

ISRAEL AND JUDAH

Ellet J. Waggoner and Alonzo T. Jones



Chapter 1

The Revolt of the Ten Tribes

With the beginning of the third quarter we enter again upon the study of the Old Testament. The close of the Old Testament lessons for last year, was at the end of Solomon's reign. We learned:

- How Solomon forsook his wisdom and plunged into the depths of folly;
- How that he loved "many strange women," women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites;
- How that he went after Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites;
- How that he built "high places" for Chemosh of Moab, and Molech of Ammon, and for all the gods of his strange wives; and
- How that for it the Lord stirred up adversaries on every hand which were adversaries all the days of Solomon.

And then to crown it all the Lord said unto Solomon: "Forasmuch as this is done of you, and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely rend the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. ... Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one

tribe to your son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen." (1 Kings 11:11,13)

By Solomon's sins, a fearful train of evils was laid. In his iniquities there was sown the seed from which sprang a most abundant harvest, which was reaped in long years, and even ages, of suffering, of sorrow, and of bitterness. How little he thought, how little any one things, of this! Yet there is nothing surer, there is nothing more diligently inculcated by the word of God, than this one thing, that sin cannot be committed with impunity. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap." (Galatians 6:7) "Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same." (Job 4:8)

Nor is this confined to the immediate acts. "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." (Jeremiah 17:10)

Remember therefore that when wickedness is sown nothing but wickedness can spring from it, and the fruit that is borne, enters into the computation of the reward, whatever it may be. If the reward be the reward of the wicked, it will be the greater according to the fruit of the wickedness committed. And if by the mercy of God the sin is forgiven, and if, by patient continuance in well-doing, the reward of the righteous be obtained, yet the fullness of that reward will be diminished according as the fruit of wickedness shall abound.

Sin is a terrible reality. "And be sure your sin will find you out."
(Numbers 32:23)

Nowadays it has become quite a common thing, even almost tacitly understood, that young men must sow their "wild oats." Yes; and nearly all do so, but it were well to remember that, from the beginning of sin, never yet was there sown a particle of such "wild oats" that did not spring up and bear fruit abundantly, all of which must be reaped, in one place or another, in sorrow and in dread. There is absolutely no escape, no wind will blast it, no mildew will smite it; it cannot be plucked up by the roots,--it must be reaped. "Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. For he that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." (Exodus 20:5)

It is not in vain that God has written in the table of his law, "I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments." (Exodus 20:6)

In accordance with the word of the Lord to Solomon, the prophet Ahijah told Jeroboam that ten of the tribes should be given to him, and he should reign over them. Jeroboam was the son of Nebat of the tribe of Ephraim, and his mother's name was Zeruah, and was at this time a widow. As Solomon was building Millo, and repairing the walls of the city of David, he saw Jeroboam among the workmen, and "seeing the young man that he was industrious, he

made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph [Ephraim]." (1 Kings 11:28)

As Jeroboam was going out of the city of Jerusalem one day, Ahijah met him and drew him aside into the field. Then Ahijah took his own outer garment, tore it into twelve pieces, and said to Jeroboam, "Take ten pieces; for thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to you." (1 Kings 11:31)

And although the Lord told him plainly that this should not be done while Solomon lived, yet like a great many before his time he could not await the Lord's time and so he attempted to seize the kingdom before the time. "He lifted up his hand against the king," (1 Kings 11:26) and therefore Solomon sought to kill him. "And Jeroboam arose, and fled into Egypt, unto Shishak, king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon." (1 Kings 11:40)

Rehoboam succeeded Solomon on the throne of David, and of course expected to reign over all the tribes of Israel, and so went to Shechem to be acknowledged as king. But there was a hitch in the proceedings. Israel had sent word to Jeroboam in Egypt and called him up to Shechem, and it may well be supposed that with the ambitious schemes that he had in hand even while Solomon lived, that he would suffer nothing to be settled by which Rehoboam should rule over all. But besides this, the people had a real grievance. In Solomon had been fulfilled, in a great measure, the prophecy of Samuel when the people chose a king in the first place.

"He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your olive-yards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and you shall be his servants." (1 Samuel 8:11-17)

All this had been done by Solomon; and all to support his heathen wives. The burdens of the people had really been made heavy, and now they asked relief from some of these. But of this, Samuel had also told them, "and you shall cry out in that day because of your king which you shall have chosen; and the Lord will not hear you in that day." (1 Samuel 8:18)

And so when they ask Rehoboam to relieve them he only mocks them. He first consulted the old men who gave him wise counsel, but he had not sense enough to follow it, but instead turned to "the young men that were grown up with him." (1 Kings 12:8)

And a fine set of counselors these were! Let us see for a moment under what influences he and these young men had grown up. Rehoboam was the son of Solomon by Naamah an Ammonitess. (1 Kings 14:21) And we read in 1 Kings 11:18 that all these heathen women burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods. These gods were Molech, and Ashtoreth, and Chemosh, and Baalim. These represented the male and the female principles of generation, and all the rites of their worship corresponded to that idea, and is expressed in the one word, lasciviousness. Their priests were men dressed in women's clothes; their priestesses were harlots, and their most acceptable worship was by prostitution, and burning the offspring in the fire.

Such were the influences amidst which these young men had grown up, and such was the training that they had, by which they should be fitted to become counselors in an emergency that involved one of the greatest kingdoms then in the world. How could the issue be anything else but fatal? And so it was. They said: "Thus shall you speak unto this people that spoke unto you." (1 Kings 12:10)

Thus implying that it was an act of rebellion for them even to speak to him of their grievances. And he was to say to them, "My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. My father has chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." (1 Kings 12:10-11)

There could be but one result. The people answered the king, saying: "What portion have we in David? neither have we

inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to your own house, David." (1 Kings 12:16)

Thus comes, fast following, evil upon evil as the fearful fruit of the sins of Solomon. It was only for David's sake that all this did not happen in Solomon's own day. And even now, when it did come about, it was still for David's sake that there was a tribe left to Rehoboam at all. "Notwithstanding in your days I will not do it for David your father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of your son. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to your son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen. ... But he [Solomon's son] shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel." (1 Kings 11:12-13,32) "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God." (Romans 11:22)

His mercy is upon children's children to such as fear Him, and in visiting iniquity, transgression, and sin, yet in wrath upon the disobedient, in mercy He remembers those who have been obedient. "Visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Him, And showing mercy unto thousands [of generations] of them who love Him, and keep His commandments." (Exodus 20:5-6) "And I will delight myself in your commandments, which I have loved." (Psalm 119:47)--Signs of the Times, June 25, 1885--Notes on the International Lesson, July--1 Kings 12:6-17

A.T. Jones

Chapter 2

The Kingdom Divided

In this lesson we have the climax of the trouble for which the later years of reign had been preparing the way. For: "King Solomon loved many strange women. ... And he had seven hundred wives. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. ... Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of you, and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely rend the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. Notwithstanding in your days I will not do it for David your father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of your son. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to your son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen." (1 Kings 11:1,3-4,11-13)

It had been only a hundred and twenty years since Saul was anointed king, and yet the evil results of having a king, which the Lord pointed out to the people at the time, were already being severely felt. He had said: "You shall cry out in that day because of your king which you shall have chosen you." (1 Samuel 8:18)

And so it was.

Real and False Kingly Power

When God created man in His image and said: "Let them have dominion," (Genesis 1:26) it was not an arbitrary power over the earth which was conferred upon him. He was to have dominion by virtue of that inherent power of the righteousness of the character which was given to him in making him in the image of God. And it was God's plan that the earth should be ruled by the power of His own righteousness as revealed in and through man.

After man had fallen into sin, this purpose of God was not changed, although it became necessary to give His own Son to become the man, the second Adam, through whom all this should be accomplished.

Just in proportion, therefore, as men lived near to God, following in His ways and permitting Him to reveal His righteousness in them, so would they have dominion, so would they have stability of character, and thence would follow stability of government.

Just in proportion as they departed from God and refused to be obedient to His commandments, and thus permitted sin to have dominion over them, so would they lose their dominion, so would weakness of character assert itself, and thence would follow instability of government. This was the history of the people of God under all their rulers.

Apostasy and Distress

In his later years Solomon "kept not that which the Lord commanded," (1 Kings 11:10) but his heart was turned away "after other gods." (1 Kings 11:10)

Wealth, luxury, and self-indulgence worked out, as in numberless other royal cases, their bitter fruits. The material gifts of God's bounty were perverted to selfish ends. A policy of mere worldly expediency, instead of righteousness, led to alliances with heathen courts. These, in turn, involved increased expenditure, which was met by augmented taxation. Thus was the way prepared for discontent and revolt.

A Petition Disregarded

After the death of Solomon and the accession of Rehoboam, the people came to the new king and said: "Your father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make the grievous service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve you. ... The king consulted with the old men," (1 Kings 12:4,6) and they gave wise counsel, saying: "If you will be a servant unto this people this day, and will serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants for ever." (1 Kings 12:7)

Then the king "consulted with the young men that were grown up with him," (1 Kings 12:8) and they recommended this reply: "My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins." (1 Kings 12:10)

The new king followed the counsel of the young men and threatened the people with heavier burdens than his father had imposed upon them.

The True and the False Principle of Government

The two replies well represent the difference between the principles of the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. "If you will be a servant unto this people," (1 Kings 12:7) said the old men, and this was the principle upon which God in Jesus Christ deals with the rebellious world. "Behold my Servant whom I uphold." (Isaiah 42:1) "I am among you as he that serves." (Luke 22:27) "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." (Matthew 20:27)

Thus does He who is King of kings and Lord of lords relate himself to those whom He would win as His loyal subjects. In marked contrast with this is that arbitrary spirit which would seek to crush under an iron heel every one who should raise a voice against oppression. The one would win by self-sacrifice; the other would drive by an increase of arbitrary power.

But instead of being terrified into submission by the threats uttered, the people were driven into open revolt: "What portion have

we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to your own house, David." (1 Kings 12:16)

When the tax gatherer came among them, "all Israel stoned him with stones, that he died. So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day." (1 Kings 12:18-19)

Thus by disunion and division was the way being prepared for the downfall of the nation and their captivity.

The Situation Today

He who considers the situation among the nations of the earth today cannot fail to see the working of the same influences which brought disaster to Solomon's kingdom. There are nations where the people are groaning under the burden of debt and taxation, and yet their protests, not always wisely made (as in the recent riots in Italy), are met with a display of military power, and no hope is held out that the condition of affairs will be improved. The ruling powers have in many cases so far repudiated the principles of truth and righteousness that there is no sure foundation upon which to build any hope of future reform. The time is near when "all these things shall be dissolved," (2 Peter 3:11) and the only hope of individuals will be that each one has built for himself upon the sure foundation, and "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 3:11)--Present Truth, June 23, 1898--Notes on the International Sunday-School Lessons--1 Kings 12:4-25

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 3

Seek the Lord

The futile life of one of the weakest kings of Judah (Rehoboam) is gathered up in this one striking sentence: "He did evil, because he did not fix his heart to seek the Lord." (2 Chronicles 12:14)

That is to say, because he did not strongly resolve to do right, he did wrong; and that is a universal truth.

Yet there is a deeper truth than that in the words--because he did not set his heart to seek God, therefore he stumbled into the grip of every tempting evil. That is to say, the true way to overcome temptation is to fill the heart with God.--Present Truth, September 25, 1902--2 Chronicles 12:14

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 4

Idolatry Established

"Then Jeroboam built Shechem." (1 Kings 12:25)

He enlarged and fortified the city, and made it his capital. Shechem is one of the most noted places mentioned in the Bible. It was the first place at which Abraham stopped, when he departed out of Haran and came into the land of Canaan; there the Lord appeared to him and made him the promise of the land; and there he built his first altar in the land of Canaan. "And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto your seed will I give this land: and there he built an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him." (Genesis 12:6-7)

When Jacob came out of Mesopotamia, on his journey back to his own land, he pitched his tent before the city, and "bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent." (Genesis 33:19)

In this "parcel" of ground at Shechem, the children of Israel buried the bones of Joseph, which they had brought out of Egypt. "And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, they buried in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of silver: and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph." (Joshua 24:32)

On each side of it, on Mts. Gerizim and Ebal, stood all the people after crossing over Jordan, when the blessings upon the obedient, and the curses upon the disobedient, were pronounced. "And all Israel, and their elders, and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark and on that side before the priests the Levites, which bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, as well the stranger, as he that was born among them; half of them over against mount Gerizim, and half of them over against mount Ebal; as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel." (Joshua 8:33)

Here all Israel assembled to make Rehoboam king; here they rebelled and chose Jeroboam; and thus it came that he made it his capital. It was near the town that the Saviour, "being wearied with his journey, sat thus," (John 4:6) on Jacob's well, when the woman of Samaria came to draw water. (See John 4:1-42) Shechem was thirty-four miles north of Jerusalem. "And 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 the Lord at Jerusalem." (1 Kings 12:26-27)

There probably was some truth in this observation. For, as all were to assemble in Jerusalem three times in the year especially, besides the many other important occasions of worship; and as the Levites that were in all the cities would have to go up from time to time to fill the order of their course in the temple service; the chief religious interest would be at Jerusalem, and therefore the interests

of the whole nation would be centered there, and Jeroboam's rule would be to a certain extent only nominal.

Even if all this were so, it could only be for the best interests of the nation in every way. But that was nothing to Jeroboam. Like every other professional politician, his own personal interests must take precedence of everything, even to the usurpation of the prerogatives which God had reserved to himself. "Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold." (1 Kings 12:28)

These calves were the images of the Egyptian gods. Jeroboam had learned about them and their worship, during his sojourn in Egypt, when he fled from Solomon. The worship was of the same degraded nature as that of the gods of the Ammonites, Moabites, and Zidonians, with the exception of burning the children in the fire. "And he set the one in Bethel." (1 Kings 12:29)

It was, no doubt, an easy task to turn the people to Bethel instead of Jerusalem to worship, for there Abraham had built an altar and had worshiped, both before and after he went to Egypt: "And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Beth-el, and pitched his tent, having Beth-el on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he built an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord." (Genesis 12:8) "And he went on his journeys from the south even to Beth-el, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Beth-el and Hai; Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the Lord." (Genesis 13:3-4)

There the Lord appeared unto Jacob, and there Jacob set up a pillar, and called it God's house; (Genesis 28:10-22) there Jacob built an altar when he returned with all his substance from the house of Laban, and there the Lord appeared to him again, and renewed to him the promise made to Abraham and Isaac. (Genesis 35:6-15) In the troubled times of the judges there was the ark of the covenant, and there the people came to inquire of the Lord; (Judges 20:18-28) and there Samuel went in his circuit once a year to judge Israel.

So when Jeroboam built an altar there, and established a system of worship, idolatrous though it was, he could appeal to them upon all these sacred memories, as against Jerusalem, and especially when by the cry: "These be your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt," (Exodus 32:4) he would palm off upon them the idols as simply representations of the God of their fathers. "And the other he put in Dan." (1 Kings 12:29)

Dan was already the place of an idolatrous worship by the tribe of Dan. When the tribe of Dan sought for an inheritance in the land, they first sent out five men, who, in their search, came to Laish, and found a place where there was "no want of anything that is in the earth," (Judges 18:10) and returned and told their brethren. Then the tribe sent 600 armed men to take the place. As they were on the way, they came to the house of Micah of Mount Ephraim, and there they found a graven image, and ephod, a teraphim, and a molten image, and a Levite whom Micah had hired as his priest in the worship of these his gods, and the Danites took priest, idols, and all,

and carried them with them to Laish. They attacked and destroyed Laish, and there they built a new city and called it Dan, and established their idolatrous worship there, and maintained it till the captivity of the ten tribes.

It was easy enough, therefore, for Jeroboam to set up his golden calf at Dan, and to turn the people there to the worship of it, not only because the people were prone to idolatry, but because they were actually practicing it.

And so with one place of worship in the northern, and another in the southern, part of his kingdom, he could present very forcibly his next appeal: "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem." (1 Kings 12:28)

Yes, "It is too much for you to go to the place that the Lord himself appointed, and to worship Him as He has directed. It is too hard for you to obey the Lord, you can obey me, that will be much easier. It is too hard for you to travel away down to Jerusalem, here is a place to worship almost at your own doors as it were; this will be ever so much easier for you.

"These are your gods, anyhow, that brought you out of Egypt. You worship the same gods here that they worship at Jerusalem, only in a little different way; but then everybody cannot see alike; there is unity in diversity; we are all only branches of the same church; we are only different departments of the same army; the Lord is the one great Commander!"

Yes; Jeroboam could thus offer them ease, and that is the one thing desirable with many who pretend to worship the Lord. They will willingly worship if they can only do it in their own way. But such people don't worship the Lord, they worship themselves.

But was Jeroboam the last one who ever held out to the people such inducements? Hardly. We need not go very far to find the same thing today. When the Sabbath of the Lord, and the coming of Christ, are now presented to the people, and their holy claims urged upon them, there are plenty of would-be leaders, who, like Jeroboam, will appeal to their love of ease.

"Oh," say they, "it is not necessary for you to keep the Sabbath. Just think, you will lose your position, and your standing in society and in your church. And oh, worse than all, those people who keep the Sabbath, and are looking for the Lord, don't have any church fairs, nor festivals, nor 'mum' socials, nor fish-ponds, nor grab-bags, nor sleeping-beauties, nor kissing-bees, nor gambling--why you cannot even put up your young ladies at public auction, and sell them to the highest bidder! And that is 'too much for you,' just stay where you are. We worship the same God that they do, only in a different way. Of course we don't do as He has commanded, but all cannot see alike, you know."

But in all this as in that of old, "This thing became a sin." (1 Kings 12:30)

It is not the service of God at all. All such are "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God," (2 Timothy 3:4) and He commands, "from such turn away." (2 Timothy 3:5)

This is what was done by a great many in that time, for we read: "And the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to him [Rehoboam] out of all their coasts. ... And after them, out of all the tribes of Israel, such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice unto the Lord God of their fathers." (2 Chronicles 11:13,16) "And he made a house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi. And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made. So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense." (1 Kings 12:31-33) "And He [God] shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin." (1 Kings 14:16)

And from that day forward neither Jeroboam, nor Israel, ever knew safety. What he and they supposed the easiest way proved the hardest possible way. So it has ever been, and so will it ever be with every one who chooses his own way. Man's way leads direct to perdition; the Lord's way leads straight to paradise. Man's ways is

the hardest way; the Lord's way is the easiest of all ways. Christ said: "My yoke is easy." (Matthew 11:30)

And the only easy way is to deny self, take up the cross and follow Him. There is no other.--Signs of the Times, July 2, 1885--
Notes on the International Lesson, July 12--1 Kings 12:25-33

A.T. Jones

Chapter 5

Reformation Under Asa

Asa was the grandson of Rehoboam, in whose days, and through whose folly, Israel had been divided into two kingdoms. The division had been attended and followed by much ill-feeling, and during the reign of Ahijah, this had culminated in the battle of Mount Ephraim, in which Israel was defeated with heavy slaughter, although twice as strong in numbers as their opponents. No less than five hundred thousand of the chosen men of Israel were slain in this conflict. "Thus the children of Israel were brought under at that time, and the children of Judah prevailed, because they relied upon the Lord God of their fathers." (2 Chronicles 13:18)

Removing the Idols

Israel was long in recovering from the severe defeat then sustained, and after Asa's accession to the throne there was a period of ten years of unbroken peace. The time was spent in clearing out of the kingdom of Judah the idolatrous relics of King Solomon's apostasy. The altars of the strange gods were taken away, and the images of the sun were destroyed out of all the cities of Judah. A royal proclamation was sent throughout the country, commanding the people to seek the Lord and obey His commandments.

Religious Legislation

There are many nowadays who think that because such proclamations as these are recorded in the Scriptures, it was right to issue them, and that it is still right to enforce matters of religion by the law of the land. But, although Asa was a reformer, he showed by this edict that he did not fully appreciate the character of the worship which God requires of His people.

God's law is a law of love. By His loving-kindness He draws men to himself, and His commandments are given, not as rigid, autocratic requirements, but as a word of life, promising to all who hear and live the righteousness they set forth. Christ was the law of God in life and action, for "love is the fulfilling of the law," (Romans 13:10) and Christ was perfect love. Whoever would get correct ideas of the law of God will find them in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, who said: "Your law is within my heart." (Psalm 40:8)

He came not to condemn but to save. "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." (Galatians 3:21) "But what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son ... condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us." (Romans 8:3-4)

God's Word is strong enough in itself to accomplish the thing whereto He sends it, and if the Word prove weak through the flesh, the flesh does not improve matters by promulgating a supplementary

law of its own. The only effect of this is to hide from view the efficiency of the Divine Word, and thereby diminish faith in it.

Ensuring Peace

Asa showed further that he did not appreciate what God wanted to be to His people, by the measures he took to secure peace. In another proclamation to Judah, he admitted that because they had sought the Lord, He had given them rest on every side; yet, instead of exhorting them to continue to seek the Lord, and thus maintain their security, he ordered that they should build fortified cities, "and make about them walls, and towers, gates, and bars." (2 Chronicles 14:7)

In the same spirit he increased his army, until it numbered nearly six hundred thousand men, all of them mighty men of valor.

The Way of Peace

It is true that when God blesses men, with peace or any other good, He uses means; but we ought not to look for the fulfillment of the divine purpose through means which He has not provided. The measures taken by Asa were such precautions as might well be adopted by the heathen who knew not God, but the Lord did not design that His people should be preserved in peace by increasing their armaments.

At the present time the world is largely of opinion that the nation best prepared for war stands the best chance of maintaining peace, and statesmen and politicians claim that it would be criminal neglect to allow their nation to fall behind in the headlong race for military pre-eminence.

But peace can only come in the knowledge that the Lord's protection is over us, for "except the Lord keep the city, the watchman wakes but in vain." (Psalm 127:1)

If Judah had committed their ways unto the Lord, He would have seen that their peace was not disturbed. "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You." (Isaiah 26:3) "When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." (Proverbs 16:7)

The Ethiopian Invasion

This was soon demonstrated to Asa. A great king was advancing rapidly toward the border of Judah, conquering as he went, and threatening Asa's kingdom with the horrors of a barbarian invasion. The continual struggle between Egypt and Ethiopia had ended for the present in the subjugation of the former country, and Zerah, king of Ethiopia, had joined Egypt and the surrounding countries to his own. Now he was come forth, with more than a million warriors in his train, to lay waste the land of Palestine. Asa despaired of overthrowing this army with his own, Judah's numerous forces and fenced cities were seen to be of no avail in this tremendous crisis.

"And Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord, it is nothing with You to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on You, and in your name we go against this multitude. O Lord, You are our God; let not man prevail against You." (2 Chronicles 14:11)

A Needed Experience

God could have easily hindered the Ethiopian army from approaching Palestine and doubtless the faith of some waxed faint as they watched with growing apprehension the steady advance of the invading host. But the lesson was needed.

God would teach His people that their security did not consist in armies and fortifications, that it was indeed nothing to Him whether He were called to help those who were many, or those who had no power. To the extent that armies and walled cities obscured the need of His protecting presence, they were no gain at all, but a decided loss.

Asa's prayer showed that the danger which God had allowed to threaten the nation had taught him the intended lesson. It indicated complete dependence upon the Lord, and the Lord amply honored the trust reposed in Him. "So the Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah." (2 Chronicles 14:12)

Their overthrow was so complete that they could not recover themselves. Zerah's conquering career was checked, and he returned

to the country of Ethiopia, abandoning his foreign conquests and devoting his attention to the restoration of his own shattered kingdom.

Lifting the Standard

Once more the knowledge of the true God had shone out, and His power been seen, "working salvation in the midst of the earth." (Psalm 74:12)

God would deepen the lesson in the hearts of His people, so as Asa was returning with rejoicing to Jerusalem, a prophet was sent to meet him, declaring that if they would continue to seek the Lord, He would certainly be found of them. They were therefore exhorted to be strong and fearless in the Lord, for their work would be plentifully rewarded.

Asa took courage from these promises and applied himself diligently to the work of exterminating every vestige of idolatry, not even tolerating it among his own relations, and all Judah joined him in the work with their whole heart. As the reformation spread, those in the kingdom of Israel who desired to worship the Lord in truth, left their homes, "for they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that the Lord his God was with him." (2 Chronicles 15:9)

God was drawing to himself all who would be drawn, and those in Israel who rejected this opportunity of uniting themselves with

the worshipers of Jehovah, sank lower and lower in idolatry, until the time soon came when there were only seven thousand in all the land who had not bowed the knee to Baal. (1 Kings 19:18; Romans 11:4)

A Foolish Policy

God was desirous that His people should keep in mind the victory over Zerah, but it faded from their memories, and when, after twenty-five years of peace, trouble again arose between the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Asa made appeal for assistance, not to Jehovah, but to the heathen king of Syria.

It seemed as though the arrangement worked satisfactorily. The immediate difficulty was averted, but in turning away from the Lord, Asa had turned away from that which alone made peace sure to his kingdom. The Lord sent word to him that he had done foolishly, and that from thenceforth he would have wars. The messenger asked: "Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims [Libyans] a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because you did rely on the Lord, He delivered them into your hand." (2 Chronicles 16:8)

A Reliable God

The Lord likes to be relied upon. He makes great promises to those who will trust Him, declaring that they "shall never be put to shame, nor confounded, world without end." (Isaiah 45:17)

He is strong enough and willing enough to do for His people all that they need, but although He has given innumerable evidences of His power and love, it is rarely that He finds any who care to trust Him. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards Him." (2 Chronicles 16:9)

One who realizes his need, and determines to trust the Lord's promise to supply all his need, should never fear that he is going to be disappointed. The Lord has been searching the whole earth for just such a case, to give Him an opportunity of showing what He can do, and now, if the man will only continue to trust Him, the Lord will show himself strong in his behalf.

Taking the Name of God

God did not ask Asa to keep up a huge army, and thus take all possible precautions against his enemies. He asked simply that Asa would rely upon Him, and trust, not in horses and chariots, but in the living God. It did not offend Him that Asa should say: "In your name we go against this multitude...let not man prevail against You," (2 Chronicles 14:11) for He has identified himself to the full with our cause and interests, and to all who thus acknowledge their intimate relation with God, and claim the privileges which the relationship confers, the promise is given: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." (Exodus 20:7)--Present Truth,

September 22, 1898--Notes on the International Sunday-School
Lessons--2 Chronicles 14:2-12

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 6

Misappropriation of Funds

"In the six and thirtieth year reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah, and built Ramah, to the intent that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah." (2 Chronicles 16:1)

That was a critical situation,--worse than any amount of private debt,--for it threatened the very existence of the nation. If the king of Israel succeeded in building and holding Ramah, then he could command the whole of the kingdom of Judah and put it under tribute. All the traffic of the kingdom would be stopped, or be exclusively in the hands of the king of Israel; no one, from the king to the peasant and tradesman, could have anything that he could call his own. It was a desperate case, and called for desperate measures,--at least the king of Judah thought so,--and that promptly. "Then Asa brought silver and gold out of the treasures of the house of the Lord and of the king's house, and sent to Ben-hadad king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus, saying, There is a league between me and you, as there was between my father and your father: behold, I have sent you silver and gold; go, break your league with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me. And Ben-hadad hearkened unto king Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel; and they smote Ijon, and Dan, and Abel-main, and all the store cities of Naphtali. And it came to pass, when Baasha heard it, that he left off building of Ramah, and let his work cease. Then Asa

the king took all Judah; and they carried away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Asa was building; and he built therewith Geba and Mizpah." (2 Chronicles 16:2-6)

So the kingdom of Judah was delivered from the king of Israel, by the prompt action of Asa. At least it seemed to be delivered. Asa had done all that he could do, and the general opinion would be that he could not have done any less. He not only stopped the plan of the king of Israel and drove him away, destroying the city that was to command the commerce of Judah, but he guarded against any future danger by building Geba and Mizpah, or to translate the words, a hill and a water tower. To be sure he used the Lord's money with which to do it; but what else could he do? Perhaps he intended to pay it all back again with returning prosperity.

That is the way man looks at the case; now hear the truth of the matter from God: "And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said unto him, Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the Lord your God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of your hand. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because you did rely on the Lord, He delivered them into your hand. For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him. Herein you have done foolishly: therefore from henceforth you shall have wars." (2 Chronicles 16:9)

This was not a case of pique on the part of the Lord. He did not propose to punish Asa with wars, because he had relied on the king of Syria, instead of on Him, but He merely told him, through His prophet, what would be the inevitable result of his foolish course, which to human shortsightedness seemed so wise and politic.

Asa did not stop to consider that in bribing Ben-hadad to break his league with Baasha, so that Baasha would be compelled to cease operations against him, he was simply placing means in the hands of the king of Syria, wherewith to attack him at some future time; for Ben-hadad could break his league with Asa as readily as he had broken his league with Baasha. King Asa had simply postponed his trouble, but had by no means ended it.

Here we have an exact parallel to the case of many who are in debt, and sorely distressed, perhaps not knowing even how to supply the wants of their family, to say nothing of paying their debt. Or it may be that they are not in debt, but they are in exceedingly close circumstances; and they can see no way out except to take the Lord's tithe, or other money belonging to Him, and use it for their pressing necessities. They may say that they will pay it back as soon as they can, but even if they cannot, they must live; they cannot let their family starve.

The case resolves itself into this:

"Shall we trust the Lord to use His own unlimited resources in His own way for our deliverance, or shall we seize upon a portion of His property, to help ourselves?"

Enlightened judgment would say that the former was the wiser course. The one who takes the Lord's tithes to pay his own debts, or to keep himself out of debt, as he imagines, does not accomplish his purpose. He succeeds only in putting off the trouble, and the last case will be worse than the first.

If Asa had trusted the Lord, and depended on Him for deliverance from the king of Israel, he would have been delivered; for God has never forsaken those who seek Him. "And they that know your name will put their trust in You: for You, Lord, have not forsaken them that seek You." (Psalm 9:10)

His promise is, "I will not fail you." (Joshua 1:5)

And the deliverance which the Lord wrought would have been decisive, as it was when the Ethiopians came against him, to which the prophet referred. See what took place then. An overwhelming force came against Asa. "And Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord, it is nothing with You to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on You, and in your name we go against this multitude. O Lord You are our God; let not man prevail against You." (2 Chronicles 14:11)

Now what was the result of Asa's trust in God? "So the Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled. And Asa and the people that were with him pursued them unto Gerar: and the Ethiopians were overthrown, that they could not recover themselves; for they were destroyed before the Lord, and before His host; and they carried away very much spoil." (2 Chronicles 14:12-13)

What a pity that Asa did not remember that experience; and what a pity that we do not always remember and profit by the record of it; "for whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." (Romans 15:4)

How many things were written aforetime concerning how God provided the necessities of life for His people! Think of the manna in the desert, and the water from the rock. Think of the widow's meal and oil, (1 Kings 17:12-16) and of the provision for the payment of the widow's debt, and for her future living, in the time of Elisha. (2 Kings 4:1-7) Think of the feeding of the multitudes in the wilderness in the days of Christ, and of many other miraculous interpositions on the part of God, as well as the miracle of our very existence day by day, when we are not conscious of want.

The same God lives today, and He is our God. His resources are undiminished, and He is just as compassionate, and just as ready to help the needy. We have been taught to pray: "Give us this day our daily bread," (Matthew 6:11) and we profess to believe that all that

we have comes from Him, and that our existence depends on Him; yet when trouble comes we are likely to act as though God did not exist, and everything depended on ourselves. Do you not see why these hard times are allowed to come upon us? They are to test our confidence in God. Shall we trust Him in the time of trouble, even to the last extremity, and experience a wonderful deliverance? or shall we trust in ourselves, and multiply our troubles?--Present Truth, October 2, 1902--2 Chronicles 16:1-9

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 7

Jehoshaphat's Good Reign

Jehoshaphat came to the throne of Judah at the age of thirty-five, at which time Ahab had been king of Israel three years. The reign of Jehoshaphat, like that of his father Asa, was a prosperous one, but while, like his father, Jehoshaphat acknowledged that the Lord was the strength of His people, he also followed the policy of Asa in increasing the number of his fighting men.

Although 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, this did not seem to be considered sufficient, and so we find the armies of Judah reaching the enormous total of one million, one hundred and sixty thousand, without counting the garrisons which the king put in the fortified cities throughout all Judah.

Not by Might

It had been necessary to teach Asa that the national safety did not depend upon its armed hosts, and there were events in Jehoshaphat's life which showed that, with all his piety and steadfastness, he needed to learn the same lesson.

The possession of so large an army made him a desirable ally, and Ahab sought his assistance against the king of Syria. Ahab and Jezebel would know how to entrap the unworldly Jehoshaphat, if he

should cease to seek the Lord humbly for wisdom and guidance, and they seem to have taken special pains to gain his goodwill. "And Ahab killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people that he had with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramoth-Gilead." (2 Chronicles 18:2)

Jehoshaphat knew that Ahab was a wicked king, who had almost extinguished the worship of the true God, by favoring the idolaters and persecuting the servants of Jehovah, yet his answer to Ahab was, "I am as you are, and my people as your people; and we will be with you in the war." (2 Chronicles 18:3)

The alliance between the two was strengthened by the marriage of Ahab's daughter to the eldest son of Jehoshaphat, a union which bore evil fruit.

Departing From God

Micaiah, a true prophet, gave a faithful warning as to the disastrous results that would follow the projected campaign, but the first steps had been taken in departing from the Lord, and it seemed easier to go forward than back. Jehoshaphat perhaps comforted himself with the thought that, supported by so large an army, he could not run much risk, but he had forfeited the protection of the Lord, and nothing else could avail him.

His new ally dexterously arranged, as he supposed, to divert all danger from himself to Jehoshaphat, and therein demonstrated at

once to the latter how poor an exchange he had made in forsaking the Lord for such a friend. The principal onslaught of the Syrians was made upon Jehoshaphat, and his life was in peril till he "cried out, and the Lord helped him; and God moved them to depart from him." (2 Chronicles 18:31)

Turning to the Lord

As Jehoshaphat returned to his home in Jerusalem a sadder, and perhaps a wiser man, a prophet was sent to meet him with the rebuke, "should you help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon you from before the Lord." (2 Chronicles 19:2)

The vain-confidence which had prepared the way for the disaster was not confined to Jehoshaphat, for all the cities of Judah were permeated with the military spirit. It was therefore necessary that all should learn how "cursed is the man that trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from the Lord." (Jeremiah 17:5)

The report came that a great multitude of the Moabites and Ammonites were gathered to battle against Judah. "And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah gathered themselves together to ask help of the Lord: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord." (2 Chronicles 20:3-4)

The Victory That Overcomes

Victory was certain then. Even with a large army, if that were all, success would have been extremely uncertain, but the turning to the Lord in faith was the overcoming. "The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the Lord." (Proverbs 21:31)

So the message was sent to praying Judah: "The battle is not yours but God's." (2 Chronicles 20:15)

They had turned the matter over to Him, and He took it up promptly and gladly. To every soul before whom is the battle of life, against sin, God sends the message of comfort, that the "warfare is accomplished." (Isaiah 40:2)

Victory is achieved, and faith may take it from first to last. "You shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you." (2 Chronicles 20:17)

The enemies of Judah were totally destroyed, "and the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries, when they had heard that the Lord fought against the enemies of Israel. So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet: for his God gave him rest round about." (2 Chronicles 20:29-30)

Entering into Rest

It was not the fault of the Lord that His people did not have rest all the time. Jehoshaphat had it at the beginning of his reign, and the only thing that disturbed the rest was the army he raised to secure it. God had been always proclaiming rest, and to this day, "the rest remains for the people of God." (Hebrews 4:9)

Rest, because "the works are finished from the foundation of the world." (Hebrews 4:3)

Peace, because the "warfare is accomplished." (Isaiah 40:2)

Israel failed to enter in, "because of unbelief," (Hebrews 3:19) and that is the only barrier between us and God's perfect rest. "Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest." (Hebrews 4:11)

Exalting the Nation

Because Jehoshaphat did not learn perfectly every lesson given him, he was not therefore rejected. God blessed him to the fullest extent possible, and established the kingdom in his hand. Jehoshaphat provided for the more thorough teaching of the Word of God throughout his dominions by sending forth men of the tribe of Levi, who "went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people." (2 Chronicles 17:9)

They had with them the book of the law of the Lord. In this work and in the prosperity that followed in its train, it was made manifest that: "Righteousness exalts a nation." (Proverbs 14:34)

They realized the truth of the words spoken by Moses, "This is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." (Deuteronomy 4:6)

As the Word of the Lord was diligently taught throughout the land, the fear of the Lord was made known to the surrounding peoples, and the Philistines and the Arabians were numbered among those who brought presents and tribute to Jehoshaphat.--Present Truth, September 29, 1898--Notes on the Sunday-School Lessons, October 9--2 Chronicles 17:1-10

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 8

Elijah the Tishbite

The life of Elijah, up to the time of his translation, is the subject of the greater part of the lessons during the remaining part of the present quarter. It is well; for Elijah and his times form one of the most interesting subjects that can be studied by the people of the present day.

The very last words of the Old Testament are a prophecy concerning Elijah: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." (Malachi 4:5-6)

As they came down from the Mount of Transfiguration the disciples asked Jesus about this prophecy, as follows: "And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead. And His disciples asked Him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elijah is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that He spoke unto them of John the Baptist." (Matthew 17:9-13)

According to these words of Christ, therefore, this prophecy referred to John the Baptist, and Luke gives a fuller view of its application to him: "But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elisabeth shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you shall have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:13-17)

But this is not all that Elijah has to do with the work of the Lord Jesus. As this prophecy, fulfilled by John the Baptist referred to the times just preceding the first advent of the Saviour, so the times of Elijah, and Elijah himself, bear an important part in relation to the times just preceding the second advent of the Saviour and in connection with that advent itself.

In Matthew 17:1-5, Luke 9:28-35, and Mark 9:2-7, we have the account of the Saviour's transfiguration, and all three agree in recording the fact that Elijah and Moses were there talking with Him. Nor were they simply the spirits of these two men. Luke says plainly: "There talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elijah: Who appeared in glory." (Luke 9:30-31)

They were two glorified men therefore.

Now if we can learn what the transfiguration meant, then we can learn also what was the meaning of the appearance there of these two men. We turn to 2 Peter, and read: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount." (2 Peter 1:16-18)

Here the apostle is writing of the coming of the Lord in His everlasting kingdom (verse 11), and says, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables" when they made known "the power and coming" of the Lord. Why have they not followed fables, that is, "made-up stories"? Because they "were eyewitnesses of His majesty," as He shall then appear. When were they eyewitnesses of his majesty? Answer: "When we were with Him in the holy mount," (2 Peter 1:18) when the voice came from heaven, saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (2 Peter 1:17)

What did they see there? "[Jesus] was transfigured before them; and His face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." (Matthew 17:2) "And His raiment became shining, exceeding

white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them." (Mark 9:3)
"Behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them." (Matthew 17:5)

Is this the way Jesus will appear when He comes? "Behold He comes with clouds; and every eye shall see Him." (Revelation 1:7) And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory." (Matthew 24:30) "He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels." (Luke 9:26)

How great will be that glory? "Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before His ancients gloriously." (Isaiah 24:23)

Therefore according to Peter's words, these things are proof positive that when they saw the Lord Jesus transfigured--when they saw Him standing on the mount with the glittering glory of God about Him--they were then "eyewitnesses of His majesty" as He shall appear in His second advent to this world.

But what will occur when Jesus comes in His glory? "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

It is plain, then, that when Jesus comes in glory, the righteous living will be "changed," "caught up," translated, as was Elijah, and therefore when Elijah stood in glory, with his glorified Lord, in the picture of the coming of the Lord, which Peter, James, and John saw, he stood there as the representative of those who shall be translated at the coming of the Lord, as he was translated in the days of old.

But this is not all. The experience through which Elijah passed just before his translation was also representative. His experience then is, in many points, an exact representation of that through which those will have to pass who shall be translated as he was. This experience will be the subject of several of the following lessons, and therein we shall endeavor to make the subject plain. Again we say, the life of Elijah is one of the most important studies in which the people of the present day can be engaged.

The question may arise, "Why was Moses there?"

It is foreign from the lesson, yet so intimately connected with the line of Scripture which we have pursued, that it might be well to explain this point. The answer to the question is that Moses was there as the representative of the righteous dead, as Elijah was the representative of the righteous living. For we have seen that when Jesus comes, the righteous dead are raised, as well as the righteous living translated. Now as the Scriptures make absolutely no provision for reaching life beyond this world, except by a resurrection from the dead, or a translation, as were Enoch and

Elijah; and as Moses had died, it follows that as he, a man, stood in glory, on the Mount of Transfiguration, he was there by virtue of a resurrection from the dead. There is Scripture that shows this. Jude, in the ninth verse, says: "Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses." (Jude:9)

Now Paul says that the devil had the power of death. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." (Hebrews 2:14)

He says, also, as we have quoted above, that it is at the voice of the archangel that the dead arise: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first." (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

And we read in John 5:25 that it is the voice of the Son of God that will raise the dead: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live." (John 5:25)

Therefore the archangel of Jude 9 is the Son of God; as it is He alone who raises the dead. And as when one dies he goes into the power of the devil who has the power of death; when the Son of God went to raise Moses, the devil disputed His right. Mark, this is a

dispute between the devil and the Son of God, about the "body of Moses." And as the body of Moses stood in glory on the Mount with the Son of God, we know that when He said to the devil, "The Lord rebuke you," (Jude 9) He took the body of Moses, in spite of the devil's dispute. And thus Moses stood on the Mount of Transfiguration, the representative of the righteous dead; as Elijah stood there the representative of the righteous living; and the Lord Jesus above all, as the One whose voice shall call both dead and living from this world to himself in glory, when He comes in His glory.--Signs of the Times, July 23, 1885--Notes on the International Lesson, July 26--1 Kings 17:1-16

A.T. Jones

Chapter 9

Standing Before God

Elijah, we are told, was "a man subject to like passions as we are"; (James 5:17) he was a mortal having the same nature that we have. But that which made Elijah what he was, and distinguished him from most other men that have lived on the earth, is indicated in the words of his message to King Ahab, which so suddenly introduced him into the Scripture narrative. "And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab: As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." (1 Kings 17:1)

"Before whom I stand"--these are words that distinguished Elijah from the mass of his fellow-men. Elijah stood before the Lord, and therefore whatever he did was done before the Lord, and as in His presence.

It was true of other men, and is true of men today, that they stand before God; but Elijah recognized and realized the fact, while others did not, and his course differed from others accordingly. And that difference could not be slight; for would not our own course of life be vastly different if we were visibly standing and acting before the Lord?

Imagine the effect upon ourselves of coming into the actual presence of God, as concerns our thoughts, motives and actions.

Every other presence would shrink into nothingness; its influence upon us would be gone; we would have no fear of it, or regard for its words. Our whole interest and anxiety would be concentrated upon the single thought of the will of God, and the relation of our lives to it.

Thus it was with Elijah; for his faith made real to him that which was actual truth, but was hidden from his natural senses, and thus it may, and should be with us; for being a man of like passions with us, we also may be like him in faith. We stand, as truly as he did, before Him who is Lord of all. We act in His presence. And it will be to our infinite advantage if we but realize the fact, and confess it in our actions.--Present Truth, July 4, 1895--1 Kings 17:1

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 10

Elijah, the Prophet

It was the work of Elijah, the Prophet, to be a witness for the true God and the power of His word at a time of general apostasy in Israel. Ahab was the king, and: "[He] did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him." (1 Kings 16:33)

When he was at the very height of his sinful course, Elijah came to him with this message: "As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." (1 Kings 17:1)

From another scripture we learn that this is an illustration of the power of prayer: "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months." (James 5:17)

When the prophet said, "but according to my word," it was not a self-assertive boasting of his own power; but in answer to his prayer of faith, the Lord had entrusted him with His own word of power to speak, and thus did it become his word.

Distinguishing Sign of the True God

The giving, or the withholding of rain is one of the ways by which the true God is made known as distinguished from false gods. "Are there any among the vanities of the heathen that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? are not You He, O Lord our God?" (Jeremiah 14:22,RV) "Nevertheless He left not himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." (Acts 14:17)

Thus did God, in His tender mercy, preach the Gospel of His mercy and His righteousness, and call the attention of all the people to himself as the only true God, through the prophet Elijah, when the people were being led away into idolatry through the wickedness of Ahab.

It is through the ministry of the rain that the Lord usually provides food for the people, for: "The rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and returns not thither, but waters the earth, and makes it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater." (Isaiah 55:10)

But when the necessities of the case render it desirable, the Lord can just as easily provide food in some other way; and so when He told Elijah to hide himself "by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan," (1 Kings 17:3) He said: "I have commanded the ravens to feed you there." (1 Kings 17:4)

This method seems miraculous to us simply because it is a departure from God's usual methods, unless perchance we have failed to recognize the direct agency of God in providing us with daily food. He feeds us just as truly as He fed Elijah by the brook, but usually it is in cooperation with our efforts, for which He supplies the power, that the result is obtained.

Great Power Through Weak Instruments

The channels used through which to supply food to Elijah are suggestive of God's ability to use the most dependent instrumentalities with which to accomplish His purpose. The ravens cannot supply themselves with food: "Who provides for the raven his food?" (Job 38:41) "He gives to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry." (Psalm 147:9) "They neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them." (Luke 12:31)

So also the widow woman was by her very circumstances more dependent than the one whose husband might be expected to provide for the needs of the household. But by using such instrumentalities as these to feed the prophet Elijah, God is proclaiming the fact that: "[He] has chosen the weak things of this world to confound the things which are mighty," (1 Corinthians 1:27) and shows His ability to accomplish His purpose. The prophet of God, through whose word the rain was stayed, and through whose word it came again, was himself thirsty and needy of water, and like any other

man, he asked the favor of a drink. He said to the woman: "Fetch me, I pray you, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink." (1 Kings 17:10)

In like manner, many years afterward, "a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people," (Luke 24:19) himself the giver of the water of life, said to a woman, "Give me to drink." (John 4:7)

Thus do power and weakness touch each other, and thus is the power of God magnified through weakness.

Food From the Word

It was by the word of the Lord that there came to be meal in the barrel and oil in the cruse in the first place, for: "He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that He may bring forth food out of the earth; And wine that makes glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengthens man's heart." (Psalm 104:14-15)

It is by the power of the same word, making the earth to bring forth the annual increase, that meal is kept in the world's barrel throughout the year, and that famines are averted. But people forget this because they see the grain growing in the fields, and so comparatively few receive it as the direct gift of God. They eat by sight rather than by faith.

In the case of the widow woman it was purely by faith, her faith in the word of the Lord to her through the prophet Elijah, "the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail." (1 Kings 17:14)

Thus while the Lord was preaching the Gospel of His power and righteousness to His own people by withholding His usual blessings, on account of their departure from Him, He was by the same prophet proclaiming the same Gospel of His power and righteousness among the heathen, and offering special blessings to be received through faith in His word.

The Saviour himself cited this experience of Elijah with the widow woman, when the unbelief of the people of His own city prompted the question: "Is not this Joseph's son? And He said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country." (Luke 4:22-23)

Happy are those who, like the widow of Zarephath, receive the word of the Lord, the message of His own power to save, without stumbling at the messenger, and so learn to live by the word. For, "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." (Luke 4:4)--Present Truth, June 30, 1898--Notes on the International Sunday-School Lessons--1 Kings 17:1-16

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 11

The Famine in the Land

Having learned in last week's lesson that Elijah stood on the Mount of Transfiguration as the representative of those who shall be translated at the coming of the Lord, we turn now to a study of the times of Elijah just before his translation, and we shall find in them a representation of the times in the days just before the coming of the Lord and the translation of the righteous who shall then be alive.

That there will be a company of people alive on the earth, when the Lord comes, who will hail Him with joy and meet Him with gladness, is abundantly shown in the Scriptures. Paul says plainly: "This we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [go before] them which are asleep [the dead]. The dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them...and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)

Again he says: "We shall not all sleep [not all die], but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; ... then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." (1 Corinthians 15:51-52,54)

Where is that "saying" written? "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces;

and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth: for the Lord has spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation." (Isaiah 25:8-9)

It is plain, therefore, that there will be some righteous on the earth when the Lord comes, but compared with the wicked they will be but few. When the Lord comes, He will take vengeance on the wicked as well as save the righteous. "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven with His mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8)

And in Revelation 6 we read: "And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and every bond man, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Revelation 6:15-17) "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." (Matthew 24:12-13)

Thus we see that the two classes, the righteous and the wicked, will be upon the earth when the Lord comes. The wheat and the

tares "both grow together until the harvest. ... The harvest is the end of the world." (Matthew 13:30,39)

We see by the words of the present lesson that, through the drought, the streams of water and the vegetation had so dried up that the beasts were likely to perish. "And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself." (1 Kings 18:5-6)

Now read what Joel says of the time that just precedes the day of the Lord: "Alas for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come. Is not the meat cut off before our eyes, yea, joy and gladness from the house of our God? The seed is rotten under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered. How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate. O Lord, to You will I cry: for the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame has burned all the trees of the field. The beasts of the field cry also unto You: for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness." (Joel 1:15-20)

And in view of it he says: "Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain; let all the inhabitants of the land

tremble: for the day of the Lord comes, for it is nigh at hand." (Joel 2:1)

Zephaniah says of that time: "The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hastes greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord; the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord." (Zephaniah 1:14-16)

Zephaniah tells exactly why the terrors of this great day come so upon men. It is "because they have sinned against the Lord." (Zephaniah 1:16)

This is what brought all the trouble in the days of Elijah. For when Ahab cried out to Elijah: "Are you he that troubles Israel?" (1 Kings 18:17)

Elijah replied: "I have not troubled Israel; but you, and your father's house, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and you have followed Baalim." (1 Kings 18:18)

And it was because Elijah had held up before the people the commandments of God, and had insisted on obedience to them that he was now accused of troubling Israel; and it was Israel's persistent

violation of the commandments that brought upon them all the trouble. Here then, in the days of Elijah, was a controversy over the commandments of God. On one side was Jezebel wielding all the power of the state in behalf of the violation of the commandments; on the other side was Elijah and a few others maintaining the honor of God by strict adherence to the precepts of His law.

Now it is the truth that just before the Lord comes there is to be just such another controversy in regard to the commandments of God. The last message to men, that the Bible contains, is one that warns them against the transgression of the commandments, and calls them to "keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." (Revelation 14:12)

This message is found in Revelation 14:9-12, and reads as follows: "And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascends up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receives the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." (Revelation 14:9-12)

That this is the very last message to men is shown by the fact that, following in direct connection with this, the prophet says: "And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in your sickle, and reap; for the time is come for you to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe [the end of the world is come]. And He that sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped." (Revelation 14:14-16)

These scriptures show that when the Lord comes in the clouds of heaven, it is to reap the harvest of the earth; that which will fit a people to be gathered as wheat into the garner of God, is the keeping of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus; and that by which men make themselves only to be accounted chaff to be burned in the fire, is the worship of the beast and his image. This shows also, that to worship the beast and his image is to violate the commandments of God, and so incur His wrath; and that to keep the commandments of God is to excite to oppressiveness the power of the beast and his image. "And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed." (Revelation 13:15)

We are here making no argument as to what is the beast, nor what is his image, nor what it will be to worship them. We simply draw a parallel between the events of the times of Elijah and those

which immediately precede the coming of the Lord. Nor do we here present any argument to show that the coming of the Lord is near; we simply show by the Scriptures that, whenever His coming shall be near, then, as in the days of Elijah, the commandments of God will be the one subject of controversy between those who will serve the Lord, and those who will not.--Signs of the Times, July 30, 1885--Notes on the International Lesson, August 2--1 Kings 18:1-18

A.T. Jones

Chapter 12

Elijah's Gospel and Ours

Im the work of Elijah, the prophet of God, we have an instructive example of preaching the Gospel "in demonstration of the Spirit and power." (1 Corinthians 2:4)

In a time when Israel's king, Ahab, "did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him," (1 Kings 16:30) and had openly established the worship of Baal at the court, so that the influence of the royal family was tending to lead the people into idolatry, Elijah bore his testimony faithfully in behalf of the true God. His work reached its climax in the experience at Carmel, as set forth in 1 Kings 18:17-39.

Elijah Sent to Ahab

After the years of drought, during which Elijah had been hidden from the king and miraculously fed by the Lord, "the Word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go show yourself unto Ahab. And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, Are you he that troubles Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but you, and your father's house, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and you have followed Baalim. Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto Mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table. So

Ahab sent unto all the children Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto Mount Carmel. And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long do you halt between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him." (1 Kings 18:1,17-21)

The Test

Then the test was arranged in accordance with the terms of which the prophets of Baal were to prepare a sacrifice, and then Elijah was to do the same, "and the God that answers by fire, let Him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken." (1 Kings 18:24)

So the plans were carried out, and although the prophets of Baal "called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, ... and ... prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, ... there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded." (1 Kings 18:26,29)

Then Elijah "built an altar in the name of the Lord," (1 Kings 18:32) and offered a brief prayer recorded in verses 36-37, and: Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord He is the God; the Lord He is the God." (1 Kings 18:38-39)

The Question for Decision

The question to be decided then was, "Who is the true God?"

And the Lord so revealed himself in the ministry of His servant, Elijah, that the people were given an opportunity to see the difference between the true and false, and to make an intelligent decision in the matter. This was the Gospel as preached by Elijah. He pointed out that the real essence of idolatry was in forsaking the commandments of the Lord, and then in his ministry he revealed "the power of God unto salvation;" (Romans 1:16) that power which would be sufficient to keep the people from forsaking or breaking the commandments of the Lord.

The same question has been before the children of men since the days of Adam, "Who is God?"

And in every generation men have said with Pharaoh: "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice?" (Exodus 5:2)

But in all these years the Lord has had His faithful servants who were preaching His Gospel, declaring His Word to all the people, giving all an opportunity to choose between the true and false.

The Same Thing in Christ's Day

A departure from the true God reveals itself in different ways at different times in the development of "the great controversy between

Christ and Satan."--Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 762; *The Great Controversy*, p. 518; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 358; *Prophets and Kings*, p. 685.

In Elijah's time it showed itself in making "a grove" and in the open worship of a false god under a distinct name; at the time of the first advent of our Lord it showed itself in substituting the authority of man, "the tradition of the elders," (Matthew 15:2) in the place of the Word of God in matters of faith and practice. It was with reference to this very thing that Jesus said: "Well has Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men." (Mark 7:6-8)

To walk "according to the tradition of the elders," when it is done knowingly, instead of according to the commandment of God, even though it is done by those who at the same time profess to be the children of God, is just as much a vain worship as to fall down before an image which is "a doctrine of vanities." (Jeremiah 10:8)

John the Baptist and Elijah

Inasmuch, therefore, as there was the same departure from God at a time when the first advent of our Lord was drawing near as there was in the days of Elijah, although it was manifested with a different outward form, it was necessary that the same Gospel

should again be preached with the same power. And so the Lord had said, through the prophet Malachi: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." (Malachi 4:5-6)

In Elijah's time they forsook the commandments of God and openly worshiped another God, under another name. In Christ's time they had forsaken the commandments of God, even though professing great regard for them, and had substituted the "tradition of the elders" in their place. The principle of departing from God by forsaking His commandments was the same. And so the needed Gospel message was sent by John the Baptist, of whom it was said: "And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God [just as Elijah did]. And he shall go before Him in the Spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:16-17)

And in the course of His ministry, Christ said of John: "And if you are willing to receive him, this is Elijah, which is to come." (Matthew 11:14,RV)

The Gospel in John's Day

In preaching the Gospel, the special message which was given to him to deliver, John the Baptist faithfully rebuked the people, even

those who professed to be teachers of religion, for their departure from God; warned them against trusting in man for salvation; (Matthew 3:7-10) and urged them "that they should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." (Acts 19:4)

In doing this He was simply declaring the message due at that time, which he had found in the prophet Isaiah: "Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God will come." (Isaiah 40:9-10)

Thus was fulfilled the command: "Prepare the way of the Lord. ... And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed." (Isaiah 40:3,5)

The Apostasy and the Gospel in the Last Days

But now the second advent of our Lord draws nigh, and the present situation is thus described by the Scripture: "This know also that in the last days perilous time shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, ... lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." (2 Timothy 3:1-2,4-5)

By way of further description we also read: "Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of the devils." (1 Timothy 4:1)

The "falling away" has come, as foretold by the great apostle to the Gentiles, the "man of sin" (2 Thessalonians 2:3) has been

revealed, "Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." (2 Thessalonians 2:4)

And as previous to the first advent of Christ a message went forth "in the Spirit and power of Elijah," (Luke 1:17) to those of whom Christ spoke as "not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God," (Matthew 22:29) although they made a great deal of the "form of godliness," (2 Timothy 3:5) so now in messages going forth, "the everlasting Gospel," in fulfillment of the prophecy, "to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." (Revelation 14:6-7)

A careful reading of the 13th and 14th chapters of Revelation will show that it is describing a time when worship is being directed to some other than the true God, (Revelation 13:4, 8, 12, 15; Revelation 14:9-10) and just then "the everlasting Gospel" is preached "with a loud voice," just as in the time of Elijah and of John the Baptist, urging the worship of the true God.

That the issue at stake now is the same as of old, is shown from the fact that those who receive this special message of "the everlasting Gospel" are described in verse 12 as follows: "Here are they that keep the commandments of God." (Revelation 14:12)

1. In Elijah's time they forsook the commandments of God and followed Baal;

2. In the time of John the Baptist they "reject the commandment of God" (Mark 7:9) and follow the "tradition of the elders;" (Mark 7:5)

3. In our time there is "a form of godliness," without the power, and the same putting of the authority of man in the place of the plain Word of God.

In all three cases God sends forth His Gospel message of warning, with a revealing of His power, in order that men may be "without excuse." (Romans 1:20)

Jehovah, He Is God

But there is a special force in the fact that the Gospel message now calls upon all men to "worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." (Revelation 14:7)

This demands a recognition of God as the Creator all things, and the "worship" which He requires is the worship of obedience. "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous." (1 John 5:3)

But which commandment reveals God as Creator? The fourth, in which He says: "The seventh [not the first] day is the Sabbath of the

Lord your God. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is [compare with Revelation 14:7], and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it." (Exodus 20:10-11)

God thus reveals himself as the Creator of all things, and commands us to "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," (Exodus 20:8) because our only hope of salvation is in His creative power. "For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:8-10) "For thus says the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it;...I am the Lord; and there is none else. ... Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, you that are escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save. ... Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else." (Isaiah 45:18,20,22)

He alone can save who can create, and that we may know Him as the Creator, and so know Him as "God of Israel, the Saviour," (Isaiah 45:15) He has given us His Sabbath. "And hallow my Sabbaths and they shall be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God." (Ezekiel 20:20)

To know Him as the One who creates is to know Him as the One who sanctifies, and so the Lord says further: "Moreover also I gave them my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that does sanctify them." (Ezekiel 20:12)

The Sabbath the Sign

The Lord Jehovah's Sabbath is the seventh day of the week (Saturday) and not the first day of the week (Sunday). And the observance of the seventh day of the week (Saturday) is our recognition of the true God, "who created all things by Jesus Christ," (Ephesians 3:9) and our acknowledgment of our dependence upon, and trust in Him for salvation. It is the outward sign of our having entered into His rest through faith, of our having "ceased from our own works as God did from His." (Hebrews 4:10)

The observance of Sunday as a sacred day, or as being of any significance in the religion of Jesus Christ, rests upon no Scriptural authority and is a forsaking of the commandment of God, and a following of the traditions of men, just as truly as was the worship of Baal in Elijah's time, or "the washing of pots and cups" (Mark 7:8) by the Pharisees. But the Elijah message is also going forth, saying now as of old: "If the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him." (1 Kings 18:21) "By their fruits you shall know them. Not everyone that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 7:20-21)

Oh, that each one who reads these lines would say as did Joshua of old: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15)--Present Truth, March 24, 1898--1 Kings 18:17-39

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 13

The Lord or Baal?

Baal was the chief god of the Phoenician and Canaanitish nations. He was the sun-god, and in him the people worshiped the sun. His worship to some extent had found a place among the people of God before the time of Samuel, (Judges 2:10-13; 10:10) but under the guidance of Samuel his worship was wholly forsaken by Israel, and they followed and "served the Lord only." (1 Samuel 7:4)

Two hundred years pass by, to the accession of Ahab, before Israel turns again to the worship of Baal. Ahab is introduced thus: "And in the thirty and eighth year of Asa king of Judah began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel: and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty and two years. And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshiped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him." (1 Kings 16:29-33)

This very supremacy of wickedness reached by Ahab was through the alliance formed with Jezebel. Taking her to wife was

considered by the Lord as worse than walking in the wicked ways of all before him. As stated above, "as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam...he took to wife Jezebel." (1 Kings 16:31)

And when he had taken Jezebel for his wife, his queen, and put himself thus in her power, then he had literally sold himself to work evil. And thus the matter is summed up by the graphic writer of the Kings: "But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up." (1 Kings 21:25)

Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal ("Baal with him") priest of Baal and Astarte, and king of Tyre and Zidon. Tyre was the chief seat of the Baal-worship, and there was a magnificent temple devoted to his worship, and when Jezebel became the wife of Ahab she deliberately set herself to establish his licentious worship among all Israel. The most of the people were idolaters already; but the calf-worship, established by Jeroboam, was in the name of the Lord. With him the calf-worship was more a political measure than anything else. He set up the calves to keep the people from going to Jerusalem to worship the Lord, through fear that if they should go there to worship, the kingdom would turn again to Rehoboam. So to prevent this apparent danger to his kingdom, he set up the calves, saying: "Behold your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt." (1 Kings 12:28)

This worship, idolatrous as it was, and bad as it was, had yet this merit, that it was at least in the name of Jehovah, and the people in their worship, mistaken though it was, still at least pretended to worship the Lord.

But this was not enough for Jezebel. It was not enough that idolatry should abound; Baal must be the idol. Nor was it enough that one god should be worshiped; Baal--the sun--must be that one. It was not enough that some, or even most, of the people should worship the sun; they must all do it. So she set on foot a systematic attempt to absolutely suppress the true worship of the Lord, and by Baal to supplant the true God.

Nor was it enough for her that all should, if possible, be persuaded to adopt the service of Jezebel and Baal, they must be compelled, under penalty of death to do it. Accordingly she began to cut off all who clung to the worship of Jehovah. By these energetic measures she brought the condition of affairs to the point where there were only 7,000 out of all Israel that had not bowed the knee to Baal; and these only escaped by taking refuge in dens and caves of the earth, and were so widely scattered that Elijah thought that he was the only one left alive.

Thus matters stood when the voice of the Lord came to Elijah saying: "Go show yourself unto Ahab." (1 Kings 18:1)

Elijah went and said to Ahab: "Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto Mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four

hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table." (1 Kings 18:19)

Ahab did so, "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long do you halt between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him." (1 Kings 18:21)

The question was not, whether they should worship God. The question was,

"Who is the true God?"

The question was not whether they should worship or not worship; all were ready and willing to worship. But the question was,

"Whom shall we worship?"

Would they have another god before Jehovah? or would they have Him and Him alone, according to His own commandments.

The first commandment was the one that was involved in the controversy in the days of Elijah.

"Should God be worshiped? or should Baal?"

In last week's lesson we learned that that people who shall be alive on the earth, and who when the Lord comes, shall be translated

as Elijah was, will be brought to a like test as to whom they will worship. They will have to decide whether they will worship the beast and his image or whether they will worship God. The word of God says: "If any man worship the beast and his image ... The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God ... here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." (Revelation 14:9-10,12)

And in Revelation 15:2, we learn that those who keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus, get "the victory over the beast and over his image, and ... stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God." (Revelation 15:2)

Anyone who fairly studies the subject cannot fail to see that the following is the truth. The "beast" is the papal power. The "image to the beast" will be the United States Government when the National Reform party shall have succeeded in forming here the union of Church and State for the purpose of compelling everybody to keep Sunday (the day of the sun) as Jezebel in the days of Elijah compelled the people to worship the image of the sun.

And as the Sunday institution was established by the papacy--the beast--and is set forth as the sign of her authority; so when, after the similitude of the papal church, the National Reform party unites, in this country, Church and State, for the express purpose of compelling all the people to keep Sunday--an institution of the beast, the papal church--then to keep that day will be to worship the beast and his image.

We say that then to keep Sunday will be to worship the beast and his image. Because absolutely the only authority for Sunday keeping is the Church of Rome, and when we yield obedience to any power that enforces that authority, we then become servants to that power, for, "know you not, that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are to whom you obey?" (Romans 6:16)

What then shall we do? The Bible tells. When the beast and his image are enforcing their own worship, the Lord says: "Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." (Revelation 14:12)

True the National Reform party pretends that it is the ten commandments to which they are going to compel obedience. But not one of the ten commandments says a word about keeping Sunday. Oh, but the fourth commandment says: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy;" (Exodus 20:8) and they will have it that Sunday is the Sabbath. But that is not true; that same commandment which says, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," says also, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God." (Exodus 20:10)

The National Reform party and everybody else knows that Sunday is not the seventh day. Therefore when they seek to compel people to keep Sunday, that is not obedience to the commandment of God. And in opposition to that very thing the Lord sends His own

word: "Here are they that keep the commandments of God, etc."
(Revelation 14:12)

The time is coming, and now is, when the people shall hear the message of God, "saying with a loud voice, ... If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation. ... Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." (Revelation 14:7,9-10,12)

In obedience to that message from God, the test will be as strict as was that in the day of Elijah; and the question for decision will be:

- "If the Lord be God, follow Him;" but if the Church of Rome, then follow her.
- If the authority of God be binding, obey Him; but if the authority of the papal church be binding, then obey her.
- If the commandment of God should be kept, which says, "The seventh day is the Sabbath," then keep it; but if the commandment of the Romish Church should be kept, which says we must observe Sunday "instead of the Sabbath," then keep it.

And thus it must be decided whether we will "worship Him that made the Heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters;" or whether we will "worship the beast and his image."

Thus we find another parallel in the experience of Elijah and of those who must be translated as was he. In the next lesson (See Article 16 in this section, "The Lord, He Is the God.") we shall see another.--Signs of the Times, August 6, 1885--Notes on the International Lesson, August 9--Original title: If the Lord Be God, Follow Him; but if Baal, Then Follow Him--1 Kings 18:19-29

A.T. Jones

Chapter 14

Elijah on Carmel

At the close of the "many days" (1 Kings 18:1) (three years and one half) (James 5:17) of drought, of which something was learned in the last lesson, "the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, show yourself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth." (1 Kings 18:1)

So the prophet and the king are brought face to face, and "Ahab said unto him, Are you he that troubles Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but you, and your father's house, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and you have followed Baalim." (1 Kings 18:17-18)

It is true that Elijah had said: "There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word," (1 Kings 17:1) and because the blessing of rain had been withheld, the people had suffered exceedingly, "And there was a sore famine in Samaria." (1 Kings 18:2)

But there was a cause back of all this, and that was that the true God had not been recognized as the giver of these blessings.

Why Judgments Come

When God is recognized, and is acknowledged to be what He is in fact, the Creator of all, and therefore, "Lord of all," (Acts 10:36) His commandments at once become the law of the life, and He is thus given His rightful place to rule in the hearts of men.

But Israel had departed from the true God, and the blessings which He intended as a means of turning every one of them away from their iniquities (Acts 3:36) were being so abused that their continuance only served to confirm the people in their sins, and so they are withheld as a means of again calling the attention of the people to Jehovah, the true God, who alone could cause the rain to fall.

Thus does the Lord use every possible way, both by giving and by withholding blessings, in His efforts to reveal himself to men as the only true and living God.

A Decisive Test

But Elijah now proposed a test which shall settle the rival claims of Jehovah and Baalim. He requested Ahab to gather together "all Israel unto mount Carmel," (1 Kings 18:19) together with the prophets of Baalim and the prophets of the groves. This was done, and then: "Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long do

you halt between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him." (1 Kings 18:21)

He then directed that the prophets of Baalim should prepare a sacrifice, and he would do the same, and "put no fire under, And call upon the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord: and the God that answers by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken." (1 Kings 18:23-24)

So the prophets of Baal prepared their sacrifice, "and called on the name of Baal from morning even unto noon saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. ... And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded." (1 Kings 18:26,29)

Then Elijah called all the people unto him, "And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord." (1 Kings 18:31,31)

He then prepared his sacrifice, and three times he told the people to "fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood," (1 Kings 18:33) and it was done. In his brief prayer he said, "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel ... Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that You are the Lord God. ... Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the

wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God." (1 Kings 18:36,39)

Whom Shall We Serve

The question to be settled in Elijah's time was not a new one then, neither is it out of date today. From the time of the first solicitation to sin in the garden of Eden, until the end of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, the whole matter at issue is, "Who is God?"

The inducement held out to depart from the commandment of the Lord in the first place was, "You shall be as God," (Genesis 3:5) and Satan has sought ever since to inspire man with a sense of his own superiority, to fill him with his own spirit of disloyalty and rebellion, and to prevent him from acknowledging God as the rightful King over all the earth and from yielding loving obedience to Him as such.

Sometimes Satan has worked in one way and sometimes in another, but his purpose is always the same: to turn man away from the true God. In order that man should be able to make an intelligent choice and that he might be drawn to God by seeing Him as He is, the Lord has through a succession of faithful servants in every age revealed himself to the people, as He did through the ministry of Elijah.

The Spirit and Power of Elijah

The Old Testament scriptures closed with this prophecy: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord," (Malachi 4:5) and this was fulfilled in John the Baptist, whose work was done. "In the spirit and power of Elijah, ... to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:17)

But this work of preparing a people for the Lord's coming was not completed in the time of John the Baptist, and will not be completed until "He shall appear the second time without sin unto salvation." (Hebrews 9:28)

And as the fulfillment of the prophetic Word shows that "The great day of the Lord is near," (Zephaniah 1:14) so the Elijah message in all its old-time power ought to be given now: "If the Lord be God, follow Him." (1 Kings 18:21)

History Repeated

But the work of John the Baptist was also in direct fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, "The voice of him that cries in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord, ... Behold your God." (Isaiah 4:3,9)

And the demand for this special message grew out of the fact that in the multitude of forms and ceremonies, and through following the traditions of men, the true character of God was being altogether hidden or misrepresented, and that righteousness which is ... conformity of the heart and life to the revealed will of God,--Ellen White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, Volume Two, p. 218. was lightly esteemed. So complete was this departure from God in John's day, and so little was His true character known even by those who professed to be His chosen representatives, that when Jesus appeared among them, "the image of the invisible God," (Colossians 1:15) they did not recognize Him, and John said: "There stands one among you, whom you know not; ... Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world." (John 1:26-29)

Prophecies were interpreted in harmony with their own ambitious desires for an earthly kingdom in which they should occupy the prominent places, and their religion degenerated into mere political scheming, a sort of "civic righteousness" or "Christian citizenship" affair, in which the Messiah could be made to serve their own selfish purposes.

The leaders of the people, while professing to be loyal to the true God, had in reality gone after other gods just as surely as had king Ahab in the days of Elijah. And to them the message came: "Repent ... And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father." (Matthew 3:2,9) "There comes one mightier than I after me." (Mark 1:7) "Behold the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36)

The Closing Call

It is one of the signs of the times "that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, ... Having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof." (2 Timothy 3:1-2,5)

Forms and ceremonies, and "science falsely so called," (1 Timothy 6:20) have been substituted for that true knowledge of God through which grace and peace are multiplied, the traditions of men have been followed instead of the Word of the living God, and so now that message is demanded which says, "Fear God, and give glory to Him; ... and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." (Revelation 14:7)

The nothingness of man and the greatness of God, the inability of man to save himself and his consequent need of a mighty Saviour, man's weakness and God's power,

"All flesh is grass, ... Behold your God," (Isaiah 40:6,9) this is the message which is now to go "to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." (Revelation 14:6)

And thus will the way of the Lord be prepared. The lesson which was taught that day at Carmel is to be taught again, "in the spirit and power of Elijah," (Luke 1:17) and the soul-stirring inquiry which was then made is to be repeated, "How long do you halt between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him." (1 Kings 18:21)

And each one is answering the question by the choice which he is daily making, and soon the decree will go forth, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still:...and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still." (Revelation 22:11)

Oh, that every one would say in his heart and in his life, "The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God." (1 Kings 18:39)--
Present Truth, October 17, 1895--1 Samuel 18

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 15

Jehovah or Baal-Which?

The International Sunday-school lesson for July 17, 1898, was "Elijah on Carmel." The M. E. Church South publishes a weekly Illustrated Lesson Paper, devoted largely to the lesson for each successive Sunday.

The Catechism Lesson

In this Lesson Paper, concerning "Elijah on Carmel" we find the following, which we copy exactly as it was there printed:

Catechism Lesson

Question 81: What is the fourth commandment?

Answer: The fourth commandment is: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt you labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shalt not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your man servant, nor your maid servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it."

Question 82: What does the fourth commandment forbid?

Answer: The fourth commandment forbids us to work on the Sabbath day.

Question 83: What day is the Sabbath?

Answer: Sunday is the Sabbath.

That is precisely the way that the Baalites talked and taught in Elijah's time. See here:

Catechism Lesson

Question: What is the first commandment?

Answer: The first commandment is: "I am the Lord your God, which have brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me."

Question: What does the first commandment forbid?

Answer: The first commandment forbids us to have any god but the true God.

Question: What God is the true God?

Answer: Baal is the true God.

That is a catechism lesson such as was taught by the priests of Baal in Elijah's time. And no man can fairly deny that it is parallel in every respect with the catechism lesson here quoted bodily from the Lesson Paper of the M. E. Church South.

Setting Up a False God

The word of God in the fourth commandment, as printed in this catechism lesson of July 17, 1898 AD, says, plainly, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God."

Yet directly in the face of this word, a man, or a set of men, sets up the word, "Sunday is the Sabbath;" while these men themselves know that Sunday is the first day, and not the seventh day at all.

Just so in the lesson of July 17, 898 BC; the word of God in the first commandment said plainly that the true God was He who had brought the children of Israel "out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Yet directly in the face of this word of God, men set up the word, "Baal is God;" while these men themselves knew that Baal was not he who had brought them out of Egypt.

Changing the Word

Oh, yes, we know full well that those who got up this catechism lesson of July 17, 1898 AD, say that the Sabbath has been changed from the seventh day to Sunday; this, too, in the face of the plain

word of God, and of their own contradictory action in printing, in that very lesson, this: "the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God."

Just so those who got up the catechism lesson of July 17, 898 BC, said that the God of Israel had been changed to Baal; this, too, in the face of the plain word of God that the God of Israel was He who had created the heavens and the earth, and had brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage; and that He cannot change.

Citing the Fathers

True, those who got up this catechism lesson of July 17, 1898 AD, can and do cite the "Fathers," and the "saints" of the apostate church to sustain their contradiction of the word of God that "the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God."

Just so those who got up the catechism lesson of July 17, 898 BC, could cite the chief father of their apostasy to sustain them in their contradictions of the word of God. Jeroboam was the chief in that apostasy; and when he began it with the setting up of the golden calves, he said to all the people: "Behold your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt." (1 Kings 12:28)

This itself was a form of sun-worship; but when Jezebel came in, she gave the apostasy a further and fuller turn to sun-worship in making the sun in Baal the chief god. And the priests of the apostasy

in Elijah's day could cite, against the first commandment, the chief father of that apostasy, just as readily and as truly as the priests of the apostasy in our day can cite, against the fourth commandment, the chief Fathers of the later apostasy.

That Woman Jezebel

The priests back there were supporting and defending Jezebel in their setting up Baal as the God of the first commandment, just as those down here are supporting and defending "that woman Jezebel" (Revelation 2:20) in their setting up Sunday as the Sabbath of the fourth commandment.

Sun Worship

It is remarkable that in the lesson of July 17, 898 BC, and in the lesson of July 17, 1898 AD, the sun should be held up as the object of worship, as the true god in the place of Jehovah, who alone is the true God. There it was done through the images of the sun-god, by the influence of Jezebel; here it is done through the day of the sun-god,--Sun-day,--by the influence of "that woman Jezebel."

Spirit and Power of Elijah

It was against such wickedness that Elijah in that day, on behalf of Jehovah lifted up his voice; and it is against that same wickedness in this day that those who are imbued with the spirit and power of Elijah, (Malachi 4:5) on behalf of Jehovah lift up their voices.

The word of God by Elijah for that time is the word of God in the spirit and power of Elijah now: "If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him." (1 Kings 18:21)

Sunday is not the Sabbath any more than Baal is Jehovah. Sunday owes its place among those who profess to be the Lord's people to the influence of "that woman Jezebel," (Revelation 2:20) just as truly as Baal owed his place among those of Elijah's time who professed to be the Lord's people, to the original Jezebel of 1 Kings 14:31.

Troublers of Israel

Elijah in his day was counted a troubler of Israel because he told the people that Baal was not God, and that in following Baal they had "forsaken the commandments of the Lord."

And those who now, in the spirit and power of Elijah, tell the people that Sunday is not the Sabbath, and that in observing Sunday they have "forsaken the commandments of the Lord,"--these now are counted troublers of Israel, just as Elijah was.

But at that time God vindicated Elijah, and sustained him in all the contest in that day; and the same God will vindicate those of the spirit and power of Elijah, and will sustain them in all the contest in this our day.

Translation

And when the contest was over, and his work done, Elijah was translated. And now when this contest is over, and our work is done, "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

Therefore "Hallow my Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God." (Ezekiel 20:20) "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God." (Exodus 20:10) "How long halt you between two opinions? if Jehovah be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him." (1 Kings 18:21)--Advent Review, September 6, 1898--1 Kings 18:21

A.T. Jones

Chapter 16

The Lord, He Is the God

It will be remembered that the lesson for last week was upon the scene of Elijah's calling all Israel to the point of decision between the Lord and Baal; how that all Israel, and the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, came to him at Mount Carmel, and there the test was to be made, by which the people should decide as to whom they would follow. The prophets of Baal prophesied from morning till noon, "But there was no voice nor any that answered." (1 Kings 18:26)

Then they cried louder and "cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out upon them," (1 Kings 18:28) till the time of the evening sacrifice (about three o'clock), but still, "there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded." (1 Kings 18:29)

Then, "Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near." (1 Kings 18:30)

Then he repaired the altar of the Lord, that had been broken down, and "took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob." (1 Kings 18:31)

With these he built the altar of the Lord; then prepared his sacrifice and commanded water to be brought and poured upon the

sacrifice and the altar until it ran over and down and round about the altar and filled the trench that he had caused to be digged. "And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God." (1 Kings 18:36-39)

In last week's lesson we also showed that just before the Lord comes the people will be brought to just such a test upon their obedience to the Lord, in keeping the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, against the decree of Church and State in favor of Sunday, as was Israel against the decree of the ancient Jezebel in favor of Baal; that every man must decide whether he will "worship the beast and his image," (Revelation 14:9) or whether he will "worship him that made heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." (Revelation 14:7)

We called attention to the fact that there is now a party working for a union of Church and State, for the express purpose of compelling the people to keep Sunday; and that against this the Lord

sends a message of warning, and also calls upon all men to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

When the people all gathered before Elijah, they seemed to be wavering. It seems that they could not make up their minds what they should do. Although the narrative is very brief, it is plain that the attention of all the people had been called to the conflict that was going on between Jezebel and the prophets of the Lord, between Baal and Jehovah. For,

1. Jezebel had cut off all the prophets of the Lord that she could find, and those who escaped were obliged to take refuge in caves, and there were 7,000 persons scattered throughout Israel who had not worshiped Baal. It is impossible that all this could have been carried on without the attention of all Israel being called to this great subject.

2. Ahab had made such a diligent search for Elijah that it was impossible that the subject of controversy could have been hidden, for when Obadiah finally met Elijah, he said: "There is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord [Ahab] has not sent to seek you: and when they said, He is not here; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found you not." (1 Kings 18:10)

3. The prophets of Baal were working in the interest of Baal, throughout the nation of Israel; for when Elijah did show himself to Ahab and gave the challenge and told him to gather Israel and the prophets together, we read: "So Ahab sent unto all the children of

Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto Mount Carmel." (1 Kings 18:20) Of these there were four hundred and fifty, and of the prophets of Ashera, the female companion of Baal, there were four hundred.

From all these things it is plain that this thing "was not done in a corner;" (Acts 26:26) and we may safely conclude that the subject had been thoroughly discussed by all Israel. This is further shown by the very first words that Elijah spoke to the people, when they had assembled. Said he, "How long do you halt between two opinions?" (1 Kings 18:21)

It is plain therefore that the people were acquainted with the two views of the subject, although there was hesitancy in decidedly adopting either.

On the one side was Jehovah:

- who had brought their fathers out of Egypt;
- who had planted them in Canaan;
- who had been with Samuel, and Gideon, and Barak, and Jephtha;
- who had led the host of Israel round Jericho, and had thrown down its walls;

- who had caused the waters of Jordan to stand still while Israel passed over;

- who had led them through the wilderness, and had fed them with bread from heaven, even with angels' food; (Psalm 78:25)

- the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel;

- the Creator of heaven and earth;

- the lover of a world of sinners.

On the other side was Baal, the embodiment of shame, with the wicked, licentious, cruel, shameful Jezebel as his grand patron, and the promoter of his worship.

Oh! how were it possible for there to be "two opinions"? How could it be that they would not only recognize "two opinions," but actually "halt"--hesitate--between them? Was it because they were worse than any other people that have ever been? Not at all. It was simply because they were human. Let us see for a moment what there was to draw them toward Baal.

1. First of all. Baal worship was fashionable, it was popular. Remember that Baal-worship was sun-worship. It was just as fashionable, just as popular, then to worship Baal as it now is to keep Sunday. The king, the queen, the court, the rich, the powerful,

the mighty, all worshiped Baal; and after these all the middle classes, and all the common people, all, all were for Baal--except only seven thousand out of all the multitudes of Israel. There were a few scattered here and there throughout the nation who refused to accept anything as worthy of an opinion but that the Lord was God, and that his commandments were yea and amen and must be obeyed, and these were held as fanatics.

2. Then, too, a person could not prosper at all, unless he worshiped Baal. All the patronage and all the power of the kingdom with the queen at the head, was exerted in favor of Baal. So much so indeed was this, that it was even dangerous not to follow the way of Jezebel and Baal. It was at the risk of life itself that the faithful seven thousand and served the Lord.

3. More than this, when by all these considerations they were induced to forsake their duty to God and their respect for His commandments, the restraints of conscience and the law of God were loosed, for Baal demanded nothing of this kind. No self-denial was ever asked of the worshipers of Baal; no pleasure, be it what it would, was ever denied to the followers of Baal.

4. Then, it was just as fashionable to go to a feast in the house of Baal, as it now is to go to a festival in the house of the Lord.

5. Then it was just as honorable to bow the knee to Baal in the house of Baal, as it now is to gamble in the house of the Lord.

6. Then it was just as entirely proper to offer the young women to the highest bidder, in the temple of Baal, as it now is to put them up and sell them at auction, or sell their kisses, to the highest bidder, in the house of the Lord.

7. And then, for the servant of the Lord to reprove those, was to make himself as unpopular, and as much of a troubler of Israel, as it now is to reprove these.

8. Then, it was counted just as stubborn fanaticism to acknowledge Jehovah in the first commandment, as it now is to acknowledge Jehovah in the fourth commandment.

And this fashionableness, and popularity, and worldly honor, and worldly advantage, and abundance of pleasures, were what caused the people then to halt between two opinions as to whether they would follow the Lord or follow Baal, just as it now causes people to halt between two opinions as to whether they will keep the Sabbath of the Lord, or keep the Sunday of the papal church. "How long do you halt between two opinions?" (1 Kings 18:21)

If the Bible says that "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord," (Exodus 20:10) keep it, but if the Bible says that the first day of the week is the Sabbath of the Lord, then keep that. What matters it though four hundred and fifty prophets, with the second Jezebel (Revelation 2:20) at their head, all say that Sunday--the first day--is the Sabbath; until they point to a verse in the word of God that says plainly, "The first day is the Sabbath of the Lord" until then, their

word on that subject is no more to be taken as the truth than was the word of the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal that Baal was God.

There is no disguising the fact that this Sabbath question is fast gaining the lead of all public questions. The great multitude, as governments, and as nations, are rapidly wheeling into line in support of the claim that Sunday is the Sabbath and must be so kept under penalty of law. There are a few, a little company, who, in opposition to this, maintain that the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord, and must be so observed.

And this question, as to which day is the Sabbath, is not left for our decision, any more than the question as to who was the true God was left to theirs in the day of Elijah. The Lord himself has decided this question as well as that. And after the manner of Elijah we say to all: Write these two questions,

1. Is the seventh day the Sabbath?

2. Is the first day the Sabbath?

Then which ever one that the word of God in the Bible says is the Sabbath, let that day be the Sabbath. And that holy word answers, with no uncertain sound, to every man in the wide world, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God: in it you shall not do any work." (Exodus 20:10)

"If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words: Then shall you delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it." (Isaiah 58:13-14)--Signs of the Times, August 13, 1885--Notes on the International Lesson, August 16--1 Kings 18:30-46

A. T. Jones

Chapter 17

Elijah's Flight and Encouragement

In Elijah's conduct, after the triumph on Mount Carmel, is seen the manifestation of human weakness. He who had boldly faced an apostate nation, the wrath of the king and the malice of the priests of Baal, now flees for his life before the anger of Jezebel.

God had vindicated His own name in sending fire from heaven, and Elijah, as His faithful servant, had shared the glory which thereby came upon the worship of Jehovah. Israel, at his command, had risen against their false prophets and slain them all; yet to Elijah it seems that the cause is lost, evil had, triumphed, and death would be a welcome end.

In past lessons we have traced slightly the parallel between Elijah's times and these. Today a message is due, given in the spirit and power of Elijah, calling men to forsake Baal and return to the worship of the true God. Still, as then, God uses men as His instruments, and now, as ever, men are but dust. Circumstances are before us which will try us to the utmost, and will, unless we profit by the Scriptures which are written for our learning, desolate our souls and wring from us Elijah's cry, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life." (1 Kings 19:4)

How then shall those who fear God, and serve Him, declare His message fearlessly as did Elijah, and yet escape the bitterness of his despair?

A Source of Failure

Does not his self-accusing plaint, "for I am not better than my fathers," (1 Kings 19:4) suggest the cause of his sudden weakness? It seems so difficult for men to allow God to work through them without taking to themselves some credit for the power manifested. Those who feel their utter need of all things, and in whose weakness the strength of God is made perfect, are yet tempted, when a great work is done, to forget that all they have contributed to it was nothing and less than nothing; for: "Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity." (Psalm 39:5)

So they flatter themselves that they must be better than their fathers. The awakening from this delusion is a painful experience, but an absolutely necessary one. Together with the "spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17) must go the spirit displayed in John the Baptist, to whom was committed the same work, "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30)

So shall we be saved from painful and humiliating falls, and our continued usefulness be secured.

The food given to Elijah, by which he was sustained for forty days and forty nights on his journey to Horeb, showed that the

strength in which he was to go was in no wise dependent upon himself, and its apparent insufficiency for so long a period might have prepared him for the lesson given at Horeb, that the power of God is not qualified or limited by outward appearances.

The Still, Small Voice

At last Elijah reached the mount of God, "And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said unto him, What are you doing here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and slain your prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." (1 Kings 19:9-10)

Surely it was a doleful state of things, and Elijah's words seem to imply that God might have bettered it if He would. Elijah had been very jealous for God, yet God had allowed Elijah's life to be threatened and endangered in His service. When he was gone the last worshiper of God would have perished; so far had matters drifted.

Then Elijah was told to stand on the mount before the Lord. He did so, and as a great and strong wind rent the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces, he fully expected to hear the message of Jehovah, delivered in tones of rolling thunder. "But the Lord was not in the wind." (1 Kings 19:11)

And now followed the crashing of an earthquake, and again, the hot fierce blast of a devouring fire, but in neither of these was the Lord revealed. Then in the quietness and calm that followed the passing of the fire was heard a still, small voice. And Elijah wrapped his face in his mantle and listened.

Again the same question as before was asked, and again he made the same reply. After telling Elijah to anoint fresh kings over Israel and Syria, and Elisha to be prophet in his own room, the still, small voice went on to say, "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him." (1 Kings 19:18)

Strength Made Perfect

What a glorious word was that; well worth coming the long journey to hear. Seven thousand faithful souls! And Elijah thought there was but one discouraged witness, and they sought his life. So God had been working after all, and had not left the whole burden on Elijah's shoulders. Who would have thought it? No one had talked of great demonstrations of Divine power, creating excitement and swaying multitudes with mysterious, force. What had done the work? The still, small voice. Yet what infinite power there had been in the voice.

The message of the everlasting Gospel is to go to the world in these days with a loud cry, and those who hear it are to lift up the

voice with strength; but it will not always be with the outward demonstration that suggests earthquake and roaring fire. When the Saviour of the world lay, wrapped in swaddling clothes, in a manger, when He toiled at the carpenter's bench, and above all, when He was nailed to the cross between thieves, forsaken of all men, "His visage marred more than any man," (Isaiah 52:14) so far from being the Power and Wisdom of God, He seemed "a worm and no man; a reproach of men; and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn." (Psalm 22:6-7)

Yet in it all, He was declared to be the Son of God with power, "Because...the weakness of God is stronger than men." (1 Corinthians 1:25)

Just as Christ prayed, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) so the people of God in the last days mourn and lament that "the Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me." (Isaiah 49:14)

But since Christ, for us, passed through that experience, we need never feel forsaken. He says to us, "Behold I have graven you upon the palms of my hands." (Isaiah 49:16)

Another Parallel

When the message of the Gospel, given in the power of Elijah, brings the messengers face to face with the wrath of the dragon, and the powers of this world, the temptation of Elijah will come to us to

make us feel that evil has triumphed, we alone are left to serve God, and they seek our lives to take them away. "Like as a woman with child, so have we been in your sight, O Lord. We have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind; we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth; neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen." (Isaiah 26:17-18)

Then will the Lord comfort us, as He did Elijah with the news of the seven thousand. "Lift up your eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together and come to you. ... Behold, these shall come from far: and lo these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim. ... Then shall you say in your heart, Who has begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?" (Isaiah 26:18,12,21)

The Lord answers this question by telling of His own working, and adds, "And you shall know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me." (Isaiah 26:23) "His strength is made perfect in weakness," (2 Corinthians 12:9) but we so soon get tired of weakness. Christ was always dependent upon His Father for words and works, and even for will.

Power in Gentleness

He spoke with a still, small voice, but the power of God was in the voice. The power of God is very gentle. Paul wrote to the

Thessalonians that: "Our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." (1 Thessalonians 1:5)

Yet he says, "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherishes her children." (1 Thessalonians 2:7)

The remembrance of the gentleness of God's power will keep us from discouragement if we do not see the kind of power manifested that seems to our minds necessary for the furtherance of the Gospel, and the lament of Elijah, that we are no better than our fathers, and that it can profit the world nothing for us to live on any longer, will never rise to the lips of those who remember that God has chosen "the base things of the world, and things which are despised, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence." (1 Corinthians 1:28)--Present Truth, July 14, 1898--Notes on the International Sunday-School Lessons--1 Kings 19:1-6

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 18

What Are You Doing Here?

After the scene on Mount Carmel, which was the subject of last week's lesson, Ahab went and told Jezebel all that had been done, and how that the prophets of Baal had been slain. "Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time. And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers. And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for you. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God." (1 Kings 19:2-8)

Thus Elijah was compelled to flee for his life because of his faithfulness to the Lord and in the defense of His commandments. Remember, that with the exception of the rain of that same day,

there had been no rain for three years and a half, and all the vegetation had dried up, as was shown in the lesson of August 2. (See Article 11 in this section, "The Famine in the Land.") And into this waste, desolate wilderness Elijah was compelled to flee for his life, and when he had gone a whole day's journey, "He ... came and sat down under a juniper tree, and requested for himself that he might die." (1 Kings 19:4)

But what a singular reason it was that he gave for wanting the Lord to take away his life, "O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." (1 Kings 19:4)

Nowadays, in a great many, indeed in most instances it seems to be considered the very peak of perfection to be no better than our fathers were. Just as soon as the duty of keeping the Sabbath of the Lord is urged upon the people, then the plea arises, "Our fathers, for generations back, all kept Sunday, and they were good people and accepted of the Lord, and if we are as good as they were we shall be all right; if they are saved we shall be; if I can be as good as they were that is all I want."

Elijah reasoned not so. He had a better idea of the principles of righteousness, of duty, and of allegiance to God, than to offer any such beg-off as that. So has everybody a better idea of consistency than to reason so upon any subject of minor, or even common, importance.

No person refuses to ride in a palace car because our fathers had nothing better than a lumbering stage-coach. No person refuses to ride on a steamer because our fathers never saw one. So likewise it is with all advancement in science, art, and human knowledge. Instead of refusing it men take every advantage of it, and try by all means to profit by it.

And the man who makes a new discovery in the field of science, of philosophy, or of exploration of a continent, it matters not though his discovery upsets all the accepted theories of men, if his discovery bears the test of the truth in the field to which it belongs, men readily accept it, and the discoverer is honored, and rightly so, as a benefactor of his race in that he has enlarged the view, and added to the sum, of human knowledge.

Thus it is when the matter relates to things of this world. But when the subject is one that concerns the eternal destiny of men; when it is discovered by someone that in matters of faith and morals, men are wrong; then when the way of truth is pointed out, even though it bear every test of truth known to the Bible, that man is held up as a heretic, a propagandist, a troubler of Israel, an exciter of divisions among the people; then, a question upon which hang eternal interests, is calmly put aside with the observations that: "Our fathers knew nothing of this, therefore it is of no interest to us; our fathers did not find it out, therefore it cannot be the truth; what matters it, though the Bible does say it is the truth, as it was not obeyed by our fathers, we need not obey it; if we are only as good as they, we shall be safe."

But let all such know that our fathers, who were good, did all that they knew, and were accepted of the Lord, in it. "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man has, and not according to that he has not." (2 Corinthians 8:12)

And unless we do all that we know, or all that we may know, we are not as good as they were. Therefore it is plain that we cannot be as good as our godly fathers were by simply doing what they did. To be accepted of the Lord they had to do all that they knew; to be accepted of the Lord, we likewise must do all that we know. And if in the advancing work of God in the world, points of truth, of which our fathers knew nothing, shine forth from the word of God, we must accept them, walk in the light of them, and live according to them, to be accepted of the Lord in this our day as our fathers were in theirs. "While you have light, believe in the light, that you may be the children of light." (John 12:36) "And the law [of God] is light." (Proverbs 6:23)

As Elijah, away in the wilderness alone, lay and slept under that juniper tree, "Behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head." (1 Kings 19:5-6)

Although the bitter Jezebel was seeking for his life, and though to escape her wrath, he has fled into the wilderness where he has neither food nor water, yet an angel visits him, and he has the blessed privilege of eating food from an angel's hand. Blessed

privilege, even though it be only bread and water. Bread and water, in the desolation of the desert, from the hand of an angel, is infinitely better than the richest dainties, in the luxury of kings' palaces, from the hand of a Jezebel.

Elijah laid him down again and slept, "And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for you." (1 Kings 19:7)

He did eat and drink and "went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God." (1 Kings 19:8)

There the word of the Lord came to him, and He said unto him, "What are you doing here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and slain your prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." (1 Kings 19:9-10)

We have shown, in previous lessons, the contest that there is to be between the beast and his image and those who keep the commandments of God, just before the coming of the Lord. We have referred to the National Reform Party, and its work of forming a union of Church and State in the Government of the United States, for the sole purpose of compelling all people to keep Sunday, in violation of the commandment of God. We have shown that, in opposition to this, God sends a message calling upon all to "keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." (Revelation 14:12)

And when this union of Church and State is accomplished, that will be an image to the beast--the papal church. And from this history of all such unions, we may know what will be the inevitable result--persecution of dissenters. We are not left, however, to infer from what has been, what will be; the word of God tells us plainly what will be the result of such an action. The word says: "And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. ... And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name." (Revelation 13:15,17)

Then it will be with these who keep the commandments of God, as it was with Elijah, the representative of these. The new Jezebel then swaying the power of the Government, will seek their lives, to take them away. Then these will have to flee, as Elijah did, and they, as he did, will find drought in all the land, and "the rivers of water dried up," (Joel 1:20) and all the pastures of the wilderness dried up. Yes, and these too will find, amidst the desolation, as Elijah did, that "He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways." (Psalm 91:11)

These too, as Elijah did, will find even in the desolate wilderness that their "place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks: [that] bread shall be given them; [and their] waters shall be sure;" (Isaiah 33:16) that their eyes too, as his did, "shall see the

King in His beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off."
(Isaiah 33:17)

And when found thus fleeing for their lives, if asked as was Elijah, "What are you doing here?" (1 Kings 19:9) they can reply as he did: "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, ... and they seek my life, to take it away." (1 Kings 19:10)

But even though the new Jezebel shall seek to take away the lives of those who keep the commandments of God, yet the holy prophet says, "I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God." (Revelation 15:2)

The Lord calls, now, for those who will be "very jealous for the Lord God of hosts." He calls for those who will jealously regard His commandments, even at the expense of every earthly thing. He seeks now for those who will "keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus," (Revelation 14:12) against all earthly powers. What are you doing here? Are you very jealous for the Lord God of hosts?--Signs of the Times, August 20, 1885--Notes on the International Lesson, August 23--Original title: What Doest Thou Here?--1 Kings 19:1-18

A.T. Jones

Chapter 19

The Story of Naboth

At Jezreel, about twenty-five miles from Samaria, Ahab had a palace. Hard by this palace was a vineyard belonging to Naboth. And Ahab said to Naboth, "Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give you for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to you, I will give you the worth of it in money. And Naboth said to Ahab, The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto you." (1 Kings 21:2-3)

The Lord had given commandment that the land should not be sold forever. "And in all the land of your possession you shall grant a redemption for the land." (Leviticus 25:25) "So shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe: for every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers." (Numbers 36:7)

Naboth simply proposed to obey the word of the Lord, and so told Ahab that he could not have his land. But even though the Lord had given no directions on the subject, it was clearly the right of Naboth to refuse to sell his land for the private purposes of the king. For if he had no right to refuse to sell, he had no rights at all in the matter, and was thus placed subject to the mere whim of the king. And if he was obliged to so yield to the wish of Ahab, even though Ahab had given him a better vineyard, what assurance was there that

he would not shortly have to give up that vineyard at the wish of the king, as he had given this at the first. Not only by the word of God, but by every principle of justice and right, Naboth was in the right and Ahab in the wrong.

Frederick the Great once wanted, for a part of his garden, an adjoining piece of ground upon which a wind-mill stood. He sent an agent to buy the ground and the mill. The miller sturdily refused to sell it. At last the agent said, "Not at any price? Could not the king take it from you for nothing if he chose?"

The miller replied, "Have we not the Kammergericht [the Imperial Chamber of Justice] at Berlin?"

That was as much as to say that, though Frederick wanted the grounds for his own private use, yet if he attempted to take them by force, the miller would appeal to him as king, and that, in justice to his subject, Frederick as king would not allow Frederick as a private person, to take the land against the wish of the owner. Frederick was wonderfully pleased at the answer of the lowly miller, and, "Have we not the Kammergericht at Berlin," became a popular saying in Germany.

But Ahab was not a Frederick. "Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him...And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread." (1 Kings 21:4)

Throughout Ahab's whole career he appears as capricious as a spoiled child, with yet this shortcoming that he had no force of character even in his caprices, but was always ready to be ruled by whatever influence affected him at the moment.

1. First he took to wife Jezebel, the very embodiment of imperious infamy;

2. Then he allowed her to stir him up to commit more iniquity than all the kings of Israel before him;

3. Then, when because of his wickedness Elijah pronounced to him the judgment of the Lord, in drought upon the land for three years and a half, there was not nation or kingdom round about that he did not send to in search of Elijah; and when Elijah finally came to meet him and denounced him to his face, all he did was to simply go, in obedience to Elijah's command, to gather together all Israel and the prophets of Baal to Mount Carmel.

4. Then, when the contest had been decided at Mount Carmel, instead of firmly taking a stand on the side of the Lord, he simply went and told Jezebel all that had happened, and let her exert herself anew in behalf of Baal.

5. And now in this instance with Naboth, because he can't have that vineyard he must go to bed and refuse to eat anything!"

Jezebel, however, had enough self-assertion for ten men, and a regiment of women. She can tell in a minute what to do--she will murder Naboth and his family so that there shall be no heirs, and take everything that he has. All this will she do and be merry about it. "I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." (1 Kings 21:7)

And she did. And then, as might be expected, just as soon as she came telling him that Naboth was dead, this weak, wicked, and wickedly weak king "rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite to take possession of it. And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab...behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth wither he is gone down to possess it." (1 Kings 21:16-18)

And there as Ahab stands with satisfaction contemplating his new possession, suddenly there strikes upon his ear a voice, as thunder out of clear sky, exclaiming, "Have you killed, and also taken possession?" (1 Kings 21:19)

Ahab cries out, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" (1 Kings 21:20)

The stern reply is, "I have found you; because you have sold yourself to work evil in the sight of the Lord. ... In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your blood, even yours. ... The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. Him that

dies of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dies in the field shall the fowls of the air eat." (1 Kings 21:20,19,23-24)

It is very natural for those who have sold themselves to do evil to count as their enemies those who reprove them and point out their sins. But there is no escape. It may long be delayed, but, sooner or later, "Be sure your sin will find you out." (Numbers 32:23)

And it is vastly better for us to find out our sins, and put them away, than at last to have them find us out, when it is too late to put them away.

Ahab's covetousness ended in murder and robbery. "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses." (Luke 12:15) "You shall not covet." (Exodus 20:17)

Covetousness is the leading sin in the transgression of any commandment of the decalogue. Not one of the commandments can be broken but that covetousness leads in the transgression. Covetousness itself is idolatry: "For this you know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." (Ephesians 5:5) "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." (Colossians 3:5)

And covetousness in all its forms is summed up in one word--selfishness. May we all remember the Saviour's warning, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness." (Luke 12:15)

And may we, with David, ever pray, "Incline my heart unto your testimonies, and not to covetousness." (Psalm 119:36)--Signs of the Times, August 20, 1885--Notes on the International Lesson, August 30--1 Kings 21:4-19

A.T. Jones

Chapter 20

Naboth's Vineyard

Among the kings of Israel, "There was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up." (1 Kings 21:25)

God had commanded Israel that they should not make marriages with the people of heathen nations, because these would turn them away from following Him and beguile them into the worship of false gods, but: "Ahab did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshiped him." (1 Kings 16:30-31)

It seemed a grievous sin, even in so depraved a nature as Ahab's, but it brought its own punishment. God had said that if Israel would join themselves to idolatrous nations and make marriages with them, "they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land." (Joshua 23:13)

A Present Danger

The same warning is given now. "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship has righteousness

with unrighteousness? and what communion has light with darkness? And what concord has Christ with Belial? or what part has he that believes with an infidel?" (2 Corinthians 6:14-15)

It is true that Ahab was not himself faithfully serving God, but, for this reason, it was all the more dangerous for him to become allied with a woman whose influence would certainly tend to still further separate him from the Lord. Many who have not fully surrendered themselves to God, though knowing His will, excuse their intention of joining themselves to unbelievers by saying that these are as good as themselves. While this may be true the terrible danger of their course is none the less real.

In a little while the glamour of romance will have worn away, the novelty of a new experience will cease to excite the mind, for no human love can satisfy the soul's deep need. There will be an intense desire for the pure, sweet, lasting comfort that Christ alone can give. Then too late comes the bitter awakening to the fact that what was intended to be a temple for the living God has been surrendered to idols.

To be faithful to God means then a lifelong struggle against opposing, ever-present influences, and many give up in discouragement.

Evil Influences

Since the time dealt with in our last lesson, God had given Ahab two wonderful deliverances from the hand of Benhadad, king of Syria. The Syrian army, although greatly out-numbering Israel, had been totally destroyed and Benhadad forced to sue for his life, which Ahab had weakly spared.

There is evidence in Ahab's history that he was not altogether indifferent to the word of the Lord and that, at least once, he showed real contrition for his wrong-doing. Without Jezebel he might have left undone some of the crimes which have stained the record of his reign, but he was "stirred up" by the wicked ingenuity of his abandoned wife. He had heavily handicapped himself by his union with her, and he had to suffer the consequences.

Naboth's Integrity

Close by Ahab's palace in Jezreel was a garden of herbs owned by Naboth. Some plan of the king's for the improvement of his property made it seem desirable that this garden should be added to his grounds, and he approached Naboth with a proposition for its purchase or exchange. Naboth, unlike his corrupt neighbors, respected the commandment of the Lord, which had forbidden any man to permanently dispose of his inheritance, and firmly declined to entertain the king's suggestion.

Baulked in this pet project, Ahab went home like a spoiled, peevish child, and fretted because he could not have his own way. "And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread." (1 Kings 21:4)

Jezebel found him thus, giving rein to his ill-humour, and drew from him the story of his complaint. She laughed to scorn his dejection over the repulse of a rebellious subject and promised that she would give him the vineyard herself. Doubtless in Zidon, where she came from, they had a short way of dealing with men like Naboth, who presumed to set themselves against the wishes of a king.

Falsely Condemned

Her plans were soon executed, and found only too ready agents in the men of Naboth's city. These at her instigation brought false charges against him, and with deep-dyed hypocrisy condemned him to death on a charge of blaspheming God. "Then they carried him forth and stoned him with stones that he died." (1 Kings 21:13)

His sons also were slain. "Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons, says the Lord." (2 Kings 9:26)

The report was carried to Jezebel that Naboth had been removed, and she in turn conveyed it to Ahab, bidding him "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth, which he refused to give you for money: for Naboth is not alive but dead." (1 Kings 21:15)

In the first blush of pleasure Ahab sets out to examine his new possession. He must have at least guessed that it had come to him by unjust means, but in the gratifying reflection that he could now carry out his plans unhindered, he gives himself no trouble as to how the transfer has been accomplished.

The Wages of Sin

But who is this menacing figure that stands before him in the garden? The sight of the man of God recalls.

- the long story of his past misdoing,
- the thirsty years of famine,
- the scene on Mount Carmel,
- the fire from heaven and the slaughter of the priests of Baal,
- his own hopeless struggle against the power of God,
- his recent crime, the very place in which he stands testifying to his guilt and crying, like the blood of Abel for vengeance on a murderer; all crowds upon his guilty conscience and fills him with a dire foreboding of well-earned retribution. Before Elijah has spoken, the cowering king confesses his self-condemnation in the words, "Have you found me, O my enemy!" (1 Kings 21:20)

Sharp and clear, like all Elijah's words, comes the sentence, "Thus says the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your blood. ... The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel." (1 Kings 21:19,23)

Here, on the scene of their latest crimes the punishment is to come. The vineyard of Naboth is not taken from Ahab. He may take what pleasure he will in it now.

Jezebel was a heathen who professed no allegiance to God, but this in no wise exonerated her from the duty of rendering obedience to His law, or exempted her from the penalty of transgressing it. Men think that God has no claims upon them except such as they choose to acknowledge, but "What things soever the law says, it says to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." (Romans 3:19)

Jezebel and Ahab thought to secure for themselves desired advantages by their sin, but in their case, as in all others, the only wages received for sin is death.

Reaping Corruption

Satan makes many things appear, in the eyes of men, of priceless value, if they be forbidden by the law of God, but when

men have gained the thing desired, often at the cost of their own soul, they realize for how little they have sold themselves.

Like Cain, men become filled with a thirst for revenge that will not be satisfied without destroying the offending life, but when the desire is gratified, the cold, impassive face of the dead turns the short-lived triumph into an abiding curse, heavier than they can bear. Amnon so greatly desired Tamar that he became sick with longing, but when he had satisfied his lust, he "hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her." (2 Samuel 13:15)

The soul of Judas was consumed with a passion for gain, but when he received the thirty pieces of silver, which had outweighed in his estimation the sacred claims of friendship and honor, there was no sacrifice he would not have made to cancel the fatal bargain. It was not silver that he had won, but the unblessed end of a despairing suicide, the abhorrence of a universe.

Grace Abounding

The history of Ahab teaches that the way of the transgressor is hard, (Proverbs 13:15) that it may be made even harder by marriage with one who will confirm evil tendencies, that Satan's promises to those whom he deceives are never fulfilled, and we may also learn from Ahab's life that "the mercy of the Lord endures for ever," (Psalm 118:1) for even after Naboth's murder, because Ahab humbled himself before God, the threatened evil did not come in his

days. Surely, "There is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared." (Psalm 130:4)--Present Truth, July 21, 1898--Notes on the International Sunday-School Lessons--1 Kings 21:4-16

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 21

Elijah Translated

From Horeb, Elijah was directed to go by Damascus on his return to the land of Israel, and to anoint Hazael to be king of Syria, and Jehu to be king of Israel, and Elisha to be prophet in his room, and then it was, and not till then, that the Lord told him of the 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed to Baal. Then it was the Elijah knew that he was not alone in honoring God in the nation of Israel.

Elisha was found in the field plowing with twelve yoke of oxen. He asked permission to go and kiss his father and his mother; this was given, and he did so. Then he killed two of the oxen and made a feast for the people, "Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him." (1 Kings 19:21)

That Elijah was to be translated was known not only to himself, but to Elisha, and also to the schools of the prophets. When Elijah said to Elisha, "Tarry here, I pray you; for the Lord has sent me to Bethel," (2 Kings 2:2) Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you;" (2 Kings 2:2) and this determination not to leave Elijah was because he knew that Elijah was to be taken away. When they were come to Bethel, the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, "Do you know that the Lord will take away your master from your head today? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold your peace." (2 Kings 2:3)

And when Elijah and Elisha had passed on and had come down to Jericho, there likewise the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, "Do you know that the Lord will take away your master from your head today?" (2 Kings 2:5)

And again he answered, "Yea, I know it; hold your peace." (2 Kings 2:5)

And when they two had gone on down to Jordan, fifty of the sons of the prophets went and stood "to view afar off." (2 Kings 2:7)

It is useless to speculate upon the question of how they all knew it. We know that they did know it. And the fact of Elisha's knowing it is a sufficient reason for his determination not to leave Elijah. Nor need we suppose that this determination was the result of curiosity; but rather of a desire to be a partaker of the rich experience, and the immense help to his faith, that would be afforded by his walking by Elijah's side, even to his entering into Heaven, and by seeing, himself, as it were, the rending of the veil that separates us from the other world.

We know that this was so, because several years afterward, when the king of Syria had with "horses, and chariots, and a great host," (2 Kings 6:14) compassed about the city where Elisha was, Elisha's servant cried out, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" (2 Kings 6:15)

The prophet replied, "Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray you, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw; and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." (2 Kings 6:16-17)

Elisha did not pray that his own eyes might be opened, but that the eyes of the young man might be opened, that he might see what Elisha already knew was there. As for himself, he had seen the heavenly horses and chariots take away Elijah, and he knew that they were ever ready to protect the servant of God. He did well to go with Elijah to the furthest possible step.

As these two men went onward from Jericho, they presently "stood by Jordan. And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground. And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for you, before I be taken away from you. And Elisha said, I pray you, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me. And he said, You have asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so unto you; but if not, it shall not be so. And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father,

my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof! And he saw him no more." (2 Kings 2:7-12)

Thus Elijah went bodily into heaven without seeing death. His natural body was "changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," (1 Corinthians 15:52) into a spiritual body. His mortal body was made immortal. The same body that walked by Elisha's side, and the same hands upon which Elisha had poured water, were changed from the natural to the spiritual, from mortal to immortal. That same body went to Heaven; that same body stood on the mount of transfiguration; and today that same body stands in the presence of God in Heaven. Those same lips that denounced sin and called the people to obedience to the commandments of God, are today singing the songs of Zion, in Zion the beautiful city of God.

Paul says, "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." (1 Corinthians 15:44)

In this, however, he does not speak of two bodies, but he speaks of two conditions of the same body. Man has a natural body now; and if he ever reaches another world, it will be by the change of this natural body into a spiritual body either by translation or by a resurrection. It is all a hoax about there being a spiritual body inside of the natural body, and that the natural body is cast off and the spiritual body flies away. It is all a hoax that at death the spirit leaves the natural body and goes into a spiritual body.

Elijah did not leave his body in this world when he went to Heaven; nor did Jesus leave His body when He went to Heaven. Elijah did not obtain a spiritual body by dying, but by translation. Neither do those who die obtain a spiritual body by dying, but by a resurrection from the dead. And these two ways--by translation and by resurrection--are the only ways that God has appointed by which men may ever reach another world.

It was in writing of the resurrection of the righteous dead, that Paul referred to the spiritual body. He says, "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from Heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly." (1 Corinthians 15:42-48)

- We have shown that Elijah stood on the mount of transfiguration as the representative of those who shall be translated at the coming of the Lord.

- We have shown that in their leading points, the times and the experience of Elijah just before his translation were representative

of the times and the experiences of those in the last days who shall be translated at the coming of Christ.

- We have seen that as there was great drought in the land then, so there is to be just before the Lord comes.

- We have seen that as there was a controversy over the commandments of God in the time of Elijah, so there is to be in the last days.

- We have seen that as there was persecution of those who kept the commandments then, so there is to be, just before the coming of the Lord, persecution of those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

- We have seen that as the test was then whether they would worship the Lord or Baal, so in the last days it will be whether men will worship the beast and his image, or whether they will worship Him that made heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

- We have seen that as then the test of obedience to God was involved in keeping the first commandment, so now it turns upon showing allegiance to God by keep the fourth commandment.

And now as Elijah's experience in this world ends with his translation, and his being carried up into heaven by the heavenly chariots, so also ends the experience, in this world, of those who in

the last days keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. The commandments of God and the faith of Jesus must be kept against the most determined opposition of all the powers of earth. And of those who will do this, it is said, "I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire, and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God." (Revelation 15:2)

Of this same company it is said in another place, "These were redeemed from among men." (Revelation 14:4)

Elijah was redeemed from among men.

It cannot be said of those who shall be raised from the dead, that they were redeemed from among men. They will be redeemed from death; (Hosea 13:14; I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be your plagues; O grave, I will be your destruction: repentance shall be hid from my eyes) they will be redeemed from among the dead. But this company of those who keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus, who get the victory over the beast and his image, who stand on the sea of glass, in the presence of the great white throne, (Revelation 4:6) who have the harps of God, these being redeemed from among men as was Elijah, will be translated as was he. "For the Lord himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be

caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) "For, behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with His chariots like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire." (Isaiah 66:15)

Oh, joy! oh, delight! should we go without dying.
No sickness, no sorrow, no dread, and no crying.
Caught up through the air with our Lord into glory,
When Jesus receives "His own."
--H. L. Turner, Hymn: Christ Returneth, 1878.

And now as we, for the present, take our leave of Elijah, we pray that each one who has read these sketches of his experience, may be as faithful and uncompromising in his allegiance to God and his commandments, in this our day, as was Elijah in his; that each one may be as jealous for the Lord God of hosts as was he; and then there is no shadow of question but that when the Lord and His holy angels shall come with fire and with His chariots, all such shall be not only where Elijah is, but where the Lord Jesus himself is. They shall see the King in His beauty, (Isaiah 33:17) they shall behold the King of glory. "Take heed to yourself, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life: but teach them your sons, and your sons' sons; ... Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children." (Deuteronomy 4:9)--Signs of the Times, August 27,

1885--Notes on the International Lesson, September 6--2 Kings 2:1-15

A.T. Jones

Chapter 22

Did Elijah Die?

We have long been perfectly assured, and it has been often shown in these columns, that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul turns into utter confusion and nonsense the whole scheme of divine revelation as contained in the Bible. If, however, there had been in our minds the least doubt that such is the truth, such lingering doubt would have been entirely and effectually removed by what has lately come under our notice.

Our readers will recollect that the International Sunday-school Lesson for September 6, 1885, was on the translation of Elijah. During the past week, the religious papers containing notes on this lesson have reached us from different parts of the country, and it is in these "notes," and "observations," and "practical suggestions," etc., etc., that we find most aptly and fully illustrated, the havoc that is made with Scripture, reason, and common sense, by the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. We propose to lay before our readers some of the effusions (Note: These extracts can be found in the issue of August 27, 1885, of each of the respective papers, except the S.S. Times--in that the date is August 22.) that have actually been set forth as worthy of being taught in the Sunday-schools of our country.

The Bible record is: "And it came to pass, as they [Elijah and Elisha] still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a

chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into Heaven." (2 Kings 2:11)

There is a narrative so simple that a child can understand it, and an event transcendently sublime. And yet upon such a subject the writer of the "notes" in the Pacific gets off the following:

A sudden departure from this world is often considered a misfortune, and a stroke of lightning a token of divine displeasure. But, if we are ready, as Elijah was, we may accept it as a token of divine love that the manner of our removal is quick and painless.

Does this writer mean to convey the idea that Elijah was struck with lightning? If not, does he mean to say that, if a man were struck with lightning, it would be the same to him as was translation to Elijah? Again, is a "sudden departure from this world" by death, whether it be by a stroke of lightning or otherwise, equivalent to the departure of Elijah from this world? If so, why should it be considered "a misfortune"? Was it "a misfortune" to Elijah that he should make the "sudden departure" that he did? Well, if he was struck with lightning, doubtless it was; but if as the word of God says, Elijah went up by a whirlwind into Heaven, then it was certainly everything but a misfortune.

But the writer of the Pacific is not by any means alone. Here is one in the Christian Union writing "Home Talks about the Word," on this same subject:

Paul says Elijah was a man of like passions with ourselves. Every child of God goes to Heaven just as much alive as Elijah did. The body is not you; you live in it, and you keep on living without it.

We would suggest that if this writer would study the word of God more and the doctrine of the immortality of the soul less, she would not have quoted Paul as saying that Elijah was a man of like passions with ourselves. (It was James who wrote this: James 5:17) This simply in passing. But now to our subject.

If it be true that, "Every child of God goes to Heaven just as much alive as Elijah did," how is it that nobody does it, nor ever has done it since Elijah did it? If, "Every child of God goes to Heaven just as much alive as Elijah did," then how is it that every child of God, as well as everybody else, dies? Is it the same thing to die that it is to be translated? Here we set together two passages of Scripture:

1. "And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into Heaven." (2 Kings 2:11)

2. "And Elisha died, and they buried him." (2 Kings 13:20)

Now we ask: Do these two passages mean the same thing? Did Elisha go to Heaven just as much alive, as Elijah did? If language is of any use at all; if the power of reason, or of comprehension, be of any worthy whatever; then it is impossible to hold both these scriptures as meaning the same thing--one just as much as the other.

It is equally impossible to believe that these words of the Lord, and those quoted from the Christian Union, can both be the truth. And as the word of God is the truth, we know by that, that this from the Union is not the truth.

There is another statement in the same paper to which we would call attention, this by Dr. Lyman Abbott, in which it is implied, if not definitely stated, that this narrative is not a part of the Bible. He says:

If any one doubts or denies the truth of the story, it is not worth while to argue with him. The translation of Elijah was a sign to Elisha. The sight was vouchsafed to him. He learned its lesson. That is enough. ... It is not right to treat as a rejecter of Christian truth one whose philosophic tendencies make him skeptical respecting such an event as this. The translation of Elijah is a flower embroidered on the edge of the garment; it is no part of the woof.

We can but wonder how Dr. Abbott knows that the "translation of Elijah is no part of the woof" of the garment of Christian truth. Is it not a part of the word of God? Was it not written for our learning? (Romans 15:4) Is it not profitable? (2 Timothy 3:16) By what right does Dr. Abbott take upon himself to decide how much of the word of God is a part of the "woof," and how much is not? And if "it is not right to treat as a rejecter of Christian truth one whose philosophic tendencies make him skeptical respecting such an event as this," then is it right "to treat as a rejecter of Christian truth one whose philosophic tendencies make him skeptical respecting such

an event as" the resurrection of Christ? If "philosophic tendencies" will justify skepticism respecting this event or this part of the word of God, why will they not justify it respecting any or all other events or any other part, or even all of that word?

Next we have the New York Observer. One of the practical suggestions drawn from Elijah's translation is this:

The dead do not slumber in the grave. God's own go straight to the heavenly place. Elijah went up thither, not to sleep, but to live and serve and rejoice. So do dying saints now pass at once to glory "in paradise."

Let us give a scriptural analysis of this.

1. "The dead do not slumber in the grave." "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake." (Daniel 12:2) "Our friend Lazarus sleeps; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. ... Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. ... Jesus...came to the grave, ... And ... cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth." (John 11:11,14,38,43)

2. "God's own go straight to the heavenly place." "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after my own heart." (Acts 13:22) "Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day. ... For David is not ascended into the Heavens." (Acts 2:29,34)

3. "Elijah went up thither, not to sleep, but to live and serve and rejoice. So do dying saints now pass at once to glory 'in paradise.'" "The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence." (Psalm 115:17) "For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who shall give You thanks?" (Psalm 6:5) "Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You shall seek me; and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, you cannot come; so now I say to you." (John 13:33) "I go unto my Father." (John 14:12)

Reader, which will you believe? the word of God, or the word of man? Will you believe a doctrine to be the truth that directly contradicts the word of God?

The Sunday-School Times says: "The miraculous translation of Elijah only sets before us in a visible appearance what takes place when every true child of God departs."

And the New York Independent: "Elijah's translation only slightly differs from that of every Christian. The important part is not that the body is taken up to Heaven, but that the soul is. And that is what we can all hope for."

These quotations might be multiplied but we have not the space, nor, indeed, do we think it necessary. But from these no one can fail to see that there is an utter confusion of ideas, in regard to death and translation. From these extracts from the Sunday-school teaching, it is impossible to tell whether Elijah died, or whether all men are

translated. Yes, more, from these it is impossible to tell whether Elijah himself died or whether he was translated. We have often wondered what that man could have been thinking about, who wrote in the margin of 2 Chronicles 21:12, of a certain writing of Elijah's that it, "was writ before his death"! But since seeing the above extracts from these leading, evangelical (?) papers, we cannot see but that he was just as clear in his estimate as are these eminent theologians of our own day.

And such confusion of ideas, and of plain Scriptures, in short, such unmitigated nonsense, is taught in the Sunday-schools throughout our land, as being the veritable truth of God. And all this that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul may have free course to run and be glorified. That doctrine cannot be held in harmony with the Scripture; and, that it cannot, needs no better proof than is found in the extracts which we have given. It is a doctrine entirely foreign to the word, the work, and the purpose of God.

We will present just one more extract--another from Dr. Abbott--and if anything could show a worse confusion of ideas, than the foregoing extracts display, this must be the thing that does it. It is as follows:

What light, if any, does this incident throw on the question respecting the resurrection of the body?

Well, we should like to know. We wish the Doctor had answered his own question. We should exceedingly like to know

what light could be thrown upon the resurrection of a dead man, by the fact that a living man went to Heaven! True, the Doctor says, "...if any." Well, is there any?

We believe the Bible. We believe that Elijah went up into Heaven; this too, with no hint of death. We believe also, according to the Bible, that when a man dies and goes to the grave, (Ecclesiastes 9:10; 2 Kings 22:20; 2 Chronicles 34:26) it is just as far removed from any similarity to that which happened to Elijah, as anything can possibly be. One is life, and the other is death; Elijah went into Heaven, the person who dies goes into the grave.

But if death and translation mean the same thing, if the experience of the man who dies is the same as that of the man who never dies, then language becomes useless, reason is made impotent, and the Bible a mass of meaningless phrases.--Signs of the Times, September 10, 1885

A.T. Jones

Chapter 23

Elijah's Spirit on Elisha

Only two instances are recorded of men who have passed from mortality to immortality without going through the grave. They are Enoch and Elijah. Others have gone to heaven, but they have been raised from the tomb, among them being Moses (Jude 9, Matthew 17:3) and the saints which arose from their graves at the resurrection of Christ, (Matthew 27:52-53) the multitude of captives whom He led with Him, "when He ascended up on high." (Ephesians 4:8)

Translation of the Saints

We have noted in the work of Elijah several points of similarity with the message which is to prepare the world in these days for the second coming of Christ. The call is to be given in the spirit and power of Elijah, but the likeness does not end there. Those who "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17) will be on this earth, "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels." (2 Thessalonians 1:7) "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

In Revelation 14:1-5, we read of 114,000 who were redeemed from among men. These are the ones "prepared for the Lord," on whom the seal of the living God is placed, (Revelation 7:2) who "are without fault before the throne of God." (Revelation 14:5)

Thus the people in whom the message of Elijah is fulfilled will share his experience in being translated without seeing death.

In the Presence of God

It was revealed to Elijah that he was to be taken up into heaven by a whirlwind, and the fact became known also to Elisha and the sons of the prophets. How Elijah's heart must have thrilled with rapture at the thought that the last day of earth had dawned, and ere its close he should see the face of Him in whose presence he had lived. God was to him the living God, "before whom I stand," (1 Kings 17:1; also 1 Kings 18:15) and this consciousness of His presence had been the source of all Elijah's power, and the preparation for his translation. Enoch, also, who was translated, had walked with God. Concerning Jesus, the Scripture says, "I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because You will not leave my soul in hell. ... You shall make me full of joy with your countenance." (Acts 2:25-28)

So, too, those who meet the Lord at His appearing are made ready. The message of preparation, given in Isaiah 40 is to: "Behold your God." (Isaiah 40:9)

The studies which are followed every week in the Present Truth call on us to behold God, and point to the revelation of Him that is made in all His works. To receive this message and to behold God is to know that we are always in His presence, and the acknowledgment of this fact, that "in Him we live and move and have our being," (Acts 17:28) will prepare us to meet Him in peace at His appearing.

A Double Portion

Elisha desired a double portion of the spirit of Elijah, and this he might have if he should see the angels that bore Elijah from the earth. The fact that he did so was evidence that his eyes were opened, that there was done for him the work that he asked God to do for the young man at Dothan, who beheld "the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." (2 Kings 6:17)

The very seeing of spiritual things was the receiving of the Spirit, for it is "the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, ... of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord," (Isaiah 11:2) and of "revelation in the knowledge of Him." (Ephesians 1:17)

Elisha's request for a double portion of Elijah's spirit was not dictated by any desire to outshine his predecessor in exploits and

fame. Had there been any thought of this, he would not have received his petition. The man who prays for the Spirit with any thought of self-exaltation knows not for what he is asking.

Elisha knew that he was called to succeed Elijah. He knew the work was infinitely beyond his strength. He was anxious that it should still be carried out aright, and he felt that if Elijah needed so much of the Spirit of God, his own need was doubly great.

Some regard the outpouring of the Spirit as not absolutely necessary to the Christian life, but as being a very distinguishing addition. Such need to learn that at their best state they are "altogether vanity," (Psalm 39:5) and then they will seek for the Spirit as the very essence and beginning of the Divine life.

A Hard Thing

Elijah could say nothing as to whether this request for a double portion of his spirit would be granted. It was not under his control, he was subject to it. He warned Elisha, however, that he was not asking for something that was all ease and prosperity.

To some it might seem that Elijah's lot was one to be coveted, awing kings by his word, bringing rain and fire from heaven at his call, and enjoying communion with the Creator, but he himself knew the other, inner side of a prophet's life. He whose eyes were opened to behold God could feel, as others could not, the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Like Moses and Paul, he had great heaviness and

continual sorrow in his heart. "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren." (Romans 9:3)

To the nation it seemed a light thing to go on carelessly in wrong-doing, putting on one side the tender entreaties of a loving Father, but to Elijah's enlightened understanding, the sight of their willful ingratitude brought something of the anguish that wrung the Infinite Heart. To those who receive the Spirit of God there comes a new, appalling sense of the guilt of turning from the Lord, and despising the riches of His grace.

Ask and Receive

No one can tell the motives that are in the heart of another, but God looks on the heart. He knew that Elisha's desire for a double portion of the Spirit was that the Divine life might be abundantly revealed, and so, though the request was a great one, it was granted.

There is no promise in the Scripture more plain or more emphasized than that relating to the bestowal of the Spirit. God is most anxious to give it to us, far more so than the most earnest seeker is to receive it. If men would submit to the teaching of the Spirit they would learn that often, when they felt especially tried and discouraged, the Spirit was working to convince them of sin that it might also bring the comfort of righteousness. "And it came to pass as they still went on and talked, that, behold, there appeared a

chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder." (2 Kings 2:11)

As Elijah's mantle fell from him, Elisha took it for his own, and it was a sign that the spirit of Elijah rested upon him. That God was with him was seen in the parting of the Jordan at his word.

No Respect of Persons

God is no respecter of persons. "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are," (James 5:17) and whatever God did for him, He will gladly repeat to others. Moses was honored above many, but it was not a special honor for him alone. To his successor, and to us, the promise was given, "As I was with Moses, so will I be with you: I will not fail you, nor forsake you." (Joshua 1:5)

Elijah's history gives encouragement to all. Although but a man, God wrought great things through him, so that he was more to Israel than the chariots and horsemen thereof. Who now will come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty, (Judges 5:23) receive the spirit and power of Elijah, (Luke 1:17) stand faithfully for truth, count not his life dear (Acts 20:24) for the excellency of the knowledge (Philippians 3:8) of the living God, and have the privilege of being "redeemed from among men [to] follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes?" (Revelation 14:4)--Present Truth, July 28, 1898--Notes on the International Sunday-School Lessons--2 Kings 2:6-15

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 24

The Secret of Freshness

When the poor widow cried to the prophet Elisha for help in her poverty, as her creditor had come to take her life--her two sons--in payment of a debt, the man of God found that she had a pot of oil at home, and told her to get all the empty vessels she could find or borrow, and to go home and shut the door upon herself and her two sons, and to pour out oil into all the empty vessels. And she did so. "And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed." (2 Kings 4:6)

If she had only had more empty vessels, she might have had more oil. Even so with the grace of God. It will flow in as long as there is a place for it, because it is inexhaustible. But here is a problem: when He fills us full, so that through the Spirit by faith we are "filled with all the fullness of God," (Ephesians 3:19) how are we to keep the stream flowing, so as constantly to have a fresh supply? The answer is this: We must always remember that we are "made full in Him," (Colossians 2:10) and that in ourselves we are but emptiness. So we may every day and every hour present our empty lives to the Lord, for Him to fill them, and we may never be without our vessel full of grace and truth, and never lack an empty one in which to receive a fresh supply.--Present Truth, July 5, 1900--2 Kings 4:6

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 25

The Shunammite's Son (1885)

As soon as Elijah had been taken away from him, Elisha took up the mantle that had fallen from the translated prophet, and went back and stood by Jordan, and, as Elijah had done as they two went over, he smote the water with the mantle, and the waters separated, and Elisha passed over.

He then came back to Jericho, and the men of the city called his attention to its pleasant situation, but the water was bitter and the ground barren. Elisha took salt and cast it into the spring, and said, "Thus says the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha." (2 Kings 2:21-22)

Shortly afterward, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel, and the kings of Israel, Judah, and Edom, went against him, and came out into the wilderness where there was no water; and according to the word of Elisha, "there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water," (2 Kings 3:20) and this with "neither wind nor rain." (2 Kings 3:17)

Next there came to him a woman whose husband had died in debt, and the creditor had come to take her two sons for bondmen to pay the debt, and all they had was a single pot of oil. Elisha told her

to go and borrow empty vessels from all her neighbors, and then pour into these from her one pot of oil till they were all full, then go and sell the oil, pay the debt, and she and her sons live of the rest.

Then the next account of him is that given in our lesson. "It fell on a day that Elisha passed to Shunem." (2 Kings 4:8)

Shunem was a city of the tribe of Issachar, (Joshua 19:18) about five miles south of Mount Tabor, about three miles from Jezreel, and in full view of the point on Mount Carmel where Elijah stood when the great decision was made between the Lord and Baal. It was at Shunem where the Philistines had pitched, when Saul saw them from Mount Gilboa, and his heart failed him, and he went and had a spiritualist medium at Endor hold a seance for him. (1 Samuel 28:4)

At Shunem Elisha found "a great woman," a good woman too, as events proved; "and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, which passes by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray you, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick; and it shall be, when he comes to us, that he shall turn in thither." (2 Kings 4:8-10)

And this kindness to Elisha was not forgotten by him, nor by the Lord. "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which you have showed toward His name, in that you have

ministered to the saints, and do minister." (Hebrews 6:10) "He that receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." (Matthew 10:41-42)

The Lord wants people to use hospitality. It is one of the qualifications demanded in one who shall be chosen to be elder of the church. "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach." (1 Timothy 3:2)

The Lord wants it to be genuine hospitality too. He says, "Use hospitality one to another without grudging." (1 Peter 4:9)

When we see people coming to our house, we say, "I should like to know what they are coming here for. I just wish they would stay away;" and then, when they reach the house, say, "How do you do? I am so glad to see you! Sit right down. Why, I haven't seen you for so long. Oh! you must stay to dinner. I can't think of your going before dinner," &c., &c.

Then we rustle around and get a big dinner, and have a grand time gossiping about everybody in the neighborhood, and finally the visitors go away, and then we say, "There, I am glad they are gone, and now I hope they will stay away," &c., &c.

And we call that hospitality! But it is no such thing. Hospitality, to be real hospitality, must be "without grudging," must be from the heart, before people come, while they are with us, and after they are gone. Nor are we to be forgetful to entertain strangers. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." (Hebrews 13:2)

This Shunammite was genuinely hospitable. She thought, and planned, and executed, to make her guest comfortable, and specially because he was a "man of God." And she was richly rewarded for it.

1. First, by being blessed was the whole history of the nation shows, the highest aspiration of every wife among the children of Israel--the boon of embracing a son in hope of the coming Messiah.

2. And second, the wonderful blessing of having him restored to her even from the dead.

Thus the Lord, in His loving-kindness, remembered and blessed the acts of kindness that had been shown to His servant.

But the Lord's mercy and goodness is not limited to our acts. Once David sat in his house thinking. Presently he spoke, and said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within curtains." (2 Samuel 7:2)

That same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan to go and tell David that "The Lord tells you that He will make you a house. ... And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you: your throne shall be established forever." (2 Samuel 7:11,16)

David was not allowed to build a house for the Lord. But because he thought of it, because his mind had a care for the work and worship of God, God took note of the thought and blessed it with a reward that embraces eternity. Oh that there were more men like David! Oh that there were more women like this Shunammite, to take thought and care for the work, the worship, and the service of God! What blessings would be upon such! What grace would be to the children of men! "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." (Colossians 3:2) "And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died." (2 Kings 4:18-20)

It is supposed that the child's disease was sunstroke, followed by brain fever. "And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out. And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray you, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again. And he said, Wherefore will you go to him today? it is neither

new moon, nor Sabbath. And she said, It shall be well." (2 Kings 4:21-23)

The new moon, the beginning of the month, was a solemn feast, day, (Psalm 81:3) and the Sabbath was the day of weekly convocation. It would be natural for her to wish to go to the man of God on these days, but as it was neither, her husband is surprised, and yet she has such faith that the child shall be restored, that she will not allow her husband to suffer the grief of knowing that his only child is dead. And when Elisha asks her if it is well with herself, with her husband, and with her child, her answer is, "It is well." (2 Kings 4:26)

Thus may say everyone who believes in God. Has death taken away your child? God has said, "Your children shall come again to their own border. They shall come again from the land of the enemy." (Jeremiah 31:16-17)

Death is the enemy, and God has promised to destroy it, and bring back those who are held in its strong grasp. There is One who has all power in Heaven and in earth. He lives, and was dead; and is alive forevermore, and has the keys of hell (the grave) and of death. (Revelation 1:18) And trusting in Him, even though the child be dead, we can truly say, "It is well." For when He shall call, the child shall live, never to die any more. "Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slack not your riding for me, except I bid you." (2 Kings 4:24)

It seems strange that people would use an animal for riding that has to be followed by a person on foot to whip it up all the time. But in the East, to this day, the people do just that thing. A late traveler thus tells of the donkey boys in Damascus:

"These persecutors run after the animals, shouting and goading them for hours together; they keep the donkey in a gallop always, yet never get tired themselves nor fall behind."--Signs of the Times, September 3, 1885--Notes on the International Lesson, September 13--2 Kings 4:18-37

A.T. Jones

Chapter 26

The Shunammite's Son (1898)

While journeying from place to place, Elisha had frequent occasion to pass through the town of Shunem, where he received much hospitality at the hands of one of the prominent residents. The Shunammite woman is spoken of as being "great," (2 Kings 4:8) and the narrative shows that her husband possessed servants, land and cattle in plenty, but when Elisha first made her acquaintance she was without the blessing counted chief of all among the women of Israel, the possession of a son.

Instead, however, of giving way to bitterness and repining, she seems to have set herself to the work of helping others. Seeing that Elisha was a man of God, she proposed to her husband that they should build him a room in their house, and furnish it, so that he might regard it as his own home, whenever he should pass that way.

You Have Done It Unto Me

Elisha was much touched by this unusual evidence of kindly consideration, and God, regarding the attention and honor as paid unto himself, moved the prophet to declare unto his hostess that her own darling wish was granted, and that she should at last embrace a son.

Anyone would be glad to entertain a stranger if they believed him to be a prophet, who would reward them with the bestowal of some much-desired blessing, but the opportunity of doing what the Shunammite woman did is offered to all even now. Christ says, "Whosoever shall receive a little child in my name receives me." (Matthew 18:5) "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." (Matthew 10:42)

"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." (Hebrews 3:3)

The Child's Death

"And when the child was grown, it tell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head." (2 Kings 4:18-19)

Under the fierce blaze of an Eastern sun, it is not unusual for a person to receive severe injuries to the brain, which quickly prove fatal. The little child was taken to his mother, and "sat on her knees till noon, and then died." (2 Kings 4:20)

Without saying anything of the child's death to her husband, the mother went up to Elisha's room with the body, laid it on the prophet's bed, and went out. She then asked her husband to let a servant go with her to Mount Carmel, "that I may run to the man of God, and come again." (2 Kings 4:22)

Expressing some surprise at this sudden idea, her husband consented, and she set out, urging the servant to make all speed and slack not his driving on her account.

The Mother's Faith

Why should she thus hasten to the prophet, without telling a soul that her child was dead? What meant that assuring answer to her husband's question, "It shall be well," (2 Kings 4:23) when the fast-stiffening body of their only child lay cold and still in the room upstairs?

God had given her the child. It had not come as other parents received their children, for this, like Isaac, was a child of promise. It may be that the mother's heart had dwelt much on the similarity of circumstances, and had loved to think of her son as a second Isaac, destined to an honorable place in the work of God.

Now the resemblance was more complete, for the trial of Abraham had come to her. Isaac's life was spared at the last moment. Her son's had been taken, but still Abraham, knowing not the turn events would take, had accounted that God was able to raise up Isaac from the dead, and this was the faith that sustained her now.

The Gifts of God Without Repentance

God had given her this son in acknowledgment of her kindness to His servant, but a gift, taken away again, was no gift, and she believed that what God had given her He would not take back, and none other could. Therefore she goes to the prophet, strong in her confidence in God's love and justice, that it will confirm her in the possession of the son whom death has for the moment taken away.

Surely the Shunammite woman is among the great cloud of witnesses to the power of faith, of whom we read in the 11th chapter of Hebrews. "Women received their dead raised to life again." (Hebrews 11:35)

Elisha saw her coming afar off and told Gehazi, his servant, to run to meet her, and enquire after the welfare of herself and her family. He did so, but she had no word for him, beyond what she had said to others: "It is well." (2 Kings 4:26)

She came to Elisha, and poured out the pent-up torrent of her mother's heart in the words, "Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?" (2 Kings 4:28)

She appeals to the power that gave her a son. That can restore him to her. Elisha is its channel to her, and she refuses to leave him, even to go with Gehazi to the body of her child. Elisha yields and follows with her to her home.

An Old Testament Judas

Gehazi is Elisha's servant. He is to him what Elisha was to Elijah, and has doubtless been selected for his superior qualifications, to be Elisha's successor, when death shall take away his master. He may have been well-adapted by natural abilities for the place, but is now making evident most clearly his unfitness to be to Israel a prophet of the living God.

He has a high opinion of the dignity of the position, for when the Shunammite woman casts herself at the feet of Elisha, he attempts to thrust her away. He takes no note of her agony of distress, but thinks only of maintaining the propriety of approach to an office which will be his one day to exercise. Like Judas he failed to learn the character of his high calling, and, like Judas, he finally fell.

Doubtless it is with considerable elation that Gehazi bears the prophet's staff to the body of the dead child. The miracle he is about to perform will considerably elevate him in the popular respect, and increase his already high standing in the schools of the prophets. He forgets that the rod of Moses, the mantle of Elijah, and the staff of Elisha are but symbols. The power is of God, and not in the staff, or the man who wields it. He lays it, as instructed, on the mouth of the child, but there is no response, and he returns to Elisha to report, with chagrin, that the attempt has been a failure, "The child is not awaked." (2 Kings 4:31)

The check and disappointment might have taught Gehazi a heart-searching lesson, but it did not, and shortly after we find him lying to Naaman and his master for the sake of gain. The deceit is revealed to Elisha, the judgment of God is sent upon the covetous imposter, and he who might have been an honored successor of his master, goes from Elisha's presence a leper white as snow.

Restored to Life

"And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. ... And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm." (2 Kings 4:32,34)

Elisha's proceeding seems strange until we reflect upon the circumstances. He had been closely concerned in the child from the beginning. It was by his mouth that the promise of its birth had been given. He would be greatly interested in the coming of the little one, in noting its growth from time to time as he sojourned at the Shunammite's home, and doubtless his sympathy and cooperation were strongly enlisted in the mother's efforts to bring up her child in the knowledge of the living God.

This continual and intimate association with the little child cannot have failed to unite the two in the closest mutual affection, and Elisha's first impulse on beholding the body, would be to clasp the poor little dead form to his heart, with the intense desire, born of

deep strong love, that he might wake it to life again, and find it responsive to his caress.

Gehazi's indifferent soul could be content with laying a staff on the mouth of the child, but this in no wise represented the tender interest of the Divine Father over His sleeping children. The vitalizing touch of Christ's own hand, and His tears over the grave of Lazarus, like Elisha's close embrace, were far more expressive of the attitude of God's heart of love, not only over the Shunammite's son, but over all those who sleep in the grave till the resurrection. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." (Psalm 116:15)

Elisha's amiable, approachable disposition may be judged from the way in which the sons of the prophets brought all their little troubles to him. And the way in which God wrought miracles to remove those troubles, shows that "He has respect unto the lowly," (Psalm 138:6) and that Elisha's spirit revealed His own. Elisha's prayer was heard. Life returned into the little body, and the child was given to his waiting mother. Her thankfulness and joy seemed too great for words. "Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out." (2 Kings 4:37)

Death an Enemy

If it were true, as is generally taught, that the soul goes to heaven at death, it would have been an evidence of great selfishness

on the mother's part to desire that her son might be recalled from scenes of bliss. Evidently she did not take this view, nor did Elisha, nor did the Lord who restored the child. When children come back to life again, it is not from the glory of heaven, but from "the land of the enemy." (Jeremiah 31:16)

Death is an enemy, the last enemy that shall be destroyed. It is not a blessing to man, for it only comes as the consequence of sin, and any teaching that minimizes the evil of death, calling it the "gate of life," (Attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux. Isaac Watts made a similar statement popular in the hymn "Christ's presence makes death easy," from Hymns and Spiritual Songs (1707-1709), Book II, Number 31, which has the line, "Death is the gate of endless joy") to that extent obscures the evil of sin, in its nature and effect.

A New Life

Doubtless in after-life the Shunammite woman would impress upon her child that his life must be always yielded to God, as being doubly the Lord's. Not only was he a child of promise, but when his life had once been lost, it was restored again. His was not an ordinary life, for he had been raised from the dead.

But this is a consideration which should influence all of us. Paul tells us to "yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead," (Romans 6:13) "that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:4)

Men say sometimes that if they could only have a new life, they would gladly yield up everything. Nothing else than this does the Lord offer to all. Whoever confesses his sins to God may know that those sins were the crucifixion of Christ. But since "in Him we live and move and have our being," (Acts 17:28) if He is crucified, we are too. So whoever is baptized into Jesus Christ, taking His name, thereby confesses his belief, that he is baptized into His death. "Know you not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?" (Romans 6:3)

Now if we be dead with Christ, and He is raised from the dead, it is equally clear that we must live with Him. "Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dies no more; death has no more dominion over Him. For in that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He lives, He lives unto God. Likewise reckon you also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:4-11)

Therefore, whoever confesses his sins to Christ may know that he has new life indeed, even the life of Christ. "We know that we have passed from death unto life." (1 John 3:14)--Present Truth, August 4, 1898--Notes on the International Sunday-School Lessons--2 Kings 4:25-37

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 27

Naaman the Syrian

Syria lay to the north of Palestine. It was bounded on the east by the Euphrates and the Desert of Palmyrene; on the west by the Mediterranean Sea, Phoenicia, and Cilicia; and on the north by Cappadocia. It was about the size of Scotland. Haran, the place where Abraham stopped on his way to Canaan, (Genesis 11:31) was in Syria. Haran was the city of Nahor; Nahor was Bethuel's father; "Bethuel the Syrian" (Genesis 25:20) was Rebecca's and Laban's father, Isaac married Rebecca, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian, (Genesis 22:20-23) the sister to Laban the Syrian; and when Jacob, Rebecca's son, fled from the fury of Esau, his mother told him, "Flee to Laban my brother to Haran." (Genesis 27:43) "And Jacob fled into the country of Syria." (Hosea 12:12)

After Israel had come into the land of Canaan, among the idols that they served, were the gods of Syria. "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the Lord, and served not Him." (Judges 10:6)

David defeated the Syrians of Damascus, slaying 22,000 of them, and put garrisons in Syria of Damascus, and the Syrians became servants to David. "And when the Syrians of Damascus

came to succor Hadadezer king of Zobah, David slew of the Syrians two and twenty thousand men. Then David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus: and the Syrians became servants to David, and brought gifts. And the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went." (2 Samuel 8:5-6)

When Absalom had killed his brother Amnon, he fled to Geshur in Syria and stayed there three years. "So Absalom fled, and went to Geshur, and was there three years." (2 Samuel 13:38) "For your servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the Lord shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the Lord." (2 Samuel 15:8)

Solomon brought horses and chariots out of Egypt for the kings of Syria. "And a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty: and so for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, did they bring them out by their means." (1 Kings 10:29)

Asa, of Judah, sent a present of silver and gold by which he induced a king of Syria to break his league with Baasha of Israel, and to help Asa. "And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days. And Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah, and built Ramah, that he might not suffer any to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. Then Asa took all the silver and the gold that were left in the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, and delivered them into the hand of his servants: and king Asa sent them to Ben-Hadad, the son of

Tabrimon, the son of Hezion, king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus, saying, There is a league between me and you, and between my father and your father: behold, I have sent unto you a present of silver and gold; come and break your league with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me. So Ben-Hadad hearkened unto king Asa, and sent the captains of the hosts which he had against the cities of Israel, and smote Ijon, and Dan, and Abel-Beth-Maachah, and all Cinneroth, with all the land of Naphtali. And it came to pass, when Baasha heard thereof, that he left off building of Ramah, and dwelt in Tirzah. Then king Asa made a proclamation throughout all Judah; none was exempted: and they took away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Baasha had built; and king Asa built with them Geba of Benjamin, and Mizpah." (1 Kings 15:16-22)

Elijah was directed to anoint Hazael king over Syria. "And the Lord said unto him, Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when you come, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria." (1 Kings 19:15)

Benhadad, king of Syria, came up with thirty-two kings and besieged Samaria. But two hundred and thirty-two princes of the provinces led a sortie out of Samaria, and the Syrians fled, and Benhadad escaped on a horse. The next year he came again, and the children of Israel went against the Syrians, and pitched before them, "like two little flocks of kids; but the Syrians filled the country." (1 Kings 20:27)

The battle was joined and of the Syrians 100,000 footmen fell in the battle. Benhadad first fled to Aphek, and then surrendered to the king of Israel. (1 Kings 20) Three years afterward there was war again with Syria in which Ahab, of Israel, was killed. (1 Kings 22)

The next mention of Syria is, two years afterward, in our lesson. Naaman was captain of the host of the king of Syria, "a great man with his master, and honorable,...also a mighty man in valor, but he was a leper. And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy. And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel. And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter is come unto you, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may recover him of his leprosy. ... So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall come again to you, and you shall be clean. But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?

may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage." (2 Kings 5:1-6,9-12)

Naaman had his own ideas of how things should be done, and if he could not have it that way, he would not have it done at all. He was not the last person of that kind. Many people present their petition to the Lord, and they have their minds all made up about how it will be answered, and then if they do not receive it that way, they do not recognize that the Lord has answered their prayer at all.

And there is often actual harm done by would-be revivalists in giving instruction, especially in regard to conversion. Many are brought to see their great need of salvation, of conversion, and honestly and earnestly inquire the way; and then the revivalist will perhaps undertake to tell them how they may know when they are converted, when they are accepted of God. They are told that they will feel a certain way, that they must obtain a certain kind of feeling, etc., etc., and the poor souls are left to look long and wait for that particular feeling, so they are set to follow a will-o'-the-wisp instead of the word of God.

This is all wrong. No man can tell another how that other will feel when he is converted. More: no converted person can make an unconverted person to understand how he himself felt when he was converted. The conversion of a soul is by the power of God through his Holy Spirit, and it "passes all understanding." (Philippians 4:7)

The converted soul understands it, in a measure, but he cannot make another to understand it in any measure, and for any one to undertake to tell the seeker for salvation just how he will feel, or just what to expect, is only to mislead, and perhaps plunge into despair a soul for whom Christ died.

What then shall we tell the seeker to do? Tell him what Christ tells to all. Tell him: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asks receives; and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened. ... If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him." (Luke 11:9-10,13)

Tell the people that, and it will be all right, because it is the word of Him who saves sinners. We may tell also that we know that it is true, because we asked of Him the Holy Spirit and He gave it; we sought the Lord, and we did find Him; we knocked and He did open unto us; and we know it. Tell this, and when they seek Him they will find Him; and then they will know it, and not till then can they know it. Oh, never set a human example before a soul seeking salvation. Point him to Christ. There He is. He waits to be gracious. Seek, and you shall find Him, and then, oh the peace, the joy in the Holy Ghost, none can know but him who receives it. "When you said, Seek my face; my heart said unto you, Your face, Lord, will I seek." (Psalm 27:8)

Thank Heaven for the religion of Christ--a religion that converts the soul. "[Naaman] turned and went away in a rage. And his servants came near, and spoke unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid you do some great thing, would you not have done it? how much rather than, when he says to you, Wash, and be clean." (2 Kings 5:12-13)

How reasonable! And Naaman was won by it. Would that all men were as ready to act upon the suggestion as was Naaman the Syrian. If men were bidden do some great thing by which the terrible leprosy of sin might be taken away, would they not do it? How much more then when a Fountain is open to all for sin and uncleanness, (Zechariah 13:1; In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness) free to all, and He says, "Wash, and be clean." "Then he went down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." (2 Kings 5:14)

But until he had dipped himself the seventh time, he was not clean. If he had gone away after the sixth time, he would still have been a leper as before. This is the very lesson that is taught by the Saviour in that place where he tells us to seek and we shall find. "And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of my in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say,

Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give you. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needs. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." (Luke 11:5-9)

It is earnestness, importunity. Not that he would teach that the Lord is hard to be entreated, but that we should be importunate, even as Jacob of old, "I will not let You go, except You bless me." (Genesis 32:26)

How much more when there is no place else to go. There was no water but that of Jordan to cleanse Naaman. There is no fountain but that of Calvary to cleanse the sinner. "[We] all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) and we all must be cleansed by the precious blood of Christ.

What can wash away my stain?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

What can make me whole again?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

--Robert Lowry, Hymn: What Can Wash Away My Sin? (1876).

--Signs of the Times, September 10, 1885--Notes on the International Lesson, September 20--2 Kings 5:1-16

A.T. Jones

Chapter 28

Naaman Healed

Naaman was a great man, honored by his master, the king of Syria, and a mighty man of valor, to whom his country owed its high position, "but he was a leper." (2 Kings 5:1)

All the outward dignity and honor counted for nothing beside this. Thousands of soldiers obeyed the lightest word of Naaman, but he himself was in the grip of a foul disease, that was slowly but surely consuming his life.

In his household was a little maid, taken by force from her home in Israel during some Syrian raid. She, although a captive and with sorrows enough of her own, was touched with the sight of Naaman's misery, and felt the gloom of the shadow that it cast over his home. "She said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria, for He would recover him of his leprosy." (2 Kings 5:3)

Revealed to Babes

Was not this a marvelous knowledge of the Lord? To this child were revealed the things that were hidden from the wise and prudent, so that she had a truer conception of God than many who boasted of knowing Him.

Naaman was an enemy of Israel; his military skill and prowess had been directed against their nation. Surely it was a matter of rejoicing that so formidable a foe was rendered powerless by his leprosy. Who would think of recommending his case to the favorable consideration of the God of Israel? Yet the little maid was sure that God so pitied the suffering, was so truly a God of love, that if this enemy of Israel should go before Him in his need, relying on the Divine mercy, he would not be sent away disappointed.

No one could be so well acquainted with the Lord as this little child without revealing in her life the power and goodness of God, for it is "through the knowledge of Him [that there come to us] all the things that pertain to life and godliness." (2 Peter 1:3)

Therefore it was that the utterance of her faith carried conviction to the heart of Naaman. He realized that this was not some childish tale of wonder, but that there was the power of God in it, and he determined to obtain the healing so confidently promised to him.

Weak Things

There is to be a great work done in the world in these last days. The Gospel of the kingdom is to be preached in all the world for a witness before the end come, and is to be carried before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings. Who is sufficient for so great a work? "God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty." (1 Corinthians 1:27)

He is able to use children in His work, and through them, He can do great things, even making them His witnesses before kings, as the little Israelitish maiden was used to make known the true God to the famous Naaman.

Only let the children receive and treasure the knowledge of God, and let all receive the kingdom of God as little children, and through them God will reveal himself to many who, surrounded by earthly pomp and grandeur, and counted fortunate and happy by their friends, yet mourn in secret over the plague of their own hearts, and long for deliverance from the leprosy of sin.

A Fatal Disease

For sin is the loathsome disease that has fastened itself upon the lives of all. We may try to forget it, and persuade ourselves that we shall grow out of it, but all the while it is tightening its hold upon us, it is eating away our life, marring and disfiguring us.

In spite of our efforts to overcome it we find that we cannot shake it off, it has become a part of us, and as the horror of its continual presence overwhelms us, we feel that we too have become like the lepers of old, unclean. Our cry is, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24)

But Naaman was made free from his leprosy. So there is hope that we may be made whole. How was he cleansed?

Wash and Be Clean

First of all, Naaman went to the King of Israel with great sums of money, and changes of raiment, and with a letter of introduction from the King of Syria to the King of Israel. But none of this did him any good. Wealth and splendor and kingly rank were of no avail against the leprosy. Elisha heard that Naaman was come to the king seeking to be cured, and he sent word, "Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel. So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha." (2 Kings 5:8-9)

And the prophet sent out a messenger to him to tell him to wash in Jordan seven times, and he should be clean. Then Naaman did just what we would have done in his place. He got offended because things did not happen according to the way he had arranged in his own mind as he came along in his chariot. It was to be something like this:

The prophet would come out of his dwelling a venerable and majestic figure, raise his eyes to heaven, and solemnly call upon the name of his God, then pass his hand over the leprous places, and Naaman would find himself suddenly healed. Then Naaman would say graciously, "Don't go yet, behold here are ten magnificent suits of raiment, ten talents of silver, and no less than six thousand pieces of gold. I give them to you. You can do as you like with them."

Then while the prophet would stand open-mouthed at this exhibition of princely generosity, Naaman would mount and drive off, well pleased with himself and satisfied that he had done the thing handsomely.

But now this exasperating old man had not even come outside the door. It was outrageous treatment for one in his position. Naaman was not going to stand it. He should go back to Syria at once. The idea of telling him to bathe in the muddy Jordan! Weren't Abana and Pharpar just as good, and a great deal cleaner, too? Why not wash in them and be clean? "So he turned and went away in a rage." (2 Kings 5:12)

Good Counsel

It was well for Naaman then that he was not one of those haughty characters that it is unsafe to speak to when they are offended. He had listened to the story of his wife's little slave-girl, and had come all this way on the strength of it. His servants must have loved him and earnestly desired his recovery, for they ventured to reason with his fuming indignation. Said they, "If the prophet had bid you do some great thing, would you not have done it? how much rather then, when he says to you, Wash, and be clean?" (2 Kings 5:13)

The reasoning was sound, and Naaman saw the force of it. In a humbled frame of mind he set himself to carry out the simple conditions on which his healing was promised. "Then he went

down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." (2 Kings 5:14)

He returned to Elisha converted from his idolatry, a sincere worshiper of the true God, and doubtless recognizing that Elisha's seemingly abrupt treatment of him in the first place had been directed by Divine wisdom, and had taught him the needed lesson.

Whiter Than Snow

What God did for Naaman He does for those who are afflicted with the leprosy of sin. He gives a new life, which is free from sin. "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) "For He has made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. ... Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21,17-18)

He whose sins are borne by "the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world," (John 1:29) is made whiter than snow, (Psalm 51:7) and his flesh becomes like the flesh of a little child, for he is born again.

Why Are Not All Healed?

But, "Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian." (Luke 4:27)

Why was this? Was not God able or willing to heal more than one leper, and if not, why did He not choose to heal one of the lepers of Israel?

Remember that Naaman was not compelled to be healed. He went to Israel to find healing, and went on to the Jordan, because he desired the healing so much, and believed the word that was spoken to him. Any other leper in Israel or Syria might have been healed in the same way.

Today God's arm is not shortened, and His mercy and salvation are free. You, who read these lines, are you cleansed from the leprosy of sin, so that your flesh has come again as the flesh of a little child? If not, why not?

Others have found healing and cleansing from sin in receiving the life of God. Will you be among them, or among the many who, like the lepers in Israel in Elisha's day, were not healed, although the living God was among them to heal and save, so that even heathen, like Naaman, found Him and proved His power. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases." (Psalm 103:2-3)--Present

Truth, August 11, 1898--Notes on the International Sunday-School
Lessons--2 Kings 5:1-14

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 29

Man's Way and God's Way

The case of Naaman, the Syrian, affords a good illustration of that natural perversity of the human heart which prevents many people from realizing the blessing of God.

Naaman was captain of the armies of Syria, and a great man, but was a leper. In this respect he was like many who live today. Sin is a leprosy no less real than the loathsome disease which afflicted the body of Naaman. It is the leprosy of the soul. Of how many may it be said, as it was of Naaman, "Great, but a leper!"

His leprosy was a complete offset to his greatness. The king of Syria heard that there was a power in Israel to heal disease above that possessed by man, and sent Naaman to the king of Israel to be healed of his malady. And Elisha the prophet sent to the king, and said, "Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel. So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall come again to you, and you shall be clean. But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." (2 Kings 5:8-11)

Naaman had the plan by which the Lord was to heal him all laid out in his own mind, and because the Lord did not purpose to manifest His power in that way, he went away in a rage. And so it is with people today. They want the Lord to work for them, but they have the plan by which He is to work all arranged in their own minds, and they ask the Lord to work and then watch to see some manifestation of the nature which they have marked out. They want God to work for them in their way. And when something comes from the Lord which is not in their way at all, although perhaps a direct answer to their prayers, they turn away and will not have it. Naaman said: "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them and be clean?" (2 Kings 5:12)

If he was to be cleansed by washing, he knew a better way of doing it than the Lord had proposed! And just so with us. Our own way seems a great deal better in our eyes than God's way. But God says His ways are as much higher than our ways as the heavens are higher than the earth. (Isaiah 55:9)

But Naaman's servants came to him, and said, "My father, if the prophet had bid you do some great thing, would you not have done it? how much rather then when he says to you, Wash, and be clean?" (2 Kings 5:13)

Men are continually seeking to be cleansed of their soul leprosy by doing some great thing. This is the way it should be by the wisdom of man. It is a fundamental idea of all false religions. By

doing some great thing,--going on some weary pilgrimage, enduring long fasts and other bodily afflictions, saying so many thousand prayers, or in some other way exercising his powers of mind or body to their utmost limit--he can so commend himself to God that he will receive from Him what he desires. But when man has done something that he thinks is great, then the glory is his own and not the Lord's; and as God cannot work for the glory of man, his elaborate and laborious plan can only utterly fail.

God's plan, God's message, is, "Wash, and be clean." It is so simple that all can do it,--so simple that the glory of the result must all be given to God. There is a fountain open for sin and uncleanness, and the most leprous soul that will wash in that fountain will be cleansed. The word of the Lord is, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be read like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isaiah 1:18)

To wash in that fountain is to believe the word of the Lord. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

Who can be simple enough to believe God? Naaman believed and washed in Jordan, and was cleansed. So will all be cleansed who are willing to give up their own way, and take God's way instead.--Present Truth, January 18, 1894--2 Kings 5:8-13

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 30

Elisha at Dothan

In this lesson is seen the powerlessness of men to do ought against those who are under the Divine protection. It has been a source of encouragement in innumerable instances in the past, and will continue to be so until the last enemy of God's people is destroyed. It is not recorded that we may envy Elisha for the remarkable way in which his life was safe-guarded, but that we may know for ourselves the nature and efficiency of the protection on which we may rely.

The Syrians had resumed their policy of harassing Israel by repeated forays, and seemed desirous of capturing the king. More than once they laid an ambush for him, but in some way he became aware of the danger and managed to avoid their encampment. The king of Syria began to suspect treachery in his own ranks, as one plot failed after another, and reproached his servants with their unfaithfulness to him in warning Jehoram.

One of them replied that the discovery of the ambuscades was due to no defection on their part, but to the presence of Elisha the prophet in the ranks of Israel. He was repeating to the king of Israel the words uttered in Benhadad's chamber.

God's Vigilance

Who could hope to circumvent such a foe as this? No deep-laid schemes could be relied upon, for the utmost cunning of the Syrians could not surprise a man who knew their thoughts. Yet this is the advantage enjoyed by those who array themselves under the banner of the cross.

Many fear the power of Satan because he has gained dominion so largely over their minds, but this does not render his position an impregnable one. It is true that he often lies in wait for us, and when we least look for it, some sudden temptation is sprung upon us which too often finds us unprepared for resistance; but whoever commits the keeping of his soul to a faithful Creator (1 Peter 4:19) may rest in the confidence that God cannot be surprised, or found off His guard. "Behold, He that keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." (Psalm 121:4) "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." (Isaiah 27:3) "You know my down-sitting and my uprising, You understand my thoughts afar off." (Psalm 139:2)

Although our sinful thoughts may spring upon us unawares, they are not unknown to God. He knows all about them afar off. "You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of your countenance." (Psalm 90:8) "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape." (1 Corinthians 10:13)

None need feel that the odds are against them in their quest of "the kingdom of God and His righteousness," (Matthew 6:33) for it is as true now as it was in Elisha's day that the advantages are all with the servants of God.

No Power Against the Lord

The king of Syria might be expected to recognize that he could not hope to capture an enemy who knew his most secret plans, but having learned that Elisha was at Dothan, he sent thither "horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about." (2 Kings 6:14)

It was an imposing expedition for the capture of one man, but its very size and strength only emphasized its inability to do anything at all against Elisha.

It is not a matter for discouragement when difficulties come thick and fast around us, but rather for rejoicing, because then the victory of faith will be so much the greater and more manifest; "for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few." (1 Samuel 14:6)

Elisha's servant saw the host compassing the city, when he went forth in the early morning, and his heart was filled with dismay. Returning to his master he cried, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" (2 Kings 6:15)

Elisha was not alarmed, "And he answered, Fear not: For they that be with us are more than they that be with them." (2 Kings 6:16)

Ministering Spirits

In the course of earthly history it has often seemed that the truth was in a minority. Witnessing alone for God, men have faced angry multitudes, who thirsted for their blood, and to human eyes it seemed a contest of one against many, with all the power and influence on the side of the crowd.

But it has not been so in reality. Angels, that excel in strength, (Psalm 103:20) never forsake the side of those who trust in God. Amid snares and perils, their ministry preserves and guides those who shall be heirs of salvation. (Hebrews 1:14) "The angel of the Lord encamps round about them that fear Him, and delivers them." (Psalm 34:7)

At Elisha's request the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, "and he saw: and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." (2 Kings 6:17)

They were not sent there to be shown to the young man, but were there before, as Elisha's bodyguard. The only difference was that the servant's eyes were opened, so that now he saw how matters stood.

Invisible Beings

We may learn from this incident why it is that men do not see angels. Abraham saw and talked with them, so did Jacob, and so did many others. They have not become extinct, or diminished in number or power, nor are they less present about us. The reason we do not see them is that our eyes are closed. The difficulty is in ourselves.

If we would accept their service, and submit ourselves to their influence, we would quickly learn how irresistible was their power, and how comforting their fellowship. Their sympathies are keenly enlisted in our behalf, and their greatest desire is to use their strength in our defense against the powers of evil. But while men array themselves determinedly against these ministers of blessing, it is not to be wondered at that they are so seldom seen.

To Elisha the presence of the living God was a reality, and, continually beholding God, his eyes were opened. When we learn to see God in all places where He is revealed, when "[He] lifts up the light of His countenance upon us," (Psalm 4:6) and is always before our face that we should not be moved, (Psalm 16:8) when "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen," (2 Corinthians 4:18) our own eyes will be anointed with eyesalve and we shall see much that is now hidden from our vision. "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing." (Isaiah 35:5-6)

Leading the Blind

Elisha's next request was that the Lord would smite the Syrians with blindness. This was done, and they were led helpless into Samaria, which suggests another reason why blindness in part has come upon men, so that they cannot discern spiritual things. Had sinful man been still allowed the privilege of beholding the angels and spiritual beings, he might have proved as intractable as Satan and his fallen hosts. One who is blind will sometimes submit to be led, just as Benhadad's army followed meekly the leading of Elisha. The Lord says, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known." (Isaiah 42:6)

The mercy of the Lord is over all His works (Psalm 145:9) and endures for ever, (Psalm 136:1) and it will yet be seen that: "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth." (Psalm 25:10)

It is only that He may make His mercy known to men, that their eyes are now blinded, and when they submit to God, and acknowledge Him in all their ways, He will speedily direct their paths (Proverbs 3:5-6) into the visible, unbroken, everlasting communion of "the whole family in heaven and earth." (Ephesians 3:15)--Present Truth, August 18, 1898--Notes on the International Sunday-School Lessons--2 Kings 6:8-18

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 31

Conquered by Kindness

Elisha was a prophet of the God of Israel. The king of Syria fought against Israel, but God showed his servant Elisha all the plans of the king of Syria, and he told them to the king of Israel. So the king was able to escape from his enemy, and did not fall into the traps that were laid for him.

When this had happened many times, the king of Syria thought there must surely be a traitor among his servants who told the king of Israel his plans, and he asked them to show him who it was. Then one of the servants said: "None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bed chamber." (2 Kings 6:12)

Then the king said, "Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him." (2 Kings 6:13)

And it was told him that he was in Dothan. So he sent a great host, with horses and chariots, to take Elisha captive. When Elisha's servant saw the hosts of Syria, he was very much afraid, but Elisha was not, for he knew that God was with him. He prayed that God would open his servant's eyes, and then the young man saw that there were horses and chariots of fire all round about Elisha.

Then Elisha prayed that God would smite the army of the king of Syria with blindness. So God smote them with blindness. Then Elisha said to them, "Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." (2 Kings 6:19)

But he led them to Samaria where the king of Israel's army was. Then the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw that they were in the midst of their enemies. Now it was their turn to be frightened, and no doubt they were, for they thought that they were caught in a trap, and would surely all be slain. The king of Israel thought so too, and he said to Elisha, "My father, shall I smite them? shall I smite them?" (2 Kings 6:21) as though he were eager to begin. But Elisha knew a better way of conquering his enemies than by killing them. He knew God's way, and he had read the words of the wise King Solomon: "If your enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing you shall heap coals of fire on his head." (Romans 12:20; Proverbs 25:21-22)

When he prayed that God would smite them with blindness, it was only that he might have the opportunity to do them good. So Elisha said to the king of Israel, "You shall not smite them ... set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master." (2 Kings 6:22)

And he prepared great provision for them, and when they had eaten and drank, he sent them away, and they went to their master. We may be sure that the king of Syria was very much surprised to hear that they had been so mildly and kindly treated. Elisha's

kindness quite conquered the enemies of Israel, and there was no more trouble with them, for we are told that: "the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel." (2 Kings 6:23)--Present Truth, July 11, 1901--2 Kings 6:12-23

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 32

The Famine in Samaria

Ben-Hadad had gathered together a great host and had besieged Samaria till the famine had become terrible. So scarce had grown the food that an ass' head sold for eighty pieces of silver (about \$44), (Editor's note: \$44 in 1885 is equivalent to about \$1400 in 2024.) and at last women were found who had eaten a child. When the king heard of this, he determined to kill Elisha, but when he came to where Elisha was, then Elisha said: "Then Elisha said, Hear the word of the Lord; Thus says the Lord, Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria. Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said, Behold, you shall see it with your eyes, but shall not eat thereof. And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die." (2 Kings 7:1-4)

When men were found to be lepers the law was that: "The leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry,

Unclean, unclean. All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be." (Leviticus 13:45-46)

The famine being so great in the city, these men of course could obtain no food from there, and as they were about to perish any way, they concluded that nothing greater than that could befall them even though the Syrians should get them; but if the Syrians should happen to favor them, and give them food, their lives would be saved. So they determined to go. "And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there. For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life." (2 Kings 7:5-7)

It is easy for the Lord to spread terror among men. Several such instances are given in the Bible. Gideon will be remembered, with his three hundred men with their pitchers and torches, and how that, all of a sudden, the breaking of the pitchers and the glare of the torches put the 135,000 Midianites to flight in terror. (Judges 7) And, "the children of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir," (2 Chronicles 20:10) came up against Judah when Jehoshaphat was king. The children of Judah were all gathered together in the

wilderness of Tekoah, and Jehoshaphat "appointed singers unto the Lord, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the Lord; for His mercy endures for ever. And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten. 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." (2 Chronicles 20:21-23)

It is not alone in the Bible, nor alone in Bible times that such things have occurred. The Lord has done just as remarkable things for His people in later ages as He did in those ancient times.

After the Papacy had put to death John Huss and Jerome of Prague, it set about to extirpate all the heretics of Bohemia. For this purpose crusade after crusade was set afoot, only to be defeated in disgrace. At last in 1427 AD, the pope had succeeded in gathering together an army of nearly 200,000 men.

Led by three electors of the Empire, by many princes and counts, and the legate-a-latore of the pope,--J. A. Wylie, The History of Protestantism, Book Third, Chapter 17, "Brilliant Successes of the Hussites." this great host invaded Bohemia, entering it in June.

The Bohemians marched to meet their invaders. They were now within sight of them and the two armies were separated only by the

river that flows past Meiss. The crusaders were in greatly superior force, but instead of dashing across the stream, and closing in battle with the Hussites, whom they had come so far to meet, they stood gazing in silence at those warriors hardened by constant exposure, and begrimed with the smoke and dust of battle, and seemed to realize the pictures of terror which report had made familiar to their imaginations long before they came in contact with the reality. It was only for a few moments that the invaders contemplated the Hussite ranks. A sudden panic fell upon them; they turned and fled in the utmost confusion.--Ibid.

Four years afterward another army was raised for the invasion of Bohemia, to destroy the followers of the doctrines preached by Huss, and for which he had been cruelly and treacherously burned at the stake. This time--the fifth of these crusades--130,000 men swept into Bohemia.

On the 1st of August, 1431, the crusaders crossed the Bohemian frontier, penetrating through the great forest which covered the country on the Bavarian side. They were brilliantly led, as concerned rank, for at their head marched quite a host of princes, spiritual and temporal. ... The feelings of the Hussites as day by day they received tidings of the numbers, equipments, and near approach of the host, we can well imagine. Clouds as terrible had ere this darkened their sky, but they had seen an omnipotent Hand suddenly disperse them. ... They reflected, however, that victory did not always declare on the side of the largest battalion, and, lifting their eyes to heaven, they calmly awaited the approach of the foe. The

invading host advanced, "chanting triumph before victory," says Lenfant, and arriving at Tochan, it halted there a week. ... Forming in three columns, the invaders moved forward. Procopius fell back on their approach. ... His design was to lure the enemy father into the country, and fall upon him on all sides. On the morning of the 14th of August, the Bohemians marched to meet the foe. ...

The enemy were encamped near the town of Reisenberg. The Hussites were not yet in sight, but the sound of their approach struck upon the ear of the Germans. The rumble of their wagons, and the war-hymn chanted by the whole army as it marched bravely forward to battle, were distinctly heard. Cardinal Cesarini had a companion climbed a little hill to view the impending conflict. ... The cardinal and his friend had gazed only a few minutes when they were startled by a strange and sudden movement in the host. As if smitten by some invisible power, it appeared all at once to break up and scatter. The soldiers threw away their armor and fled, on this way, another that; and the wagoners, emptying their vehicles of their load, set off across the plain at full gallop. ... The army had been seized with a mysterious panic. That panic extended to the officers equally with the soldiers. The duke of Bavaria was one of the first to flee. He left behind his carriage, in the hope that its spoil might tempt the enemy and delay their pursuit. Behind him, also in inglorious flight, came the elector of Brandenburg; and following close on the elector were others of less note, chased from the field by this unseen terror. The army followed, if that could be styled an army which so lately had been a marshaled and bannered host, but was not only a rabble rout, fleeing when no man pursued.

The cardinal succeeded in rallying a few of the flying soldiers.

They stood then ground only till the Bohemians were within a short distance of them, and that strange terror fell upon them, and the stampede became so perfectly uncontrollable, that the legate himself was borne away in the current of bewildered and hurrying men. He left behind him his hat, his cross, his bell, and the pope's bull proclaiming the crusade--that same crusade which had come to so ridiculous a termination.

This was now the second time the strange phenomenon of panic had been repeated in the Hussite wars. The Germans are naturally brave; they have proved their valor on a hundred fields. ... There is here the touch of a divine finger--the infusion of a preternatural terror. So great was the stupefaction with which the crusaders were smitten, that many of them instead of continuing their flight into their own country, wandered back into Bohemia; while others of them, who reached their homes in Nuremburg, did not know their native city when they entered it, and began to beg for lodgings as if they were among strangers.--Ibid.

It is impossible to read this narrative and not see in it a perfect likeness to the panic of the Syrians in this lesson. Rome and the Emperor Sigismund had treacherously burnt the saintly Huss, and the scholarly Jerome, and now sought to destroy their innocent brethren, and God wrought for His people here as veritably as ever He did in the world. God's wondrous workings for His children are

not all confined to the times in which the Bible was written. He is the same Mighty One still. There is still a God in Israel.

Yes, and still there are men as unbelieving as that "lord" upon whose hand the king of Israel leaned when Elisha said that "tomorrow about this time" there should be such plenty in the gates of starving Samaria. Still there are such ready to say, "If the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" (2 Kings 7:2)

But yet for all the unbelief of men, the fact remains that God leads, and works for, His people. And yet for all the unbelief of men, every part of the word of God will be fulfilled as literally as was the word of Elisha that day. The four lepers went and called to the watchman of Samaria, and told the city, by him, that the Syrians had fled and left everything; then a company was sent out to learn whether it were really true, and they returned and confirmed the word; then the whole city poured out "and spoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord." (2 Kings 7:16) "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall you be established; believe His prophets, so shall you prosper." (2 Chronicles 20:20)--Signs of the Times, October 1, 1885--Notes on the International Lesson, October 11--2 Kings 7:1-17

A.T. Jones

Chapter 33

Jehu's Zeal

The real title of the subject of this lesson, as given in the "International Lessons," is "Jehu's False Zeal." But we know not by what right the lesson committee insert the word "false." And we think it is contrary to the intention of the inspired record. For we read distinctly in verse 30: "And the Lord said unto Jehu, Because you have done well in executing that which is right in my eyes, and have done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, your children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." (2 Kings 10:30)

This was said to Jehu by the Lord, after Jehu had done what is recorded in the lesson. And when the Lord says to Jehu, "You have done well in executing that which is right in my eyes, and have done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart;" and when because of this the Lord pronounces a reward upon Jehu and upon his house for four generations, upon the throne of Israel; in view of all this we think it a very questionable piece of wisdom for the lesson committee to brand it as "Jehu's false zeal." When the Lord says that Jehu did "well;" that he did "right;" that he did according to what was in His heart concerning Ahab; then for the lesson committee to charge it up as "false zeal," is certainly, to say the least, not very far removed from charging the Lord himself with a "false zeal." We think when the Lord pronounces so plainly as this

upon the merit of an action, it is best for men to confine themselves to the record.

The time had fully come when judgment must be executed upon the bloody house of Ahab. When that "still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12) came to Elijah as he stood at the mouth of the cave in Horeb, the Lord said unto him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when you come, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: And Jehu the son of Nimshi shall you anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholah shall you anoint to be prophet in your room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapes the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay; and him that escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay." (1 Kings 19:15-17)

And again Elisha sent a young man of the children of the prophets directly to Jehu with this message: "Thus says the Lord God of Israel, I have anointed you king over the people of the Lord, even over Israel. And you shall smite the house of Ahab your master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets; and the blood of all the servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish." (2 Kings 9:6-8)

According to this word, Hazael was now king of Syria, and Joram, the son of Ahab, had made war against Hazael and "the Syrians wounded Joram. And king Joram went back to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael king of Syria." (2 Kings 8:28-29)

Then it was that Elisha sent the young men to anoint Jehu king, that he might, according to the word of Elijah, slay him that had escaped from the sword of Hazael. And if he had escaped the sword of Jehu, then it would have remained for Elisha to slay him. The house of Ahab was devoted to destruction, and their judgment could no longer be delayed. And as Jehu came, driving "furiously, Joram said, Make ready. And his chariot was made ready. And Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah went out, each in his chariot, and they went out against Jehu, and met him in the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite." (2 Kings 9:20-21)

There was that fatal field of Naboth--the monument of the united iniquities of Ahab and Jezebel. And when, on that fatal day, after the innocent blood of Naboth and his sons had been poured out, Ahab went down to take possession of the portion of Naboth, Jehu followed him in a chariot, and was there when Elijah pronounced the fearful doom of Ahab and Jezebel with all their house, and now Jehu comes to execute the judgment that day pronounced. "And it came to pass, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, Is it peace, Jehu? And he answered, What peace, so long as the whoredoms of your mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many? And Joram turned his hands, and fled, and said to Ahaziah, There is treachery, O Ahaziah. And Jehu drew a bow with his full strength, and smote Jehoram between his arms, and the arrow went out at his heart, and he sunk down in his chariot. Then said Jehu to Bidkar his captain, Take up, and cast him in the portion of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite: for remember how that, when I and you rode together

after Ahab his father, the Lord laid this burden upon him; Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons, says the Lord; and I will requite you in this plat (Plat = a plot of land), says the Lord." (2 Kings 9:22-26)

When Jehu came to Jezreel, "Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window." (2 Kings 9:30)

She must once more assert herself, and as Jehu entered in at the gate she cried out, "Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?" (2 Kings 9:31)

But it was her last effort. The chamberlains of her palace pitched her out through the window, and so perished Jezebel.

But Jehu's work was not done yet. The house and the prophets, and the priests, and the worship of Baal, which Jezebel had introduced, still remained. "And Jehu gathered all the people together, and said unto them, Ahab served Baal a little; but Jehu shall serve him much." (2 Kings 10:18)

So he proclaimed a solemn assembly for Baal. "And Jehu sent through all Israel: and all the worshipers of Baal came, so that there was not a man left that came not...and the house of Baal was full from one end to another." (2 Kings 10:21)

They were all destroyed. "And they brought forth the images out of the house of Baal, and burned them. And they broke down the image of Baal, and broke down the house of Baal, and made it a draught house unto this day. Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel." (2 Kings 10:26-28)

Thus sin brings its fearful penalty. Warning after warning, reproof after reproof, entreaty after entreaty, had come to the house of Ahab, but all to no avail. And, "He that being often reprov'd hardens his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." (Proverbs 29:1) "Turn at my reproof; behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you." (Proverbs 1:23)

There is another point in this lesson worthy of consideration. It is the part taken by Jehonadab, the son of Rechab. As Jehu was on his way from Jezreel to Samaria, he came upon Jehonadab and saluted him. In the midst of all the corruption and iniquity of Israel, Jehonadab had taken special precaution to keep his family pure. He had pledged them particularly that they should drink no wine, neither they nor their sons forever, etc. (Jeremiah 35) Jehu said to him, "Is your heart right, as my heart is with your heart? And Jehonadab answered, It is." (2 Kings 10:15)

Said Jehu, "If it be, give me your hand. And he gave him his hand; and he took him up to him into the chariot. And he said, Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord. So they made him ride in his chariot." (2 Kings 10:15-16)

And it appears that Jehonadab acted in concert with Jehu in all that followed. For he went with Jehu through the crowd of Baal-worshipers in the house of Baal, to search and see that there were no worshipers of the Lord there. This again is against the idea of Jehu's zeal being a "false zeal."

In this narrative of Jehu in his chariot, riding in his zeal to perform the righteous judgment of the Lord upon the adversaries of Jehovah in the land of Israel, we are reminded of a Greater than Jehu, who at the last is to visit the judgments of the Lord upon all of the ungodly. "Behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with His chariots like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword will the Lord plead with all flesh; and the slain of the Lord shall be many." (Isaiah 66:15-16) "For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon His head; and He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay, fury to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies; to the islands He will repay recompense." (Isaiah 59:17-18)

And when thus He comes in His glory, then to every one whose heart is right as His heart is with the right, He will say, "Give me your hand," and all such will He take up in His chariot, and make them ride in His chariot.

God is righteous. He loves righteousness and hates iniquity, and to "the Son He says, Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above your fellows." (Hebrews 1:8-9)

And to all of the children of men who love righteousness and hate iniquity, the Son of God says, "To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne." (Revelation 3:21)--Signs of the Times, October 15, 1885--Notes on the International Lesson, October 18--2 Kings 10:15-31

A.T. Jones

Chapter 34

The Nature of Jehu's Zeal

There is much in the character of Jehu to admire. He was active and energetic, one who never let the work in hand lag. He was a driving, go-ahead man; one who in these days would doubtless be called, if engaged in trade, a successful businessman. When he was commissioned by the Lord to execute His judgment on the house of Ahab, he lost no time. Jehoram and Jezebel were quickly dispatched, together with all the sons and relatives of Ahab. As he was engaged in the work of the extermination, he met Jehonadab, to whom he said, "Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord." (2 Kings 10:16)

He knew that he was following the commandment of the Lord, and he seemed to take pride in it. He wanted others to see that he was not afraid to stand up for the truth, even though it was unpopular. So after slaying the remnant of Ahab's followers, he gathered the priests of Baal and destroyed them, and, so the record says, "destroyed Baal out of Israel." (2 Kings 10:28)

All this was very praiseworthy. The Lord commended him for it, in these words: "Because you have done well in executing that which is right in my eyes, and have done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, your children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." (2 Kings 10:30)

But unfortunately Jehu's zeal stopped too soon, or, rather, it was not of the right kind. We read: "But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart; for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin." (2 Kings 10:31)

His zeal for the Lord did not lead him to shun sin himself. He could rebuke and punish sin in others, but could not avoid it himself. When there was vigorous work to be done, when people could see, he was zealous; but when it came to the matter of walking in the law of the Lord with all his heart, with none but God to see, his zeal was gone.

How many there are like him. They can talk the truth glibly, and are ever ready to defend it. No matter how unpopular the truth is, they are not ashamed to uphold, and are ready to denounce those who differ. But as to living out the truth in their daily lives, at home and abroad, in private as well as in public, they are lacking. They seem to think that they can make up for personal sins by a vigorous denunciation of the sins of others.

But God has not two sets of workmen: one to watch and another to pray; or one to preach and another to work. One good quality will not make up for the absence of another. All must be combined in the same individual. He only is a man of God, who is "perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3:17)--Signs of the Times, February 8, 1883--2 Kings 10:16-31

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 35

The Temple Repaired (1885)

The subject of this lesson is, "The Temple Repaired," but before we notice that, we shall have to inquire how it became necessary that the temple should be repaired. Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, married Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, and this carried into the kingdom of Judah all the corruptions of the house of Israel; for, says the record, "He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab: for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife." (2 Kings 8:18,RV)

The Arabians came and slew all of Jehoram's sons except Ahaziah, the youngest; Jehoram died; and Ahaziah went down to see Joram of Israel just at the time when Jehu was executing judgment on the house of Ahab, and Jehu slew him with the princes of the house of Ahab. And even while he lived, "his mother was his counselor to do wickedly." (2 Chronicles 22:3)

When Athaliah learned that Ahaziah was dead, "she arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah." (2 Chronicles 22:10)

But Jehoshabeath, the sister of Ahaziah, was the wife of Jehoiada the priest, and she secured Joash, who was about a year old, and fled with him to the temple, where she hid him and his nurse, and there he was kept under the care of Jehoiada the priest,

six years. This left Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel, in authority in the kingdom of Judah. She, being the true daughter of her mother, forced the worship of Baal upon the people of Judah as her mother had forced it upon Israel. She built a house for Baal, and robbed the house of the Lord of its ornaments and decorations and wealth, to furnish the house of Baal. When Joash was seven years old, Jehoiada laid plans to proclaim him king. "And he set all the people, every man having his weapon in his hand, from the right side of the temple to the left side of the temple, along by the altar and the temple, by the king round about. Then they brought out the king's son, and put upon him the crown, and gave him the testimony, and made him king. And Jehoiada and his sons anointed him, and said, God save the king. Now when Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she came to the people into the house of the Lord: And she looked, and, behold, the king stood at his pillar at the entering in, and the princes and the trumpets by the king: and all the people of the land rejoiced, and sounded with trumpets, also the singers with instruments of music, and such as taught to sing praise. Then Athaliah rent her clothes, and said, Treason, Treason." (2 Chronicles 23:10-13)

Then Athaliah was slain, "And Jehoiada made a covenant between him, and between all the people, and between the king, that they should be the Lord's people. Then all the people went to the house of Baal, and broke it down, and broke his altars and his images in pieces, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars." (2 Chronicles 23:16-17)

Thus Baal was destroyed out of Judah also.

Then under the guidance and wise counsel of Jehoiada, Joash carried forward the good work of reformation, and gave orders that the temple that had been rifled by Athaliah should be repaired. But, although the people were willing and gave of their means for the purpose, it seems that the priests, to whom was given the charge, were unfaithful; for the donations continued twenty-three years, yet nothing was done for the house of the Lord. It appears that the priests who had charge of the matter had gone so far as to even keep for themselves the means dedicated to the house of the Lord. "Then king Jehoash called for Jehoiada the priest, and the other priests, and said unto them, Why do you not repair the breaches of the house? now therefore receive no more money of your acquaintance, but deliver it for the breaches of the house. And the priests consented to receive no more money of the people, neither to repair the breaches of the house." (2 Kings 12:7-8)

Then, "Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one comes into the house of the Lord: and the priests that kept the door put therein all the money that was brought into the house of the Lord. And it was so, when they saw that there was much money in the chest, that the king's scribe and the high priest came up, and they put up in bags, and told the money that was found in the house of the Lord. And they gave the money, being told, into the hands of them that did the work, that had the oversight of the house of the Lord: and they laid it out to the carpenters and builders, that wrought upon

the house of the Lord. And to masons, and hewers of stone, and to buy timber and hewed stone to repair the breaches of the house of the Lord, and for all that was laid out for the house to repair it." (2 Kings 12:9-12)

This time they found honest men to do the business--so strictly honest, indeed, that it was not necessary to reckon with them, for we read, "They reckoned not with the men, into whose hand they delivered the money to be bestowed on workmen: for they dealt faithfully." (2 Kings 12:15)

We cannot be any too careful with the house of the Lord. The Lord himself has great care for the place of His worship, and we are doing His will when we have a care for it. Once as David sat in his house, Nathan was sitting by, and David spoke to him, saying, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within curtains." (2 Samuel 7:2)

That very night the Lord appeared to Nathan, and told him to go and tell David that he should not build the house himself, but that his son should build it, and also to say to David, "Also the Lord tells you that He will make you a house. ... And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you: your throne shall be established forever." (2 Samuel 7:11,16)

Thus we see that a thought of David's, concerning the house of the Lord, is rewarded with eternal glory. There is a thought that bears fruit to all eternity.

At another time the house of the Lord was desolate, and the people regarded it carelessly, although they themselves dwelt in good houses. And at the same time they made excuses that they could not build the house because they were not doing well financially. Their crops failed; their money seemed to slip away unawares; and their clothing did not wear as well as it ought. But the very thing which they made an excuse for not building the house was the result of their not building it. Then the Lord said, "Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, says the Lord. You looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew upon it. Why? says the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that is waste, and you run every man unto his own house." (Haggai 1:7-9)

Again we say, the Lord has a care for the place of His worship, and He not only wants His people to have a care for it, but He richly rewards such care. But such a care as He regards is not that kind in which the place of His worship is fitted up for theatricals, operatic airs, feasts, and festivals.--Signs of the Times, October 8, 1885--Notes on the International Lesson, October 25--2 Kings 12:1-15

A.T. Jones

Chapter 36

The Temple Repaired (1898)

When Jehoshaphat died, Jehoram, his son, reigned in his stead. He had been associated with his father on the throne for four years, and his reign extended over another four. As Jezebel had been a curse to the kingdom of Israel, so her daughter, Athaliah, the wife of Jehoram, was a curse to Judah. Under her influence Jehoram became like Ahab, "and he wrought that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord." (2 Chronicles 21:6)

His first proceeding, after his father's death, was to slay all his brethren, "and divers also of the princes of Israel." (2 Chronicles 21:4)

The Way of Transgression

This precautionary measure did not, however, strengthen his hold upon the kingdom. Nations which had given allegiance to his father now broke away. The Philistines and the Arabians, who had acknowledged that God was with Judah and had brought presents and tribute to Jehoshaphat, now turned against Jehoram as he departed from the Lord, "And they came up into Judah, and broke into it, and carried away all the substance that was found in the king's house, and his sons also, and his wives." (2 Chronicles 21:17)

Only the youngest son was left. Two years after the beginning of his sole reign, Jehoram was smitten with an incurable disease, and after another two years of horrible suffering, he died, and was buried without royal honors. "He ... departed without being desired." (2 Chronicles 21:20)

An Evil Taint

The youngest son of Jehoram was named Ahaziah. He was the only one who had been spared by the Arabians. At the age of forty-two he came to the throne, but only reigned one year. His life also was overshadowed by his mother's fatal influence, and to her he owed its early termination, for while visiting his relative the king of Israel, Jehu slew him in obedience to the command of the Lord to utterly destroy the seed of Ahab and Jezebel. (2 Chronicles 22:1-9; 2 Kings 9:7-10)

Another Jezebel

As soon as Athaliah learned that her only son was dead, she slew all his sons and took the kingdom herself. One, however, of Ahaziah's children, the newborn Joash, was concealed by his aunt, the wife of Jehoiada the priest. (2 Chronicles 22:10-12) Under their care he was preserved for six years, and at the end of that time Jehoiada was able to organize a movement which set Joash on the throne and slew Athaliah. "And all the people of the land rejoiced: and the city was quiet, after that they had slain Athaliah with the sword." (2 Chronicles 23:21)

Sowing and Reaping

The influence of this one wicked woman had been powerful for evil. Had Judah been faithful to God, the people might have withstood Athaliah's attempt to introduce and establish the worship of Baal, but, the spirit which viewed with indifference a union between the servant of God and a worshiper of idols, was well adapted to foster and strengthen a false religion, which appealed to desires for sensual indulgence, and gave its devotees unbridled license to follow the dictates of their corrupted hearts.

Nothing Small

It does not do to think lightly of sin. The fault for which we excuse ourselves may be a slight one, but it is a seed which can develop to undreamed-of proportions.

To Jehoshaphat it may have seemed unlikely that any harm would come of his permitting a friendship between his son and the youthful daughter of Ahab. Doubtless Jehoram, which means "Jehovah is high," had been carefully trained by his pious father, and instructed in the knowledge of the true God, and Jehoshaphat could not think that these defensive barriers would fail to protect his son against Athaliah's tendencies towards idolatry.

Yet within two years from his own death, the temple of God had been broken up to furnish material for the house of Baal, all the

things dedicated to God's service had been bestowed upon Baalim, and Jehoram, the son of a godly father, had slain his own brethren and his father's friends. "Moreover he made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication, and compelled Judah thereto." (2 Chronicles 21:11)

His career is a solemn warning to parents to make no compromise with sin, in their dealings with their children, and to guard them as long as possible from all willing contact with evil, however fascinating and comparatively harmless it may now appear to be.

Restoring the Temple

In the days of Joash, in consequence of the depredations committed by Athaliah, the temple was in great need of restoration, and the king was minded to repair it. He accordingly instructed the priests and the Levites to go out into the cities of Judah and gather money from the people for this purpose.

The temple had been an asylum for Joash during the first six years of his life, while hidden from Athaliah, and he desired to see it rescued from its dilapidated condition. He commanded that the business should receive immediate attention, and that the work of repair should be hastened forward.

After some years, however, it was found that the work was not making much progress and the king sent for his uncle, Jehoiada the priest, to inquire into the delay.

A Contribution Box

A new plan was then decided upon. "At the king's commandment they made a chest, and set it without at the gate of the house of the Lord." (2 Chronicles 24:8)

Then proclamation was made that all the people should come to the temple, and bring the offering that Moses had directed, for the service of the tabernacle. "And all the princes and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the chest." (2 Chronicles 24:10)

When the box was filled, the priests opened it and counted the money, then replaced the chest. "Thus they did day by day, and gathered money in abundance." (2 Chronicles 24:11)

With the funds collected in this way the builders were paid. "So the workmen wrought, and the work was perfected by them." (2 Chronicles 24:13)

How to Give

The scriptural rule for giving is, "He that gives, let him do it with simplicity." (Romans 12:8) "God loves it cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7)

He does not value an offering that is given with reluctance, and counted a matter of hardship. "This have you done again, covering the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that He regards not the offering any more, or receives it with goodwill at your hands." (Malachi 2:13)

Even though a man bestow all his goods to feed the poor, except love prompt the gift, it is a worthless, unprofitable offering. When the thought in giving is to attract attention to the generosity of the giver; and cause him to be well spoken of, God does not count the offering as made to himself. Such a payment is neither offered nor accepted as a free gift. It is a business transaction. The donor desires to purchase so much of standing, influence and fame, and gives what he thinks will acquire the desired advantages. "They have their reward." (Matthew 6:2)

There is nothing further for them.

As the World Gives

It is rare to find a body now, professing to be the servants of God, which is content to rely upon the simplicity of giving. Bazaars

and entertainments are needed to extract money from the pockets of those who are "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." (2 Timothy 3:4-5)

Such efforts are not always successful in raising the desired funds, but when they are, it is not the love of God that has provided the means. An equivalent has been received by the purchasers of amusement. "They have their reward." (Matthew 6:2)

How much better is God's way. Every gift, given with simplicity and grateful acknowledgment to God, is another link to connect us with Him. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matthew 6:21)

God knows how to acknowledge to every cheerful giver the receipt of his offering, and does it in a way that, in itself, is worth more than the gift.

The charge of robbery is made by God against all who withhold from Him the tithes and offerings which are His due, but to all who render these cheerfully a glorious promise is given: "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house, and prove me now herewith, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." (Malachi 3:10)--Present Truth, October 6, 1898--Notes on the International Sunday-School Lessons, October 16--2 Chronicles 24:4-13

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 37

The Death of Elisha (1885)

After the anointing of Jehu as king of Israel, nothing more is said of Elisha till this record of his last sickness and death--a period of about forty-five years; this covered the whole of the reign of Jehu and his son Jehoahaz, and part of the reign of Joash, the grandson of Jehu. Hazael reigned in Syria all this time, and continued to commit depredations in all the coasts of Israel. (2 Kings 10:32; 13:22) He even made an incursion into the kingdom of Judah, took Gath, and "set his face to go up to Jerusalem." (2 Kings 12:17)

Then Joash of Judah "took all the hallowed things that Jehoshaphat, and Jehoram, and Ahaziah, his fathers, kings of Judah, had dedicated, and his own hallowed things, and all the gold that was found in the treasures of the house of the Lord, and in the king's house, and sent it to Hazael, king of Syria: and he went away from Jerusalem." (2 Kings 12:18)

Hazael had so persistently oppressed Israel that finally there was left "of the people to Jehoahaz but fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen; for the king of Syria had destroyed them, and had made them like the dust by threshing." (2 Kings 13:7)

This was the condition of affairs at the time of our lesson. "Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and

said, O my father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." (2 Kings 13:14)

Now that Joash is about to lose Elisha from his kingdom forever, he comes to weep over him, and to remember the day when Elisha alone was more than a match for all the armed hosts of Syria. He now begins to realize what a protection Elisha was, and what a power the kingdom is now about to lose. If he had remembered this sooner, he would not have been brought so low. If he had never forgotten it, Israel would have flourished instead of being oppressed.

It is ever so. We appreciate our blessings when they are gone. Then, too we act without them as we should have acted when they were with us. But if we would only learn to appreciate our blessings while we have them, then we should not have to do without them; for by the advantage of these, we should but be advanced to other and greater ones.

But for even this parting token of regard, Elisha, in kindness, shows the king a token of good from the Lord. "And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows. And he took unto him bow and arrows. And he said to the king of Israel, Put your hand upon the bow. And he put his hand upon it: and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands. And he said, Open the window eastward. And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the Lord's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria; for you shall smite the Syrians in Aphek, till you have consumed them. And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them.

And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed. And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, You should have smitten five or six times; then had you smitten Syria till you had consumed it: whereas now you shall smite Syria but thrice." (2 Kings 13:15-19)

Hazael was succeeded by his son Ben-Hadad. "And Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz took again out of the hand of Benhadad the son of Hazael the cities, which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz his father by war. Three times did Joash beat him, and recovered the cities of Israel." (2 Kings 13:25)

And Syria never invaded Israel anymore. "And Elisha died, and they buried him." (2 Kings 13:20)

And that is the obituary of Elisha, "the man of God." (2 Kings 13:19)

The Bible writers are remarkable for the brevity of the obituaries. It would be well if their way were followed more fully at the present day. "And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year." (2 Kings 13:20)

The Moabites were the descendants of Moab, the son of one of the daughters of Lot, by her father, after the destruction of Sodom. Their country lay to the east of the Dead Sea. "And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulcher of Elisha: and when the

man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet." (2 Kings 13:21)

It is idle to conjecture upon why the Lord wrought this miracle. He has not told us why it was. He has recorded the fact, and that is all we can say about it.

With the death of Elisha closes the lessons in the Kings, for this year. But the kingdom of Israel continued only about a hundred years longer, until even the Lord could no longer bear with them, and then He cast them out of His presence. In today's lesson, verse 23, we read that for all the sins of the successive kings, yet: "The Lord was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast He them from His presence as yet." (2 Kings 13:23)

Finally, however, they had so literally "sold themselves to do evil," (2 Kings 17:17) that the Lord "removed them out of His sight," (2 Kings 17:18) and rejected all the seed of Israel, and they were carried captive into Assyria, and never returned to their own land.--Signs of the Times, October 22, 1885--Notes on the International Lesson, November 1--2 Kings 13:14-25

A.T. Jones

Chapter 38

The Death of Elisha (1898)

Some sixty-five years had passed since Elisha entered the service of Elijah, when he fell sick "of his sickness whereof he died." (2 Kings 13:14)

There was yet much wickedness in the land, and the ancient sin of Jeroboam still bore its evil fruit, but in many respects the closing circumstances of Elisha's life present a brighter picture than could have been seen in Israel at the beginning of his work.

- The zealous purging of Jehu,
- The oppression of Hazael, king of Syria, and
- The faithful, enduring testimony of Elisha's influence, had not been without affect. The royal attitude toward Elijah had been one of eager, relentless persecution. He had been accounted a hateful enemy, "he that troubles Israel." (1 Kings 18:17)

But on Elisha's death-bed, the king of Israel came to mourn the loss of one who had been a bulwark to the State, more efficient for defense than all its panoply of military strength. "And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." (2 Kings 13:14)

Faithful Work

One especially pleasing feature in the history of the sister country of Judah deserves notice. It bears witness to a revival of the spirit that had of old exalted the nation, recalling the few occasions on which they had consecrated themselves to God with unreserved devotion. It was in connection with the restoration of the temple and, telling of the way in which the funds were handled, the record says, "Moreover they reckoned not with the men, into whose hand they delivered the money to be bestowed on workmen: for they dealt faithfully." (2 Kings 12:15)

Elisha's Blessing

At the time Elijah was instructed to anoint Elisha to be prophet in his own room, the sentence of judgment went forth, against Israel: "It shall come to pass, that him that escapes the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapes the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay." (1 Kings 19:17)

Now that Elisha was about to leave the people he loved, for whom his long life had been spent, he desired to see this sentence lifted from them. The destruction was accomplished; Jehu had done his part and passed away, Hazael's reign was near its close, and Elisha himself was on his dying bed. He wished to leave a blessing and not a curse behind him, as Moses "blessed the children of Israel before his death," (Deuteronomy 33:1) and as Christ longed to bless

His own who "received Him not," (John 1:11) when He beheld the city and wept over it. It was not yet too late for Israel and Judah to turn from their wickedness and fill the high position destined for them. "The Lord was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither did He cast them from His presence as yet." (2 Kings 13:23)

Elisha hoped that they had learned the lesson which their afflictions had been designed to teach, and that he might leave for them a last message of blessing and comfort in the promise of perfect deliverance from their enemies.

A Sign of Weakness

At his direction the king of Israel aimed an arrow through the open window toward the stronghold of their Syrian foes. This was a declaration of war, and since God, by the prophet, directed the flight of the arrow, it showed that His hand was against their enemies.

Elisha then told the king to take the arrows and smite upon the ground with them. He did so thrice and stopped. This revealed to Elisha that only thrice would it be possible for the Lord to lead the armies of Israel to victory, and he was wroth with the king, and told him that if he had smitten five or six times, he should have smitten Syria till he had consumed it.

The sign was of the Lord. It simply indicated the future, but did not control it, and Elisha's wrath was against the spirit of indifference and backsliding that was so easily contented, when it might have had all that was to be desired. Elisha knew from this that the reformation in Israel was only a partial and transitory one, and that there was no prospect of a complete deliverance from the bondage of sin, and all the other forms of slavery thus entailed, because in their hearts the people "loved to have it so." (Jeremiah 5:31)

Willing Bondage

It seems surprising indeed that a people could be found, so enslaved in heart as not to desire freedom when they might easily have it, but to this day men are displaying the same lack of appreciation of their privileges. God wants to set us free. The Son came at infinite sacrifice to make us "free indeed," (John 8:36) and sometimes, when the way of transgression becomes especially hard, and the intolerable degradation of spiritual bondage makes the iron enter into our souls, we do rejoice at the offer of freedom, and, for a while, exchange "the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." (Isaiah 61:3)

Yet, too often, we fail to realize how great a salvation is provided for us in the gift of Christ, and are so easily satisfied. As the sense of condemnation is taken away, it is felt that all is well, and that there is no danger of further subjection. Satan awaits his opportunity and ere long, instead of going on from strength to

strength, we find ourselves again led captive. Why should we not smite again and again until our enemies be utterly consumed?

Limiting God

It is the Lord who fights for us, (Joshua 23:10) but we are "workers together with Him." (2 Corinthians 6:1)

He is willing and anxious to show himself strong in our behalf, (2 Chronicles 16:9) and to work in us more than we can ask or think (Ephesians 3:20) of freedom and power and deliverance, but He does not thrust himself upon us unbidden. He desires that we shall seek His help, and meet the tempter in His strength. He is able to do all things, but His people ask so little at His hands. They let go the arm of the Lord too soon. He only finds occasional admittance to their hearts and has no opportunity allowed to show what He can do for those who trust Him. His rightful place is in the heart, but He is made to stand without, knocking and pleading for permission to come in. "O the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why should You be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turns aside to tarry for a night? Why should You be as a man astonished, as a mighty man that cannot save?" (Jeremiah 14:8-9)

The Lord reproached His people of old because "They...limited the Holy One of Israel." (Psalm 78:41)

If we would cease to limit Him with our unbelief, and our disposition to sit down and go no further whenever we receive a blessing, He would speedily make bare His holy arm in the sight of the nations, and all the ends of the earth would see the salvation of God. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." (Hosea 6:3)

That which prevents our having this experience in its fullness is set out in the following verse, in which the Lord expresses himself as "a man astounded [or bewildered], a mighty man that cannot save." (Jeremiah 14:9) "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto you? O Judah, what shall I do unto you? for your goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew it goes away." (Hosea 6:4)

Paul says, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14)

A Wonderful Miracle

One more miracle is recorded in relation with Elisha, and it took place after his death. A band of Moabite invaders, burying one of their company, were surprised and hastily cast the body into the sepulchre of Elisha. "And when the man was let down, and touched

the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet." (2 Kings 13:21)

The narrative is very brief and we are not told why God wrought this miracle, but it must have been a striking lesson to Israel. As Elisha's presence was withdrawn and clouds were once more gathering round the nation, it would remind them that the power by which he spoke and lived was not diminished, and that while his body was fast turning to dust and was withdrawn from their eyes, the God in whose presence Elisha stood and walked, was still among them, able to use that which was weak, and even that which was not, (1 Corinthians 1:28) to accomplish His great designs.--Present Truth, August 25, 1898--Notes on the International Sunday-School Lessons--2 Kings 13:14-25

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 39

Captivity of the Ten Tribes

The kingdom of Israel had failed to learn the lesson that God desired to teach it, that He was the giver of all the good they enjoyed. Their great desire had been to get away from the Lord, and now, in a measure, their wish was about to be granted.

Nearly eight hundred years had passed since they came out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, to be to God a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation, a peculiar treasure to Him above all people. He had given them the land of Canaan, casting out the inhabitants thereof, because of the nameless abominations with which they polluted it, but Israel had fallen so low that the same evils were now found among them.

The prophets had testified faithfully against their sins, and called them to return to the worship of the true God; they had declared His forgiving love, but the message fell upon indifferent ears and hardened hearts. "They knew not that I healed them." (Hosea 11:3)

Trust in the Lord

When the king of Assyria began to fasten his yoke upon the kingdom of Israel, exacting tribute from them, instead of seeking the Lord for deliverance, appeal was made to Egypt, the very kingdom from which God had once delivered them with great power and with

a stretched out arm. Israel knew well that Jehovah had crushed the pride of Egypt, yet they leaned upon the broken reed. (Isaiah 36:6; Lo, you trust in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all that trust in him) "Ephraim is like a silly dove, without understanding: they call unto Egypt, they go to Assyria." (Hosea 7:11,RV)

The payment of tribute to Assyria was withheld for awhile in hope of help from Egypt, but the rising was quickly suppressed, and the Assyrian king sent Hoshea, king of Israel, to prison. (2 Kings 17:4)

A Record of Transgression

The scripture which contains the day's lesson is one long list of the iniquities of Israel, telling how they walked in the statutes of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out before them, and how they did secretly those things that were not right against the Lord, setting up idols on every high hill and under every green tree. The Lord had spoken to them, "by all the prophets, and by all the seers," (2 Kings 17:13) reminding them of His dealings with their fathers, and exhorting them to turn from their wickedness and live. "Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the Lord their God. And they rejected His statutes, and His covenant that He made with their fathers; and they followed vanity, and became vain." (2 Kings 17:14-15)

All the abominations of the heathen were reproduced in their history; they worshiped all the host of heaven, with the degrading rites that the heathen taught them. "And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger." (2 Kings 17:17)

Grey Hairs

To the people it appeared that they were having a good time. Restraints were cast off, and all did what their hearts prompted them to do, but the course of sin was quickly run, and they were about to reap the fruit of their doings. "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knows it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knows not." (Hosea 7:9)

So men often promise to themselves a long career of sinful pleasure, and say, "Soul, take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry, for you have much goods laid up for many years," (Luke 12:19) when even then the sin has worked its own destruction. The Lord was not pleased to see the evil plight into which Israel's contempt for His counsel had plunged the nation. He said to them, "O Israel, you have destroyed yourself; but in me is your help. I will be your King: where is any other that may save you?" (Hosea 13:9-10) "O Israel, return unto the Lord your God; for you have fallen by your iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously. ... I will hear their

backsliding, I will love them freely: for my anger is turned away from him." (Hosea 14:1-2,4)

The mercy of the Lord endures for ever, and even when the dark clouds of doom were about to burst over the guilty nation, the Lord stood by them, as ready as ever to heal their backsliding, and love them freely.

A Final Call

In yet another way the Lord sought to save Israel, and to help them to return. Just at that time the king of Judah was carrying on a thorough reformation in his kingdom, and in calling the people of Judah to return to the Lord with all the heart, he kindly sent messengers throughout all Israel with earnest invitations to them to seek the Lord also. They were assured from the Lord that if they would turn to Him with all the heart, they would not only remain in the land, but those who had been carried captive would find compassion with their captors, and would come again unto their own land.--A.T. Jones, *Empires of the Bible*, p. 241.

This message from the king of Judah to the people of Israel was carried by the posts throughout all Israel and Judah, "but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them. Nevertheless divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun ["a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun"] humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 30:5-11) And all that did so humble themselves and turn to the Lord, escaped

captivity or slaughter. For "then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land," destroying the cities; making captives of the people; and leaving the country desolate. At last he came "up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them...in the cities of the Medes."--Empires of the Bible, p. 242

The Lost Ten Tribes

Some claim that the kingdom of Israel, which they refer to as the Lost Ten Tribes, will yet come to light as one or more of the great nations of modern history. It is true that the whole house of Israel will be saved, and will become one nation, under one King, but "they are not all Israel which are of Israel." (Romans 9:6)

All were saved out of the ten tribes that would be saved, and the rest judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life. Full opportunity was given to return to the land of Israel to all who desired to do so, when Judah ended her captivity in Babylon, and all others became in destiny what they had long been in heart, like the heathen round about them. The Israel of God is made up of those who take hold of His covenant (Isaiah 56:4) by faith in Christ, and "If you are Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:29)--Present Truth, September 8, 1898--Notes on the International Sunday-School Lessons--2 Kings 17:9-18

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 40

Hezekiah's Good Reign

"And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did." (2 Kings 18:3)

Hezekiah was one of the best kings that ever reigned in Judah, while Ahaz, his father, was one of the worst. There was a conspiracy formed by Rezin king of Syria, and Pekah king of Israel, against Ahaz king of Judah. They proposed to destroy Ahaz and set up Ashariah the son of Tabael as king of Judah. The Lord sent Isaiah to Ahaz to say, "Thus says the Lord God, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass." (Isaiah 7:7)

Then Ahaz, instead of trusting the Lord, "sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyrian, saying, I am your servant and your son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me. And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent it for a present to the king of Assyria. And the king of Assyria hearkened unto him: for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried the people of it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin. And king Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, and saw an altar that was at Damascus: and king Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the fashion of the altar, and the pattern of it, according to all the workmanship thereof. And Urijah the priest built

an altar according to all that king Ahaz had sent from Damascus: so Urijah the priest made it before the coming of king Ahaz from Damascus. And when the king was come from Damascus, the king saw the altar: and the king approached to the altar, and offered thereon." (2 Kings 16:7-12)

"For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him: and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel." (2 Chronicles 28:23)

In following this worship of the gods of Syria, he shut up the house of the Lord, "And in every city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods." (2 Chronicles 28:25)

Then too after he had put himself into the hands of the king of Assyria, he had to rob the house of the Lord to satisfy his demands. "[He] cut off the borders of the bases, and removed the laver from off them; and took down the sea from off the brazen oxen that were under it, and put it upon a pavement of stones. And the covert for the Sabbath that they had built in the house, and the king's entry without, turned he from the house of the Lord for the king of Assyria." (2 Kings 16:17-18) "And Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came unto him, and distressed him, but strengthened him not." (2 Chronicles 28:20)

Thus it was that when Hezekiah came to the throne there was urgent necessity for a reformation. He accordingly immediately set

about it. "He, in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the Lord, and repaired them." (2 Chronicles 29:3)

Then he brought in the priests and the Levites, and had them sanctify themselves, and sanctify and cleanse the house of the Lord. It took eight days to clean out all the rubbish and uncleanness that they found in the temple. Then Hezekiah gathered the rams, lambs, and bullocks for the burnt offering, and all the different orders of musicians to sing in the worship of the Lord. "And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people; for the thing was done suddenly." (2 Chronicles 29:36)

Next, "Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, to keep the passover unto the Lord God of Israel. ... So the posts passed from city to city, through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, even unto Zebulun: but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. Nevertheless, divers of Asher and Manasseh and Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem. ... even many of Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun." (2 Chronicles 30:1,10-11,18)

This was the Lord's last call to the people of the ten tribes. Those who thus humbled themselves and joined with Judah in the worship of God were delivered from the captivity inflicted by Sargon shortly afterward. The Lord knew the iniquities that were

multiplying in Israel. He knew that their destruction could not long be delayed. As a nation, they were even now beyond recovery.

But in His mercy and pity He sends one more gracious invitation to whosoever would return to His service and His worship. Still He longs for Ephraim to return. Still He pleads with Israel to repent. And then when they have gone with a perpetual backsliding, He cries out, "How shall I give you up, Ephraim? how shall I set you as Zeboim? my heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." (Hosea 11:8)

But Ephraim was "like a silly dove." (Hosea 7:11) "Ephraim provoked Him to anger most bitterly," (Hosea 12:14) till even mercy compelled to cast them out of His sight. "So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day." (2 Kings 17:23)

When Hezekiah had brought back the people to the worship of God, "So that there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem," (2 Chronicles 30:26) then, all Israel that were present went out to the cities of Judah, and brake the images in pieces, and cut down the groves, and threw down the high places and the altars out of all Judah, and Benjamin, in Ephraim also and Manasseh, until they had utterly destroyed them all. Then all the children of Israel returned, every man to his possession, into their own cities." (2 Chronicles 31:1)

Then it was that Hezekiah broke "in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it a piece of brass." (2 Kings 18:4,margin) "And he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not." (2 Kings 18:7)

His rebellion, however, did not, in the end, amount to much in his favor. Perhaps he would have fared better if he had maintained his rebellion upon its own merits, and trusted in the Lord to help him. But he not only rebelled, but he meddled with that which did not concern him at all, and so vitiated the righteousness of his own rebellion, and brought upon him a reverse, and the oppression of the king of Assyria. In short, the story is as follows:

The people of Ekron rebelled against the king of Assyria also. But their king--Padi--"was inspired by friendship and zeal for Assyria" (so says Sennacherib himself), and resisted their rebellion. Then they took Padi, and gave him up, "bound in chains of iron, to Hezekiah of Judah." They then joined with Egypt against Assyria. Sennacherib defeated the allied forces, and then went to Ekron. What he did there we will let him tell in his own words:

I deposed the rulers and dignitaries who had revolted, and killed them; I hung their bodies on crosses on the walls of the city. I sold for slaves all the men of the city who had committed violence and crimes. As for those who had not committed crimes or faults, and had not despised their masters, I pardoned them. I brought Padi,

their king, out of Jerusalem and restored him to the throne of his royalty.

Then, as Hezekiah, by keeping Padi a prisoner for them, was made partaker in their rebellion, Sennacherib went up to punish him. Of this Sennacherib says:

But Hezekiah king of Judah did not submit. There were forty-four walled towns, and an infinite number of villages, that I fought against, humbling their pride and braving their anger. By means of fire, massacre, battles, and siege operations, I took them; I occupied them; I brought out 200,150 persons, great and small, men and women; horses, asses, mules, camels, oxen, and sheep, without number; and carried them off as booty. As for himself, I shut him up in Jerusalem, the city of his power, like a bird in its cage. I invested and blockaded the fortresses round it; those who came out of the great gate of the city, were seized and made prisoners. I separated the cities I had plundered from his country; and gave them to Mitenti king of Ashdod, to Padi king of Ekron, to Ishmabaa king of Gaza. Then the fear of my majesty terrified this Hezekiah of Judah. He sent away the watchmen and guards whom he had assembled for the defense of Jerusalem.

Then it was that Hezekiah did as the Bible says: "And Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, I have offended; return from me: that which you put on me will I bear. And the king of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold." (2 Kings 18:14)

Of this Sennacherib says:

He sent messengers to me at Nineveh, the seat of my sovereignty, with thirty talents of gold, and eight hundred talents of silver, metals, rubies, pearls, great carbuncles, seats covered with skins, thrones ornamented with leather, amber, seal skins, sandal wood, and ebony, the contents of his treasury. ... He sent an ambassador to present this tribute and to make his submission.--Le Normant's Ancient History of the East, Book 4, chap. 3, sec. 3, par. 9-11. Rawlinson's Seven Great Monarchies, Second Mon., chap. 9, par. 166, 167.

That was a dear piece of business for poor Hezekiah. He had far better have let the Ekronites conduct their own rebellion, and send their king somewhere else. It would have been much better if he had attended to his own business, and let this business of these others alone. By doing as he did, he not only brought upon himself this evil, but he debarred himself from the help of the Lord. He could not ask the Lord to help him. All that he could do, in his distress, was to confess to the king of Assyria, "I have offended; return from me: that which you put on me will I bear." (2 Kings 18:14)

It is far different from this the next time this same king of Assyria comes into the land, and sends an insulting letter, demanding a further surrender. Then in his innocence he could go and spread the letter before the Lord, and ask Him to look upon it and see, and bow down His ear and hear all that Sennacherib had

spoken. Then, too, the Lord answered; and the king of Assyria's army was smitten by the angel, and he returned with shame of face to his own country. Let every one remember that injunction of the Scriptures, "Let none of you suffer ... as a busybody in other men's matters." (1 Peter 4:15)

Keep yourself clear of such things, and then if distress comes, in innocency you can present your petition to the Lord, and can trust in Him to help, and He will hear, and deliver.--Signs of the Times, November 12, 1885--Notes on the International Lesson, November 22--2 Kings 18:1-12

A.T. Jones

Chapter 41

Hezekiah's Weakness and Strength

There is an interesting contrast in the history of Hezekiah's conflict with Sennacherib, the ruler of Assyria. It shows how weak a man is when in the wrong, and how strong when in the right.

The Ekronites had rebelled against Assyria, and Hezekiah had made himself a partner in the revolt. Therefore Sennacherib, after punishing Ekron, came against Judah. "And Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, I have offended; return from me: that which you put on me will I bear. And the king of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house. At that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria." (2 Kings 18:14-16)

The next invasion of Judah by Sennacherib ended far differently. Doubtless the proud Assyrian expected that the same humiliating submission might be exacted a second time. But this time Hezekiah said to the people: "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him; for there be more with us than with him; with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to

fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah." (2 Chronicles 32:7-8)

What made the difference? Before, Hezekiah was in the wrong, and now he was in the right; and all the strength of the right was his. Assyria represented the greatest power on earth, but all the pride of the arm of flesh was humbled in a night by one angel, who smote the thousands gathered about Jerusalem. More power was with Hezekiah than with Assyria.

The Lord lives today, and it is a blessed truth that the humblest and weakest man or woman who is in the right with God is stronger than the combined strength of all the world. And the world is powerless to coerce into sin. It is the sin within that makes one weak in the day of trial, not the forces without.--Present Truth, December 12, 1895--2 Kings 18:14-16; 2 Chronicles 32:7-8

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 42

Hezekiah's Great Passover

At the time of Hezekiah's accession to the throne, the worship of God had fallen into sad decay in the land of Judah. The king's father, Ahaz, during a reign of sixteen years, had gradually made up his mind that there was no profit in serving Jehovah or maintaining His worship. The treasures of the temple had been used to purchase the alliance of heathen kings, "For Ahaz took away a portion out of the house of the Lord, and gave it unto the king of Assyria: but he helped him not." (2 Chronicles 28:21)

The reign of Ahaz was filled with disaster, but although the prophets Micah, Hosea, and Isaiah, proclaimed faithfully the cause of the evils, and exhorted the people to return to the Lord, to find in quietness and confidence the needed strength, they would not hearken. (Isaiah 30:15; For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel; in returning and rest shall you be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength: and you would not) Instead they leaned upon those who smote them, for Ahaz said, "Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel." (2 Chronicles 28:23)

At last Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut them in pieces, and shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem.

Re-Opening the Temple

As a consequence, when Hezekiah was made king, at the age of twenty-five, the house of God was in a deplorable condition. Before he had been on the throne a month he opened the doors of the temple and repaired them. Although the father of Hezekiah had been an infidel, his mother was the daughter of a prophet, and to her training of him was doubtless due the stand he took on the side of the Lord.

He gathered the priests and Levites together, and exhorted them to sanctify themselves, and then cleanse the temple, removing all the filth that had accumulated. In eight days this work was accomplished, and sin-offerings were made on behalf of all the people.

By His prophets God gave directions concerning the order of the proceedings. As the people joined in the solemn service of confession and re-consecration of themselves and the temple to God, their hearts were filled with gladness and thanksgiving. "And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people: for the thing was done suddenly." (2 Chronicles 29:36)

A Short Work

It was a marvelous change. A month before the worship of God had seemed dead and forgotten, Now it had revived and all the

congregation was rejoicing in the Lord. No man would have dared to predict such a reformation, and if anyone had proposed it, the general expectation would have been that it would take a long time to accomplish.

But God's arm was not shortened. All through the years of the reign of Ahaz one disaster after another had fallen upon the nation, and its enemies had triumphed over it, because Judah had not leaned upon the strong arm of their ever-present Deliverer. Now the first recognition of His presence was meeting with such a response of spiritual power and blessing that their hearts were filled with rejoicing.

The barren years of the past might all have been as full of blessing as this week was proving, and it was not God's fault that they had been so different. We may learn from this that when we come to God sinful and unworthy, His temple polluted and abandoned to filth, "which temple you are," (1 Corinthians 3:17) our past lives but a record of idolatry and abominable deeds, God does not turn away from us. He gladly takes such people and prepares them suddenly.

Unfaithful Shepherds

There is one feature of the history which demands attention, because it is ever present in a work of reform. At the preparation of the burnt offerings, not all the priests had sanctified themselves, "for

the Levites were more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests." (2 Chronicles 29:34)

In Christ's day, the question was asked, "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?" (John 7:48)

And there were many who did not dare to confess Him for fear of being put out of the synagogue. It was not until many days after Christ's ascension that we read, "A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." (Acts 6:7)

So in Hezekiah's reformation it was not until all the people had come in, even from the provinces of apostate Israel, that the priests and Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves. "Then they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the second month: and the priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves, and brought in the burnt offerings into the house of the Lord." (2 Chronicles 30:15)

Yet, in spite of the truth which is repeated so often in the Scriptures, that God alone is the head of every man, (1 Corinthians 11:3) and that no one is to be conscience for another, we find men today asking what the ministers and church leaders believe. When an old truth shines anew from the sacred Word, men who profess to be God's servants, excuse themselves from accepting or obeying it, because the ministers have not done so. Many who learn that the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord, ask, "Why do not the ministers preach it then?"

If the people had waited for the priests, Judah would never have seen the reformation, and those who wait now for others to obey before they receive the word, may wait for ever. When God prepared the hearts of the people they waited for no man, and the thing was done suddenly. So the prophets of Hezekiah's day tell us that the remnant of Jacob, in the last days, shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, "that tarries not for man, nor waits for the sons of men." (Micah 5:7) "You have eaten the fruit of lies: because you did trust in your way, in the multitude of your mighty men." (Hosea 10:13)

Observing the Passover

While the people were assembled at the re-dedication services, it was decided among them that the Passover should be observed. The proper time for this was the first month, but rather than wait a whole year for the privilege, they agreed, and the Lord approved their decision, that the Passover should be kept in the second month. Letters were sent throughout Judah and Israel calling all the people to Jerusalem to join in the service.

The promise was given, perhaps through Isaiah, that if the people would yield themselves unto the Lord, and come once more to His sanctuary, the fierceness of His wrath should be turned away from them, and those of them that had already been carried away captive should return to the land. Even then, on the very eve of Israel's captivity and dispersion, Jehovah's love for them was as

strong as ever. He was still ready to do for them all the good things that were promised to the obedient, if they would turn to Him with all their hearts. "So the posts passed from city to city...but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. Nevertheless divers...humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem." (2 Chronicles 30:10-11)

Rejoicing in the Lord

All Judah joined with one heart in the celebration of the Passover, and a great company assembled at Jerusalem. They broke down all the idolatrous altars in Jerusalem and cast them into the brook Kidron. Many of the people were ignorant of the cleansing that God had prescribed for those who should eat the Passover, "yet did they eat the Passover otherwise than it was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good Lord pardon every one That prepares his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people." (2 Chronicles 30:18-20)

So there was great gladness among all the people, and they made the air ring with their songs of praise, "singing with loud instruments unto the Lord." (2 Chronicles 30:21)

The Levites taught the good knowledge of the Lord, and the people had such a joyful time together, that it was unanimously decided to keep another seven days in the same way. "So there was

great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem. ... and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to God's holy dwelling-place, even unto heaven." (2 Chronicles 30:26-27)

Praise is Comely

"Praise waits for You, O God, in Zion!" (Psalm 65:1) "Praise the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely." (Psalm 147:1)

God inhabits the praises of Israel, but too often, instead of building Him a glorious habitation of praise and thanksgiving, His people cause Him to dwell in a silent, deserted house, in sad need of cleansing and repair. God loves to be praised by His children, not for the sake of being praised, but because He delights to fill their mouth with laughter and their tongue with singing over the great things He has done for them. "He puts gladness in men's hearts, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased." (Psalm 4:7)

When men praise God with their whole heart it means that they are waking up to some appreciation of His everlasting love for them by proving it in their own lives. When Israel could be persuaded for awhile to fix their eyes on the Lord, it always let in a flood of rejoicing. If it were not that we are equally blameworthy, we would wonder that men could ever be so foolish as to drop back again into the chilly darkness of despair. Yet they did, and their history is

written for us that we should not "fall after the same example of unbelief." (Hebrews 4:11)--Present Truth, October 27, 1898--Notes on the International Sunday-School Lessons, November 6--2 Chronicles 30:1-13

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 43

The Assyrian Invasion

It is written of Hezekiah that "He clave to the Lord, and departed not from following Him; ... so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him." (2 Kings 18:6,5)

Yet this unswerving devotion did not procure for him immunity from foreign invasion. The attacks made on him, however, by the empire of Assyria, were not necessarily misfortunes. It is no hardship to sustain an assault which can be easily repulsed, and since Hezekiah, in the hour of need, always sought help from the Lord, he was never left without defense.

It is evident from the history that Jerusalem was more than once threatened by Assyria during Hezekiah's reign, but there is no record of its falling into the hand of the Invader, although the other fenced cities of Judah were taken.

The Object of Affliction

It was necessary for the sake of Assyria that that heathen people should receive the knowledge of the true God. The promise had been given to Israel: "All people of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord; and they shall be afraid of you." (Deuteronomy 28:10)

The fulfillment of this promise depended upon their hearkening diligently to the voice of the Lord. The angels in heaven do this, and for that reason they excel in strength, and the commandments of the Lord are fulfilled in them. (Psalm 103:20; Bless the Lord, you His angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word) The same attitude would have made Israel strong in the Lord and obedient to His voice. It would not have been necessary for them to go about calling attention to the fact that they were called by the name of the Lord. Everybody would see this for themselves.

A man does not set his name to a cheque or document without being sure that he can meet the obligation that he is incurring, and in sending forth Israel under His own name the Lord had regard to what was due to the Name; He made every provision to ensure that they should live all to the Name, and that no one should think less highly of it because it was borne by mortal men. "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise. ... You are my witnesses, says the Lord, that I am God." (Isaiah 43:12,21)

Witnessing to Truth

"Hear and your soul shall live." (Isaiah 4:3)

Had Israel only hearkened to God's word to them, continually declaring His Name in His character, they would have lived the life that belonged to the Name; and Assyria, and all the other heathen

nations, though they had never seen Jehovah, would know all about Him through Israel. His people would have been His witnesses that He was God.

For the lack of this witness, all the nations had made gods for themselves, and the Assyrians, having conquered all who met them in battle, concluded that their own gods were better and stronger than all others. Thus it became important to bring their false god, which was supposed to be greater than all other false gods, into conflict with the only true God; that it might be seen that there was but one true God, and that in learning this truth, the heathen might find life. "For this is life eternal, that they might know You, the only true God." (John 17:3)

Since Assyria had gained pre-eminence over all other nations, and was watched by them all, the result of the conflict between the gods of Assyria and the God of Judah could not fail to become known to all the nations.

A Blessing for All People

It was by no means necessary, however, that the land of Judah should be invaded by the heathen, and that the knowledge of the true God should be proclaimed by means of siege and famine. There was a much better and easier way. The seed of Abraham was to be a blessing to all the families of the earth, and had they accepted the responsibility which the knowledge of a Saviour brought, to make the glad tidings known to all people, the same power which

occasionally wrought marvelous deliverances for them in their own land, would have always attended their missionary labors in other lands, "to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed, Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God." (Romans 15:18-19)

An Uncertain Sound

God had exalted Assyria to be chief over the nations, giving into their hands all other kingdoms. In consequence of this no nation had been able to stand before them in battle. This continued success had filled them with pride, and they attributed their victories to their own strength. It became necessary therefore that they should learn their weakness, and know that all power was of God.

The occasion for the lesson was furnished by Sennacherib's invasion of Judah. He demanded that the city should submit to him, and warned them that their God was not able to deliver them from his hand. For this delusion on his part, Judah was partly to blame. He knew that they were relying to some extent on the king of Egypt, and, measuring his own strength with that of their ally, he felt confident of his own superiority. Naturally, he would feel that if the God of Judah was all powerful they would not trouble themselves about earthly alliances.

Hearing that the king of Egypt was coming against him, he went off to crush Tirhakah, and wrote to Hezekiah warning him to trust no god that promised deliverance from Assyria's conquering army.

The Strength of Israel

Hezekiah knew what to do with the taunting message of Sennacherib, in which he boasted that he had overthrown all the nations, in spite of their gods, and said, "Let not your God in whom you trust deceive you." (2 Kings 19:10)

He took the letter up into the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord. It was a matter that concerned the Lord, for it declared that He was impotent as were the false gods. Hezekiah prayed, "Now, therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech you, save us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the Lord God, even You only." (2 Kings 19:19)

The Lord was not slow to take up the case. He had put His name upon Israel, remembering that they were dust, and had no power in themselves to preserve its honor; for His purpose was that He and His people should be so closely identified, His strength being made perfect in their weakness, that the one Name would serve for both.

Just as soon as they were willing to identify themselves with Him, so far from counting it presumption on their part, or throwing in their teeth the accusation that they only remembered Him when they got into insurmountable difficulties, He at once identifies himself with them, and lo, they are as absolutely safe from Assyrian invaders as though they sat beside Him on the throne of universal dominion.

The Lord's Derision

Now they are delivered from all their fears. They are authorized to laugh in contemptuous, derision at the empty power of Sennacherib. Isaiah brought from God the message, "That which you have prayed ... I have heard." (2 Kings 19:20)

Concerning the king of Assyria, the word was given, "The virgin the daughter of Zion has despised you, and laughed you to scorn!" (2 Kings 19:21)

His rage was not against Judah but against God, and because he, being nothing, had presumed to exalt his voice against God, he was to be taught his weakness. "I will turn you back by the way by which you came." (2 Kings 19:28)

Doubtless the message was conveyed in some way to Sennacherib, and with it would go the startling intelligence that the words of Jehovah were already made good, for: "It came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred fourscore and five thousand." (2 Kings 19:35)

Among these would be Rabshakeh, whose insolent, over-bearing spirit had made him an instrument to bear the scornful message of his master, for we read that the angel smote "all the mighty men of valor, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of

Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land." (2 Chronicles 32:21)

An Impressive Lesson

Numerous inscriptions have been discovered in the land of Assyria, and much additional information has been gleaned therefrom concerning the life of Sennacherib, but, so far as is known at present, the "shame of face" in which he returned from Jerusalem was sufficiently deep to prevent his leaving behind him any record of this particular expedition.

He reigned for twenty years after his return, but did not again attempt to invade the land of Judah. It must have been known throughout his wide dominions that there was one God at least before whom "the great king" (2 Kings 18:19,28) had to confess himself powerless. A last testimony to the futility of serving idols was borne by his death, for it was while engaged in worshiping in the house of his god that two of his sons slew him with the sword.

Yours Is the Power

"There is no power but of God." (Romans 13:1)

Therefore the servant of God is not to fear any of his enemies. "Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread." (Isaiah 8:13)

All power in heaven and earth is given to Christ, and whoever bears His name need not fear the malice of the hosts of darkness. We may take for our encouragement God's words to Sennacherib, and laugh to scorn the efforts of Satan to destroy us, so long as we remember that we are without strength, but that God is the strength of our life, and He is mighty to save. Therefore, "Rejoice ... always, and" (Philippians 4:4) "Be in nothing terrified by your adversaries," (Philippians 1:28) even though the temptations that assail you have a long record of past successes. The continual remembrance that God alone has power will keep us continually rejoicing over the fact that our adversaries have none. When we believe the Word of God we can laugh them all to scorn. "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad." (Psalm 34:2)--Present Truth, November 3, 1898--Notes on the International Sunday-School Lessons, November 13--2 Kings 19:20-22, 28-37

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 44

Hezekiah's Prayer Answered

After Hezekiah's punishment, and his confession and submission to Sennacherib, as related in last week's lesson, (See Article 40 in this section, Signs of the Times, November 12, 1885, "Hezekiah's Good Reign") he fell sick of the malady which forms the subject of this lesson. "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amos came to him, and said unto him, Thus says the Lord. Set your house in order; for you shall die, and not live." (2 Kings 20:1; also Isaiah 38:1)

This message is somewhat different from that which would be given in the majority of cases nowadays to as good a man as Hezekiah. Now, the word of comfort would be, in most instances, in substance about this:

"You are now to leave this world and go to Heaven. We speak of it as death, but in reality there is no death. 'Death is but the gate to endless joy,' and you will soon be happy in Heaven; and by this you will know what true life is; it is then you will really begin to live, etc., etc."

But such is not the message of God to any dying person. "You shall die, and not live," is the word of God. And therefore when a person dies, and he does not live. A person cannot be dead and alive

at the same time. If he is dead, he is dead, and not alive; and he will not be alive until the resurrection:

- if righteous, till the resurrection of the just;
- if unrighteous, till the resurrection of the unjust.

And so Hezekiah understood it. He seems to have had no idea that he was going to Heaven when he died; if he had, he certainly showed very little appreciation of the blessedness of it, by weeping, as he did, "with a great weeping." (2 Kings 20:3,margin)

But we have his own word on this subject: "The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness: I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave; I am deprived of the residue of my years. I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living. ... Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove. ... For the grave cannot praise You, death cannot celebrate You: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for your truth. The living, the living, he shall praise You, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known your truth." (Isaiah 38:9-11,14,18-19)

Thus spoke Hezekiah. And it was because, if he should die, he would go to the grave--to a place and condition in which he could neither see nor praise the Lord,--it was because of this that he "wept sore." It was because of this that he desired not yet to die. Then came the word of the Lord to him by Isaiah: "I have heard your

prayer, I have seen your tears; ... And I will add unto your days fifteen years. ... And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs. And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered." (2 Kings 20:5-7)

It is right to pray for the sick, indeed the Lord has given specific directions to do so; but He has not directed us to disregard appliances. On the contrary, in this place He gives just as specific directions to use appliances as He does in the other place to pray for the sick.

Notice, too, that it was after His distinct promise to heal Hezekiah and to add unto his days fifteen years, that He ordered them to take a bunch of figs and lay on the boil; but it was not till after they had applied the figs that he recovered. Prayer and faith and works, or, in other words, common sense, go together in the intelligent service of the Lord; while that kind of faith-cure, that is now becoming too prevalent, that proposes to cure all manner of diseases without either appliances or common sense, is nothing but spiritual quackery, and is strikingly akin to presumption. It certainly is not intelligent faith. "And Isaiah said, This sign shall you have of the Lord, that the Lord will do the thing that He has spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees? And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees; nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees. And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the Lord: and He brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz." (2 Kings 20:9-11)

It is hard to understand how Hezekiah should think it any more of "a light thing" for the shadow to go down than for it to go back. To us it would seem to be just as easy to do the one as to do the other; for certainly no power but that of God could do either, and it is just as easy for Almighty power to do one thing as it is to do another. Whatever Hezekiah may have thought about this, we can find excuse for him; but we can find literally no excuse for those modern would-be wise "divines" who attempt to tell just how this thing was done. They attempt to explain by natural causes, not only this miracle, but other such recorded events, especially in the Old Testament. If these were the result of what we know as natural causes; if these things were in accordance with what is termed and known as natural law, then there was no miracle about them.

And to talk, as some do, of these things as being too "violent interferences with the order of nature," (PP Editor's note: This phrase is found in George Bernard Shaw's, *Back to Methuselah*, Preface (1921). However, it predates him. I found it in at least one periodical from 1872, so it may have been a more common phrase among skeptics of the late 1800's) is simply to talk nonsense. What is the order of nature? Who established the order of nature? Is not God above nature? Is not the order of nature simply the ordinances which God established? Assuredly so. Then is He bound, as we are, to act strictly according to these laws? If so, then there is no such thing as a miracle. And every attempt to explain by natural causes any of the miracles recorded in the Bible, is just so much of an effort to reduce them to the level of the natural, and to rob them of their

sublime dignity as miracles, and is therefore simply unbelief, however much faith may be professed.

Shortly after Hezekiah's recovery, Merodach-Baladan, king of Babylon, sent messengers with letters and a present unto Hezekiah, because he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick and had recovered; and he also sent these messengers "to enquire of the wonder that was done in the land." (2 Chronicles 32:31)

Merodach-Baladan was at first king of a small country at the head of the Persian Gulf; but he spread his authority northward, and took Babylon and began to reign there about 721 BC--the same year in which Sargon became king of Assyria. Sargon went down to recover Babylon. He did so; and took Merodach-Baladan prisoner, and carried him into Assyria; but he escaped from prison, returned to Babylon, re-established his authority there, and maintained it a few years, until Sennacherib once more recovered Babylon to Assyria. Merodach-Baladan then fled to an island in the Persian Gulf, where he died; and Sennacherib, to prevent further revolt of the rebellious city, determined, as he says himself, "to overthrow it even more than was done by the deluge," and so left it a heap of ruins, with the Euphrates running over it.

It was during Merodach-Baladan's second reign in Babylon, and between Sennacherib's first and second invasions of Judea, that this embassy came from Babylon to Hezekiah. We saw in last week's lesson how Hezekiah, by receiving the king of Ekron, had brought Sennacherib upon him; and how that, by his submission and the

payment of a large tribute, Sennacherib had turned back. The matter of the second invasion appears to be about as follows:

Ambassadors were sent, either by Hezekiah or by an influential faction, to solicit the alliance of Egypt against Assyria. (Isaiah 30:1-7; 31:1-5) Sennacherib learned of it, (2 Kings 18:19-21) and came out to Lachish, and so placed himself between Hezekiah and his forces, and the king of Egypt and his forces. From Lachish he sent Rab-shakeh and Rabsaria and Tartan up to Jerusalem to demand the submission of Hezekiah, upon the condition that he should remain in his own land until Sennacherib got ready to come and carry all away captive. (2 Kings 18:31-35) Hezekiah refused to hear him, and forbade any of the people to answer him, and sent a company to Isaiah to ask whether the Lord would not hear the words of Rab-shakeh. (2 Kings 18:36-37; 19:1-5) Then Rab-shakeh returned to Sennacherib at Libnah, "for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish." (2 Kings 19:8)

Then Sennacherib heard that Tirhakah king of Ethiopia had come out to fight against him. Then he sent messengers with a letter to Hezekiah. Hezekiah took this letter up into the temple and spread it before the Lord, and prayed him to see and hear all the words of Sennacherib. (2 Kings 19:6-16) "And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred fourscore and five thousand." (2 Kings 19:35)

So it is a mistake to suppose that Sennacherib's army was encamped against Jerusalem when it was smitten by the angel. And

this is exactly what Isaiah had said: "Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it." (2 Kings 19:32)

Accordingly, we find that the whole narrative goes to show that Sennacherib was away below Libnah, going to fight with Tirhakah, when his army was smitten. And Sennacherib "returned with shame of face to his own land." (2 Chronicles 32:21)

Thus once more Jehovah showed himself to His people and to the heathen as above all gods; and showed himself ready and willing to deliver His people from the oppressor, when they put their trust implicitly in Him. He is the same mighty God, the same tender Father, to His people today as He was of old. "With Him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (James 1:17)

But men's sins have separated between them and Him, and when they shall return, as He in mercy is now calling upon them to do, to faithful obedience to all His law, once more He will show himself valiant "in the behalf of those whose hearts are perfect toward Him." (2 Chronicles 16:9) "Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound." (Psalm 89:15) "Yea, happy is that people, whose God is the Lord." (Psalm 144:15)--Signs of the Times, November 19, 1885--Notes on the International Lesson, November 29--2 Kings 20:1-17; Isaiah 38:9-19

A.T. Jones

Chapter 45

Hezekiah's Sickness

The case of Hezekiah affords an excellent test of the doctrine expressed by the popular hymn, that: "Death is the gate to endless joy. (Isaac Watts, Hymn 31, "Christ's presence makes death easy," or "Why should we start, and fear to die.") "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him, Thus says the Lord, Set your house in order: for you shall die, and not live." (Isaiah 38:1)

There was no doubt but that he was doomed to die. And how did he receive the news? We are told that "Hezekiah wept sore." (Isaiah 38:3)

He loved life more than death. But perhaps there was something in his past life that was wrong, and the thought of this caused him to fear. Let us see. "Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the Lord, And said, Remember now, O Lord, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in your sight. And Hezekiah wept sore." (Isaiah 38:2-3)

He was a very good man; and besides this, the Lord granted him time to set his house in order, and to make any preparation that he might desire. This privilege is not accorded to everyone. And yet Hezekiah did not want to die; did not want to go (according to the

popular idea) to be with the One whom he loved and had served so faithfully. We will let him tell in his own words why he did not want to die. After he had recovered, he deliberately wrote as follows: "I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave; I am deprived of the residue of my years." (Isaiah 38:10)

So instead of his years being lengthened out to all eternity, they would have been cut off. Then he would not have gone to Heaven, but to the grave. But would he not have gone to Paradise, there to praise God? Hear his words again: "For the grave cannot praise You, death cannot celebrate You: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for your truth." (Isaiah 38:18)

This was at least one reason why Hezekiah did not want to die. He wanted to continue praising the Lord, and he knew that he could not if he died. We will not now consider whether or not he might have honored the Lord more by dying than by living. Had he died at that time he would have avoided at least one sin; but the point is that he could no more have uttered praise to God.

But the objector will say, "All this is spoken of his body; of course its functions would have ceased, and it would have decayed; but his soul would have gone to God."

Well, then, we will listen to him once more: "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but You have in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for You have cast all my sins behind your back." (Isaiah 38:17)

So it appears that neither his body nor his soul would have gone to Heaven if he had died, although he was a good man. This case alone is sufficient to disprove the doctrine that the good go to their reward at death.

But it may still be urged that Hezekiah lived in the old dispensation, before Christ, and that "life and immortality" (2 Timothy 1:10) had not then been brought to light; that he did not understand the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and that his words are not to be taken as authority. We readily admit that he did not understand the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, as held by the majority nowadays, but will not admit that his words are not authority. Hear what Paul says of the Old Testament writings: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, etc." (2 Timothy 3:16)

Then we may go to the Old Testament to learn doctrine; and in this case we learn a very important doctrinal lesson. These words of Hezekiah stand unrebuked and uncontradicted, as a part of divine revelation. We will then accept them as such, believing that they, with the rest of the Scripture, are necessary in order to make us wise unto salvation.--Signs of the Times, October 5, 1888--Isaiah 38:1-18

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 46

What Is in Your Heart?

Hezekiah king of Judah was a good man, who "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." (2 Chronicles 29:2)

He could remind the Lord that he had walked before Him in truth and with a perfect heart, and done that which was good in His sight, and God did not correct him. "Remember now, O Lord, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in your sight. And Hezekiah wept sore." (Isaiah 38:3)

Nevertheless at one time Hezekiah acted very foolishly and wickedly. God had wondrously healed him, and had given him a sign in the heavens, which could not but be known in all the earth; yet when messengers from Babylon came to inquire about it, Hezekiah, instead of using the opportunity to lead them to God, vainly showed them all his treasures, like a child exhibiting his toys. We read that: "[He] rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up." (2 Chronicles 32:25)

Pride goes before destruction, and in this instance we see how it prepares the way for it; for the vain-glorious exhibition of the treasures of the kingdom only aroused the cupidity of the Babylonians, and resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem.

But how could Hezekiah, who had always lived a humble, godly life, turn so suddenly to folly, and to sin against God? The answer is: "In the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart." (2 Chronicles 32:31)

We see, therefore, that all this folly was in Hezekiah's heart, unknown to him, even while he was serving God in truth and uprightness. The hearts of all men are alike. All have the same nature. "From within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, and foolishness." (Mark 7:21-22)

These things are in the heart, not of a few men only, but of all mankind. No one need say that none of these things are in his heart, for they are all there, even though they have not all appeared openly. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I the Lord search the heart." (Jeremiah 17:9-10)

Was not Hezekiah a converted man? was he not a Christian? Certainly he was. The history of his life shows that. Yet all this evil was present, waiting the time when it could reveal itself. In the flesh of no man dwells there any good thing. (Romans 7:18) It is only when we walk in the light as God is in the light, that: "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7)

The life-blood must continually flow through us, to cleanse away the impurity. Only in the Lord have we righteousness and strength; there is none in us. If we allow Him to leave us for a moment, some of the wickedness of the flesh will manifest itself.

Many are trusting in themselves, and congratulating themselves upon their own supposed righteousness. They are ready enough with their condemnation of others, forgetting that much of their own seeming goodness is simply lack of opportunity or of special temptation to do wrong.

Forgetting to give God the glory, they will surely some time be allowed to exhibit the weakness of their lives. If from such a fall they learn, as did Peter, to trust in the Lord, then even that will contribute to their salvation. None of us have any reason to boast over another. "By the grace of God I am what I am." (1 Corinthians 15:10) "Who makes you to differ from another? and what have you that you did not receive? now if you did receive it, why do you glory, as if you had not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7)

We have no occasion to boast of any goodness that appears in us, since it is all of God; but we have much reason to be ashamed of any sin, because grace from God is given us in sufficient measure to overcome all sin. Although sin, like a beast of prey, always crouches at the door, with its desire toward us, we may rule over it; (Genesis 4:7) but this can be only when we recognize that the sin of all the world is ours, and in humility trust in the Lord.

Even though God should for a little moment leave us, He will gather us with great mercies. "For a small moment have I forsaken you; but with great mercies will I gather you. In a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you, says the Lord your Redeemer." (Isaiah 54:7-8)

But this history of Hezekiah was recorded in order that we might know what is in our hearts without its being necessary for God to leave us. Even while we are serving God in truth and righteousness, we may and should know that we stand only by the power of God's hand. "Wherefore let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." (1 Corinthians 10:12) "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen." (Jude 24-25)--Present Truth, July 27, 1899--2 Chronicles 32:25-31

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 47

Manasseh's Sin and Repentance

Manasseh was the son of Hezekiah. He became king at the age of twelve and reigned fifty-five years. Hezekiah by his piety and steadfastness had been a blessing to the nation, so that since the time of Solomon there had been nothing like his day in the history of Judah. (2 Chronicles 30:26) His son "Manasseh, seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel." (2 Kings 21:9)

We are not told how it was that the son of Hezekiah proved so different from himself, but we may learn from the circumstances that prosperity is not always good. When Hezekiah was anointed king, the house of God was deserted and out of repair, and the kingdom was harassed on every side, while Manasseh found himself on the throne of a powerful state, with well-filled treasuries and storehouses. Youth is seldom fitted to exercise power, because it has not learned that in reality the ruler is the servant of the governed. When power is used only to minister to self-exaltation and self-indulgence it is a curse.

False Friends

There is never any lack of evil counselors and flatterers to fill the mind of a king with false notions of his relations to his people,

and Manasseh was misled by these. The Lord spoke to him also by His prophets, but he would not hear them.

Hezekiah had employed men to copy out some of the proverbs of Solomon, and among these wise sayings were several which related to the office of a king. They are found in the 25th to the 29th chapters of Proverbs. One of the proverbs reads, "Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness." (Proverbs 25:5)

This may explain why Manasseh's throne was not established. He listened rather to counsels that favored his own inclinations than to the faithful warnings uttered by servants of God.

Led Captive by Satan

Manasseh stopped at nothing in his departure from the Lord, and his case is a warning to those who think that because they have been brought up respectably they can refuse to serve God, and yet never become so abandoned as others who have sunk to the depths of shame and degradation.

Manasseh had a good father and godly training, but turning from the Lord, he went altogether to the bad. He built again the high places which his father had broken down, and reared altars for the worship of the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. As if this was not enough, "he set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God." (2 Chronicles 33:7)

He caused his children to be sacrificed unto devils, in obedience to the cruel dictates of heathenism. He dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards. The evils for which the Amorites had been cast out were reproduced in Manasseh. "Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another." (2 Kings 21:16)

Perilous Times

In these last days the prophecies tell us that before Christ comes, it will be as it was in the days of Noah, when "the earth was filled with violence, ... and every imagination of the thoughts of men's hearts was only evil continually." (Genesis 6:11,5)

Some may think that it would take a very long time to undo all the work of civilization, and bring the world to such a depth of depravity, but we see in the case of Manasseh that it did not take very long to descend from an exceptionally high standard to one that went beyond the excesses of the unspeakable Amorites.

All the good there is in the world is due to the Spirit of God. Men do not recognize this fact, and attribute all signs of good to themselves, but the Spirit strives with them, and though it is seldom allowed to appear as a positive power, its negative influence is always at work, smothering to some extent the manifestations of the carnal heart. As the world finally hardens itself against the work of the Spirit, it will quickly be seen how little restraining power there is

in the boasted growth of civilization. "This know, that in the last days perilous times shall come. ... All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." (2 Timothy 3:1,12-13)

A Broken Staff

There was only one hope of saving Manasseh. He had rejected the true God for false ones. He must be left to make practical trial of their value. The captains of the host of the king of Assyria came, conquered him, bound him in chains and carried him away to Babylon. This must have brought forcibly to his mind the uselessness of serving idols.

Hezekiah had met the armies of that same nation in the strength of Jehovah and one of His angels had laid them low. Manasseh had served his false gods diligently, had even sacrifice his children to them, but now in his distress they did nothing for him. It must have come home to him then that all these years he had been following nothing. He had exchanged the truth of God for a lie. What insanity of folly!

Promises to the Penitent

Man's extremity is God's opportunity. In captivity, bemoaning his fate, Manasseh was more accessible to the Spirit of God. There were no flatterers at hand now to fill his ears with vanity. God loved

Manasseh still, and His Spirit came, not to fill his mind with the terrors of a vain remorse, but to whisper thoughts of comfort, and forgiveness. "And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers." (2 Chronicles 33:12)

Perhaps he remembered reading, in the book of Deuteronomy, the promise of God that if, when the curse had fallen on any for disobedience, they should call His words to mind and return unto Him, the Lord would turn their captivity. "If any of your be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord your God gather you, and from thence will He fetch you." (Deuteronomy 30:4)

The history of Manasseh is recorded that no one should despair. From the height of opportunity and privilege, he fell to the depths of deserved ruin; yet from those depths his plea for mercy was heard at the throne of grace. And God was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord He was God.

Manasseh's repentance was sincere, and during the rest of his long reign we read of no relapse on his part. The people also returned to the worship of God, although they sacrificed still in the high places.

A Royal Love

The greatness of God's love is seen in His treatment of the repentant sinner. He does not say, "You are forgiven, but I can never trust you again."

There is no humiliation attached to His forgiveness, for with it He bestows the love that casts out fear. He not only forgives the sin but remembers it no more. He restores the years that the locust has eaten: "And I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you." (Joel 2:25)

He says of Israel, "I will bring them again to place them and they shall be as though I had not cast them off." (Zechariah 10:6)

Manasseh not only received forgiveness but was restored to more honor than he had before. So to Nebuchadnezzar, when he learned that the heavens do rule, was given greater honor than that which before had lifted up his heart in vanity. "For the glory of my kingdom, my honor and brightness returned unto me; and my counselors and my lords sought unto me and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me." (Daniel 4:36)

The Lord does not fill His kingdom with shame-faced, amnestied criminals, but with a royal nation, a holy priesthood, "kings and priests unto God." (Revelation 1:6) "You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive: You have received gifts for

men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." (Psalm 68:18)

Abundant Pardon

None should feel discouraged because they find themselves in evil case, and have certain evidence that their own sinfulness and folly has brought them there. Satan tries to persuade such that it is useless to expect help from God, when it is the very rejection of His counsel that has brought them into distress. God brings people into such places for the very purpose of helping them, and because there is no other way of getting them to accept His help. "Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are, afflicted. ... Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble." (Psalm 107:17,19)

Does He reply, "You should not have been such fools. If you had obeyed me you would not have got into trouble. Now you must bear the consequences."?

No. "and He saves them out of their distresses. He sent His Word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions. Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men." (Psalm 107:19-21)

Israel would not listen to the voice of God, so by means of the things that fascinated them, He allured them into the wilderness. There, in distress, He spoke comfortably to them. It was not for the sake of punishing Israel that they were allured into the wilderness,

but that God might give them their vineyards from thence. "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." (Hosea 2:14-15)

So Manasseh went into the wilderness, and received his kingdom from thence. Knowing from whom He received it, and acknowledging the Giver, he was established in the possession of it as he never had been before.--Present Truth, November 10, 1898--Notes on the International Sunday-School Lessons, November 20--2 Chronicles 33:9-16

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 48

Josiah and the Book of the Law

In this lesson we return to the kings of Judah. After the good king Hezekiah died, his son Manasseh reigned. "And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel. For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served them. ... And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. ... And Manasseh seduced them [the children of Judah] to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel. ... Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord." (2 Kings 21:2-3,6,9,16)

Then because of all this great evil, the Lord said by His prophets: "Therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever hears of it, both his ears shall tingle. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab; and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipes a dish, wiping it, and turning it

upside down." (2 Kings 21:12-13) "And the Lord spoke to Manasseh, and to his people; but they would not hearken. Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria [Esarhaddon], which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon." (2 Chronicles 33:10-11)

He was released, however, after a while, and at his death his son Amon reigned. "And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father Manasseh did. ... And the servants of Amon conspired against him, and slew the king in his own house. And the people of the land slew all them that had conspired against king Amon; and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead." (2 Kings 21:20,23-24)

Thus it was that young Josiah--only eight years of age--came to the throne. And he found the land full of iniquity and abominable idolatry:

- altars reared to Baal;
- images of Ashtoreth in the high places;
- places of worship for horrid Moloch;
- horses and chariots dedicated to the sun;

- priests of Baal, and of all the idols, burning incense to Baal, to the sun, to the moon, to the planets, and to all the host of heaven;

- the house of God shut up;

- the worship of the Lord forsaken, and the book of the law forgotten; this had been the condition of affairs for nearly fifty years. In the eighth year of his reign he began actively the work of reformation--to break down the altars; to break in pieces the images; and to burn the chariots of the sun. Thus he did throughout all Judah. "And so did he in the cities of Manasseh, and Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naphtali, with their mattocks round about." (2 Chronicles 34:6)

While these things were going on, the Levites were at the same time gathering money from all the people, "of the hand of Manasseh and Ephraim, and of all the remnant of Israel, and of all Judah and Benjamin; and they returned to Jerusalem. And they put it in the hand of the workmen that had the oversight of the house of the Lord, and they gave it to the workmen that wrought in the house of the Lord, to repair and amend the house." (2 Chronicles 34:9-10) "And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, that the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of the Lord, saying, Go up to Hilkiyah the high priest, that he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of the Lord, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people. ... And Hilkiyah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. And Hilkiyah

gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. And Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again. And Shaphan the scribe showed the king, saying, Hilkiyah the priest has delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiyah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Michaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying, Go you, inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us." (2 Kings 22:3-4,8-13)

These messengers went immediately to Huldah the prophetess, who "dwelt in Jerusalem in the college," (2 Kings 22:14) and when Josiah received the answer from the Lord, he gathered all the people together, "small and great: and...read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord. And the king ... made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments, ... with all their heart and with all their soul. And all the people stood to the covenant. ... And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him." (2 Kings 23:2-3,25)

Josiah did a grand work, and it is a grand commendation of the Lord that he received because of it. But this was not written for his sake alone. Those who tremble at the word of the Lord, and turn from their transgressions, as did King Josiah, the Lord will accept and commend as readily as He did him.

This reformation by Josiah is only an illustration of the power of the word of God. When Luther found a Bible chained in the library of his monastery, its precious word touched his heart, and by it caused a revolution in all Europe. When Wesley began to obey that word "with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might," (2 Kings 23:25) the power of the word could not be kept back, but it fairly turned England and America "upside down." So it will be ever. Only let a few men, or even a solitary man, walk in the way of the commandments of God, with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their might, and they can move nations. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

The work of reformation is not yet done. The noble duty of covenanting to walk after the Lord and to keep His commandments, did not cease with this act of Josiah, nor with Luther, nor with Wesley. Even now the Lord sends a message to all people, saying with a loud voice, "Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." (Revelation 14:12)

Even now iniquity and idolatry, prevail as really as in the days of Josiah, Luther, or Wesley. And now it is the duty of those who fear God to covenant to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments and testimonies and His statutes, with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their might, to perform the words of this covenant that are written in the book.

As it was in the days of Josiah, that the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth and the honor of the sun, had supplanted the worship and honor of Jehovah, even so now the worship of the beast (the papacy), and his image (the so-called National Reform), and the honor of the "venerable day of the sun" are fast supplanting the worship and honor of Jehovah. Even now, as of old, the Lord cries out, "If I be a Father, where is my honor? if I be a Master, where is my fear?" (Malachi 1:6)

Men who make their boast of the law, through breaking the law are dishonoring God. "You that make your boast of the law, through breaking the law do you dishonor God?" (Romans 2:23) "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words: Then shall you delight yourself in the Lord." (Isaiah 58:13-14) "Them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." (1 Samuel 2:30)--Signs of the Times, December 24, 1885--Notes on the International Lesson, January 3--2 Kings 22:1-13

A.T. Jones

Chapter 49

The Book of the Law Found

After the death of Manasseh, his son Amon reigned for two years. He was only twenty-two years old, but he walked in all the evil of his father's earlier life. A conspiracy was organized against Amon which resulted in his murder, but the people of the land slew the conspirators, and put Josiah, the son of Amon, on the throne at the age of eight years. He reigned for thirty-one years, and was one of the best kings that Judah ever had. "He...walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left." (2 Kings 22:2)

This disposition became especially marked in him when he was sixteen years old, and during the rest of his life it was steadfastly maintained. "And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him." (2 Kings 23:25)

A Discovered Treasure

In his eighteenth year, Josiah instructed Hilkiyah, the high priest, who was father to Jeremiah the prophet, to apply the temple contributions to restoration of the sacred building. This work was put in hand and, in the course of it, an important discovery was made. The book of the law, which God had directed should be kept

with the ark of the covenant, was brought to light. Hilkiah showed the book to Shaphan, the scribe, who read it himself, and then took it to Josiah. "And Shaphan read it before the king." (2 Kings 22:10)

A Grievous Famine

It is impossible for us to conceive now the feelings with which this recovered treasure would be regarded. The Word of God is so easy of access that men have come to regard it as a common thing, and often show it scant reverence. But no greater calamity could befall the world than to be deprived of the Bible. Because we are so accustomed to it, and to enjoying the results of its influence, we seldom think how everything that makes life worth living, yea, even life itself, we owe to this Word. The prophet Amos tells how the loss of the Word will affect men: "Behold, the days come, says the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the Word of the Lord, and shall not find it. In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst." (Amos 8:11-13)

Choosing Darkness

The Lord is not to blame for such a famine. Men will not endure sound doctrine, "[Men] will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having

itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

Having rejected the counsel of God against themselves, and chosen pleasing error rather than sanctifying truth, they have only themselves to blame when "false Christs, and false prophets." (Matthew 24:24) ensnare their souls. Rejecting the Word that would save them, there is no other way of escape.

A Modern Inconsistency

Occasionally some fragment of ancient manuscript is brought to light, purporting to bear some mutilated portion of the "Sayings of Jesus," but it is strange that while these discoveries cause great excitement, men can calmly ignore the authentic sayings that all possess in the Scriptures. The high estimation in which the fragments are held should be much more bestowed on the Word which God's goodness has preserved for us in such perfect form.

When we remember that it is the Word of the Creator of the universe to us, bringing infinite treasures of wisdom and knowledge, manifesting unsearchable love in an everlasting salvation, we will honor the precious revelation by implicit confidence and unquestioning obedience.

Slow to Anger

When the book of the law was read before Josiah, he rent his clothes. He knew that the nation had pursued a course very different from the one commanded by God in the discovered document, and had justly incurred the judgments therein denounced against the disobedient.

Josiah sent messengers to enquire of the Lord by Huldah the prophetess, whether the evils of which Moses wrote were indeed to fall upon Judah. The answer was returned that the Lord would certainly fulfill His word, but in that reply evidence was given that the judgments of God were only directed against the stubbornly impenitent. To Josiah, because his heart was tender and he had humbled himself before the Lord, the promise was given that his eyes should not see the evil, but that he should end his days in peace.

The same heart-felt repentance on the part of others would have secured the same degree of favor. It was because the people would not be turned from their own ways that the judgment could not be averted. The Lord was trying to purify His people by suffering, but they were so joined to their sins that the people were melted entirely away before they would allow themselves to be separated from their iniquities. "They are all grievous revolters,...they are all corrupters. The bellows are burned, the lead is consumed of the fire; the founder melts in vain: for the wicked are not plucked away." (Jeremiah 6:28-29)

Ready to Forgive

The compassionate Judge of all the earth, who had inspired Abraham's pleading for the cities of the plain, and himself wept over Jerusalem, was not at this time less desirous of finding some reason to spare the guilty nation. Before the city was finally destroyed He proclaimed, "Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if you can find a man, if there be any that executes judgment, that seeks the truth; and I will pardon it." (Jeremiah 5:1)

Long after Josiah enquired of the Lord, a promise was given that if the people would fear God and give glory to Him, by keeping the Sabbath which He had sanctified, the city should stand for ever. (Jeremiah 17:20-27) So in the last days, the test of the fourth commandment reveals who will follow the Lord and be saved, and who will choose his own way and be destroyed.

A Transient Reformation

For a time after the discovery of the Book of the Law, the people returned to the Lord. Many of those who were left in the cities of Israel joined Judah in observing the Passover. Never before since the days of Samuel had there been such a gathering. It was in his time that Israel rejected the Lord from being King over them, and the evil effects of kingly rule upon the nation may be judged from the fact that the sacred historian has to go back before the time

of the kings to find a parallel to the Passover which was kept in Josiah's eighteenth year.

Before the Passover, there was a thorough destruction of all idols throughout the land. In the country of Israel, where the fast decaying power of Assyria no longer bore sway, the altars set up by Jeroboam were now destroyed. In Bethel for three hundred and fifty years there had been preserved the prophecy uttered in Jeroboam's day, that a king named Josiah should defile the altar and offer upon it the dead bodies of its priests. "And he cried against the altar in the word of the Lord, and said, O altar, altar, thus says the Lord; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon you shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon you, and men's bones shall be burnt upon you." (1 Kings 13:2)

Josiah saw the tomb of the prophet who had uttered this prediction, and gave orders for its preservation, after the prophecy had been repeated to him by the men of the city.

Josiah's Death

The iniquity of Assyria was now filled up, and the mighty empire was tottering to the fall which its pride had provoked. Egypt, Babylon and Media, were encompassing it with their armies, and Pharaoh-Necho, king of Egypt, came through the land of Judah to attack the Assyrian stronghold, Carchemish. It was in God's plan that the king of Egypt should do this, and when Josiah thought to

arrest the progress of his army, Pharaoh-Necho sent him a warning message from God, saying that he was not come against Josiah, and had no desire to meet him in battle, "for God commanded me to make haste: forbear yourself from meddling with God, who is with me, that He destroy you not." (2 Chronicles 35:21)

Notwithstanding this warning, Josiah persisted in his attempt to stop the king of Egypt, and was fatally wounded in the battle that followed. There was great lamentation at his death in all Judah and Jerusalem. Yet he was taken away from the evil to come, and the words of Christ to the weeping women of Judea were indeed applicable to those whom Josiah left behind him: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children." (Luke 23:28)--Present Truth, November 24, 1898--Notes on the International Sunday-School Lessons, December 4--2 Kings 22:8-20

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 50

The Faithful Rechabites

The Rechabites were of the people of the Kenites, and of the house of Rechab. The Kenites were the descendants of Moses's father-in-law. When the children of Israel were in the wilderness, Moses's father-in-law came with Moses's wife and his two sons to visit him in the wilderness, shortly after they had left Egypt. After remaining a while with Moses he departed, and "went his way into his own land." (Exodus 18:27)

But, "Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses's father-in-law, We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you; come with us, and we will do you good; for the Lord has spoken good concerning Israel. And he said unto him, I will not go; but I will depart to my own land, and to my kindred. And he said, Leave us not, I pray you; forasmuch as you know how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and you may be to us instead of eyes. And it shall be, if you go with us, yea, it shall be, that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto you." (Numbers 10:29-32)

By this Moses prevailed on Hobab to go with them; for when we come down to the book of Judges, we read: "And the children of the Kenite, Moses's father-in-law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which lies in

the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people."
(Judges 1:16)

In 1 Chronicles 2:55, we have the first mention of Rechab, the father of the Rechabites. "And the families of the scribes which dwelt at Jabez; the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, and Suchathites. These are the Kenites that came of Hemath, the father of the house of Rechab." (1 Chronicles 2:55)

The next mention we have of any of the house of Rechab, is in 2 Kings 10. When Jehu was on his way to execute judgment on the house of Ahab, "he lighted on Jehonadab the son of Rechab coming to meet him: and he saluted him, and said to him, Is your heart right, as my heart is with your heart? And Jehonadab answered, It is. If it be, give me your hand. And he gave him his hand; and he took him up to him into the chariot. ... And Jehu went, and Jehonadab the son of Rechab, into the house of Baal, and said unto the worshipers of Baal, Search, and look that there be here with you none of the servants of the Lord, but the worshipers of Baal only." (2 Kings 10:15,23)

After this there is no more mention of any of the house of Rechab till this time which is the subject of the lesson for today,--a period of about two hundred and seventy-seven years. But here we find that this Jehonadab who accompanied Jehu was the one who had given the directions which the Rechabites had observed all these years, which the Lord adopts as the meaning of teaching an important lesson to His people.

The date of the events connected with this lesson is about 607 BC. Jehoiakim was king of Judah, having been made king by Pharaoh-Necho, king of Egypt. About 610, Necho had gone out against the king of Assyria; but he went no farther than the River Euphrates, being delayed there by the siege of Carchemish. As he was on his way toward the Euphrates, Josiah, king of Judah, went out to stay him. Necho tried to persuade him to let him pass unmolested, as he was not the one against whom Necho was going. Josiah would not listen, but persisted in his resistance to Necho, and a battle was brought on, in which Josiah was killed, and thus perished the last good king, and the last stay, of the nation of Judah. "And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah." (2 Chronicles 35:25)

By the death of Josiah, the nation of Judah fell into the power of Pharaoh-Necho, and when the people of the land made Josiah's son, Jehoahaz, king in his father's stead, he was suffered to reign only three months, when "Pharaoh-nechoh put him in bands at Riblah," (2 Kings 23:33) and made Eliakim, another son of Josiah's, king, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. Shortly after he began to reign, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Carchemish, and defeated Pharaoh-Necho's army, and drove him back to his own country. "And the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land: for the king of Babylon had taken from the river of Egypt unto the River Euphrates all that pertained to the king of Egypt." (2 Kings 24:7)

At this time, wickedness was rife in Jerusalem, and Jehoiakim showed no disposition to check it. "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord." (2 Kings 23:37)

And when the Lord sent him a message direct by the hand of Jeremiah, when Jehudi had read to him "three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth." (Jeremiah 36:23)

Then the Lord said to him, "He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David; and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost." (Jeremiah 36:30)

It was to this man, and to a people who were scarcely better than he, to whom the Lord sent the lesson that forms the subject of our lesson today. When Nebuchadnezzar had come over the Euphrates against Pharaoh-Necho, the Rechabites had bundled up their tents and equipage, and had gone into Jerusalem for fear of the Chaldean army. The Lord told Jeremiah to go to the house of the Rechabites, and bring them into the house of the Lord, and set wine before them to drink. Jeremiah did so. "But they said, We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, You shall drink no wine, neither you, nor your sons for ever: Neither shall you build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days you shall dwell in tents. ... Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he has charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our

sons, nor our daughters; ... and have obeyed, and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us. ... Then came the word of the Lord unto Jeremiah, saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Go and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will you not receive instruction to hearken to my words? says the Lord. The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are performed; for unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment: notwithstanding I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but you hearkened not unto me. ... Because the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father, which he commanded them; but this people has not hearkened unto me: Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them: because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard; and I have called unto them, but they have not answered." (Jeremiah 35:5-8,10,12-14,16-17)

This lesson is of just as much importance to us as it was to the men of Jerusalem; because Paul in writing specially of this time says that the people's ears will be turned away from the truth, and turned unto fables--made-up stories, the sayings of men, the traditions of our fathers. And in view of this it was that he gave that solemn charge to the ministry: "I charge you before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom; Preach the word." (2 Timothy 4:1-2)

There is a disposition in man to follow the precepts and example of men, rather than to obey the word of God. For the reason, no doubt, that the precepts of men are not so straight as are those of God; for not all the precepts of men are as righteous as this one of Jonadab, that his people should drink no wine.

- The precepts of Mahomet are obeyed by thousands where there is one to obey the precepts of Christ.

- The doctrines of the papacy are honored likewise by thousands where there is one who will follow faithfully the word of God.-- Signs of the Times, January 7, 1886--Notes on the International Lesson, January 17--Jeremiah 35:12-19

A.T. Jones

Chapter 51

Trying to Destroy God's Word

Jehoiakim was the son of Josiah. The people of the land had made his younger brother, Jehoahaz, king before him, but Jehoahaz had only reigned three months when the king of Egypt, under whose dominion Judah had fallen by the defeat of Josiah at Megiddo, annulled the choice of the people, and placed Jehoiakim on the throne. Jehoahaz was taken captive into Egypt, where he died. Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, "And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done." (2 Kings 23:37)

Publishing the Prophecy

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the Lord commanded Jeremiah to write in a roll of a book all the prophecies that had been given through him, from the beginning of his work. This was done, Jeremiah dictating the words to Baruch the scribe, who was then directed to stand at the gate of the temple and read them in the hearing of all the people.

Standing in this audience, when the roll was read to the assembly on the fasting day, was Michaiah, the grandson of that Shaphan who read to King Josiah the book of the law which was discovered by Hilkiah the priest during the cleansing of the temple. Michaiah went to the scribe's chamber in the king's house, and

reported to the princes assembled there the startling character of the words that Baruch was reading in the ears of the people.

Burning the Roll

The princes sent for Baruch and, at their request, he sat down and read the roll to them. They cautioned him and Jeremiah to hide themselves and let no man know their whereabouts. Then the princes went in to the king, leaving the roll in the scribe's chamber, and told him of the words that God had sent. The king commanded that the roll itself be brought to him. "Now the king sat in the winter-house in the ninth month [which would correspond to our November 1]: and there was a fire on the hearth burning before him. And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth." (Jeremiah 36:22-23)

Three of the princes begged the king not to destroy the roll, but he would not hear them. He would have been glad to serve Jeremiah and Baruch in the same way, and he ordered their immediate arrest, "but the Lord hid them." (Jeremiah 36:26)

Treasuring Up Wrath

The conduct of Jehoiakim is in strong contrast to that of his father Josiah. The latter, when God's judgments against the disobedience of Judah were made known to him, humbled himself

and by sincere penitence and confession, averted from himself the coming doom. Jehoiakim was stirred to fury by the Word of the Lord and, instead of recognizing the justice of the sentence and turning from his evil course, willfully defied the righteous anger of God and burned His message.

By humbling himself, and turning at God's reproof, Jehoiakim might have yet been saved, but he cut himself off from the source of forgiveness and life, and while the roll itself was written out again in even fuller detail, there was added to it God's sentence against the rebellious king: "He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity." (Jeremiah 36:30-31)

In fulfillment of the first part of this judgment, his son, after a brief but wicked reign of three months, was carried to Babylon, where he spent thirty-seven years in captivity.

Honoring God

The principle upon which God has ever dealt with men was laid down to Eli, and is often repeated in the scriptures. "Them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." (1 Samuel 2:30)

This is not because God is like men, who will bestow respect where there is a likelihood of their getting at least as much back.

God does not seek honor from men because He likes flattery, or finds it difficult to get honor among those who know Him better. He is not satisfied when men merely draw near Him with their lips, but desires that the heart may be yielded to Him, in confiding recognition of His love, in order that He may do marvelous things for those who trust Him. "Whose offers the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifies me; and prepares a way that I may show him the salvation of God." (Psalm 50:23,RV)

The greater the conception men have of the glory and power of God, the more they can rejoice; for God, who spared not His own Son, keeps nothing for himself. Those who believe Him to be the Almighty can sing for joy because of "the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe." (Ephesians 1:19) "Therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you...blessed are all they that wait for Him." (Isaiah 30:18)

Infidelity

Infidelity does not always take the form of burning the Scriptures. There are other ways of rejecting the Word of God.

Those of our readers who have been following, during the past few months, the studies contained in the Present Truth, on "God's Saving Power in the Things that are Made," (These articles have been collected into the book, The Everlasting Gospel: God's Saving Power in the Things That Are Made, by E.J. Waggoner.) will understand clearly why it is that Satan has been making such a

special onslaught upon those parts of the Bible which deal with the record of creation. He knows what is involved in a right understanding of this question, and hence his efforts have been steadily directed towards creating false ideas of man's inherent power, and his real relation to his Creator.

To hide the truth from men, and at the same time develop in them that spirit of independence of God which will most surely render them subject to his own evil influence, he has led men to set their own ideas above the Word of God, and judge the inspiration of the Bible by their own imaginations.

But it is not only the avowed infidel who has been thus deceived. The satanic temptations are more subtle than men think, and many who hold in theory to the full inspiration of the Bible, have yet been insensibly influenced by the prevailing spirit of unbelief.

What is Man?

God's Word declares that man in himself is nothing more than dust. God's own life animating the dust produces a living soul, (Genesis 2:7) but only as God's Spirit is in man is he capable of any of the manifestations of life. This Spirit of God is the only life there is. By it all creation exists. "You hide your face, they are troubled: You take away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. You send forth your spirit, they are created." (Psalm 104:29-30)

The words "breath" and "spirit" here used are identical in the original. That which causes the dust to hold together and form the body of a man is the life of the Creator. "In Him all things hold together." (Colossians 1:17,RV)

Death is simply the undoing of this connection between God's life and the dust. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

Many refuse to believe that it is in God they "live and move, and have [their] being," (Acts 17:28) but their unbelief cannot make the Word of God untrue.

A Test

There is a real test which every one may apply for himself, by which he may know if he really believes the inspired Word of God, or if he has been deceived by Satan and has been unwittingly drawn into unbelief, only different in degree from the rampant infidelity which made Jehoiakim burn the roll that rebuked his wicked course.

If we believe God's record of our creation we will know that we are only dust and that all the life we have is God's life. Since it is absurd that dust should presume to direct or control the Divine life, (Jeremiah 10:23; O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps) he who believes the Bible will in all his ways acknowledge the Lord and

allow Him to direct. He will not lean to his own understanding, but will trust in the Lord with all his heart. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

The man who trusts in himself at all is trusting in vanity, (Job 15:31) a vain or empty thing. If he seems to be something when he is nothing, (Galatians 6:3) he is a lie. "Men of low degree are vanity," (Psalm 62:9)

But all men are alike, so that if a man thinks he is a little better than any other man, he too is only vanity. "And men of high degree are a lie." (Psalm 62:9)

It does not matter how high the degree. It may not be very much, or it may look down upon every one else in the world. However high it is, it is to that extent a lie. This is infidelity. No lie is of the truth, and the man who cherishes his own lie cannot receive God's truth.

Men of High Degree

Even among professing Christians this lie of "high degree" is found. Some will say that there are certain lines of work which they feel competent to undertake, certain temptations which they can easily meet, and because of this they feel of higher degree than others who can only make a lesser boast. Jesus, the Son of man, who was "the truth," in whom there was no lie, said, "I can of my own self do nothing." (John 5:30)

He knew that God dwelt in Him and did the works and spoke the words. (John 14:10) It is the spirit of self-exaltation, of high degree, that hinders faith. The man who knows himself to be vanity will listen humbly to the words of life spoken by his Creator, and will not presume to criticize them. "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word." (Isaiah 66:2) "How can you believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that comes from God only?" (John 5:44)

Jehoiakim thought himself of high degree, and looked upon other men as instruments of his vainglorious ambition. He built his house by unrighteousness, using his neighbor's service without wages, to make for himself a wide house and large chambers, (Jeremiah 22:13-14) and his eyes and his heart were filled with covetousness and oppression. (Jeremiah 22:17) Seeking honor for himself he could not believe the voice of the Lord, and this is the secret of his burning the roll.

But it was seen by all that his high degree was only a lie, for before his death the word of the Lord spoke concerning him: "He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem." (Jeremiah 22:19)--Present Truth, December 1, 1898--Notes on the International Sunday-School Lessons, December 11--Jeremiah 36:20-32

E.J. Waggoner

Chapter 52

The Captivity of Judah (1886)

The lesson drawn by Jeremiah from the obedience of the faithful Rechabites, was unheeded by the king and people of Judah and Jerusalem. Jehoiakim died, after a reign of eleven years, and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead; but his reign contained only three months, and Nebuchadnezzar came again to Jerusalem and besieged it. "And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers." (2 Kings 24:12)

The king of Babylon, at that time, took the treasures of the house of the Lord, and all the golden vessels of the temple; and all, with king Jehoiachin, and all his family, and all the mighty of the land, and the craftsmen and siths, carried he captive to Babylon, leaving only "the poorest sort of people" (2 Kings 24:14) in the land. Jehoiachin was kept in prison at Babylon till the death of Nebuchadnezzar, a period of thirty-seven years. Then Evil-merodach became king of Babylon, and took Jehoiachin out of prison, and "spoke kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon." (2 Kings 25:28)

Thus he remained all the days of his life. (See 2 Kings 24:8-16; 25:27-30) When Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin prisoner, he chose Mattaniah, another son of Josiah, and made him king, and changed his name to Zedekiah. The reason that the name was changed was

this: When Nebuchadnezzar chose Mattaniah to be king, Mattaniah entered into a solemn covenant; gave his hand, and took an oath before God that he would be a faithful subject, in all things, to the king of Babylon. Then it was, and upon this covenant and this oath, that Nebuchadnezzar changed the name, and gave him that of Zedekiah, that is, "The judgment of Jehovah;" thus placing upon him a constant reminder of his obligation before God, and that, if he violated his oath, he would incur the judgment of God. If Zedekiah had kept this covenant, the kingdom would even then have stood; for the Lord had said to Zedekiah, "Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live." (Jeremiah 27:12) "But the sin of Judah [was] written with a pen of iron and with a point of a diamond: it [was] graven upon the tables of their hearts, and upon the horns of their altars," (Jeremiah 17:1) and Zedekiah only "helped forward the affliction." (Zechariah 1:15)

He broke his covenant; he violated his oath; he rebelled against his king; and he sent "ambassadors into Egypt that they might give him horses and much people." (Ezekiel 17:15)

Then came upon him the judgment that was implied in his oath, and in his acceptance of the name Zedekiah--the judgment of Jehovah. For said the Lord, "Shall he prosper? shall he escape that does such things? or shall he break the covenant, and be delivered? As I live, says the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwells that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he broke, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die. Seeing he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, when, lo,

he had given his hand, and has done all these things, he shall not escape. Therefore thus says the Lord God; As I live, surely my oath that he has despised, and my covenant that he has broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head." (Ezekiel 17:15-19)

From that day forward there was but one message for Zedekiah, and that was,

"This city shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon." (See Jeremiah 21:10; 32:24-25; 38:3,18)

Jeremiah was in the city all the time with his message from the Lord. Always, he was telling the people that the city would be given up; and when Nebuchadnezzar came and laid siege to the city, the prophet declared that he that remained in the city should die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; "but he that goes out, and falls to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey." (Jeremiah 21:9)

Yet the people refused to believe the prophet of God, and steadily resisted the siege. Then at Zedekiah's request Pharaoh sent an army out of Egypt to draw away the king of Babylon. This gave Zedekiah renewed confidence, and he sent to ask Jeremiah for a word from the Lord, and he got it. The Lord said: "Deceive not yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us: for they shall not depart. For though you had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans that fight against you, and there remained but

wounded men among them, yet should they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire." (Jeremiah 37:9-10)

The Chaldean army suspended the siege to go and meet the Egyptian army, and then Jeremiah started out of the city to go into the land of Benjamin; and when he was passing the gate of Benjamin, the captain of the ward arrested him, and accused him of going over to the Chaldeans; for which "the princes were wroth with Jeremiah, and smote him, and put him in prison," (Jeremiah 37:15) in a dungeon in the house of Jonathan the scribe. While he was there Zedekiah again sent and had him brought secretly to the king's house, and asked if there was any word from the Lord. "And Jeremiah said, There is: for, said He, you shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon." (Jeremiah 37:17)

Then Jeremiah asked the king not to allow him to be committed again to the dungeon, which was granted, and orders were given that he should remain in the court of the prison, and have a piece of bread daily as long as there was any in the city. (Jeremiah 37:11-21)

Next, the princes came to Zedekiah and said: "We beseech you, let this man be put to death: for thus he weakens the hands of the men of war that remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, in speaking such words unto them: for this man seeks not the welfare of this people, but the hurt. Then Zedekiah the king said, Behold, he is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do any thing against you. Then they took Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that was in the court of

the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire." (Jeremiah 38:4-6)

The Babylonian army soon returned and renewed the siege of Jerusalem, and in the 11th year of Zedekiah, "And on the ninth day of the fourth month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land. And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king's garden: (now the Chaldees were against the city round about:) and the king went the way toward the plain. And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him. So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him. And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon. And in the fifth month, the seventh day of the month,...came Nebuzar-adan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem: And he burnt the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house he burnt with fire. [And he] broke down the walls of Jerusalem round about." (2 Kings 25:3-10)

And all the remnant of the people did Nebuzar-adan carry away to Babylon; and all the vessels of gold, of silver, and of brass; and the two great pillars of brass which Solomon had made; and the

brazen sea and the bases; "the brass of all these vessels was without weight." (2 Kings 25:16)

And so was completed the captivity of Judah. A few of the very poor of the land were left "to be vine dressers and husbandmen." (2 Kings 25:12)

And over these the king of Babylon appointed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, governor, but he was murdered soon afterward, and then all the remainder arose and fled to Egypt for fear of the king of the Chaldees; (2 Kings 25:22-26) and thus the land was left desolate, "to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill threescore and ten years." (2 Chronicles 36:21)--Signs of the Times, January 14, 1886--Notes on the International Lesson, January 24--2 Kings 27:1-12

A.T. Jones

Chapter 53

The Captivity of Judah (1898)

Zedekiah was the last king of Judah. He was a son of Josiah and was made king by Nebuchadnezzar in the place of Jehoiakim's son, the latter being taken captive to Babylon after a reign of three months and ten days.

Zedekiah was made to swear by the Lord that he would be faithful to Nebuchadnezzar, but he violated his oath. He sought help from Egypt to throw off the Babylonian yoke, but although Egypt came to his assistance, its interference did not save him. He, like his fathers, rejected the one hope of deliverance in turning away from the Lord, and none other could help him. "The Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes and sending; because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwelling-place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy." (2 Chronicles 36:15-16)

A Mark on the Forehead

It was not only their fathers who had transgressed the commandments of the Lord and provoked Him to anger. Right down to the time when the city was taken the wicked practices of the nation, both rulers and governed, were continued.

The condition of the city in those days was typical of the state of things that will exist when earth's guilty career finally closes. The prophet Ezekiel was shown the wickedness that was being practiced in the city, and even in the temple itself. He saw also that a mark was put upon the foreheads of those who lamented over the abominations that were done in the midst of Jerusalem, and a destroying angel was commanded to exterminate all who had not the mark. (Ezekiel 8:9-18; 9:1-11) In the last days the winds of strife and destruction are held until the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads. (Revelation 7:1-8)

The Seal of God

A seal is not put lightly to anything. When the servants of God are sealed with His seal, it means that He accepts them as His own act and deed. They are "His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:10)

There is no thread of human invention in the garment of righteousness with which they are clothed. They know that they are sufficient for nothing of themselves, (2 Corinthians 3:5) but that Christ is made to them "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." (1 Corinthians 1:30)

They have submitted themselves to the righteousness of God, and are "complete in Him." (Colossians 2:10)

Jesus beholds in them not a vestige of the filthy rags of human self-righteousness, but the travail of His own soul and is satisfied. (Isaiah 53:11) In them He sees the work that He designed to do for men, and He is willing that these shall be known everywhere as the proofs of His saving power. He is willing to be judged by these results and He puts His own seal upon them.

So in Revelation 14 we read of the same people that they have the Father's name in their foreheads. They stand before the universe as illustrations of what that Name means in its fullness. They "keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." (Revelation 14:12)

They have learned that God's Word brings the power, without which men have in vain tried to obey it. His commandments are known to them as life everlasting, and Christ dwells in them, so that they have the faith of Jesus. They are His perfect representatives and, being filled with the Holy Spirit, are His witnesses to the ends of the earth. They have the testimony of Jesus. (Revelation 12:17)

Hated by the Wicked

The dragon, which is Satan, is wroth with these witnesses, and stirs up men against them. So, during the siege of Jerusalem, the anger of those whom he rebuked consigned Jeremiah to a prison, where he lay until he was taken from it by the victorious Babylonians. Into their hearts God put a desire to show the prophet kindness, and he was permitted by them to go wherever he would.

Zedekiah had sent often to Jeremiah to know what the Lord had to say, but although even to him counsel was given that would have saved his life, he feared to obey it. His guilty conscience made him a coward, and he dared not take the advice to go forth from the city and submit to Nebuchadnezzar. So he stayed where he was until a breach was made in the defenses of Jerusalem, and then he stole forth by night and tried to flee from the country. "And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho." (2 Kings 25:5)

Destruction of the City

Zedekiah was brought before the King of Babylon at Riblah, who passed judgment upon him for violating his oath. The last scene his eyes were permitted to gaze upon was the slaughter of his own sons, then he was blinded, bound with chains of brass, and carried a miserable captive to Babylon. Shortly after, the temple, the king's palace, and every house of prominence in Jerusalem, were burned with fire, and all the people, except the poorest classes, were removed to Babylon. Many of the principal men also were slain. (2 Kings 25:8-21)

Thus went out in darkness, for a time, the history of that nation which God had chosen to be a peculiar people to himself above all nations. God is ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy, but if the mercy be not accepted, He will by no means clear the guilty. "Jerusalem has grievously sinned; therefore she is removed: all that

honored her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness."
(Lamentations 1:8)

No Respect of Persons

The destruction of Jerusalem came because of its wickedness. Those who were grieved over these things were spared from the destruction. One instance is given us showing this. An Ethiopian eunuch, Ebed-Melech by name, when he knew that Jeremiah was put into the dungeon, and was like to die there of starvation, went in to the king and pleaded that he might be taken out. His request was granted, and Jeremiah was put in the court of the prison. After Jerusalem was taken the Lord sent a message to this man by Jeremiah, saying, "You shall not be given into the hand of the men of whom you are afraid. For I will surely deliver you, and you shall not fall by the sword, but your life shall be for a prey unto you: because you have put your trust in me, says the Lord." (Jeremiah 39:17-18)

Rejecting God

Israel rejected the Lord from being King over them when they desired Samuel to make them a king that they might be like the heathen around them. Their desire had been granted. They had kings and these had made them like the rest of the heathen. From henceforth there was to be no king until He should come whose right it is to reign over His people. The word of the Lord was sent to Zedekiah: "And you, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is

come, when iniquity shall have an end, Thus says the Lord God; Remove the diadem and take off the crown ... it shall be no more until He come whose right it is; and I will give it Him." (Ezekiel 21:25-27)

The people of God have no earthly head until Christ shall come in the glory of His kingdom. If any church professing the service of Christ has put itself under the control of a man, it has fallen into the same error that proved so disastrous to Israel of old, and like them will end in becoming like the surrounding heathen, if not worse.-- Present Truth, December 8, 1898--Notes on the International Sunday-School Lessons, December 18--Jeremiah 52:1-11

E.J. Waggoner