

JEHOSHAPHAT: A LESSON FOR OUR TIMES

by

E. W. Bullinger

The history of Jehoshaphat is written not only in the Book of Chronicles, but in the Book of Kings : and it is well to be quite clear as to the difference between those two books ; or at least between Samuel and Kings on the one hand and Chronicles on the other. It is the same history, about the same people, mostly the same events ; and yet there are differences between the two — not discrepancies, but differences. The natural man can only see something to stumble at in this: but when once we see the difference between the two books, we shall not only see nothing to stumble at, but we shall see the beauty and accuracy of the Word of God.

In the Books of Samuel and Kings we have the history viewed from MAN'S STANDPOINT—we have what the outward eye would see : but in Chronicles we have the same events from the DIVINE STANDPOINT—we are taken behind the scenes, and shown the secret reasons for the history. That is the difference. One example will be better than a great number of words.

In Samuel we read of Saul's death ; and from all that we read there, it was the Philistines who slew him : but when we turn to the record of the very same event in the First Book of Chronicles and the 10th chapter, we see very little reference to how Saul died, but in the 13th and 14th verses we are told why: " So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; And

enquired not of the LORD : therefore He slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse'." In i Sam. xxxi. it says that the Philistines slew Saul; but in Chronicles it says the Lord slew him. God had a double purpose to perform : He had to punish in Saul his great and grievous sin ; and He had to accomplish His purpose of setting David upon the throne of Israel. So we see the simple event in one book, and the secret reasons for it in the other. Another example is seen in Hezekiah. His reign was divided into two great parts—his military exploits, and the reformation which he made in the Temple, and in the worship of God. In the Second Book of Kings (chap. xviii. 4-6) we have three verses about his Reformation, and in the Second Book of Chronicles three chapters (xxix. to xxxi.) : and with regard to his military affairs it is just the reverse.

This will be the key whenever a difficulty arises in reading these books. This is why more than one history was necessary. We have the human and the Divine standpoint; that which was the outward appearance is given in Samuel and Kings : while that which had to do with " the heart," and the secret reason for it all, is given in Chronicles.

With this explanation we turn to the 19th chapter of the Second Book of Chronicles. There is not a word about this chapter in Kings. Why ? Because it contains the whole secret of Jehoshaphat's life ; and enables us to understand all that we read afterwards.

Now the opening words of any book, any history, or a part, of the Word of God are always important. The first words are everything; the first occurrence of any word, the first occurrence of any expression, is always valuable, giving the key to all that follows afterwards. Look at the first words of the Lord Jesus. He must have spoken from the time that all children speak: but not a word that He utters is

recorded until He was twelve years of age. When God the Holy Spirit singled out for preservation the first words the Lord Jesus, there was a good reason. What are the words? Only these: " Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business ? " What wonderful words these are when we look at them in connection with the 40th Psalm, and the 10th of Hebrews, " Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God It was the "Father's business" that He had come to "about." Now put this utterance beside His last words, " IS FINISHED!" What was "finished"? The Father's business which the Lord Jesus came to "be about." To see the importance and beauty of this great principle, it will be well for us to follow that rule in what we say and write: for we have a saying about "first impression being very important.

Now the first impression that the Holy Spirit has given us about Jehoshaphat is this,- "And he strengthened himself against Israel" (2 Chron. xvii. i). These words are a key to all his history: and to understand it we must remember that when Jeroboam, King of Israel, set up the calves at Bethel and Dan, the idolaters' backs were turned again to the Temple of God. Jehoshaphat "strengthened himself against" idolaters and idolatry. We are to read this in all the Old Testament histories, in order to find what is pleasing to God. He leaves us in no doubt.

We further read that Jehoshaphat "placed forces in all the fenced cities of Judah;" and in the third verse it says, "The LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim." In those few words we have the key which will enable us to understand all that we read afterward. Jehoshaphat began his reign by strengthening himself against idolatry ; and, in mentioning this, the Holy Spirit would have us bear in mind that every word of God is of importance in reading the Scriptures. Not only are the words perfect in

themselves, but they are perfect also in their order, as well as in their truth.

Now turn to the next chapter, and we see in the first verse, "Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance, and joined affinity with Ahab." Are we not struck with this? He first "strengthened himself against Israel," and here he "joined affinity with Ahab." If we had not read those opening words before, we might think there was not much in these : but in the 19th chapter we are taken behind the scenes ; and hence, when we read about his joining affinity with Ahab, we are startled. He had left off strengthening himself against Israel, and joined affinity with Ahab! This affinity means that he married his son Jehoram to Ahab's daughter, Athaliah. What an awful change, is it not? He began by strengthening himself against Ahab, and now he marries his son to Ahab's daughter. The Holy Spirit has recorded these words in order that we may note, and connect, and weigh the two facts, and see the consequence of his thus joining affinity with Ahab.

"And after certain years he went down to Ahab to Samaria. And Ahab killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance" (2 Chron. xviii. 2). If he had not joined affinity with Ahab, he would not have gone to partake of Ahab's hospitality ; and we see at once that Ahab's daughter, and Ahab's sheep and oxen, accomplished what all Ahab's men of war could never have done: because the Lord was with him when he strengthened himself against Ahab, but, when he joined affinity with Ahab, the Lord was no longer with him, although His eye was upon him.

The next fact put before us, as the result of this visit, was that Ahab "persuaded him to go up to Ramoth-gilead" (v. 2) which was one of the Cities of Refuge. This city had fallen into the hands of the Syrians, and Ahab wanted to

regain it, but he felt he could not do so without Jehoshaphat's aid ; so he said (v. 3), " Wilt thou go with me to Ramoth-gilead? " And Jehoshaphat answered him, " I am as thou art, and my people as thy people ; and we will be with thee in the war.

Now there may have been some godly people in Judah who said, " We do not quite like this; we do not like Jehoshaphat joining in an enterprise with that wicked idolater Ahab " : and there may have been some who answered, " Oh, but see what a good man he is ; he would not do it if it were wrong; and see what a good work he is doing! It is one of our 'Cities of Refuge.' Ought we not to reclaim Ramoth-gilead which God gave it to us?" Whether that was ever said or not, I do not know, but we do know that it is exactly what people say to-day. " I am sure such a good man would not do such and such a thing if it were wrong." But we have found out what God thinks of it. We have to ask what is "good" work. Do not take man's definition of a "good work" God has defined it in Eph. ii. 10 (marg.) : where He speaks of " good works " as being works "which God hath prepared for us to walk in." Only those are good works ; no other. They may be great works, but not "good." Had He "prepared" this work for Jehoshaphat? We may be perfectly certain from what follows that He had not.

Jehoshaphat not only pledged himself, but his people ; and he was very uneasy. Look at the next verse: "And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD to-day."

But this was too late, after he had said, "We will be with thee in the war." It is just like people today; they settle what they intend to do, and then "enquire of the Lord." Surely we have got beyond that. Surely we do not want the Lord to help us in anything unless it is His work, unless it is what

He prepared for us to do. Surely we are far in advance of those who content themselves with being merely willing to do God's will. If we knew how infinitely wiser God's will is than our own, we should say, "Wilt Thou, Lord, order EVERYTHING for me?" and we should not be found settling what we will do, and then asking God to guide us or to help us in the doing of it. We can see that Jehoshaphat was uneasy; because, although he had made the agreement without God, he wanted to " enquire of the LORD " in the hope that the Lord would approve of what he had agreed to do." Therefore the king of Israel gathered together of prophets four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear ? And they said, Go up; for God will deliver it into the king's hand " (v. 5). But they were "false prophets," the prophets of Baal, and Jehoshaphat knew it; and yet he had to sit there and hear what those men said. This must have made him still more uneasy; for the next verse says:- "But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might enquire of him? " This shows that he was very troubled in his mind: for Ahab said, "There is yet one man, by whom we may enquire of the LORD: but I hate him." Yes, that is always the case : if we are faithful spokesmen for the Lord, we shall be hated by the world; am if we are not hated by the enemy, it shows that we are not very faithful in our testimony. It is a very bad sign for us if the enemy can afford to treat us as a negligible quantity. If we are faithful to God, we are sure to be hated. "All that are determined to live godly in this present evil world will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. iii. 12). It is perfect true: and so, here, Ahab says : " There is yet one man, but hate him." Let us count it all joy if we are called to prove the truth of the Lord's words : " Marvel not that the world hateth you ; ye know that it hated Me before it hated you" If we seek the friendship of the world, it will despise us well as hate us. If we are to be hated, let us, at least, respected. We know the

subsequent history of Jehoshapha and how that Micaiah, the prophet of the Lord, intimated that Israel would lose their King as the result of this expedition :-" I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains, sheep that have no shepherd."

But now look at Jehoshaphat. In what a pitiable position he finds himself. He had to sit there and see the faithful witness for God smitten, bound, and led away prison. He knew he was "a prophet of the LORD," and he did not lift up his voice on Micaiah's behalf. Oh, difficulties we get into when once we leave the straight path of faithfulness to God. And now the battle is coming on ; but, before it begins, the Holy Spirit takes us aside into the camp of Israel to Jehosaphat, and lets us hear what the king of Israel says; He then He takes us into the camp of Syria, and lets us hear what the king of Syria says to his captains.

We all of us have more than one name ; and each name bespeaks the special relationship in which we stand to the person who uses it. We have all a name by which we are known to strangers; another by which we are known to friends ; and, in our own household, we have a name by which we are known only to the inner circle there. Each name tells us what the relationship is. And so with the Divine names. The Lord our God has many names by which He is known ; and each name bespeaks a particular relationship. He is known as GOD ! What is the relationship? Creator! How do we know that? What did we say above just now about the first occurrences being the key? Where is the first occurrence of the word "God" In Gen. i.i. There we have it thus:-"In the beginning GOD created the heaven and the earth" Hence, wherever we have the word "God," we have the thought of the Creator "In the beginning God created" and you will see this all through the Scriptures.

Then in Gen. ii. you have JEHOVAH, or LORD, in small capital letters. He had created man, and He is now dealing with him on covenant ground. This word, therefore, expresses the covenant relationship between Himself and His People. Now we are in a position to understand what follows.

In the 20th verse we read : - " And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and will go to the battle ; but put thou on thy robes." We are then taken over into the camp of the Syrians, and hear the king of Syria , command "the captains of the chariots that were with him, saying, Fight ye not with small or great, save only with the king of Israel." (v. 30). And with these two wonderful keys we can see and understand what is going to happen. Those two verses tell us the whole matter in a very few words. When the Syrians came into the battle, and saw Jehoshaphat in his royal robes, they thought he was the king of Israel. Oh, what a solemn thing it was to be mistaken for the wor of Israel's kings ! That was the position into which he step by step brought himself. What a mercy for him th God did not take him at his word when he said to Ahab, "I am as thou art."

In the 31st verse we read :-"And it came to pass, whe the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said -It is the king of Israel. Therefore they compassed about him to fight: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and THE LORD helped HIM; and GOD moved THEM to depart from him. Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD, Jehovah, his Covenant God, helped him; and God the Creator moved them to depart from him. God stood only in the relation of Creator to those Syrians; but to Jehoshaphat He stood in His covenant relation, as LORD, and therefore He helped him. We do not know with what Almighty power the

Create moved the Syrians, his creatures, to depart; but is not this verse wonderful ? Does it not show us something of the perfection of the Divine Word? One would naturally think the different names were used to avoid tautology; but it was nothing of the kind.

Then we know the sequel. "And a certain man drew bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: therefore he said to his chariot man, "Turn thine hand, that thou mayest carry me out of the host for I am wounded." The Syrians did not know Ahab, although they thought they saw him ; but God guided the arrow to a little opening in his armour, and Ahab was killed. Jehoshapha was not as Ahab; for Jehovah saw him as one of His own people.

And now we study this Scripture, which is "written for our learning," in order to discover what the Lord thought of all this. He had been pleased with Jehoshaphat when he "strengthened himself against Israel"; but what was His judgment when Jehoshaphat "joined affinity with Ahab"? The next chapter tells us. Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet Jehoshaphat, and said, - "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD."

Do we desire to please the LORD? Here is a lesson for us : Do not let us mix ourselves up with idolaters! Let us not "join affinity with them in any way whatever." If Romanists are not idolaters, then there never have been any idolaters. Romanists and Ritualists say they do not worship the actual bread, but Christ in it: but, if that is not idolatry, there is no idolatry in the world. Romish idolatry is far worse than any other. Romanists and Ritualists are not only idolaters, but they degrade their God by eating Him. We learn from this history that we must not have anything to do

with idolaters if we wish to please God. "Whatsoever was written aforetime was written for our learning" it was written to teach us. The Word of God is not only as a light for our eyes, but a lamp for our feet, to show us where to place them in passing through the quagmire of this evil world. But, notwithstanding all that Jehoshaphat had gone through, we are told (chap. xix. i) that " he returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem." Note the contrast of this with Ahab's return. He did not return in peace. This is just a picture of how "the God of all grace" deals with us; He is our covenant God. The God of Jacob means practically the God "of all grace". The God of Jacob means the God that Jacob had to do with when he deserved nothing but wrath. God met him, and gave him unmerited grace and favour! He gave him everything, although he deserved nothing: therefore it is written : "Happy is he that hath the God Jacob for his help " (Ps, cxlvi. 5).

We should have thought that Jehoshaphat had now learn his lesson thoroughly : but look at the 35th verse of the 2nd. chapter. We are coming to the end of his reign, and must notice the beauty and perfection of the words, and the fulness of the truth that is in them. And after this terrible mistake, and the great trouble he got into after the wonderful grace of God that delivered him, after solemn warning he had received Jehoshaphat king of Judah JOINED HIMSELF with Ahaziah king of Israel." We might think, perhaps, that Ahaziah was a better man than his father; but no - it adds, "who did very wickedly." JOINED HIMSELF to "make ships to go to Tarshish." This was a commercial alliance. First we have a matrimonial alliance; then we have a military alliance ; and, lastly, have a commercial alliance : and then we read, " Eliezer son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast JOINED THYSELF to Ahaziah, the Lord hath broken thy works." That is the sum of it.

Three times the Holy Spirit repeats these words "joined thyself" in order to show us the true secret of the evil: but from the Book of Kings (i Kings xxii. 48) we have this additional fact:—When the ships were broken, the enemy did not let him go without another assault. True, the ships which they were building were broken, but there were others, and Ahaz said, " Let my servants go with thy servants in the ship but "Jehoshaphat would not" Thank God ! he had learnt his lesson at last. Oh, that we may have grace to learn And now, there are two great lessons for our times.

(i) It is a remarkable thing that in England we have gone through this same experience in our national history. Our Jehoshaphat was James I. It is through him that we have our Authorised Version; he was a good but weak man.

James I., like Jehoshaphat, married his son Charles to an idolatress, Henrietta, the daughter of Henry, King of France. Of course we know he should not have done it; and, if he had read this narrative, he would have saved the country a vast amount of misery. It led to just the same trouble as it did in the case of Jehoshaphat; it led to national disaster. Jehoshaphat's sin made Jerusalem run with blood. Jehoram made a beginning by killing all his brethren (2 Chron. xxi); and then the Arabians came, and killed all his sons except one (Ahaziah, 2 Chron. xxi. 16, 17; xxii. i) ; and then Athaliah slew all Ahaziah's sons, with the exception of Joash (2 Chron. xxii. 10-12). It was nothing but a scene of bloodshed and murder: and it was the same in England. James married his son Charles to this idolatress, and she came to England in great state. A writer of that period said : "If the people of London had known what troubles were coming with that woman, they would have put on mourning instead of their holiday attire." England was at war on behalf of the Protestant cause, and

was engaged in the siege of Rochelle. As fast as the King and Council resolved to do certain things, it went through the Confessional, and all their plans were frustrated. Things went so far that Parliament actually sent a remonstrance to the King. It led to trouble; it ended in civil war. The whole country ran with blood. Charles lost his head, and James II. lost his throne, all through this "joining affinity" with idolaters. The people who had gone through that sea of trouble were determined that England should never again pass through such an experience ; and they set up great bulwarks, so as to prevent the throne of England ever be: occupied by a Papist, again. But for the last fifty years have been allowing these bulwarks to be destroyed. We have now little left beyond the King's Declaration, and the enemy is doing his utmost to take that away; and he will so if we are foolish enough to allow it. The cause of all the trouble was alliance with idolaters. Let us therefore learn this lesson in our private life, and in our public life ; for it the root of all the evil.

(2) But there is another lesson. The former was politic This is religious, and is connected with Christian work.

In 1804 the British and Foreign Bible Society was formed in London. The late Mr. John Radley (a member of its committee tells us, in a pamphlet published in defence of that Society that one of the earliest letters on record was from a Roman Catholic Priest in Swabia, asking the Committee to circulate Roman Catholic Versions of the Latin Vulgate. But the founders of the Society would on no account join themselves thus with idolaters and their works. The request was repeated, but the answer was a final refusal and a grant of Protestant Versions.

Some time after this, one of the Society's agents abroad expended the sum of £200 in the purchase of these corrupts

Versions ; but the Committee of that day paid the whole sum out of their own pockets, "rather than involve the Society in a transaction, the propriety of which might be questioned." While these assaults were being made on the Society the enemy of God's Truth, and apparently without success a more insidious attempt to undermine its work was undertaken.

Where Ahab's men of war failed, Ahab's daughter succeeded. From the first, the aid of Socinians and Arians was invited ; and, before many years had elapsed, a Committee was found which went back on the principles of their faithful predecessors, and formally adopted the circulation of Romish or Vulgate Versions. They thus joined themselves in the use of the false Versions prepared by the enemies of the Protestant Faith.

The result of these alliances was disaster, as it had been in the cases of Jehoshaphat, in Judah, and of James I. in England: for these Romish Versions contained the Apocryphal books, and a great controversy arose which had its chief seat in Scotland. The late James and Robert Haldane and Dr. Andrew Thompson were the champions of a. Pure Bible ; while the circulation of the Apocrypha was defended by arguments which undermined the Canon of Scripture itself.

The first disaster came in the secession of Scotland.

Separate Bible Societies were formed in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen; which were afterwards united in "The National Bible Society of Scotland" in 1861. After this first disaster, new laws were passed, and added to the Constitution of the British and Foreign Bible Society, forbidding the circulation of the Apocryphal books in any form or manner. This was in 1824 and 1825.

But all this time the Society differed from other Societies in not opening its meetings with prayer ; and the godly among its members set themselves to repair the breaches and prevent further trouble by moving, at the Annual Meeting of the Society in 1831. that the word "Christians" in Law ix. "should not be taken as including those who denied the Divinity and Atonement of Christ." This resolution was rejected: and then the second great disaster came, by secession of many of its "best and holiest " members, who formed a new Society, and called it "The Trinitarian Bible Society," the name being intended as an explanation and a justification of its separate existence.* Prayer was adopted by the old Society on June 8, 1857 but Socinian ministers, being members, are still able "attend and vote" at the meetings of its committees ; the Vulgate Versions are still circulated (though without Apocryphal books). As the circulation of the Apocrypha was defended arguments which undermined the Canon of Scripture, the circulation of these versions is defended by arguments which undermine the Inspiration of Scripture.

Moreover, the plea is made that good men (ie Jehoshaphat) would not approve of this policy if it was wrong; and that it is a "good work" to circulate these books (as Jehoshaphat thought it good to regain Ramoth gilead).

But it is written : "Better is he that ruleth his spirit th he that taketh a city" (Prov. xvi. 32). Jehoshaphat did not rule his spirit; neither did he take the city.

But we are not left in any doubt as to the Lord's verdict on these alliances, either with Romish Versions, Jesuit policy, or Socinian fellowship. The word of the prophet Jehu is written for all time, and it comes with its solemn note of warning for all the Lord's People today : " Shouldest thou

help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD ?"—2
Chron. xix. 2.