
a *Grace Notes* course

Old Testament History

by Alfred Edersheim

History 517

Grace Notes

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VI_12 Two Wonderful Manifestations of God's Presence with His Prophet: The Interposition on behalf of "the Sons of the Prophets" by the banks of Jordan, and that in the deliverance of Elisha at Dothan - Influence of Elisha's Ministry - The Syrians led blinded into Samaria - The Conduct of the King and of the Prophet.

2 Kings 6:1-23.

FOR a brief space the narrative turns again to the more private and personal ministry of Elisha. Or perhaps it may be more correct to say that the history which now follows is inserted in this connection, immediately after that of Gehazi, to show that as the unfaithful servant who did not realize the presence and help of Jehovah, received meet punishment, so would they who clung to the prophet in faith and with faithfulness experience the deliverance of God, and this, even in seemingly small matters, and, if need be, by extraordinary interposition. Thus the history of the miraculously restored ax would supplement and complement that of Gehazi's punishment - both teaching substantially the same lessons: only the one in their negative, the other in their positive aspect.

We have repeatedly noticed that the ministry of Elisha had its deep influence upon Israel, despite the corruption in Church and State. Perhaps one of the most pleasing evidences of this appears in the growing number of "the sons of the prophets." On a previous occasion (2 Kings 4:43) we found at Gilgal about one hundred assembled to listen to the instruction of Elisha. This would represent a large number in proportion to the small and, in parts, semi-heathen population of the northern kingdom - especially when we remember that there were similar communities at Bethel and at Jericho. It is probably among the latter that the present narrative is laid, and it shows that this community was so prosperous that their meeting-place ¹ no longer sufficed for their growing numbers.

¹ In v. 1, the proper rendering is "where we sit before thee," in the sense of sitting to receive instruction and direction; though it may well have been that simple huts were reared around for the accommodation of "the sons of the prophets" - not, however, in the monastic manner, since there were married men in these communities (comp. 2 Kings 4:1).

It was this which led to the proposal of constructing another and larger place for their use by the banks of the Jordan. From the abundance of timber in the district it would be easy to provide accommodation sufficient for their simple wants. And the manner in which their proposal was worded (ver. 2) is peculiarly and graphically Eastern. Elisha not only assented to their project, but at their request consented to accompany and remain with them while engaged in their work. It need scarcely be said that this was not asked in order that the prophet might superintend their labors, but to have in their midst the loved master, whose very presence seemed to imply the Divine blessing, and whose words of instruction would secure it. In any case the whole narrative shows, on the one hand, the simplicity and earnestness of their faith, and, on the other, the poverty and humbleness of their outward circumstances.

Evidence of both was soon to appear. As they were engaged in felling the timber the ax-head of one of the workers became suddenly detached and fell into the water. His exclamation of distress addressed to Elisha, with this significant addition, that the ax had been "asked" or "entreated for," constituted an appeal to the prophet. It is of comparatively secondary importance, whether it had been so asked as a gift, or as a loan - though the former seems to us the meaning of the word. ²

What followed had best be recorded in a rigorously literal translation of the sacred text. "And the man of God said: Where has it fallen? And he showed him the place, and he [Elisha] cut off wood [a stick, piece of a tree], and put it in there [sent it], and he caused the iron to flow" - on which, the man, as directed by the prophet, "put in ["sent," the same word as before] his hand and took it." The first, but also the most superficial, impression on reading these words is that they do not necessarily imply anything miraculous.

Accordingly, both some of the Rabbis and certain modern interpreters have argued, either that the

² Commentators are very keen in discussing this point. In any case the primary meaning of the verb is "to ask," nor do I know any passage in which the secondary meaning, "to ask in loan," can be established. It certainly does not mean "to ask in loan," in the two passages which are generally quoted, viz., Exodus 12:35, 36, and 1 Samuel 1:28.

stick which had been cut off struck right into the hole of the ax-head and so brought it up, or else that the stick thrust under the ax had rendered it possible to drag it to land. But, to speak plainly, both these suggestions involve such manifest impossibilities, as hardly to require serious discussion. It is scarcely necessary to add that every such explanation is opposed equally to the wording and the spirit of the sacred text, which assuredly would not have recorded among the marvelous doings of the heaven-sent prophet a device, which, if it had been possible, could have been accomplished by any clever-handed person. There cannot be any doubt in the mind of every impartial man that Scripture here intends to record a notable miracle. On the other hand, there is nothing in the sacred text which obliges us to believe that the iron "did swim." In fact, the Hebrew word is never used in that sense.³ The impression left on our minds is that the iron which had sunk to the bottom was set in motion, made to float, probably, by some sudden rush of water. Beyond this we cannot go in our attempts to explain the manner in which this miraculous result may have been brought about.

But in another direction we can go much further. We recall what has previously been stated about the extraordinary character of the mission of Elijah and of Elisha, which accounts for a series of miracles in their history, unparalleled in the Old Testament, and, indeed, quite exceptional, being connected with what may be described as the decisive crisis in the religious history of the kingdom of Israel. If there was to be direct Divine interposition in order to recall Israel to their allegiance to Jehovah, it is evident that the religious state of the people, ripening for a judgment which history has shown to be irrevocable, would render necessary means that were extraordinary, even in the miraculous history of the Old Testament. And if the mission of the prophets was in itself an extraordinary means, chiefly necessitated by the condition of the people, these means now required to be intensified. Accordingly Elijah and Elisha were to be prophets

³ Besides this passage, it only occurs in Deuteronomy 11:4, and Lamentations 3:54.

of the prophets - if we may use the expression - in order that this great truth, which alone could have saved the people, might be presented in a concrete and most vivid manner; that Jehovah was the living and the true God, ever-present with His own, whether for blessing or in judgment. And this must be always kept in view when studying this history. Nay, is it not the great truth which should always be present to our minds, alike as the outcome of all history, the lesson of our experience, and the guide in our acting?⁴

From this point of view much additional light is thrown on this particular event. Elisha, summoned to be among these poor, simple-hearted workers for God, could not have been deaf to their appeal, nor appeared helpless in presence of their felt need, however humble. Its very humbleness was only an additional reason for the Divine help. It would have been a contradiction in this special history, nay, in the history of Elisha generally, who seemed to embody the eternal presence of the living God among them. And as the man received back the lost ax-head - really to him a new ax-head, now to be used with a new ax-handle, it would teach him many lessons, not the least of them the constant care and provision of the God Whose messenger and representative the prophet was, and which extended as far as our need, however small and humble it might be.

Of this very truth, both Israel, as a nation, and their enemies, were presently to receive evidence, and that on a much larger scale. And this explains the next recorded event, without requiring us to regard it as having followed in strict chronological order on that just commented upon. The sacred text informs us that "the king of Syria was warring against Israel" - indicating rather a state of chronic warfare and marauding expeditions, such as are common in the East, than a regular campaign. In his consultation with his "servants" what place to occupy, there seems to have been a scheme to lay an ambush for the capture of the king of Israel,

⁴ It is curious, and probably in part due to the rationalizing tendency of Josephus, that, while professing to give a particular account of the "illustrious acts" of Elisha (Ant. 9:4, 1), he studiously omits all notice of the events recorded in 2 Kings 4:8 to 6:7, although there may be some reference to the healing of Naaman in Ant. 3:2, 4.

whether, as Josephus suggests (Ant. 9:4, 3), when Joram was on a hunting expedition, or else when he passed from one palace to another. But each time the prophet sent timely warning, and the king was wise enough to avoid the locality indicated, and, instead of passing that way, to send and obtain confirmation of what had been foretold him. As this happened repeatedly, the king of Syria suspected a traitor among his counselors, probably the more readily, that information of the king of Israel's projected movements must in every case have come to the Syrians from some confederate at the Israelitish court.

This explains how one of the servants of Ben-hadad - probably, one of those by whom these secret communications were carried on - could so readily point out that the information was conveyed by Elisha, whose prophetic knowledge compassed the inmost secrets of Syria's council-chamber.⁵

It also explains how the residence of Elisha could be so readily ascertained, and an expedition planned and hastily carried out with the view of making him a prisoner. We have no difficulty in identifying the Dothan which was now the temporary residence of Elisha, and the object of Ben-Hades' attack. The spot still bears the old designation of Tell (hill) Dothan. The "twin wells" which gave it that name, are north and east of it. The place itself - about twelve miles north of Samaria, and a little to the south-west of Engannim - stands on a green hill, or enclosed upland basin, overlooking (to the north) one of the richest pasture-lands, the oblong plain of Dothan.

Here Joseph's brethren could find sufficient sustenance for their flocks when they had exhausted for a time the wider plain of Shechem (Genesis 37:17). Just below it, to the south, is the great caravan-route from Gilead to Sharon, and thence to Egypt, where those Midianites passed to whom Joseph was sold by his brethren. Dothan is surrounded by an amphitheater of hills; but northwards it looks out over the plain towards those defiles through which the Syrian host advanced that was to capture Elisha.

⁵ There is absolutely no reason for supposing that this servant was Naaman; but much to the contrary.

So far from being surprised at the array of "horses, and chariots, and a strong power,"⁶ which Ben-hadad dispatched on this expedition, we feel that it is thoroughly in accordance with the heathen notions of power.

In the course of this narrative we have repeatedly met instances of this, and even the proposal to send fifty strong men for the rescue of Elijah (2 Kings 2:16) may be regarded as representing the influence of similar ideas in Israel. Besides, it might have been that the people would rise in defense of their prophet. Elisha knew all these preparations on the part of Ben-hadad; knew also, that during the night the city had been surrounded by the Syrians, so that, to the eye of man, there seemed no way of escape. But he rested quietly, for he also knew that "He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps." Nay, does it not seem as if the language of Psalms 121 quite specially described his experience, and as if he had been looking up to those "mountains" from whence his help was to come? And is it not often so in the experience of God's people, as if the wording of the Psalms were almost literally portraying alike what they feel and hope, and what happens to them?

It was early morning, and the servant of the prophet - not Gehazi now, but perhaps one of "the sons of the prophets" - went forth, it may be to make preparation for the return of his master⁷ from Dothan to his permanent home at Samaria (2 Kings 6:32).

This would throw light on the language which Elisha afterwards held to the Syrians (2 Kings 6:19). But when Elisha's servant saw the town surrounded by the Syrian host, his heart failed

⁶ The expression is difficult. From the after-narrative it cannot mean "a great host" (see vv. 22, 23), and it is even difficult to suppose that it can refer to a large division of footmen, who would be unsuited to such an expedition. The same expression occurs in 1 Kings 10:2.

⁷ Such peculiarly early rising and forthgoing - that is, for a special purpose - seems also implied in the circumstance that apparently none of the townsmen was up to see the Syrian host. Such "early" rising is very frequently mentioned in the Old Testament as in preparation for a journey (comp. Genesis 19:2, 27; 21:14; 22:3; 28:18; 31:55; Joshua 3:1; Judges 7:3; 19:9, and in other places).

him, and he turned to his master with the despairing inquiry what they were to do. If our previous suggestion that they had intended leaving Dothan that morning be well founded, it is not necessary to suppose that the servant knew the expedition to have been especially destined against Elisha; but he would naturally feel that not only was their projected journey now impossible, but that his master and himself were in imminent danger from which there seemed no possibility of escape. What follows is both historically and symbolically of deepest importance. In answer to the prayer of Elisha the eyes of the young man were opened, and he beheld the height which overlooked Dothan - or else that on which it stood - full of horses and chariots of fire. Truly had Elisha said: "Fear not, for more they with us than they with them." It was not only the Divine answer to the Syrian challenge, and the manifestation of the Divine triumphant supremacy over the power of the enemy, but the revelation of the ever-present, watchful help of Him Whose angel "encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them" (Psalms 34:7; 55:18; 91:11). But although the vision was vouchsafed to the prophet's servant when his "eyes" were "opened" (Genesis 21:19; Numbers 22:31) - that is, a sight of objects granted him, which, in our present state, is preternatural - we regard it as none the less real. And this, though the appearance of "fire," which was the well-known symbol of the Divine manifestation (Exodus 24:17; 2 Kings 2:11; Psalms 1:3; Isaiah 29:6; Ezekiel 1:4, 27), and even the form of "chariots and horses" might be the human mode of presentation familiar to the Jewish mind (comp. also Psalms 104:3; Isaiah 66:15; Habakkuk 3:8). But we entertain no doubt of the real and constant, though by us unseen, presence of those angel-hosts, which alike the Old and the New Testament teach us to believe are the messengers of God's behests and ministering spirits to His saints. And this adds both solemnity and comfort to all our doing.

In view of this heavenly guard there could be no hesitation on the part of Elisha and his servant in carrying out what we have supposed to have been

their original intention of returning to Samaria. And so the two went down to the Syrian host.⁸

At the prayer of Elisha they were smitten, not with blindness but with blinding, so that, in the words of the Rabbis, "they saw, but they knew not."⁹ It was not, therefore, "a lawful stratagem" on his part, but literally true, when Elisha said to the Syrians who were about to make their way into Dothan: "This is not the way, and this is not the city; come after me, and I will bring you to the man whom you are seeking."

For Elisha was then on his way to his home at Samaria, nor could he who had just pointed his servant to the heavenly defense around them have been tempted to tell a lie in order to escape the threatened danger. His object was to show the Syrians that the God Whose prophet he was could not be contended with in such manner as they thought, nor His purposes frustrated. And not the Syrians only, but Israel also, would have practical proof that He was the living God when Elisha brought his blinded pursuers as his willing captives into Samaria.

It must have been a wonderful sight, alike to Syrians and Israelites, when, in answer to the prophet's prayer, the LORD once more "opened the eyes of the enemy," and they found themselves in the midst of Samaria. We can only indulge in conjecture, how, perhaps, Elisha had hurried on with the swiftest; how the watchman on the tower would have announced the approach of the strange band; how, although no marauding expedition would have been expected to make a raid upon Samaria, yet the royal troops would have mustered under the command of the king himself - and perhaps, as Josephus puts it, in his somewhat

⁸ In going down from the hill on which Dothan was built, in order to journey to Samaria, they would necessarily come into the Syrian host which surrounded the place. Our A.V. puts it as if the Syrians had come down to Elisha, which, from the position of the host, would have been simply impossible. It is true, that, in the Hebrew, the pronoun is in the singular ("to him" in the A.V.), but this only means "to it," viz. the host. Indeed, according to the A.V. there would be no mention of Elisha and his servant having left the city.

⁹ The Hebrew word used does not mean actual blindness, but blinding in the sense that one does not see the actual object, but an imaginary one. Besides the present passage it is only used in Genesis 19:11.

rationalistic account of the event, have surrounded the Syrians at the prophet's bidding; and, lastly, what terrible surprise followed when they discovered where they were. It is more important to mark how once more all acted in character. With an eagerness ¹⁰ and a spiritual dullness characteristic of him, Joram would fain have slaughtered these captives of the LORD.

And with characteristic uprightness and large-hearted generosity, the prophet almost indignantly rebuked the spurious zeal and courage of the king: "Thou shalt not smite! Them whom thou hast made captives with thy sword and thy bow thou smitest." ¹¹

It would have been unmanly to have done otherwise; Jehovah had not brought these blinded men there as His own captives to give the king of Israel an easy and a cruel triumph; nay, the whole moral purpose of this event, its very character, would have been changed, if the proposal of Joram had been carried out. And it was right royal treatment on the part of the Heavenly Conqueror's ambassador, when, at his bidding, they gave them a great meal, and then dismissed them to their master, to report how Jehovah made captives of the captors of His representative, and how He entertained and released His captives.

And what is right is also wise. We do not wonder to read that after this marauding bands of Syrians no longer made incursions into the land. But to us all there are many lessons here: not only of the unseen, but certain presence of our God and of His help; of rebuke to our groundless fears, and encouragement to go forward; but also as concerning the enemies of the people of God and our dealing with them. How often when they have surrounded Dothan, and deemed themselves certain of achieving their purpose, have they seemed blinded, and found themselves in the midst

of Samaria. How many times have arguments and measures, which were thought certain of success against the truth or the people of God, ended in quite the opposite result. And lastly, should we not learn to deal with those whom not our own power, but God, has made helpless captives, not as if they were our personal enemies, but generously, while faithfully, although in meekness, instructing those who oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth (2 Timothy 2:25)? For, as harsh or self-asserting bearing on the part of those who may defend the truth of God would tend to injure that cause, probably more than anything else, so assuredly would it be palpably and painfully incongruous. And yet - the LORD reigneth, and He will take care of His own work.

VI_13 Siege of Samaria by the Syrians - Terrible Straits and Tragedy in the City - The King sends to slay Elisha, but arrests his Messenger - Announced Deliverance, and Judgment on the Unbelieving "Lord" - The Discovery by the Four Lepers - Flight of the Syrians - Relief of Samaria - The Unbelieving trodden to Death in the Gate.

2 Kings 6:24-7:20

THE sacred narrative now resumes the record of public events in Israel, although still in close connection with the ministry of Elisha, which at this crisis appears the primal factor in the history of the northern kingdom. Remembering that it is written from the prophetic standpoint, we do not here look for a strictly chronological arrangement of events, but rather expect to find them grouped according to the one grand idea which underlies this history.

It is impossible to determine what time may have intervened between the attempts and the expedition described in the last chapter and the open warfare against Samaria, the incidents of which we are about to relate. According to Josephus (Ant. 9:4, 4), it followed immediately - the narrative of those who had returned from Samaria having convinced Ben-hadad that any secret attempts upon the king of Israel were hopeless, and determined him to resort to open

¹⁰ This appears even from the repetition: "Shall I smite? Shall I smite?" and the very addition, "My father," is instructive in the circumstances.

¹¹ For linguistic reasons interpreters have generally translated: "Dost thou smite," etc. in the sense, that Joram did not even kill his lawful captives, how much less these! But this would give a very inapt and unlikely meaning. Our view of the text is that taken in Josephus' account of the event.

warfare, for which he deemed his army sufficient.
¹²

However that may be, he was soon to experience how vain were all such attempts when God was in defense of His people. And here the question naturally arises why such Divine interpositions should have been made on behalf of Israel. The answer is not difficult, and it will throw light upon the course of this history. Evidently, it was a period of comparative indecision, before the final attitude of the nation towards Jehovah was taken, and with it the ultimate fate of Israel decided. Active hostility to the prophet as God's representative and to the worship of Jehovah had ceased, and there were even tokens for good and of seeming return to the LORD. But, as events soon showed, there was not any real repentance, and what to a superficial observer might seem the beginning of a calm was only a lull before the storm. This interval of indecision, or token of pending decision, must be taken into account. The presence of the prophet in Israel meant the final call of God to Israel, and the possibility of national repentance and forgiveness. Every special interposition, such as those we have described, was an emphatic attestation of Elisha's mission, and hence of his message; and every deliverance indicated how truly and easily God could help and deliver His people, if only that were in them towards which the presence of the prophet pointed. And the more minute and apparently unimportant the occasions for such interposition and deliverance were, the more strikingly would all this appear. It is with such thoughts in our minds that we must study the history of the siege and miraculous relief of Samaria.

Ben-hadad was once more laying siege to Samaria (comp. 1 Kings 20). And to such straits was the city reduced that not only levitically unclean but the most repulsive kind of meat fetched a price which in ordinary times would have been extravagant for the most abundant supply of daintiest food, while the coarsest material for

¹² This, however, would scarcely seem to us the likely outcome of the events just recorded. We would rather suggest that some time must have elapsed during which the impression made by the miraculous help to Israel had gradually passed away.

cooking it sold at a proportionally high rate. It must have been from want of provender for them that such beasts of burden as asses, so common and useful in the East, were killed. Even their number must have been terribly diminished (Comp. 2 Kings 7:13) when an ass's head would sell for eighty pieces of silver (variously computed at from 5 pounds to 8 pounds), and a "cab" ¹³ of doves' dung" ¹⁴ - used when dried as material for firing - for five pieces of silver (computed at from 6/ to 10/ ¹⁵).

If such were the straits to which the wealthier were reduced, we can imagine the sufferings of the poor. But only the evidence of those who themselves were actors in it could have made any one believe in the possibility of such a tragedy as that to the tale of which King Joram was to listen. While making the round of the broad city wall (the glacis), probably to encourage as well as to inspect the defenders of the city, and to observe the movements of the enemy, he was arrested by the cry for help of a frenzied woman. Probably too much accustomed to the state of famine and misery, the king uttered an ejaculation, indicative not only of the general distress prevailing in the city, but of his own state of mind. His words seem to imply that he felt Jehovah alone could give help, ¹⁶ perhaps that he had some dim expectation

¹³ "A cab," the sixth part of a seah, and computed by the Rabbis as of the capacity of twenty-four eggs.

¹⁴ This seems the undoubted meaning of the term, although some writers have regarded it as the designation for some kind of vegetable or coarse peas (comp. Bochart, Hierozoicon, II., pp. 45, 46). Some of the Rabbis also regard the "doves' dung" as used for firing, since the city was so shut in that wood could not be got.

¹⁵ Classical writers record similar straits. Thus, Plutarch tells that in a famine an ass's head was sold for sixty drachms, while at ordinary times an ass was sold at from twenty-five to thirty drachms, and Pliny that at the siege of Casalimum by Hannibal, a mouse was sold for 200 denars. A tale of even sorer distress comes to us from the last siege of Jerusalem, when the excrements of men and animals were searched for and eaten (Jos. War, 5. 13, 7).

¹⁶ It is scarcely necessary to say that we regard the rendering: "If Jehovah do not help thee, whence shall I help thee?" as correctly giving the meaning of the original. To regard the words as an imprecation, is evidently incongruous, although Josephus takes that view of them. A similar remark applies to other interpretations of the words.

of it, but that the LORD withheld from sending it for some reason for which neither king nor people were to blame.

As we view it in the light of his after-conduct (comp. vv. 31-33), King Joram connected the straits of Samaria with the prophet Elisha, - either they were due to his direct agency, or else to his failure to make intercession for Israel. Such ignorance of the spiritual aspect of God's dealings, even when they are recognized, together with an unhumbled state of heart, unwillingness to return to God, and the ascription of the evils befalling us to the opposite of their true cause, are only too common in that sorrow which Holy Scripture characterizes as "of the world," and working "death."

The horrible story which the woman told to the king was that she and another had made the agreement that each of them was successively to kill her son for a meal in which they two were to share; that the one had fulfilled her part of the bargain, but that, after partaking of the dreadful feast, the other had hidden her son. Whether or not the feelings of motherhood had thus tardily asserted themselves in the second mother, or whether, in the avarice of her hunger, she wished to reserve for herself alone the unnatural meal, matters not for our present purpose. But we recall that such horrors had been in warning foretold in connection with Israel's apostasy (Leviticus 26:29; Deuteronomy 28:53); that they seem to have been enacted during the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (Lamentations 4:10); and lastly, that we have historical evidence of their occurrence during the last siege of Jerusalem by Titus (Jos. War, 6., 3, 4). Even if it had not reminded the king of the predicted Divine curse, such a tale could not have fallen on his ear, especially in existing circumstances, without exciting the deepest and strongest feelings. The story itself was sufficiently harrowing; but that a mother should, even in the madness of self-reproach, make public appeal to the king, that her neighbor should be kept to her part of the compact, revealed a state of matters and of public feeling which called for that universal mourning which the king, as head of the state, inaugurated, when almost instinctively "he rent his clothes." And so,

too often, they that will not mourn for sin have to mourn for its consequences.

But as the people watched their king as, with rent clothes, he passed on his way, they took notice that he wore other token of mourning - that "he had sackcloth within upon his flesh." And yet, strange as it may seem, there is not any inconsistency between this and what immediately follows in the sacred narrative. There is no reason to doubt his outward penitence, of which this was the token - perhaps, alas, the main part. Nor do we require to suppose, as has been suggested, either that he had put on sackcloth in obedience to a general command of Elisha, or else that his anger against the prophet was due to the advice of the latter that Samaria should hold out in expectation of Divine deliverance, and that he (the king) had put on sackcloth in the belief that thereby he would secure the promised help. For similar conduct may still be witnessed as regards its spirit, although the outward form of it may be different. A man experiences the bitter consequences of his sinful ways, and he makes sincere, though only outward, repentance of them. But the evils consequent upon his past do not cease; perhaps, on the contrary, almost seem to increase, and he turns not within himself, for humiliation, but without, to what he supposes to be the causes of his misfortunes, perhaps often those very things which are intended ultimately to bring spiritual blessing to him. The sudden outburst of the king's anger against Elisha indicates that he somehow connected the present misery of Samaria with the prophet; and the similarity of his rash vow of Elisha's death with that of his mother Jezebel in regard to Elijah (1 Kings 19:2) would lead to the inference that Joram imagined there was a kind of hereditary quarrel between the prophets and his house. This, although he had but lately experienced personal deliverances through Elisha (2 Kings 6:9, 10). Perhaps, indeed, we may hazard the suggestion that one of the reasons for them may have been to show that the controversy was not with the members of the house of Ahab as such, but with them as alike the cause and the representatives of Israel's apostasy.

But the king's mood was fitful. The command to slay Elisha was immediately succeeded by another

resolve, whether springing from fear or from better motives. He hastily followed the messenger whom he had sent, in order to arrest the execution of the sentence on which he had gone. Meanwhile the prophet himself had been in his house with the elders of the city - we can scarcely doubt, making very different application of the state of matters in Samaria than the king had done. We do not wonder that all that was happening should have been Divinely communicated to Elisha, nor yet that he should have described in such language the purposed judicial murder by Joram as characteristic of the son of Ahab and Jezebel. Plain and fearless as the words were, they would also remind the elders of the pending judgment against the house of Ahab. By direction of the prophet they who were with him now prevented the entrance of the king's messenger, who was so soon to be followed by the monarch himself. The words (ver. 33): "And he said, Behold this the evil is from Jehovah, why should I wait [hope] any longer?" were spoken by the king as he entered the presence of Elisha. They are characteristic of his state of mind. It was perhaps for this reason that the prophet apparently gave no heed of any kind to them. They only served to bring into more startling contrast the abrupt announcement which the prophet was commissioned to make. Alike in itself and in the circumstances of the city, it seemed to imply not only a miracle but an absolute impossibility. Yet the message was not only definite but solemnly introduced as "the word of Jehovah." It was to this effect, that about that time on the morrow, a seah (about a peck and a half of fine flour would be sold in the gate of Samaria, where the public market was held, for a shekel (about 2s. 7d.), and two seahs (about three pecks) of barley for the same price.

Such abundance as this would imply could not have been expected even in the most fruitful seasons. The words must have come with such surprise upon all, that only absolute faith in the prophet, or rather in the presence of Jehovah with him, could have secured credence for them. And is it not always so, whenever any real need of ours is brought face to face with a promise of God, - and are we not always tempted, in the weakness of our faith, either to minimize and rationalize God's promises, or else not to realize nor lay hold on

them? Thus every promise is a twofold test: of His faithfulness - although only if we believe; and of our faith. And in that assembly there was at least one who did not hesitate to speak out his disbelief, even though the announcement had been solemnly made in the name of Jehovah, by one who had previously often earned a claim to credence, however incredible his predictions might have seemed. But this is the very test of faith - that the past never seems to afford a quite sufficient basis for it, but that it must always stretch beyond our former experience, just because it is always a present act, the outcome of a present life. And apart from the sneer which it conveyed, there was certainly reason in the retort of the adjutant,¹⁷ on whose hand the king leaned: (Comp. 2 Kings 5:18) "If Jehovah made windows in heaven, would this thing be?"¹⁸ But it needed not the direct sending of corn through windows made in the heavens. To the lessons of God's faithfulness to His promise there was now to be added, as counterpart, another of His faithfulness as regarded the threatened judgments upon unbelief. The officer who had disbelieved the announcement should see but not share in the good of its fulfillment.

As we transport ourselves into the circumstances, it must have been impossible to imagine any fulfillment of the prediction without the most direct Divine interposition. And yet it was only because they were ignorant of what would evolve that any miracle, in the sense in which we use that expression, seemed necessary. As they were so soon to learn, and as we understand it, all happened in the orderly and reasonable succession of events. But the miracle lies in the Divinely arranged concurrence of natural events, with a definite view to a Divine and pre-arranged purpose. And so - if we would only learn it - miracles are such, because we view God's doings from earth, and in the light of the present and the seen; miracles are the sudden manifestation of the ever-present rule of God; and, if we had but eyes

¹⁷ No really satisfactory explanation of the Hebrew term has been given. But the rendering, "adjutant," gives at least the true, even if it should not be the literal, meaning.

¹⁸ Other renderings have also been proposed, but it seems to me that this most truly gives the meaning of the original.

to see and ears to hear, we are still and ever surrounded by miracles.

The means employed in the promised deliverance were as unexpected and strange as the deliverance itself. There were four lepers who, according to the law (Leviticus 13:46; Numbers 5:2), were kept outside the city, at the entrance to the gate.

In the straits to which Samaria was reduced, they could no longer expect even the scantiest provision which charity within the city might supply, or careful search without its walls might discover. In the alternative of certain starvation if they remained where they were, or possible death if they fell into the hands of the Syrians, they naturally chose the latter. As the twilight deepened into gloom, they started to carry out their purpose. As we understand it, they made a long circuit to approach the Syrian camp at its "uttermost part,"¹⁹ that is, the part furthest from Samaria.

This would naturally be their best policy, as they would neither be observed from the city, nor by those in the camp of the enemy, who, as nearest to Samaria, might be expected to be most on the watch, while at the same time it might enable the lepers to present themselves as if they were not connected with the beleaguered. And this also allows sufficient time for the flight of the Syrians having taken place without being observed by the lepers, who probably had made a wide detour around the hills. For while they crept about the camp there was a strange movement within it. It is not necessary to suppose that the "noises of chariots," "of horses," and "of a great host," which the Syrians seemed to hear in the falling darkness, depended on a supernaturally caused illusion of their senses (comp. 2 Kings 6:19, 20); nor yet that the noise itself was supernaturally caused. Such noises are said to be occasionally heard in valleys shut in by mountains, and to have been popularly regarded as portending war.

The Syrians, at any rate, thought they heard the approach of relieving armies. Tribes from the great

Hittite nation in the north, and bands, if not the armies of Egypt, had been hired against them by Joram, and were now simultaneously advancing on them from the north and the south. This would seem to explain how Samaria had held out amid such terrible straits. They had been looking for this succor all along. Terror peopled the night with the forms as well as the sounds of the dreaded host. We imagine that the panic began at the extremity of the camp. Presently they were in full flight, abandoning their horses, their asses, their tents, with all the provisions and treasures which they contained, and hastening to put Jordan between them and their imaginary pursuers.

When the four lepers reached the extremity of the Syrian camp, the fugitives were already far away. They listened, but heard not a sound of living men. Cautiously they looked into one tent, and finding it deserted, sat down to the untasted meal which lay spread, ate and drank, and then carried away, and hid what treasures they found. They entered the next tent, and found it similarly deserted. By the time they had carried away and hid its treasures also, it became quite evident to them that, for some unknown reason, the enemy had left the camp. It was, however, not so much the thought that this was a day of good tidings to Samaria, in which they must not hold their peace, as the fear that if they tarried till the morning without telling it, guilt would attach to them, that induced them hastily to communicate with the guard at the gate, who instantly reported the strange tidings. But so far from receiving the news as an indication that the prediction of Elisha was in the course of fulfillment, the king does not even seem to have remembered it. He would have treated the report as a device of the Syrians, to lure the people in the frenzy of their hunger outside the city gates. Foolish as the seeming wisdom of Joram was, there are only too many occasions in which neglect or forgetfulness of God's promise threatens to rob us of the liberty and blessing in store for us. In the present instance there were, happily, those among the king's servants who would put the matter to the test of experiment. From the few remaining troops, five horsemen and two chariots were to be dispatched to report on the real state of matters.

¹⁹ Generally the expression, "the uttermost part of the camp of Syria," is understood to refer to the part nearest the city. But this would not be the obvious meaning of the expression, and, for the reasons mentioned in the text, we have adhered to the primary sense of the words.

The rest is soon told. They found it as the lepers had informed them. Not only was the Syrian camp deserted, but all along the way to Jordan the track of the fugitives was marked by the garments and vessels which they had cast away in their haste to escape. And as the messengers came back with the tidings, the stream of people that had been pent up in the city gate poured forth. They "spoiled the tents of the Syrians." Presently there was abundance and more than that within Samaria. Once more market was held within the gate, where they sold for one shekel two sacks of barley, or else one sack of fine flour. And around those that sold and bought surged and swayed the populace. Presumably to keep order among them, the king had sent his own adjutant, the same "on whose hand" he had "leaned" when Elisha had made his prophetic announcement; the same who had sneered at its apparent impossibility. But it was in vain to seek to stem the torrent of the people. Whether accidentally or of purpose they bore down the king's adjutant, and trod him under foot in the gate. "And he died, as the man of God had said."

We mark at the close of this narrative the emphatic repetition of the circumstances connected with this event. For, assuredly, as it was intended to show the faithfulness of God in the fulfillment of His promise for good, so also that of the certain and marked punishment of unbelief. And both for the teaching of Israel, and, let us add, for that of all men, and in all ages.

VI_14 - CLOSE OF ELISHA'S PUBLIC MINISTRY: THE BEGINNING OF JUDGMENT
The Shunammite on her Return from Philistia restored to her Property - Elisha's Visit to Damascus - The Embassy of Hazael - Prediction of Future Judgment - The Murder of Ben-hadad and accession of Hazael.

2 Kings 8:1-15

THE two narratives which follow that of the siege of Samaria may be characterized as in some sense supplementary to it. On the one hand, they mark the relations between Elisha and Joram; and on the other, those between the prophet and Syria. They also close what seems the more personal account of Elisha's activity. After that we have only an account of his death and burial (chap. 13.), drawn,

as we suppose, from the same "memoirs" to which the whole of this series is due; the reference to Elisha's activity in the anointing of Jehu (chap. 9.) forming part of the more general history.

Accordingly we again remind ourselves that what is about to be described must not be regarded as following in strict chronological succession what had preceded, but rather as in internal connection with it.

The first narrative introduces once more the Shunammite and her heaven-given, heaven restored son, although in circumstances far different from those in which we first knew them. Indirectly we learn and mark that the relations between the prophet and the family of Shunem had not ceased with the restoration of the child to life, although Holy Scripture has not preserved any record of such intercourse. And this also is instructive as regards Bible history. Further, we mark the affectionate interest of Elisha, and his care for the outward well-being of this family. Among the other dealings of God with Israel we learn that He "called for a famine" - a most emphatic expression (comp. Psalms 105:16; Haggai 1:11). This dearth was to last for seven out of the twelve years of Joram's reign. Before its commencement the prophet "had spoken" to the Shunammite, warning her to betake herself to any place outside the land of Israel where she might be able to secure a temporary home; and "the woman had arisen and done after the saying of the man of God." Although we have evidence that this famine pressed severely on the people (comp. 4:38), yet the advice of the prophet must have been determined by special circumstances. From the absence of any reference to him, it is probable that the Shunammite had lost her husband, and with him her mainstay in times of trouble and difficulty.

We are told that she went to the land of the Philistines - probably as that nearest to her home, and at the same time least likely to suffer, both on account of its fertility and its easy communication with grain producing Egypt. When the predicted seven years of famine ended, the woman who, as the original expressly marks, had only gone "to sojourn as a stranger," returned to her home at Shunem. But here her faith, which had led her so

literally to obey the words of the prophet, was to receive a rude shock. "Her house," to which so many loving and sacred memories attached, and "her land" - her own and her child's property - were occupied by strangers.

We remember the proud feeling of independence with which she had on a former occasion declined Elisha's offer to speak for her to the king (2 Kings 4:13), since she dwelt among her own people. But since then, and in the troubles connected with famine and Syrian invasion, times had sadly changed. And in the circumstances it seems scarcely less indicative of the Shunammite's independence of character, that she now appealed directly to the king, not for favor, but for justice. It was surely in the good providing of God, Who ordereth all things wisely and well, that the Shunammite addressed her appeal to the king just as he was talking with Gehazi, and the latter at his request was telling all the great things that Elisha had done. But we cannot infer from this conversation that their meeting occurred before the healing of Naaman, after which Gehazi was smitten with life-long leprosy, since, although lepers were banished from the cities, all intercourse with them was not prohibited, especially under such peculiar circumstances. On the other hand, it was evidently the period when the authority of the prophet with the king was at its highest, and hence either after the capture of the Syrians in Samaria (2 Kings 6:21), or, as we think, after the fulfillment of Elisha's prediction of the relief of Samaria, and the death of the disbelieving "lord." This would best accord with the present narrative. In any case, the appearance of the woman with her son during Gehazi's conversation would not only confirm its truth, but naturally augment the interest of the king in her complaint. And so he immediately ordered not only the restoration of her property, but a return, probably from the royal treasury, of the value of the produce of the land during the previous years. But to us and to all time this history is chiefly interesting as showing how the obedience of faith will, despite trials or appearances to the contrary, be met by the faithful care of the God of promise - and still further, how God will not allow the day of His people to set in trouble, but cause the light to break forth at eventide.

The second narrative in this history shows how the name and work of Elisha were known, not only in Israel, but beyond it, even in hostile Syria. This, after what we have already learned, cannot surprise us. Although there is not any express statement to that effect, we cannot but connect the journey of Elisha "towards Damascus," with the commission formerly given to Elijah to anoint Hazael king over Syria (1 Kings 19:15).

This may help us to understand that the Word of God has a wider than the barely literal application which so often tends to perplex the superficial reader. It also shows that its fulfillment may be delayed, and when made, come in other manner than was expected; and, lastly, that the prophets may for many years have borne about the painful secret of some trouble to come - forbearing to take any part till the moment for action, or rather for their obedience, was indicated to them from above.

It was, surely, not an accidental circumstance that when Elisha arrived in Syria Ben-hadad was on that sick-bed from which his treacherous servant intended he should never rise. For the prophet was not to come until all was ready and prepared for the deed by which Hazael would ascend the throne of Syria, that while in its sequences necessarily connected with the judgments foretold upon Israel, yet no part of the incentive to the crime could be imputed to the agency of the Divine messenger. Evidently, if Hazael had not intended to murder his master, and to pretend that he had died of his disease, the words of Elisha would have had no meaning, nor could they have suggested to him his crime.

On hearing of the near approach of the great prophet of Israel, Ben-hadad charged Hazael, probably his vizier or chief general, to meet Elisha, and inquire through him of Jehovah, whether he would recover from his sickness. After the manner of the time, Hazael went to meet the prophet with a present. We are not to understand that those forty camels which bore "of every good thing of Damascus," were literally fully laden. This magnifying of a present by distributing and laying it on a great many bearers or beasts of burden, is characteristic of the East, and is not uncommonly witnessed in our own days. Hazael delivered his master's message with unblushing

hypocrisy. But Elisha had read his purpose, and replied in language which, while it unmasked, could never have suggested his murderous scheme: "Go, say to him, [viz. as thou intendest to do] Thou shalt surely live; howbeit Jehovah has shown me that he shall surely die." And as we recall the hypocritical words by which Hazael had tried to disguise his purpose and deceive the prophet, we feel that this was the most fitting answer to his pretended humility and care.

Yet this was only the beginning of what Elisha had to say to Hazael. "And he [Elisha] steadied his face, and set it till he [Hazael] was ashamed," when reading not only his inmost thoughts, but his future history also, the prophet burst into weeping. When Hazael inquired as to the reason of his tears, Elisha told the terrible cruelties which he knew the Syrian would perpetrate upon Israel. The mock humility of Hazael's answer: "But what is thy servant, the dog, that he should do this great thing?" reveals at least the spirit in which he contemplated such deeds against Israel. If Hazael had still thought to deceive Elisha, the announcement that God had shown to his prophet Hazael as king of Syria, must have convinced him that disguise was useless. Little more requires to be told. Hazael returned to his master, and gave him the lying assurance of recovery, as Elisha had foretold. Then as in his sore sickness Ben-hadad lay prostrate and helpless, Hazael laid upon his face a coverlet which had been soaked and made heavy with water. And so Ben-hadad died, and his murderer, whose crime remained probably unknown, ascended the throne.

The accession of Hazael was only part of the burden of judgment upon Israel which had been announced to Elijah. The other part was the usurpation of the throne of Israel by Jehu. With this twofold accession began the decay of the northern kingdom of Israel. Presently we shall read (10:32). "In those days Jehovah began to cut Israel short; and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel," - a smiting which included the loss of the entire territory east of the Jordan. And we believe that it was to declare, perhaps to warn of, this judgment upon Israel, that Elisha was sent to Damascus, and made to have this interview with Hazael.

For Divine judgment cannot be arrested, though it may be deferred, and what Israel had sown when on the morrow of the decisive contest on Carmel it cast out Elijah, that would it reap, when, notwithstanding all mercies shown, the son of Ahab and Jezebel could order, though he dared not carry out, the execution of Elisha. They would have none of His prophets, however clearly their mission was attested of God; nay, rather, they would have none of that God Whose prophets Elijah and Elisha had been. And yet in faithfulness God would reveal the coming judgment to His servants, and through them to Israel.

But quite a peculiar feeling comes over us in these far-off islands of the West, when now, thousands of years after these events, we stand before the black obelisk on which this part of the history of ancient Assyria is recorded, and there read the names of Ben-hadad and of Hazael of Damascus - the former in connection with "Ahab of Jezreel," who was at one time his ally against Assyria; the latter, as humbly offering rich tribute to the king of Assyria, as also does Jehu, who is styled "the son of Omri" (the founder of the dynasty succeeding that of Omri). And here these histories commingle, and the records of the one will be found to throw welcome light upon those of the other.

VI_15 - JEHOAM AND AHAZIAH, (FIFTH AND SIXTH) KINGS OF JUDAH JORAM, (TENTH) KING OF ISRAEL Accession of Jehoram - Murder of the Royal Princes - Introduction of the service of Baal in Judah - Revolt of Edom - And of Libnah - The Writing from Elijah - Incursion of the Philistines and Arabs - Death of Jehoram - State of Public Feeling.

2 Kings 8:16-24; 2 Chronicles 21

THE tangled skein of Judaeen and Israelitish history is now once more taken up. It is a period of fast-hastening judgment, luridly lit up by the horrors attending Jehoram's accession to the throne of Israel, though retarded in Judah by the mercy of God towards the house of David, and the temporary repentance and return to Jehovah in the land.

The account in 2 Kings 8:16 introduces almost abruptly the accession of Jehoram to the throne of Judah, after the death of his father Jehoshaphat. It

was probably for this reason, and because of the long gap between this and the previous historical notice about Judah (1 Kings 22:51), that the somewhat difficult explanatory clause (supposing it to be genuine) may have been inserted in 2 Kings 8:16: "And Jehoshaphat had been king of Judah." In 2 Kings 8 (vers. 16-24) the history of Judah and of the reign of Jehoram is given only in briefest outline. For details we must, as in other cases, turn to the Book of Chronicles (2 Chronicles 21.), whose narrative we now follow.

The historical notices with which the reign of Jehoram is introduced are almost identical in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. Both state that Jehoram was thirty-two years old at his accession, and that his reign lasted eight years. The Book of Chronicles connects, as usually, this accession with the death and burial at Jerusalem of the former king, while the Book of Kings marks that Jehoram ascended the throne of Judah "in the fifth year of Joram, the son of Ahab, king of Israel." And since the reign of the latter extended over twelve years²⁰ (comp. 2 Kings 8:25), their rule must for seven years have been contemporaneous - that is, to within one year of the death of Joram of Israel.

Even more important is the notice given in the same words in the two narratives - quite prominently in the Book of Kings - to the effect that Jehoram "walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab: for the daughter of Ahab [Athaliah] was his wife: and he did the evil in the sight of Jehovah" (comp. 2 Chronicles 21:6). That notice explains alike the history of the reign of Jehoram and the hastening ruin of Judah. Nor can it have been without evil influence even upon Joram and Israel.

The fatal combination of political devices with earnest religion, which constituted the weakness of Jehoshaphat's reign, and led to his alliance with the house of Ahab, appeared also in his disposition regarding his children. Besides Jehoram, who as

the eldest succeeded to the throne, he had left six sons.²¹

For these he had - apparently during his lifetime - made not only ample provision in treasure, but assigned to them certain "fenced cities in Judah." This was to imitate the policy of Rehoboam (11:23), and, no doubt, with the same purpose of securing, in troublous times, the allegiance of the country districts and of their aristocracy, by assigning these "fenced cities" as residences to the royal princes. But in the present instance the device proved fatal to them. Jehoram had nothing to fear from his brother-in-law Joram - as Rehoboam had from Jeroboam.

But the semi-royal position of his brothers, supported - as it would almost seem - by intrigues of the chiefs of the local aristocracy, roused his fears. With the same unscrupulousness that characterized the house of Ahab and Jezebel, he rid himself of any possible rivals by the murder of all his brothers, and of their adherents among "the princes." And throughout, Jehoram's reign was in accordance with its beginning. Following closely in the steps of the house of Ahab, he not only abolished all the pious ordinances and arrangements of his father, but actually rebuilt "the high places," which his grandfather Asa (17:3), and his father Jehoshaphat (17:6), had destroyed, and introduced the worship of Baal with all its abominations.

We cannot be mistaken in attributing a large share in these evil doings to Athaliah, although her name is not expressly mentioned. For, besides the repeated reference to the house of Ahab, we have the statement that his "brethren" of his "father's house were better" than Jehoram, which seems to imply that his special circumstances had made him different from the other members of Jehoshaphat's family, and also this - in our view, very

²⁰ But in all these notices the well-known rule must always be kept in mind that as regards the reigns of kings the year was counted from the month Nisan to Nisan. Thus a reign of two years might really represent only one of fourteen months.

²¹ We must here call attention to the remarkable use of the term "Israel," not Judah, as applied to the southern kingdom, 2 Chronicles 21:2, and also ver. 4. The same expression occurs in 2 Chronicles 12:1, 6; again in 15:17, and in 28:19, 27. In all these passages the name seems used with some reference to the law of God - as that which gave to Israel its name, and made it the people of Israel. It is almost an anticipation of the New Testament use of that name.

significantly - that there came to him a writing from Elijah the prophet.

For, as there is not any other reference to Elijah throughout the Books of Chronicles, we infer that his activity had been confined to the northern kingdom, and that this solitary prophecy in regard to the kingdom of Judah must have been due to the connection of Jehoram with the house of Ahab, - or, to be more particular, to his marriage with Athaliah and her influence upon him. And we would date the composition of this "writing," or it may be its commission, shortly after that ill-fated union.²²

For it seems of quite secondary importance whether Elijah himself wrote this letter, with direction to have it delivered at the proper time to the husband of Athaliah, or else commissioned one of his disciples to write it in his name, when the circumstances of the case indicated it. And as regards this latter view, we remember that the direction to Elijah to anoint Hazael king of Syria, was executed six or seven years after the death of Ahab, that to anoint Jehu fourteen years after Ahab: in both cases, therefore, many years after the commission had been given (1 Kings 19:15, 16); in both cases also, not by Elijah himself, nor yet with precisely literal fulfillment of the commission given.

The "writing from Elijah" announced, for the public and personal sins of Jehoram, public and personal judgments. But even before that warning came from the dead prophet, with all the solemnity of a message straight from heaven, the judgment upon Judah had begun. Indeed, as the sacred writer

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It is needless to discuss at length the various views propounded in regard to this writing from Elijah the prophet. There cannot be any reasonable doubt that Elijah the Tishbite is meant by that designation. Nor yet can we believe that his life extended beyond the marriage of Jehoram with Athaliah. The history as hitherto traced seems incompatible with any other view of the chronology. This idea that this letter came from heaven deserves as little serious consideration as the opposite notion of its spurious insertion from some other document by a later writer, who thought Elijah must also have been connected with the affairs of the southern kingdom of Judah. But in that case we would have expected more frequent and prominent introduction of Elijah, and the solitariness of the mention of his name is evidence of the genuineness of the notice.

remarks,²³ it would have extended to the destruction of the whole family of Jehoram - and with it of the commonwealth of Israel - but for the gracious promise to David of the continuance of his house till his rule should merge in that of "David's greater Son"²⁴ (2 Samuel 7:12, 13; 1 Kings 11:36).

Still most serious calamities befell the country, both in the east and in the west. In the south-east, Edom had for one hundred and fifty years been subject to Judah. It now rebelled. Josephus reports that the governor, whom Jehoshaphat had appointed, was murdered; while, from the prophecies of Joel (3:19), we infer that the rebellion was attended by a massacre of the Judæan settlers in Edom. From the account of the expedition against Edom - given with only slight variations in the Books of Kings and Chronicles - we learn that Jehoram started from Jerusalem with the host, and notably war-chariots;²⁵ that he was surrounded by the Edomites, but that he and the captains of his chariots - representing the standing army - fought their way through the Edomites, while the people - that is, the probably undisciplined multitude that had followed Jehoram, fled to their homes.

Thus ended the brief campaign, with the permanent loss of Edom, which, except temporarily and for a short period (comp. 2 Kings 14:7, 22), did not again become subject to Judæa, till its subdual under the Maccabean prince Hyrcan, about a century before Christ. It

²³

This is the more noteworthy, and the more clearly points to the expected Messianic fulfillment of the promise, that at the time when the Book of Chronicles appeared no scion of the house of David occupied the throne, nor was there any human prospect of the restoration of that rule.

²⁴

The expression "to give a light" is sufficiently explained by the passages quoted. In 2 Kings 8:19 the words are: "as He [the LORD] promised him to give him [David] a light as regards his sons always [all the days]." In 2 Chronicles 21:7 the words, "and to his sons" must be paraphrased in the same sense, "and that to his sons."

²⁵

In 2 Kings 8:21 we read that "Joram went over to Zair." This is probably a copyist's error for "Seir" (hry[ix; for, hry[ic e), and similarly the strange expression in that connection in 2 Chronicles 21:9: "with his princes" (wyr;c;), may originally depend on a similar misreading and an attempt at a gloss.

afterwards returned to Palestine the terrible gift of a Herod.

Nor was Edom the only loss which the southern kingdom sustained. In the west, not far from the borders of Philistia, Libnah, the ancient Canaanitish royal, and afterwards a priest city, revolted (comp. Joshua 15:42; 12:15; 21:13).

Its site has not been localized with certainty, though it has, with some probability, been suggested that it is represented by the modern Tell-es- Safieh, somewhat to the south-east of Ascalon, and on the edge of the great Philistine plain. The hill on which the site stands was known in crusading times as "bright hill" (*collis clarus*), and the fort built upon it as "white garde" (*Blanche Garde*, *alba specula* or *alba custodia*). The name not only corresponds to the ancient Libnah, "whiteness," "sheen," but to the description of the place, as in its white sheen visible in all directions. If Libnah was at the time inhabited by priests, it may have been that Diehard's apostasy from the faith led to its revolt from his rule. This may have been prompted by the success of the rising in Edom, and the movement itself have been encouraged by the Philistines.

This view is supported by the account in the Book of Chronicles, that the Philistines, aided by certain Arab tribes from the neighborhood of Ethiopia - probably hired for the purpose - made an incursion into Judaea, and literally "clave it." We know sufficient of the fierceness of these Arabs "by the side of the Cushites," when their spirit is roused, to understand that Judah, divided and enfeebled, and under the rule of a Jehoram, could not withstand their onset. The invading host seems to have taken, if not Jerusalem²⁶ itself, yet the place where the king and his household were; and they carried away with them what of the royal property they found, as well as the wives and sons of Jehoram, and indeed killed all the latter except the youngest, Jehoahaz, who, from some reason unknown, escaped death.

²⁶ It is generally supposed that Jerusalem was taken. But of this there is no mention in the text, and the non-mention of the plunder of the Temple as well as the reference to "the camp" in 2 Chronicles 22:1 seems inconsistent with it.

This was the beginning of that "great stroke" with which, as foretold in the writing from Elijah, Jehovah would smite Jehoram in his people, his children, his wives, and all his substance. For even this more public calamity had a personal character, since, as we read, "Jehovah stirred up against Jehoram the spirit" of these enemies; and very markedly their plunder was confined to the royal property. And when the second part of the threatened judgment befell the king, and that incurable internal disease²⁷ attacked him of which he ultimately died, it seems difficult to understand how those who witnessed all this, and still more, they who succeeded him, could have maintained the same attitude as he towards Jehovah.

We can only account for it by the rooted belief that Jehovah was only a national deity, who was angry with those who forsook His service; but that the new deity, Baal, who had proved so mighty a god to the surrounding nations, would by and by take them under his protection. And as between the stern demands and the purity of the service of Jehovah, Who claimed of royalty absolute submission and simple stewardship and Who elevated all His people into a royal priesthood, and the voluptuous luxuriousness of the worship of Baal, who placed king and people in so very different a relationship to each other and to himself, rulers of the character of Jehoram or Ahaziah would not hesitate in their choice.²⁸

We have evidence that the ungodly rule of Jehoram was not popular in Judah. "He departed without being desired" by his people, nor did they make any burning of precious spices at his funeral, such as was customary at the obsequies of kings (comp. 2 Chronicles 16:14; Jeremiah 34:5). And

²⁷ As regards the special disease of which Jehoram died, the curious reader may consult Trusen, Sitten, Gebr., u. Krankh. d. allen Hebr. pp. 212, 213, where the author notes a similar case in his experience from the indiscriminate use of a well-known English quack-medicine.

²⁸ We mark, as significant synchronisms with the reign of Jehoram, the building of Carthage, and that the throne of Tyre was occupied by the brother of Dido, Pygmalion: *scelere ante alios immanior omnes*. What a conjunction in Tyre, Israel, and Judah; and what light it casts upon what some persons call the exclusiveness of the Old Testament ordinances!

although "they buried him in the city of David," yet "not in the sepulchers of the kings." If these notices seem to indicate a hostile popular feeling, the same inference comes to us from the unusual statement that "the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah, his youngest son, king in his stead" (2 Chronicles 22:1).

It would probably be too much to conclude that there was opposition to the accession of one who must have been known to be like-minded with his father on the part of the Levite and Priest party, although the revolt of the priest city Libnah and the later activity of the high priest Jehoiada and of the Levites on behalf of Joash (22:11; 23) seem to point in that direction. But we cannot be mistaken in concluding that Ahaziah was placed on the throne by a faction in Jerusalem favorable to the new order of things. And it needs no elaborate argument to convince us that, alike religiously and politically, a regime must have been profoundly unpopular which had reversed the whole former order of things, was associated with the permanent loss of Edom, the defection of so important a center as Libnah, and the victorious incursions of Philistines and Arab bands. To these outward calamities must be added the paramount sway of a woman, such as the daughter of Ahab, and the remodeling of Judah after the pattern of Israel, which even mere patriots must have felt to be a most humiliating abdication of supremacy in favor of the northern kingdom. And in the history of the brief reign of Ahaziah, as well as in the later rising which resulted in the death of Athaliah, the existence of two parties in Judah must be kept in view; the one representing the corrupt court faction, the other the growing popular feeling in favor of return to the old order of things.

VI_16 - JORAM AND JEHU, (TENTH AND ELEVENTH) KINGS OF ISRAEL AHAZIAH, (SIXTH) KING OF JUDAH Accession of Ahaziah - Character of his Reign - Expedition of Joram and Ahaziah against Hazael, and taking of Ramoth-Gilead - Joram returns Wounded to Jezreel - Visit of Ahaziah - Jehu anointed King - March on Jezreel - Joram killed - Death of Ahaziah - Jezebel killed - Fulfillment of the Divine sentence by Elijah.

2 Kings 8:25-9:37; 2 Chronicles 22:1-9

THE brief reign of Ahaziah, or Jehoahaz (2 Chronicles 21:17) - for the names are precisely the same, the two words of which they are compounded being only reversed²⁹ - may be regarded as marking the crisis in the history alike of the northern and the southern kingdom. The young prince was twenty-two years old³⁰ when he ascended the throne (2 Kings 8:26).³¹

To say that he followed the evil example set by his father, would not express the whole truth. Holy Scripture designates his course as a walking "in the ways of the house of Ahab," explaining that his mother Athaliah was his counselor, and that he was also influenced by the other members of that family. It was by their advice that he united with his uncle Joram in that expedition which ended in the death of the two kings, although there is no evidence that a Judaeen army was actually joined to the forces of Israel.³²

²⁹ Jeho-achaz, "Jehovah seizes" or "holds," Achaz-jah, "seizes" or "holds Jehovah." We are unwilling to hazard any speculation why the name should have been thus transposed at the accession of the young king.

³⁰ The number "forty and two" in 2 Chronicles 22:2 is evidently the mistake of a copyist (m 40 for k 20). It must be remembered that Jehoram, his father, died at the age of forty (2 Chronicles 21:5). This implies that he was a father at the age of eighteen. Even so, we know that Jehoram had sons older than Ahaziah (2 Chronicles 22:1), although, no doubt, from different wives. But we know that marriages of princes in the East were very early - probably at the age of thirteen.

³¹ In 2 Kings 8:26 she is called "the daughter of Omri," either granddaughter, or perhaps with intentional reference to Omri as the wicked founder of the wicked dynasty of Ahab.

³² There is at least no express reference to a Judaeen army, and the circumstances of Jehu's advance and of Ahaziah's attempted flight seem most consistent with the idea that there was no Judaeen contingent.

We remember that fourteen years before, Jehoshaphat, the grandfather of Ahaziah, had joined Ahab in a similar undertaking, which had proved unsuccessful, and in which Ahab lost his life. We might wonder at the renewal of an attempt upon Ramoth-Gilead, when a man like Hazael occupied the throne of Syria; but the Assyrian monuments explain alike the expedition and its opening success. From these we learn that there was repeated war between Assyria and Hazael, in which, to judge from the number of Syrian war chariots captured (1121), the whole force of the country must have been engaged and exhausted. On another occasion we read of a war in which after a great victory an Assyrian monarch pursued his enemy from city to city, and even into the mountains, burning and destroying everything before him.

We may therefore conjecture that if Joram was not actually in league with Assyria - as Jehu afterwards was - the Israelitish king availed himself of the opportunity for an attack upon Ramoth-Gilead. In this he seems to have been successful (2 Kings 9:14), although he was wounded by the Syrians - as Josephus has it, by an arrow during the siege (Ant. 9:6, 1). Leaving Ramoth-Gilead, which he had taken, in the keeping of Jehu, his chief captain, Joram went back to the summer palace of Jezreel, to be healed of his wounds, both as nearer to the field of action, and because the court was there at the time.

It was to Jezreel that Ahaziah went to see his uncle, and during this fatal visit the "destruction" overtook him, which, as the writer of the Book of Chronicles notes, "was of God." It came together with that of Joram and the whole house of Ahab. The judgment which more than fourteen years before had been pronounced upon Ahab (1 Kings 21:21-24) had only been deferred till the measure of the guilt of his house was filled. And now the hour had come. In that awful vision on Mount Horeb, Elijah had received the commission to "anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi... to be king over Israel" (1 Kings 19:16), with special view to the work of punishment which he was to execute. The commission, which Elijah himself could not discharge, had devolved on Elisha; and, the proper time for its execution having arrived, the prophet

now sent one of the "sons of the prophets" - a young man (9:4), possibly his personal attendant. As no doubt he literally obeyed the injunctions of his master, we shall best learn what these were by following the detailed account of what he actually said and did.

As directed by Elisha, he went to Ramoth-Gilead, carrying with him a vial, probably of holy oil, which the prophet had given him. Even this is significant. On his arrival he found, as so often in this history, all apparently arranged so as to carry out the special purpose of God. He had been told to "look out" Jehu, and here were all the captains of the host sitting together, probably in deliberation. Remembering that the chief command devolved on Jehu, it would not be difficult to single out the object of the young man's mission. He had only to say, "I have a word to thee, O captain," and Jehu as president would naturally answer. It was so; and on Jehu's inquiry to which of them the message was, the young prophet replied: "To thee, O captain."

The captains had been sitting in the great court, and Jehu now took his strange visitor "into the house," no doubt, as Elisha had directed, into "an inner chamber," one that opened out of another, where what passed between them could not be observed from the court. Here, without further explanation - for abruptness of delivery was part of the object in view, and indeed characteristic of the direct Divine message - the young man poured the oil on the head of Jehu, and stated the terms of his commission. It was in the name of "Jehovah, God of Israel," and on behalf of Israel, viewed as "the people of Jehovah" (2 Kings 9:6). This emphatic introduction of Jehovah marked the character of the work to which Jehu was called. He was now Divinely anointed king, to execute judgment on the house of Ahab, and to avenge at the hand of Jezebel the blood of the prophets, and of all the servants of Jehovah. And the whole house of Ahab was to perish like that of Jeroboam (1 Kings 14:10), and that of Baasha (1 Kings 16:3). But upon Jezebel would special personal judgment descend, commensurate to the terrible crime against Naboth, which she had planned and executed (1 Kings 21:). Thus would all men see that Jehovah was the living and true God; thus also

would the loudest but also the last call to national repentance come to Israel, ere the storm of judgment burst over the land.

It is in this light that what seem from our point of view the horrible events of the beginning of Jehu's reign must be regarded. But then our point of view was not that of Israel at that time, and if the commencing judgment on national apostasy, and the final call to repentance which it implied, were to be effective, they must be suited to their, not to our, standpoint. Let it be remembered that the long ministry of Elijah and Elisha, with all the exceptionally direct and striking Divine interpositions connected with them, had passed without producing any appreciable effect on the people. The years of sudden famine, and its equally sudden cessation; the scene at the sacrifice on Carmel, as well as the prolonged public and private activity of Elisha, had apparently only wrought this result: that the great prophets came to be regarded as possessing some absolute power to influence the God of Israel (comp. 2 Kings 6:31; 8:4). A very different kind of ambassador was now to do God's behest and to execute His judgments, although perhaps just because he would do that for which he was called in his own wild Eastern manner, and in accordance with the spirit of the time.

It is in this sense that we can understand the Divine approbation conveyed to Jehu (2 Kings 10:30), even while feeling that the man himself and his modes of acting were contrary to God. And, indeed, this fact is distinctly brought out in the verse which follows the expression of the Divine approbation (ver. 31).

We have said that Jehu did his work as a Jehu, not as an Elisha, and in accordance with the spirit of his times. We may add that, as the experience of the past showed, no other mode would have been understood by Israel. It was a very dark night, and only the flashes of lightning and the flames of burning palaces which they had kindled could show what tempest of judgment had gathered in the sky. Yet even so might men have learned the

possibility of brightness and calm with the sunrise of the morrow. ³³

Returning to our history, we follow Elisha's messenger as, obedient to his directions, after having executed his commission, he opens the door and literally flees through the court where the assembled captains are in waiting for Jehu. He must not give explanations to any man; he must not be arrested nor questioned by any. His business was with Jehu - that done, alike in character with the Divine message, and even for the sake of its success, he must withdraw. And, although so widely differing in character, there is in this also a practical lesson for those who have some work to do for God. Let us avoid all mere talking, and, if we can, all explanation.

God's work will best explain itself, we cannot explain it. We must withdraw our personality as soon and as completely as may be; do the commission which we feel to be of God, and eschew in it saluting any man by the way (Luke 10:4). And so the young prophet would be outside the walls of Ramoth-Gilead, and on his way back to Samaria, when Jehu rejoined the "servants of his lord." ³⁴

They must all have recognized the garb and appearance of one of "the sons of the prophets," and inferred that something of supreme importance was about to take place. For the proper understanding of this history it is necessary to bear in mind that it was possible to be opposed to the worship of Baal, and in favor of that of the God of Israel, without any personal or true religion. In point of fact, Jehu exterminated for the time alike the service and the servants of Baal, although he "took no heed to walk in the way of Jehovah, God of Israel, with all his heart; he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin" (2 Kings 10:31).

³³ It may possibly be with reference to this, that the young "son of the prophets" was really a messenger of near judgment upon Israel, together with the dim outlook on possible repentance, that some of the Rabbis have regarded the messenger of Elisha as the prophet Jonah.

³⁴ The peculiar expression here, and the similar allusion in ver. 7, seems to me designedly chosen to bring out the work of Jehu as the sentence of the higher Master.

It was the service of Baal which Ahab had initiated, while Jeroboam's worship of God under the symbol of the golden calf might be represented as the ancient Israelitish (in opposition to the Judaeen and Levitic) service of the God of Israel. We can readily believe that there might be a large and influential national party in the northern kingdom, intensely opposed to the anti-Israelitish and foreign policy and ways in State and Church of the house of Ahab. And both from his antecedents (comp. 2 Kings 9:25, 26), and his subsequent conduct, we infer that Jehu was a leader - perhaps the leader - of this national party, which naturally would have many adherents throughout the country.

Quite consistent with this view is the deep interest taken by the captains in the mission of the young prophet to Jehu, and their readiness to take up his cause, even while at the same time the messenger was slightly spoken of - just as men of the world might characterize such an one as a "mad" enthusiast. It is difficult to decide the reason of what seems the evasive answer first made by Jehu. But when perceiving by their interest the likelihood of their joining the national cause, he told them at least that part of the message which appointed him king over Israel.

If Jehu possessed the ferocity, he evidently had also the cunning of an Eastern. Perhaps he could scarcely have been prepared for the rapidity with which the military revolution was accomplished. The assembled captains took off their upper garments, and spread them, in token of homage, as a carpet "on the platform of the steps," that is, the steps which led up to a platform or balcony, and then, amidst the blast of trumpets, the usual signal at a coronation (1 Kings 1:39; 2 Kings 11:14), Jehu was proclaimed king.

The formal conspiracy against Joram, now hastily made, was immediately carried out. At the proposal of Jehu, the city gates were watched, lest any fugitive might bring tidings to Jezreel. Jehu himself, with Bidkar as his chief captain, in his chariot (ver. 25), and attended by a "multitude" (ver. 17) - no doubt, of horsemen - rapidly made his way to Jezreel. From incidental notices in the account (vers. 17, 30, 31) we gather that the royal palace formed part of the fortifications of the

town, - perhaps, as in other places, that the palace was the only fortified part of Jezreel, the town straggling beyond, and lying, as it were, in the shelter of the palace fort, which would occupy the height. Thus the "watchman on the tower of Jezreel" would really hold that place of observation in the palace, and when "Jehu came to Jezreel," Jezebel could address him from a window above, as he "entered in at the gate."

From the knoll - about 500 feet high, forming a low spur of Mount Gilboa - on which Jezreel stands, two roads diverge, keeping close to Mount Gilboa. The one turns east and south, and then sharply round the corner at Beth-Shean; the other crosses the plain of Esdraelon, almost straight south to En-gannim ("the fount of the gardens," the modern Jenin), where the direct road leads to Samaria, but whence also we might turn off eastwards to Beth-Shean and the Jordan. It is almost needless to say that it was along the former of these roads that the watchman on the tower of Jezreel saw Jehu and his company advancing at "mad" haste. For miles they must have been visible on the road that led up to Beth-Shean. When the watchman announced their approach to the king, Joram, in his false security, directed that a single horseman should be sent to inquire what tidings they brought. As he reached Jehu, the rebel general imperiously bade him join his troop. This movement also the watchman observed and reported to Joram. If the dispatch of the first horseman may be understood, that of a second one seems in the circumstances little short of fatuity.

By the time the second messenger from Jezreel had obeyed the orders of Jehu and joined his companion, the troop was sufficiently near for the experienced eye of the watchman to recognize, not indeed the face of Jehu, but that the driving of the foremost chariot was like none other's than that of the bold, reckless chief captain of Israel's host. When the watchman reported it to the king, this would probably coincide with what had been his own idea from the first. A troop advancing from that direction could only have come from the army in Ramoth-Gilead - probably to bring tidings of some victory, or of the final retreat of the Syrians, or of proposals of peace. The announcement that it was Jehu himself would tend to confirm such

anticipations. Accordingly Joram had his war chariot and that of Ahaziah hastily made ready, and the two kings went to meet Jehu.

As we descend from Jezreel on the road to Beth-Shean there are on the east and south-east of the city "rock-cut wine-presses on the rugged hills," marking no doubt where "the portion of Naboth" and his vineyard had been. It was here that the royal party encountered Jehu and his troop. To the light-hearted question of Joram, "Is it peace, Jehu?" such answer came as must at once and rudely have dispelled any illusions. "What! 'is it peace?' (until) so long as the whoredoms of Jezebel thy mother, and her witchcrafts, the many?" the former expression referring, as frequently, to idolatry (comp. Jeremiah 3:2, 3; Ezekiel 23:27); the latter to the enchantments and heathen rites practiced in connection with it. From which words we also learn that in popular opinion Jezebel exercised paramount influence over her son, and that the un-Israelitish rites prevalent were attributed to her.

With the short cry, "Deceit, Ahaziah!" Joram turned his horses' heads to flee into Jezreel, when Jehu, drawing his bow, sent the arrow with such strength between the shoulders of Joram that it passed out at his heart, and the king fell dead in his chariot. Then reminding his "adjutant" Bidkar of the burden or punitive sentence which Jehovah had in their presence laid upon Ahab, on the day they two had ridden behind the king as his attendants, when he had gone to take possession of the property of murdered Naboth, he commanded the body of Joram to be cast into that very plat of ground, "according to the word of Jehovah."

Meanwhile Ahaziah, perceiving the turn of matters, sought safety in flight. Leaving Jezreel aside, he turned sharp round the shoulder of Gilboa, and struck the direct road southwards: "fled the way of the Beth-Gan," which we regard as another name for En-gannim, the modern Jenin, at the southern end of the plain of Jezreel.³⁵

³⁵ It need scarcely be said that the whole passage is very difficult as compared with the account in 2 Chronicles 22:9. Although we are nowise concerned to conciliate trifling differences of detail which may depend on different records of the same event, or perhaps only seem such from our ignorance of some of the circumstances, we have endeavored to give in

Unwilling to allow his escape, Jehu, while himself preparing to enter Jezreel, gave rapid directions to pursue Ahaziah. "Him also smite - in the going up to Gur! which is by Ibleam." We can at least thus far identify "the going up to Gur," that the neighboring town of Ibleam has been localized in the modern Bir el Belemeh, south of En-gannim. It is here then that we must place the "ascent to Gur," where Jehu had expected, although mistakenly, that the pursuers might overtake the chariot of Ahaziah.

As we infer, the object of Ahaziah was to reach Megiddo in safety. That place has generally been located, but, as recently shown, erroneously, at the western edge of the plain of Jezreel, under Mount Carmel. In truth Megiddo lay in the opposite direction - south and east from Jezreel - being "the large ruin between Jezreel and Beth-shean, which still bears the name Mujedd'a." This location of Megiddo greatly helps the understanding of our narrative. As already stated, Ahaziah's hope was that in reaching Megiddo he would have not only out-distanced, but out-wearied his pursuers. And his purpose may have been to make his way to the Jordan,³⁶ and along its eastern banks till he could cross into Judaea.

But in this hope, as we imagine, he was disappointed. Pursued to Megiddo, he fled to Samaria (2 Chronicles 22:9). The knowledge that the sons of Ahab were brought up in the houses of the principal men of the city (2 Kings 10:1) led him to expect that he might be able to hide for a time among the adherents of his grandfather. We know how little the loyalty of the nobles of Samaria was to be depended upon (2 Kings 10:1-7), and we do not wonder to read that Ahaziah was "caught" in Samaria, brought back to Megiddo, and there slain by order of Jehu. Nor does it seem strange that his body was given up to his servants to be taken to Jerusalem and buried there, as being a descendant of that Jehoshaphat "who sought Jehovah with all his heart." For the whole movement of Jehu was ostensibly for the purpose

the text an account of the event which will harmonize the narrative in 2 Kings with the notice in 2 Chronicles.

³⁶ He might deem himself the more safe that Jehu - and presumably those who might follow him from Ramoth-Gilead - had taken the road on the other (the eastern) side of Gilboa.

of abolishing the worship of Baal, and restoring that of Jehovah, the God of Israel.

We return to sketch, as briefly as we may, the closing hours of that day in Jezreel. Tidings of all that was passing had rapidly reached Jezebel. Her course was soon chosen. She knew she must die; and she would die as a princess of her race, and a queen. After the Oriental fashion, she put paint on her eyes,³⁷ "and tired her head." Thus arrayed as a queen,³⁸ she took her place at the window, awaiting the arrival of Jehu.

As he appeared, she called to him from above - taking up and adapting the word with which the messengers of Joram, and then the unfortunate king himself, had unsuspectingly greeted Jehu: "Is it peace? Zimri, murderer of his master!" The words were intended to remind Jehu of the fate of Zimri, whose reign lasted only seven days (1 Kings 16:9-19), perhaps to stir up feelings which would lead to a similar counter-revolution. Even if no other motive had been actuating him, self-preservation dictated quick and decisive action on the part of Jehu. Looking up, he exclaimed in his impatient way: "Who is on my side? Who?" and when some of the eunuchs immediately responded, Jezebel was, at his command, thrown from the window. Her blood bespattered the wall and the horses, and the chariot of Jehu, as he passed through the gate, crushed her mangled body.

And now King Jehu is at his royal banquet within the palace of the murdered princes. Was it statecraft, dictating regard for the Tyrian princess; or some pity for the fallen greatness of one who had died a proud queen; or a rising feeling that, for his own sake, a descendant of royalty should not be exposed to the extreme of popular contempt, which prompted him to give orders for the burial of Jezebel? But whatever his motives, the command came too late. Only the skull, the hands,

³⁷ A mixture of antimony and zinc, prepared with oil, with which the eyebrows and lashes were painted black, and which, according to Pliny, had the effect of making the eyes appear larger (comp. also Jeremiah 4:30; Ezekiel 23:40, besides references to the custom in profane writers).

³⁸ Her adornment could not have been intended to attract Jehu, since, having a grandson twenty-three years old (2 Kings 8:26), she was of an age when no adornment could have given charms to an Eastern woman.

and the feet of Jezebel were found; the rest had been food for those wild dogs which prowled about Jezreel. And if Jehu did not in his heart recognize the meaning and lessons of the terrible judgment which had fallen with such literality on the wretched queen, he at least declared and owned: "This is the word of Jehovah, which He spake by His servant Elijah the Tishbite." And so there was testimony in Israel for Jehovah and His Word in the judgments upon Ahab and his house - even as many centuries afterwards there was testimony of judgment for the Christ in the flames which consumed Jerusalem and its Temple.

**VI_17 - JEHU, (ELEVENTH) KING OF ISRAEL
ATHALIAH, (SEVENTH) QUEEN OF JUDAH
Murder of the "Sons" of Ahab and Joram -
Destruction of the adherents of Ahab in Jezreel
- March on Samaria - Slaughter of the
"Brethren" of Ahaziah - Jehonadab the son of
Rechab - Meaning of the Rechabite movement
- The Feast of Baal at Samaria - Destruction of
the Worshipers - Character of the Reign of
Jehu - Decline of the Northern Kingdom -
Commencing Decline of the Southern
Kingdom.**

2 Kings 10:2; 2 Chronicles 21:10; 24:17-26

We have learned enough of this history to understand the seeming inconsistencies in the conduct of Jehu. Absolutely speaking, he was the instrument selected for executing the Divine punishment on the house of Ahab; and also in whose reign the national judgment upon Israel was to begin. Jehu himself clearly understood his mission as regarded the house of Ahab and the worship of Baal. But he accepted it as a national and, if the term may be used, a Jehovistic movement, without implying the necessity of true fear of the LORD, or of return to Him; and he carried it out as a Jehu. Alike as regarded his feelings and his methods, he was the instrument, not the servant of the LORD.

To such an one as Jehu even common prudence would have dictated to do what work he had, quickly, sharply, and completely. A dynasty that had extended over four reigns must have numbered many adherents, while on the other hand the demoralizing influence of the worship of Baal must have widely spread in the land. There

was more than merely a mocking taunt in the reminder of Jezebel about the fate of Zimri. The mission as well as the rule of Jehu depended upon a rapid succession of measures which would alike anticipate the possibility of a counter-revolution, and render a return to the former state of things impossible. This explains the measures taken by the new king. Samaria was not only the capital, but a fortified city, where the main body of the standing army ³⁹ lay. Here, as we know, had been placed the "seventy sons of Ahab" - understanding the term ⁴⁰ in its wider sense, common in Hebrew, which included, besides the sons of Ahab, his grandsons, the children of Joram (comp. 2 Kings 10:3).

These royal princes of the house of Ahab were entrusted, some (in the Eastern fashion) for supervision, the younger for education to the "princes," ⁴¹ - that is, the governor of the palace and the governor of the city (10:1, comp. 10:5) - to the "elders," and to certain prominent persons who had charge of them.

These officials in Samaria would embody the possibility of a counter-revolution, and to them Jehu addressed on the morrow of his entry into Jezreel what really amounted to a challenge, to declare themselves for the house of Ahab, or else to make submission to his rule. The motives which decided their choice (ver. 4) show that their inclination was in favor of the old regime, while their fears dictated submission to the usurper. So Jehu had judged wisely in forcing an immediate decision, without exposing himself by marching with his small troop against Samaria.

But this was not all. Neither their allegiance nor his rule was safe so long as any of the royal

princes lived; and, indeed, their destruction was part of his work and mission. To have killed them himself would have been a doubtful expedient, which, even if successful, might have given rise to popular reaction, and at all events brought him ill-will, while it would have left free the hands of the adherents of Ahab. It was therefore, from his point of view, the wisest policy on receiving the submission of the leaders of Samaria to order them to kill all the royal princes and bring their heads to Jezreel. ⁴² This would not only accomplish the primary object of Jehu, but, by making them participate in the crimes of his revolution, render any future movement against his rule impossible. At the same time the ghastly sight of those heads, sent to Jezreel by the chief representatives of the old regime, would offer an excellent opportunity for an appeal to the people.

When, therefore, next day the heads of the seventy princes were brought in baskets to Jezreel, he ordered them to be laid "at the entering in of the gate," ⁴³ where the blood of Jezebel had so lately bespattered the wall, and the chariot of the conqueror passed over her body. And in the morning Jehu, pointing to the gory heaps, could tell the people ⁴⁴ that not only himself, but all the chief personages under the late government, had part in the destruction of the house of Ahab; that those to whom they had been entrusted had chosen rather to slay these princes in cold blood than to take up their cause - that all had perished, and so the word spoken by the LORD through the great prophet Elijah had been fulfilled. Thus his rule and the slaughter of the house of Ahab had - as he put

³⁹ We imagine that there was always the nucleus of a standing army, consisting of the king's body-guard, war-chariots, and horses (horsemen), as well as an arsenal, and that the rest of the host consisted of levies hastily made, and only partially drilled and disciplined.

⁴⁰ Similarly we must take the term "brethren" in a wider sense. The elder "brethren" of Ahaziah had all been killed in the invasion of the Philistines and Arabs; and yet they were "brethren" of Ahaziah - in the wider sense - who went to salute the children of the king (ver. 13), and who were slain by Jehu.

⁴¹ So literally; the words "of Jezreel" are manifestly a clerical error, whether we emendate it into "of Israel" or "of the city."

⁴² That, instead of coming with them to Jezreel, as they had been ordered (ver. 7), they sent the gory heads, is another indication of their feelings.

⁴³ The practice of bringing in the heads of enemies in evidence of their being killed was frequent in antiquity, and on the Assyrian monuments also we see them laid in heaps.

⁴⁴ The expression "ye are righteous" (ver. 9) probably meant: Ye have taken no part in this revolution, and are unbiased; I appeal to you as judges! Josephus adds the somewhat realistic touch, that the messengers from Samaria, bearing the seventy heads, arrived as Jehu and his friends were feasting at supper, and that this was the reason why he ordered them to be heaped up against the morning.

it - the support of all men and the sanction of God Himself.

It was now possible for Jehu to take possession of his capital without danger of opposition, and there to carry out his final measures against the old order of things. But before doing so he took care, so to speak, to secure his rear by killing all that had been connected with the house of Ahab in Jezreel, "all his great men," his friends,⁴⁵ and his chief officials.⁴⁶

On his way to Samaria another tragedy was to be enacted. It was at a solitary place, in a locality which has not been ascertained, but which bore the name of "house of binding of the shepherds" - or, as the Chaldee Paraphrast calls it: "The house of assembly of the shepherds." Here, where evidently the roads from Jezreel and Jerusalem joined, Jehu and his followers met the forty-two princes, "the brethren of Ahaziah, king of Judah,"⁴⁷ who were going on a friendly visit to "the children of the king [Joram] and the children of the mistress," [lady-ruler, Gebhirah - evidently Jezebel].⁴⁸

So rapid had been the movements of Jehu, and so great was the fear of him, that tidings of what had passed in Israel had not traveled so far as to arrest the journey of the princes of Judah. Jehu's order was to "take them alive." Whether they offered resistance, or this was part of the original order of Jehu, certain it is that they were all killed "at the cistern of Beth-Eqed,"⁴⁹ into which their bodies were probably thrown.

⁴⁵ So, and not "kinsfolks," as in the A.V.

⁴⁶ So the word should be rendered here as in 2 Samuel 8:18; 1 Kings 4:5. The "priests" of Ahab were slain in Samaria.

⁴⁷ The expression "brethren" must here be taken in the wider sense. In 2 Chronicles 22:8 they are called "the princes of Judah, and the sons of the brethren of Ahaziah."

⁴⁸ Most commentators suppose that they were going to Jezreel, but from 10:1 we infer that the royal princes of Israel were at Samaria. As Jehu met them coming from the south, we must assume that he did not follow the direct road from Jezreel. If he had gone first to Megiddo, and thence to Samaria, this would explain how he might have met the "brethren of Ahaziah" coming from the south.

⁴⁹ This, and not "at the pit of the shearing house" (10:14).

As Jehu passed from the scene of slaughter he met a figure that seems strange and mysterious.

"Jehonadab, the son of Rechab," who had come from Samaria to meet the new king, belonged to the Kenites (1 Chronicles 2:55). This tribe, which was probably of Arab nationality, appears so early as the days of Abraham (Genesis 15:19). Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, belonged to it (Judges 1:16). Part at least of the tribe accompanied Israel into the Land of Promise (Numbers 10:29-32), and settled in the south of Judah (Judges 1:16), where we find them by-and-by mixed up with the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:6). Another part of the tribe, however, seems to have wandered far north, where Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, slew Sisera on his flight from Barak (Judges 4:17, etc.; 5:24, etc.). Thus they appear to have occupied the extreme south and north of the country, and would even on that ground possess political importance. But what interests us more is their religious relationship to Israel. From the deed of Jael we infer that they were intensely attached to the national cause. Again, from the circumstance that Jehonadab, the son of Rechab - evidently the chief of the tribe - came from Samaria to meet Jehu, and from the anxiety which the latter displayed as to Jehonadab's views and intentions, as well as from the manner in which he treated him, we gather that the chieftain was a person of considerable political importance, while the invitation of Jehu: "Come with me, and see my zeal for Jehovah," shows that he and his tribe were identified with the service of Jehovah in the land. All this throws fresh light on the special injunction which from that time onward Jehonadab laid upon his tribe (Jeremiah 35:1-16). They were neither to build houses, nor to sow seed, nor to plant or have vineyards; but to dwell in tents, and so both to be and to declare themselves strangers in the land.

This rule, which the descendants of Rechab observed for centuries, must, from its peculiarity, have had a religious, not a political,⁵⁰ bearing. It

⁵⁰ This is the view of Hitzig (on Jeremiah 35), who cites the instance of the Nabataeans, who, to ensure their freedom, abstained from agriculture. But this does not explain the abstinence from wine. Besides, why should this rule have only been laid down by Jehonadab, and if its reason had been to secure their freedom, would not the flight of the Rechabites to

has with great probability been connected with Elijah, but the important question has not yet been mooted whether it originated before or after the occupation of Samaria by Jehu.

We believe the latter to have been the case, and it seems evidenced even by the circumstance that Jehonadab came from Samaria to meet Jehu. We suppose that the ministry of Elijah had made the deepest impression on Jehonadab and his tribe. The very appearance and bearing of the prophet would appeal to them, and his words seem as those of a second Moses. Earnestly they waited for the results of his mission and of that of Elisha. And when the word of Jehovah to and by Elijah was being fulfilled - Hazael made king of Syria, Jehu king of Israel, and the house of Ahab destroyed, root and branches - they would naturally turn to Jehu, in the hope that a national return to Jehovah would follow. It was a kind of Old Testament John the Baptist's hope of a kingdom of God. Feelings such as these prompted Jehonadab to go and meet Jehu, while the latter, knowing the deep impression which the Rechabite movement in favor of the reformation of Elijah had produced in the land, would be anxious to secure his public support, perhaps even - so strange and mixed are our motives - to gain his approbation. But what Jehonadab saw of Jehu must soon have convinced him that he was not one to carry out an Elijah-movement in its positive and spiritual aspect, however fitted an instrument he might be to execute Divine punishment. And so Jehonadab left Jehu to perpetuate in his own tribe the testimony of Elijah, by making them Nazarites forever, thus symbolizing their dedication to God, and by ordering them to be conspicuously strangers in the land, thus setting forth their expectation of the judgments which Elijah had predicted upon apostate Israel.

We are now prepared to accompany Jehonadab, as after responding to Jehu's anxious challenge about his feelings toward him, he mounted Jehu's chariot to go with him and see his zeal for Jehovah. The first measure of the conqueror was to repeat in Samaria what he had done in Jezreel, and to kill all related to or connected with the family of Ahab.

Jerusalem in the time of Jeremiah have been in direct contravention of their object?

His next was, by a truly Eastern device, to seize and destroy the adherents of the religious rites introduced under the late regime. Although this was in fulfillment of his mission, it will be observed that it also afforded the best means of establishing his own rule, since the national worship of Baal was identified with the house of Ahab. Accordingly we imagine that when Jehu publicly announced that he meant to serve Baal even much more than Ahab, and proclaimed a solemn assembly for Baal, the gathering would be thoroughly representative. First, as we understand it, Jehu summoned all the prophets and priests of Baal, and "all his servants" - either the leading laity generally, or else those in Samaria itself - ostensibly to make preparation for his great sacrifice. Next, similar proclamation was made throughout the country. In both cases the object was to secure the attendance of all professed worshippers of Baal. On the day appointed, the courts of the Temple of Baal were thronged "from one opening to the other [the opposite]." To make the leaders of the new religion the more prominent, Jehu now directed that each of them should be arrayed in festive vestments,⁵¹ and then, to prevent any possible mistake, since some of the servants of Jehovah might have followed Jehu and Jehonadab to the house of Baal, he ordered, on his arrival, to search for and remove any worshippers of the LORD.

Neither of these measures would excite surprise, but would only be regarded as indications of

⁵¹ The vestments of the priests of Baal are also referred to by classical writers. They seem to have been of byssus. Generally it is supposed that all the worshippers in that temple received these vestments, in which case they must have been supplied from the royal chamber of vestments, since the temple-vestry, however well filled, could scarcely have furnished sufficient for such a multitude. But a more attentive consideration will lead to the conclusion that the "servants of Baal" who were so robed were only the prophets, priests, and other leaders of the movement. For a universal robing would imply an almost impossible scene of bustle and confusion in that crowded edifice, while the possession of a distinctive dress would have rendered needless the next direction (ver. 23), to see that those with them were not of the servants of Jehovah. Lastly, Josephus distinctly states that the vestments, which we imagine not to have been ordinary priestly, but festive robes were given to "all the priests," and he lays stress on the subsequent slaughter as that of "the prophets" of Baal. On other grounds also this view seems to commend itself, and it is certainly not incompatible with the text.

Jehu's zeal, and his desire that the rites of Baal should not be profaned by the presence of strangers. The attendance of Jehonadab might seem strange; but he was in the train of the king whom he was known to have served, in whose company he had returned to Samaria, and with whom he had continued while he issued his mandates, and prepared for the feast of Baal. He might therefore be simply an adherent of Jehu, and now prepared to follow his lead.

The rest may be briefly told. As the sacrifices were offered Jehu surrounded the building with eighty of his trusted guards, who, on the given word of command, entered the building, threw down all they encountered, and penetrated into "the sanctuary ⁵² of the house of Baal," where all who had been marked out to them were slaughtered. Then they brought out the wooden images and burnt them, while the large stone statue of Baal, as well as the Temple itself, were destroyed. And completely to desecrate the site, and mark the contempt attaching to it, Jehu converted it into a place for public convenience.

"Thus," as Scripture marks, "Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel." Yet, as the cessation of idolatry after the return from the exile did not issue in true repentance towards God, nor in faith in the Messiah, so did not this destruction of Baal-worship lead up to the service of Jehovah. Rather did king and people stray farther from the LORD their God. Of the succeeding events in Jehu's reign, which lasted no less than twenty-eight years, no account is given in Scripture, except this notice, that "in those days Jehovah began to cut Israel short: and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel; from Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, of the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer, which is by the river Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan." And the Assyrian monuments throw farther light upon this brief record. They inform us about the wars of Hazael against Assyria, and they represent Jehu as bringing tribute to the king of Assyria. The inference which we derive is that Jehu had entered

into a tributary alliance with the more powerful empire of Assyria against Hazael, and that when the latter had made his peace with Assyria, he turned against Jehu, and inflicted on Israel the losses thus briefly noticed in Scripture. Be this as it may, this at least is certain, that with the loss of the whole trans-Jordanic territory, the decline of the northern kingdom had commenced.

Nor was the state of matters more hopeful in the southern kingdom of Judah. The brief and bloody reign of Athaliah was, indeed, followed by the counter-revolution of Jehoiada, and the elevation of Joash to the throne. But the reformation then inaugurated was of short duration. After the death of Jehoiada, the worship of Jehovah was once more forsaken for that of "groves and idols, and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass" (2 Chronicles 24:18).

And although the LORD sent them prophets to bring them again unto the LORD, they not only would not give ear, but actually at the commandment of the king, and in the very house of Jehovah, shed the blood of Zechariah, which, according to Jewish legend, could not be wiped out, but continued to bubble on the stones, till the Assyrians entered and laid low the sanctuary thus profaned. And even before that, the army of Hazael, though greatly inferior in numbers, defeated that of Judah, desolated and despoiled the land, and laid siege to Jerusalem. The Syrian army was, indeed, bought off, but the hand of God lay heavy on the king. Stricken down by disease he was murdered in his bed by his own servants, and they the sons of strangers. Thus had inward and outward decline come to Judah also. And darker and yet darker gathered the clouds of judgment over a land and people which had "forsaken Jehovah, the God of their fathers."

⁵² This, as surrounded by walls - is distinctive from the open court where the general worshippers were gathered - is designated by the words rendered in the A.V. "the city of the house of Baal."

