masters — an important lesson for us to learn, too.

Hoshea (deliverance) proved anything but that to his people. One alone will bring deliverance to the ten tribes. Israel

was taken captive into Assyria and resettled in various places. The ten tribes have never returned from their captivity, nor will they do so till the Lord Himself brings them back in a day to come.

CONCLUSION

“The king of Assyria carried away Israel to Assyria, and settled them in Halah and by the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes; because they hearkened not to the voice of Jehovah their God, but transgressed His covenant, all that Moses the servant of Jehovah commanded; and they would not hear nor do it.”

2 Kings 18:11-12

While God has no obligation to explain to us why He does what He does, yet in His Word He often does so. As He concludes the story of the ten-tribe kingdom, God gives us a detailed bill of particulars in 2 Kings 17:7-23 as to why He brought an end to this kingdom. God has placed it in His Word for our warning and instruction. We do well to examine it. Romans 11:20-21 tells us: “Be not high-minded, but fear: if God indeed has not spared the natural branches; lest it might be He spare not thee either.”

God had brought Israel out of their bondage in Egypt. They had turned to idols, both the idolatry of the nations that Jehovah had dispossessed before them, and the idolatry their own kings had introduced. Jeroboam is particularly singled out as having “violently turned Israel from following Jehovah, and made them sin a great sin” (2 Ki. 17:21). God is a jealous God who cannot brook rivals of any kind for the affections of His people.

God had warned His people over and over again through prophets and seers to turn from their evil ways and keep His commandments and statutes. But the people refused to hear. They had rejected His statutes and covenant and testimonies. They had followed the ways of the nations round about them

and had sold themselves to do evil in the sight of Jehovah, to provoke Him to anger.

Finally He removed Israel out of His sight as a nation. Yet His omniscience and love knows exactly where each individual is. Nor will He be frustrated in His purposes which are secure in Christ.