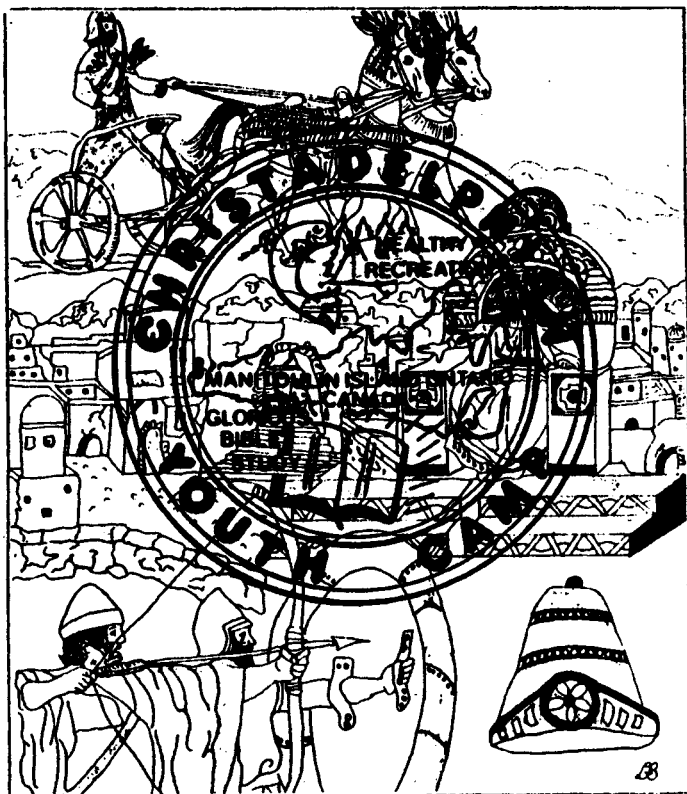


Manitoulin Christadelphian Youth Camp

THE LAST KINGS OF JUDAH



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THE LAST KINGS OF JUDAH

Hezekiah - Zedekiah

by H.P. Mansfield

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Acknowledgements

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The Story of the Bible



VOL. 6

APRIL, 1962

No. 1

Introduction to Volume Six



Our new volume takes us immediately into the dramatic events associated with Hezekiah's life.

For the reason outlined by Mr. Phillips in this issue, this is a most important section of the Word of God, and one demanding our closest attention.

It is also full of interest and action, for it moves along from crisis to crisis in the life of Judah's greatest king.

Judah is at the crossroads of its existence, wedged in by two mighty powers: Assyria and Egypt. To gain a clear conception of the issues involved, it is necessary to consider the political circumstances of the times. This we do by appealing to history and archaeology in confirmation of the Bible record.

The reader of our Story will thus be able to see how sources outside the Bible thoroughly confirm its outline of historical events.

If some of our younger readers find this a little dull, we advise them to skip it and read on. Some time in the future they can turn back to the Story again. Meanwhile, let them try to understand as much as they can concerning this important part of the Bible.

Our "Story of the Bible" is designed as more than a monthly magazine: it is designed as a book to be read and re-read. We believe that its pages can help its readers to understand more about God's most wonderful Book, and therefore suggest that the monthly parts be kept and bound together at the conclusion of each volume for further use.

We hope to make our Story as comprehensive as possible. For example, the more one studies the life of Hezekiah, the more evident it is that the incidents of the times had a great deal to do with the writings and teaching of Isaiah. We have therefore touched upon this in part, leaving it to the reader to go further into the matter if he desires. It would be simpler and easier merely to outline the life of Hezekiah in the conventional manner, but we are sure, that if the reader is a little patient with us, he will find the method we have adopted far better and more instructive.

Our Story moves along a little more slowly, of course, but it is more a Story as God tells it in His Word than the normal "story-book" method of taking isolated incidents out of their context and presenting them as Stories from the Bible.

The past year has been a difficult one for us, and for that reason the appearance of the numbers has been a little irregular. We hope to correct that (God willing) in this volume. In addition, heavy costs of publishing have threatened the continued existence of the Magazine, but we hope that they will be met by increased circulation during the coming twelve months. If we receive sufficient interest in the magazine we will play our part in trying to keep it in existence, even though it may represent a financial loss. To that end, we love to hear from readers, and to learn what they think about our Story, and above all, their comments upon the Bible from whence it is derived.

So we appeal to you to assist us in the directions suggested in the last paragraph. If you can help us extend the usefulness of our Story, by increasing the circulation, do so; we shall be delighted to send free sample copies to any who may be interested in taking it. But above all, the personal interest of readers in the matter set before them is our main concern — and if sufficient of this is received, we will always find the means of setting it before our readers.

—THE EDITOR



Hezekiah : Judah's Greatest King

Our last issue took us to the great religious reform conducted by king Hezekiah. Immediately he obtained sole control over the Kingdom of Judah, he put into effect a political and spiritual policy that completely reversed that of his father Ahaz (2 Chron. 29: 3). The holy place, the holy city, the holy people were each in turn re-dedicated to the worship of Yahweh. This commenced a period of joyous celebration which terminated in a day of thanksgiving in which king, priests and people all took part. Many were taken by surprise by this action of Hezekiah, for "the thing was done suddenly" (2 Chron. 29: 36), but most rejoiced that a man of strong, sound principles had taken over control in Jerusalem. Listen in to the conversation of Mr. Phillips as he explains these events to his family.

THE PASSOVER FEAST RE-INSTITUTED

"The great religious revival brought about by Hezekiah took place in the first year of his reign," said Mr. Phillips, as he outlined to his family the reign of Hezekiah. "At that time, the northern kingdom under Hoshea was still in existence, though the shadow of Assyrian oppression fell heavily across it, and a few years later it was taken into captivity."

"Where do we find that in the Bible?" asked Peter, who was taking notes, to later mark into the margin of his Bible.*

"In 2 Kings 18: 1 we read that Hezekiah commenced to reign in the 3rd year of Hoshea, whilst in 2 Kings 17: 6 we learn that the northern kingdom fell in the 9th year of his reign. Therefore, five years had yet to pass before the Assyrians invaded

the north and took the Israelites into captivity."

"Do you think that Hezekiah would have made any preparations to set up the true worship before he came to the throne?" asked Peter.

"Yes," replied his father. "Hezekiah had jointly reigned with his father during the last years of the latter's life, and had been able to make secret preparations for what he would do when he came to the throne. Now secrecy was set aside, and he publicly made known his policy. The doors of the Temple, which Ahaz had shut up (2 Chron. 28: 24) swung open again, and, full of enthusiasm, the king set about cleansing it that it might be fit for Divine worship. The work was accomplished in 16 days, and was celebrated by the people with great joy. Many rejoiced to see

*The Phillips' family all possess Oxford Wide-Margin Bibles. These Bibles have a wide margin designed to take notes, and are made of special paper to take ink. Send for further particulars to Mr. Phillips, Box 226, G.P.O., Adelaide, South Australia.

the re-establishment of the true worship.†

"Hezekiah now determined to bring Judah completely under the influence of God's law. According to the Law of Moses, the Passover should have been kept in the first month. For many years this feast had been neglected, but Hezekiah now decided to revive it. It was too late to keep it at the appointed time, however, so after taking counsel with the priests and elders of his realm, the King decided to keep it in the second month (2 Chron. 30: 2)."

"Would not that be breaking the law?" asked Peter.

"No, because the Law provided for a second Passover in the second month for such as could not keep it at the appointed time (Num. 9: 10-11). Hezekiah took advantage of that provision, and arranged to keep it on a scale never before attempted since the Kingdom was divided. He decided to invite all Israelites of both kingdoms to celebrate the Passover."

"How could he do that if Hoshea was still reigning in the north?" asked Peter, who likes to place as many difficulties as possible before his father.

"Under normal conditions a monarch would resent any interference in his Kingdom on the part of a neighbouring ruler," agreed Mr. Phillips, "but actually, at this time, conditions in the northern kingdom were favourable for such an attempt, and Hezekiah was able to send his messengers throughout Israel without them being

molested. Hoshea exercised but a weak hold upon the country (2 Kings 17: 1-5). All the bonds which normally hold a healthy state together were relaxed. The people were contemptuous of their king, and were inclined to think and act for themselves. They knew that he was but a nominal sovereign, and was in subjection to the Assyrian Power; therefore they did not respect him much. Moreover, the prophets Hosea and Amos had openly rebuked the leaders of the northern kingdom, and warned the people of trouble to come. This could have made them more receptive of Hezekiah's appeal.

"Accordingly, messengers were sent throughout all the land from Beersheba to Dan, advising the people that the Passover would be held, and inviting them to assemble at Jerusalem to keep it. The king wrote a personal letter which was publicly read out in the various cities. It warned the people that the present state of apostasy and wickedness must result in punishment; it spake of the widespread difficulties that even then were facing the two nations; it reminded them of the stubborn refusal of their fathers to heed God's message and the punishment that fell on them in consequence; it called upon them to submit to Yahweh's requirements in the assurance that His compassion waited for them. Finally, it concluded with a reminder that He is 'gracious and merciful and will not turn His face from His

†These things were discussed in our last volume.

people if they return unto Him" (2 Chron. 30: 9)."

"The people should have responded to that appeal!" remarked Ann.

"One would have thought so," continued her father. "But no! As the messengers went from town to town in the northern kingdom they were met with scornful laughter and mocking taunts. There were but few who were prepared to thoughtfully consider the King's words, and had the moral courage to act upon them. This is not easy to do in such circumstances. It requires a person to humble himself before God and man. Every age has seen a few who are prepared to do that, and who are styled 'God's witnesses.' And Hezekiah's times were no exception. Some in the northern kingdom accepted his invitation, so that a steady stream of worshippers made their way from the north to Jerusalem.

"The messengers had a different reception in Judah. The fine example of the king had made a great impression upon the people. They flocked to the capital to keep the Passover. In Jerusalem itself excitement was at fever point. A spirit of keen revival swept the city. The citizens wanted to make it fit for the coming Passover. Though many altars had already been destroyed, a further search was made for any that might remain, and they were smashed to pieces in the brook Kidron outside the city. The greatest enthusiasm took hold of the people. Those priests and levites

who had previously held back from dedicating themselves to the service of Yahweh, were caught up in the general feeling, and hastened to sanctify themselves and report for duty.

"A great company was thus gathered together from all parts of the land. But many were in complete ignorance of God's requirements, and were not really in a fit state of spiritual preparedness to celebrate the Passover. After all, they had been so long separated from the true worship — particularly those from the northern kingdom. This was obvious to Hezekiah, and he realised that something must be done about it. He prayed to Yahweh that he might overlook anything that was not in strict conformity with the Law, and that He might receive the worship of the people in the spirit in which it was offered. The mediation of the King was successful, and his prayer on behalf of the people was accepted (2 Chron. 30: 18-19.)"

"That prayer is very interesting," commented Graham interrupting his father. "I have been following your comments with the Bible, and I notice that Hezekiah prayed that Yahweh should pardon 'every one who prepareth his heart to seek God though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the Sanctuary.' You told us before* that Hezekiah is a type of Christ. In the light of that, this incident is significant, for we have Hezekiah instituting a Passover by which the people

*See last issue.

were accepted by God, though not according to the purification of the Temple, i.e., the Law of Moses. Christ did exactly the same thing when he instituted his Passover."

"A good point, Graham," commented his father.

"What does v. 20 mean?" asked Ann. "It says that 'Yahweh healed the people.' Were they sick?"

"They were not physically sick, but they were spiritually sick and were in need of healing. Besides, in thus presenting themselves before Yahweh without being cleansed according to the Law they were in danger of punishment by plague. But God overlooked what they had omitted to do, and did not plague them. In that sense they were healed of the plague, i.e., by prevention."

"It must have been a very wonderful time for Israel," said Joan.

"Never had there been a Passover like that one since the days of Solomon. The people rejoiced in the joy of communion with God and with each other. But Hezekiah realised that religious fervour and feeling needs the knowledge of the Word upon which to feed. He knew, full well, that in the absence of this knowledge, all the enthusiasm of the people would soon evaporate; that unless they had something more than excitement to sustain them they would soon drift back into their old ways. He provided for this need. He arranged for Levites to be sent among the people to teach them the 'good knowledge of Yahweh'

(2 Chron. 30: 22). They taught them the inner meaning of the Passover, what was implied in the sacrifice of the lamb, the service that Yahweh required of each one. This teaching caused a profound effect upon the people. They learned the need of prayer, and of 'making confession to Yahweh' (v. 22).

"Seven days were thus spent profitably together. At the end of the feast, the people did not want to disperse. They felt the need of further instruction, they wanted to experience more of the pure joy of Divine service and communion. A further seven days were set aside for this purpose. Special services were conducted. The King donated 1,000 bullocks and 7,000 sheep for sacrificial offerings. Deeply moved by the general enthusiasm and the example of their king, the princes of the realm offered a further 1,000 bullocks and 10,000 sheep. Then followed a period of solemn rededication. Publicly, in the sight of the congregation, the priests entered into a solemn covenant to serve Yahweh. The congregation did the same. All the people gathered together from all parts of the land to rejoice before Yahweh. The whole city gave itself over to joy and gladness in the realisation that God was with them. Never, since the days of Solomon had Jerusalem witnessed such enthusiasm for God.

"The rejoicing was not limited to the city of the Great King (Mat. 5: 35). It extended beyond there to heaven itself, illustrating the saying of the Lord Jesus that there is "Joy in

heaven over one sinner that repenteth' (Luke 15: 7). If that is the case when 'one sinner repents,' what must have been the joy in heaven at the work of Hezekiah, when the whole nation gathered itself together with one mind to give itself completely to God! We read: "The priests the Levites arose, and blessed the people; and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to His holy dwelling place, even unto heaven." There was joy both in heaven and on earth. And what were the words of blessing that caused such joy? They are familiar to many today who have passed through the waters of baptism, and have been received into the Ecclesia with the words of Anthem 19 in the Christadelphian Hymn Book. This anthem is taken from the beautiful passage of Numbers 6: 23-27:

"On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them: Yahweh bless thee, and keep thee: Yahweh make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: Yahweh lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put My name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them."

"This was done on the great day when Hezekiah brought the people back to Yahweh, and the priests blessed the congregation."

"And this was all a type of Christ's coming work, I suppose?" queried Peter.

"Yes. It takes us into the future, when there will be a glorious gathering of the righteous, when they shall eat the 'second Passover' with the Lord Jesus (Matt. 26: 26-29). Then

King, princes, priests and congregation will be united together as 'one' (John 17: 21)."

"I can understand who you mean by the King," remarked Graham, "but who will represent the princes, priests and congregation of the Kingdom Christ will set up."

"They represent all the redeemed. Though they will all possess eternal life in common, they will not all have the same position or status in Christ's kingdom. Some will exercise authority and will teach the people constituting the royal priesthood of the Age to come. Others will occupy more humble positions as the general congregation. All will find positions adequate to their standing in Christ's sight at that time."

FALSE RELIGION OVERTHROWN

"The Great Passover was over. But the people were not as yet satisfied. They had been lifted up in the fulness of enthusiasm, and had to manifest it in some direction. Encouraged by the King, they gave themselves over to a tumultuous proceeding of a remarkable character. The idols and altars in Jerusalem had been destroyed, but many remained in other cities. The people decided these must go.

"Throughout Judah there was a wholesale revulsion against all forms of false religion and worship which now felt the weight of popular antagonism. The people gathered at the Passover returned home smashing the idols, destroying the

altars, cutting down the images in all the towns through which they passed. They did this not only in Judah but in some of the cities of the northern kingdom as well!

"Among the things destroyed was the brazen serpent that Moses had made in the wilderness. The people had come to worship it as an idol. Hezekiah was determined that nothing should hinder the pure worship of Yahweh. He therefore destroyed it, calling it 'Nehushtan' (2 Kings 18: 4)."

"Whatever does that mean?" asked Joan.

"It means, 'a piece of brass.' The King wanted to show the people that Yahweh alone should be worshipped. The Hebrew word for serpent is 'nechash' and the Hebrew word for brass is 'nechust,' so there was a play on words."

"Do you think there is any significance in such a play on words?" asked Graham.

"Certainly. In this case it showed the people how careful they must be. As it was so easy, by a slip of the tongue, to turn 'nechash' into 'nechust,' so small acts of thoughtlessness can turn true worshippers into idolators, as in the case of the worship of the brazen serpent. It was excellent as a memorial; but became a symbol of apostasy when worshipped. The Jews treated the formalism of the Law in that way, as Christ showed at his first advent when he set it aside as Hezekiah did the brazen serpent. We have a similar example today in the sign of the cross. This is excellent as a memorial; but a sym-

bol of apostasy to a world that worships it."

"Back to the story, Dad!" warned Peter.

"Very well. Hezekiah had accomplished much; but much remained to be done. He carefully studied the order of Temple worship established by Samuel and David, and re-instituted it again. The Levites and priests were appointed their courses and form of service. He gave a public example (see 2 Chron. 31: 3) of sacrifice by arranging to personally supply animals for the daily service. He re-instituted the principle of tithing so that the Priests and Levites should not want.

"And the people responded. There poured into Jerusalem the firstfruits of wine, oil, honey, corn; the tithes of the field; the freewill offerings of the people. Yahweh had responded to the enthusiasm of the people by blessing their labours so that they had abundance. It was obvious by the third month (v. 7) when the Feast of Harvest was celebrated, that Judah was to be blessed that year with bumper crops. The firstfruits were brought in and stored in stacks. By the time the seventh month arrived, and the fulness of the harvest was gathered in, it was seen how great was the abundance.

"This was the month when the solemn Day of Atonement was celebrated, and the sins of the people were blotted out in the covering provided by the Atonement sacrifice. It was followed (see Lev. 23) by the Feast of Tabernacles, when the people

camped out together for a week, rejoicing before Yahweh because of His goodness.

"And they had ample cause to rejoice on this occasion.

"Azariah, the chief priest, showed Hezekiah the huge heaps of produce that had come in through the firstfruits, the tithes and the freewill gifts of the people.

"Yahweh has indeed blessed His people," he declared.

"Storehouses were provided for the surplus after the priests and Levites had received their dues.

"Hezekiah arranged for the priests and Levites to be registered in order that they might receive a regular distribution of foodstuffs. Levites in authority were placed in charge of the distribution and the tithes were dispensed according to the size of the families of those registered. Thus the priests and Levites were relieved of any necessity to be concerned with mundane matters, and could devote their time exclusively to teaching the people, and assisting the king in his policy of national worship. We, today, benefit from this wise provision, for among the things they did at that time, was to set in order some of the writings of Solomon (Prov. 25: 1) and David. Hezekiah used some of the psalms of David to express his own feelings and experiences, as we shall see. In fact, the evidence indicates that Hezekiah set in order many of the Songs of Zion for use in the Temple service at this time (see Isa. 38: 20).

"Meanwhile he prospered in all his ways. Notice what is re-

corded of him in 2 Chronicles 31: 20-21:

"Hezekiah wrought that which was good and right and truth before Yahweh his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered."

"But as Yahweh tests all His workmen to perfect their characters," said Mr. Phillips, as he concluded this portion of his talk, "a great trial of faith was soon to be experienced by the King."

THE POLITICAL CRISIS

Assyria on the March

Whilst Hezekiah was busy in the peaceful pursuit of restoring the pure worship of Yahweh, the world about him resounded with the thunder of approaching war.

The brutal Assyrian nation was on the march, determined to extend its power over the then known world.

The Assyrians were a cruel and ruthless nation. They knew only one argument — brute force. Their name has echoed down the ages as synonymous with torture and cruelty. Assyrian monuments, excavated by archaeologists, depict their kings and generals gloating over their spoils, mocking at their tortured captives, trampling underfoot their fallen and humiliated foes with haughty indifference.

One writer (J. Urquhart) has written:

"No considerations of pity were permitted to stand in the way of Assyrian policy. It could not afford to garrison its conquests, and it practised a plan which largely dispensed with the nec-

essity for leaving garrisons behind the Assyrian armies. There was unsparing slaughter to begin with. The kings seem to gloat in their inscriptions over the spectacle presented by the field of battle. They describe how it was covered with the corpses of the vanquished. This carnage was followed up by fiendish inflictions upon individual cities. The leading men, as at Lachish when Sennacherib had conquered that city, were led forth, seized by the executioners, and subjected to various punishments, all of them filled to the brim with horror. Some of the victims were held down while one of the band of torturers, who are portrayed upon the monuments gloating over their

fearful work, inserts his hand into the victim's mouth, grips his tongue and wrenches it out by the roots. In another spot pegs are driven into the ground. To these, another victim's wrists are fixed with cords. His ankles are similarly made fast, and the man is stretched out, unable to move a muscle. The executioner then applies himself to his task; and, beginning at the accustomed spot, the sharp knife makes its incision, the skin is raised inch by inch till the man is flayed alive. These skins are then stretched out upon the city walls, or otherwise disposed of so as to terrify the people and leave behind long-enduring impressions of Assyrian vengeance. For

HEZEKIAH'S POLITICAL CRISIS

A Memo from Mr. Phillips

The political crisis which now disturbed the reign of Hezekiah demands the closest attention of every keen student of the Bible. There is, perhaps, no more dramatic incident in Scripture than the record of the triumphal descent of the mighty Assyrian, his boastful assurances that he would reduce Jerusalem to pulp, and his ignominious defeat.

This tremendous crisis and deliverance foreshadows the impending crisis of this age predicted in Ezekiel 38, when the Russian Power will re-enact the same self-confident advance upon Palestine, only to experience the same measure of defeat.

Thus we are living in times similar to those of Hezekiah's day.

In addition, the events of Hezekiah's times form the background of the prophecies of Isaiah and anticipate the future. The people of his day had actually witnessed such a crisis as will usher in the Kingdom of God in the future. They could hardly doubt that what God had accomplished in their day He will repeat in the future.

These incidents must have made a tremendous impression upon the faithful in Judah.

So important are these incidents of history in the purpose of Yahweh that He has recorded the Political and Personal crises that disturbed Hezekiah's life no less than three times in His book (2 Kings 17; 2 Chron. 32; Isaiah 36). In Isaiah Chapters 36-39, the prophet turns historian because the things he describes in these chapters form the typical foundation for the events he predicts, many of which have yet to be fulfilled. In the embattled city of Jerusalem, a drama was enacted seven hundred years before Christ that foreshadowed the sufferings and the glory of Messiah. The King was first brought low in sickness, was then made great in victory by the defeat of Sennacherib, was exalted over the surrounding nations, and finally completed the spiritual revival in Judah which he had commenced at the beginning of his reign. Christ, too, was brought low in the sickness of mortality 1900 years ago; will be made great in victory in the Age to come; will establish his power; will complete the spiritual revival he commenced at his first advent.

The grand prophecy of Isaiah cannot be properly understood without some conception of Hezekiah's life and times.

others, long sharp poles are prepared. The sufferer, taken like all the rest from the leading men of the city, is laid down; the sharpened end of the pole is driven in through the lower part of the chest; the pole is then raised, bearing the writhing victim aloft; it is planted in the hole dug for it, and the man is left to die."

The archaeologist, Professor Sayce, wrote:

"The barbarities which followed the capture of a town would be almost incredible, were they not a subject of boast in the inscriptions which record them. Assurnatsir-pal's cruelties were especially revolting. Pyramids of human heads marked the path of the conqueror; boys and girls were burnt alive or reserved for a worse fate; men were impaled, flayed alive, blinded, or deprived of their hands and feet, of their ears and noses, while women and children were carried into slavery, the captured city plundered and reduced to ashes, and the trees in its neighbourhood cut down."

The Assyrians were the German Nazis of the ancient world.

One can imagine the fear that would be engendered in the hearts of all as news of the approach of such an army was rumoured.

That is why so much is mentioned of Assyria in the records of the Bible, why it is the subject of prophecy so continuously.

Nahum the prophet foretold the doom of this nation, in language that expresses uninhibited relief and joy in the complete overthrow of a vile and hated enemy. The doom of Assyria was a cause of rejoicing to all mankind. The nation contributed nothing to the progress of humanity.

But in Hezekiah's time, over a century was to elapse before that came to pass. In the mean-

while, Assyria rode the crest of the wave of success. Under the mighty warrior-king Shalmaneser IV, its power was extended on all sides. Syria, then Israel, was invaded. In Judah, news came through of cities destroyed, of brutalities inflicted upon the Israelites, of families torn from the land and deported to foreign parts.

In the midst of this campaign, Shalmaneser died, and his son Sargon came to the throne. He, too, delighted in war. This was the 4th year of Hezekiah's reign (2 Kings 18: 9). Samaria was besieged,* and for three years resisted the weight of Assyrian arms. At last it fell, and the Assyrians swept south against Philistia. The Egyptians sent help to the Philistines, but it was in vain. Philistia fell and was ravaged by the Assyrians.

Hezekiah now had the Assyrians on the north and west of him. Fear swept through the nation of Judah. Busy with the restoration of Divine worship, the king was not ready for war. In the face of the Assyrian threat, and the fears of his own people, Hezekiah capitulated and agreed to pay tribute.

King Sargon, of Assyria, boasts of this in his Annals that have been discovered. He calls himself the "subjugator of the land of Judah which is far off . . . the uprooter of Hamath, whose ruler was captured by his own hands."

For a time Hezekiah paid this tribute.

*The story of Samaria's fall was told in the last issue of our last volume.

The Challenge of Isaiah

From Jerusalem the statesman-prophet Isaiah looked out upon a troubled world. In a series of prophetic utterances he spoke of the fate of the various nations; he spoke of the "tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together" (Is. 13: 4). Babylon would fall, Moab would be humbled, Syria would be overthrown, confusion would sweep Egypt.

Only those who put confidence in Yahweh, and sought the Kingdom He will set up on earth under Christ, would find the strength to rise above the threatening storm.

He exhorted the people of Judah that the triumph of Assyria was for but a time:

"It shall come to pass, that when Yahweh hath performed his whole work upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks" (Isa. 10: 12).

"Be not afraid of the Assyrian," he told the people (Isa. 10: 24), "for yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction" (v. 25).

He predicted the sudden ad-

vance of the Assyrian, and his equally sudden destruction. His warning was expressed in rapid staccato statements that spell out all the fear and panic that swept Israel and Judah as the tramp of Assyrian feet were heard in the distance.

Assyria is on the march from Rimmon,
he has reached Ai,
he has passed through Migron,
he has stored his baggage at Mich-

mash,
he is through the pass,
he camps at Geba.

Ramah is in a panic,
Saul's Gibeath is in flight;
Shriek, O folk of Gallim!
Listen, Laishah!

Answer, them, Anathoth!

Madmenah runs away,

The natives of Gibbim scurry for
safety.

Today he is halting at Nob,
shaking his fist at the hill of Zion,
at the hill of Jerusalem.

But lo! the Lord, Yahweh of hosts,
lops Assyria's boughs with his axe.
The towering trees are felled,
the lofty is laid low!

(Isa. 10: 27-34—Moffatt)

But the people had little faith in Isaiah's words. They could not see how any nation could conquer Assyria unless it be Egypt. Certainly it was beyond the power of little Judah to do so. When the Assyrian swept down south to Ashdod and Philistia (see Isa. 20: 1), the fear was at its height. There was a

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general demand that Hezekiah should seek the assistance of Egypt.

Isaiah knew that that policy was disastrous. Egypt has never helped Israel, and would not do so then. He knew that Egypt was destined to be overthrown by the Assyrians, that if Judah turned to Egypt, it would be overwhelmed in the destruction that would be poured out upon the Kingdom of the Nile.

His message was dramatically presented to the people. He appeared before them as a captive, divested of his normal clothing, without shoes on his feet. As the people wondered at the strange appearance of the prophet, he gave them the message from Yahweh:

"Yahweh hath said, 'Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia; so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians and Ethiopians prisoners' (Isa. 20: 3-4)."

There was no help to be gained from Egypt; the only source of help was from Yahweh. But in the face of the Assyrian threat the people of Judah had forgotten their vows, forgotten what they had promised to do at the time of the religious revival and the Great Passover; had completely lost their faith.

The prophet went among the people trying to bring them back to their former conduct.

"What is the matter with you!" he demanded of them (Isa. 22: 1). The very people who had so eagerly swarmed the city of Jerusalem, destroying the idols in the first flush of enthusiasm for Hezekiah's religious revival, were now full of dread. The test that Yahweh now brought upon them found the weak places in their armour. Jerusalem, which had earlier resounded with vows of what the people would do for God, of how strong they were in faith, now became a city in which God's protection was forgotten. An excitement begotten of dread dominated the people. It became a "city of stirs, a tumultuous city, a city given over to pleasure," a city whose leaders were so weak that they considered themselves as good as dead before they went to battle (Isa. 22: 2).

People reacted differently to the terrible crisis facing them.

There was a class that thought death was inevitable: that put no confidence in God or man. They reasoned that defence, either spiritual or physical, was in vain. Completely lacking faith, they set aside Isaiah's message of hope, and gave themselves over to riot and revelry. They believed that death was near, therefore they would enjoy life whilst they could. "Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die," was their fatalistic philosophy.

"You shall certainly die," was

*Isaiah probably only walked among the people for three days in the manner described. The words can be rendered: "As my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot, a three years' sign and wonder. . . ." He was not necessarily completely naked, but divested of his customary clothing in similar manner as Saul is described in 1 Sam. 19: 24.

Isalah's rebuke to such a class.

Others did seek to defend the city. They busied themselves in strengthening the walls of the city; they observed with pleasure the plans of Hezekiah to cut an aqueduct from the spring of Gihon to the pool of Siloam and to wall in this reservoir so the water would not be available to the invader. These preparations were good as far as they went, but they did not go far enough. Men were putting their confidence only in the flesh, and overlooking the true Source of Defence available to them.

Isalah reminded them of this.

He told them that they had been diligent in making preparation for defence in regard to these waters of Jerusalem, "but ye have not looked unto the Maker thereof, neither had respect unto Him that fashioned it long ago" (Isa. 22: 11). Seek Him and your defences will be sure, he exhorted (Psalm 127).

Another class was quite confident that the enemy would not succeed. Their confidence was not in God but in themselves. They were haughty and self-righteous, and thought that Yahweh must surely preserve them. Such a one was Shebna,

HEZEKIAH'S AQUEDUCT

His Preparations for the Defence of the City

Hezekiah's aqueduct is one of the archaeological mysteries of the city of Jerusalem. It was laboriously dug out of rock, and follows an "S" shape for 1,700 feet linking the spring of Gihon with the Pool of Siloam (2 Chron. 32: 3-4) which was then surrounded by a wall so closing it off from outside contact (Isa. 22: 19-11 — the word "ditch" signifies "reservoir"). Why this aqueduct followed the "S" shape is not known, for if it travelled in a straight line some 700 feet of difficult digging would have been avoided. The record says that "many people were gathered together" for the purpose of digging (2 Chron. 32: 4). Perhaps in the panic and confusion mistakes were made and thus the curious shape of the aqueduct came into being. The construction of the aqueduct was apparently mooted when the Assyrians marched south and fear dominated Jerusalem (Isa. 22: 9-11), but only constructed or completed when it was obvious that Sennacherib was going to attack Jerusalem (2 Chron. 32: 1). The aqueduct stopped the water of Jerusalem from flowing into the Kidron valley, and therefore being available to any invading enemy. The story of the digging is told on an inscription in stone found on the spot of the aqueduct in 1880 and today exhibited in Istanbul Museum. It makes interesting reading:

"The boring through is completed. And this is the story of the boring: while yet they plied the pick, each towards his fellow, and while yet there were three cubits to be bored through, there was heard the voice of one calling to the other that there was a hole in the rock on the right hand and on the left hand. And on the day of the boring through the workers in the tunnel struck each to meet his fellow, pick upon pick. Then the water poured from the source to the pool 1,200 cubits, and a hundred cubits was the height of the rock above the heads of the workers in the tunnel.

the treasurer, who was over the Palace. Confident in his self-righteousness, he had actually built a sepulchre on high where it would be seen by all. He was sure he would be preserved, and that his descendants would remain in the land as well, and would see in the wonderful sepulchre he had made for himself, a memorial of his glory for all time. He found pleasure in that which the Law showed to be defiling, associated with death and cursing.

But Isalah showed that the self-righteous would be rebuked. Yahweh is not mocked, and such as Shebna would be punished. He would be "whirled round and round" violently like a stone in a sling, and cast into a far-distant land (Isa. 22: 18).

A final class whom he describes as "rebellious children" were politicians. They served Yahweh when it was politic to do so, but now they sought an alliance with Egypt. They saw the shadow of Pharaoh as their only hope, and desired to turn back to that land from whence the nation had been delivered under Moses. This, as Isalah knew (Isa. 30), was a disastrous policy of complete apostasy and doom for those trusting in it.

He warned them that Egypt was a land of darkness, a

"broken reed," that those who trusted in it would find it to be their shame and confusion.

But the city was not completely given over to wicked men. There were some who followed Hezekiah and had faith in Yahweh. Among them was Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, whose name means "El (God) shall establish, for Yahweh is a Protection." He was one who delighted to serve Yahweh even in this time of crisis, for he is styled His servant (Isa. 22: 20).

Isaiah told him that he would be preserved and promoted. He would be given a position of authority and honour in the realm of David: he would be given the charge of the Palace in place of Shebna who would be deposed.

Hezekiah must have heard the message of Isaiah and acted upon it, for later, when the Assyrian army was destroyed, Eliakim is represented as being "over the household," and Shebna is merely the scribe (Isa. 37: 2).*

Meanwhile, as the feared and hated Assyrian moved south, uprooting nations, creating a reign of terror throughout the countries; as fear and dread stalked Jerusalem, and men arose with faithless and con-

*Shebna and Eliakim are typical of the purpose of God in Christ (see Isa. 22: 15-25). The former's name means "To lead captive." He is representative of Israel trusting in the flesh. He was deposed in favour of Eliakim who represents Israel trusting in faith, the chief of whom is the Lord Jesus. The former was scattered into a "far country," the latter (both Jew and Gentile) will become ruler in Zion. As Eliakim was placed over Shebna, so spiritual Israel (with Christ as head) will gain the supremacy in the Kingdom the Lord Jesus will establish. Mr. Phillips will be happy to answer any further questions on this chapter. They should be directed to Mr. H. Phillips, Box 226, G.P.O., Adelaide, South Australia.

flicting policies and demands; whilst the trials and testing of the times separated the righteous from the wicked, and caused all to appear in their true light; the prophet Isaiah performed his ministry for the benefit of the nation: strengthening those who were prepared to be helped, warning and condemning the foolish and the wicked, striving to bring forth fruit to the glory of Yahweh's name.

Hezekiah's Challenge

Although Hezekiah had not capitulated to the demand of those who said he should seek Egyptian aid, he nevertheless gave way to the Assyrian and agreed to pay tribute.

King Sargon returned to Assyria, and Hezekiah paid tribute at Nineveh. The people of Jerusalem breathed a sigh of relief. The city returned to normal. But Hezekiah was not satisfied with what he had done. The word of Yahweh exhorted him to "bear not the Assyrian," but here he was humbly submitting to him.

Hezekiah decided to revolt (2 Kings 18: 7).

To his west, in the land of the Philistines, Sargon had placed rulers who were prepared to do his will. Among them was the king of Ekron. Hezekiah attacked the Philistines with success, capturing this king, and taking him to Jerusalem. He over-ran the whole country, occupying even Gaza, the last of

the powerful forts towards Egypt.

This strengthened Judah and Jerusalem considerably. It meant that the Assyrian would have to retake these forts before he could press his claim against the Jewish capital. To do otherwise would have allowed the Egyptians to move north against the Assyrian army under cover of these protective forts.

And Egypt was the deadly enemy of Assyria.

Hezekiah's action sparked off revolts in other countries, probably encouraged by Egypt. Nations rashly cast off their allegiance to Assyria, placing confidence in Egypt, that "broken reed," as Isaiah described it. In one of the Assyrian inscriptions, Sargon makes mention of this. "The people of Philistia, Judah, Edom and Moab . . . were speaking treason," he declared.

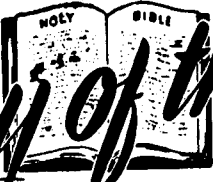
Hezekiah's challenge angered the Assyrian monarch but did not deter him. Sennacherib, the son of Sargon, and crown prince of the realm, marched against the nations of the south and west.

He was a most efficient general: ruthless, determined, brutal.

The whole country was in revolt from Sidon down to Egypt, but one by one they were attacked and crushed.

They had no hope against the efficient Assyrian war-machine.

The Story of the Bible



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No. 2

Hezekiah's Political Crisis

(Continued from last issue)

SENNACHERIB ATTACKS JUDAH

Our last issue showed how Hezekiah determined to throw off the yoke of Assyria that had rested so heavily on Judah. In this action he was supported by Isaiah the prophet, though many in Jerusalem were bitterly opposed to his policy. The Assyrians were a cruel and brutal nation, and as they invaded the countries north of Judah leaving a trail of destruction and suffering behind them, the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem became even more fearful of the consequences of the king's action.

Sennacherib swept south, leaving behind him a trail of vengeance and violence. The record of his campaign is still recorded on an inscription preserved in the British Museum. Portion of it reads as follows:

"In my third campaign I marched against Hatti. The awful splendour of my lordship overwhelmed Lull, King of Sidon, and he fled far off over the sea and died (an infamous death). The fearsome nature of the weapon of the god Ashur, my Lord, overwhelmed Great Sidon, Little Sidon, Bit-Zitti, Zariptu, Mahalliba, Ashu, Akzib and Akku. His strong walled cities, places where there were food and drinking facilities for his garrisons (were overthrown) and they bowed in submission at my feet . . . I sat on the throne to be king and imposed tribute, due to my lordship

(to be rendered) annually without ceasing."

Only pausing sufficiently to punish and demand, Sennacherib marched south wreaking his vengeance on the cities that did not bow in submission quickly enough. One by one they fell. Down as far as Philistia he continued. The Assyrian inscriptions speak of the guilt of the Philistines in submitting to Hezekiah:

"The officials, nobles and people of Ekron, had thrown Padi, their king, into iron fetters as one loyal to the treaty and obligations of Assyria, and had given him up to Hezekiah the Jew, as an enemy."

The Philistines appealed to Egypt for help — but in vain,

Full vengeance was exacted of them by Sennacherib. Then, at last, he turned the full weight of his wrath on to Judah. Forty-six cities were besieged and fell. Two hundred thousand people were brought into subjection. Destruction, devastation and ruin became the order of the day.

Sennacherib was bent on crushing Judah as his father had crushed Israel.

In Jerusalem dismay reigned. Reports arrived of city after city falling, of terrible atrocities being committed on the conquered, of the full measure of pain and misery experienced by the nation.

News came that Lachish was besieged. This was a strong fort about 35 miles from Jerusalem, which Sennacherib now set about to systematically destroy.

Jerusalem became panic-stricken. Fierce demands were made that Hezekiah should give way. The people could stand no more.

Hezekiah capitulated. He sent to Sennacherib at Lachish.

"I have offended," he said. "Return from me; that which you put on me I will bear."

Sennacherib accepted the offer. He demanded that Hezekiah give up Padi the Philistine ruler, that he pay 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold, together with other tribute.

Hezekiah submitted. To pay the tribute he had to strip the gold and silver from off the Temple. How sadly Isaiah must have observed this desecration.

And Sennacherib boasted of his triumph. On the Taylor

Prism, preserved in the British Museum, he records the details of this campaign:

"I caused Padi, their king, to come out of Jerusalem (probably part of the tribute imposed on Hezekiah—Editor), and sat him on the throne as lord over them, fixing upon him tribute to my lordship. But as for Hezekiah the Jew, who did not bow in submission to my yoke, forty-six of his strong walled towns and innumerable small villages in their neighbourhood I besieged and conquered by stamping down earth-ramps and then by bringing up battering rams, by the assault of foot-soldiers, by breaches, tunnelling and sapper operations. I made to come out of them 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, innumerable horses, mules, donkeys, camels, large and small cattle, and counted them as the spoils of war. He himself I shut up like a caged bird within Jerusalem, his royal city. I put watch-posts strictly around it and turned back to his disaster any who went out of its city gates. . . . As for Hezekiah, the awful splendour of my lordship overwhelmed him, and the irregular and regular troops which he had brought in to strengthen Jerusalem, his royal city. . . . Together with 30 talents of gold, 300 talents of silver . . . he paid tribute (see 2 Kings 18: 15—Editor) . . . and made slavish obelance."

There is a significant feature about this boast. Sennacherib claims to have shut up Hezekiah like a caged bird within Jerusalem, but he does not claim to have taken the city. That is an important omission for an Assyrian king to make. It means that though he besieged the city, it did not fall to him. To that extent the attack failed.

And the reason why it failed was that the mighty Assyrian came face to face with a Power he could not match.

It was the challenge of Yahweh that destroyed him.

Meanwhile, Hezekiah realised that his policy of appeasement was a failure. He had paid the tribute, he had spoiled the Temple to do so. But Sennacherib made no attempt to raise the siege of Lachish, and it was obvious that Jerusalem would be attacked once Lachish had fallen.

Lachish fell, and Sennacherib made it his headquarters. The defenders were treated with great cruelty. Sennacherib caused a wall relief to be made of his triumph and placed in his palace at Nineveh. It is still in existence today. It depicts the cruel king sitting on his high-backed portable throne with armrests and footstool, which was placed in his camp outside the city. Surrounding him is his officers, whilst representatives from the stricken city pay homage, and the captives, including women and children, are led past. Above the bas-relief is the following caption: "Sennacherib, King of all, King of Assyria, sitting on his nimeru-throne while the spoil from the city of Lachish passed before him."

Thus Sennacherib sat in pomp and enjoyed his triumph; but his rejoicing was short-lived.

He was soon to learn that his claim of being "King of all" was untrue. He was to be opposed by the King of heaven, before Whose power the mighty Assyrian army was to be brushed aside like "thistledown before the whirlwind" (Isa. 17: 12-14).

Hezekiah Prepares to Defend Jerusalem

When Hezekiah realised that his policy of appeasement had failed, and that Sennacherib was determined to take Jerusalem (2 Chron. 32: 1), he called together a gathering of his counsellors, and they planned preparations for the war.

He strengthened the walls of Jerusalem, completed the aqueduct (see p. 14), raised its towers, prepared munitions, did everything in his power to resist the Assyrian.

But his main confidence was in Yahweh.

It is not inconsistent with faith to do what we can for ourselves. In fact, God expects us to do so. The Lord Jesus was prudent in the face of trouble, even though he knew that the Jews could not destroy him until his hour had come (John 7: 1-8).

And Yahweh desires us to use the means He provides for us in time of need.

Faith permits us to trust in God despite what we might do for ourselves. In fact, what we do for ourselves provides the foundation upon which God can work for our deliverance or benefit.

The farmer who does not sow his seed will not reap a bountiful crop, no matter how much he prays. The man who does not work will lack the essentials of life, no matter how great his faith.

So Hezekiah prepared for the defence of the city.

But he did not neglect the

essential thing. He not only strengthened the walls, but the people as well.

With the captains of his army, he called them together in the broadspace of the city,* and there he gave them a heart-to-heart talk. He warned, counselled, exhorted and comforted them.

"Be strong and courageous," he declared, "be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for **THERE BE MORE WITH US THAN WITH HIM!** With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is Yahweh our God to help us, and to fight our battles."

The courageous, faithful attitude of the King helped the people immensely. They forgot their fear, and put confidence in Yahweh. They believed the king and "leaned on his word" (see margin).

Rabshakeh's Blasphemous Demand

(Isa. 36, 2 Kgs. 18, 2 Chron. 32)

It was not long before the people of Jerusalem had their first sight of the feared and hated enemy. Sennacherib sent a large portion of his army to the city, under the charge of Tartan, the Commander-in-Chief; Rabsaris, the chief of his officers; and Rabshakeh, the chief of the captains, a sort of political chief.

The army marched to the valley of the Kidron just outside

the walls of the city. Here, at one time, the waters of the Gihon used to flow, but Hezekiah's newly-built aqueduct had stopped all that, so that there was no water for the enemy. The Assyrians could see in the walled-up reservoir and the strengthened walls of the city, Hezekiah's determination to maintain his independence.

Jerusalem was not to be taken easily.

The Assyrian chieftains called for the king that they might discuss the situation. Under the terms of a truce, three of Hezekiah's officers emerged from Jerusalem to parley with the Assyrians. They were Eliakim, who had been newly appointed over the king's palace (cp. 2 Kings 18: 18 with Isa. 22: 15-19); Shebna, who had been deposed to the position of Scribe; and Joah, the recorder or official historian.

Angrily and haughtily the Rabshakeh addressed them:

"What foolish confidence[†] is this in which you trust?" he asked. "If you claim you have counsel and strength for war, on whom do you trust? Do you trust in the support of Pharaoh the king of Egypt? Do you think he can help you? Why he is but a bruised reed, upon which if a man lean it will only pierce his hand, like the reeds of Egypt, but will not support his weight. But perhaps you trust in Yahweh, the God of Israel. Has not Hezekiah removed His high places and altars and told the people they must worship in

*In this action, Hezekiah restored the formula for fighting laid down by Yahweh in His law. Israel was taught to go into battle with an exhortation to "fear not" in their minds, and a prayer on their lips. See the provision laid down in Deut. 20: 1-4. The principle of this can be incorporated into the actions of every-day life. It is not always physical warfare in which we are engaged or a visible enemy that we fight.

†Hebrew = "Ma habbittachon hazzeh." Bettachon is a diminutive intended to express the utmost contempt for Yahweh. Thus to trust in Him was in the mouth of Rabshakeh nothing but "foolish confidence."

Jerusalem? Now I wager* that if we gave you 2,000 horses you could not find riders for them. How then do you think you will cope with the least of the captains of the Assyrian army who each have more cavalry under him than that? But if you think that Yahweh will save you, why Yahweh has told us to go up and destroy Jerusalem! It is because He is with us that we are so successful!"

This was a clever speech, very damaging to the cause of Judah. It was designed to set the people against their king by representing him as being a despotic autocrat, who had taken away the places of worship they had set up, and had forced them to go up to Jerusalem which was now in trouble. It was a speech well calculated to cause dissension and dissatisfaction throughout Jerusalem.

The Jewish embassy well knew this. They realised that in the divided state of the people of Jerusalem, Rabshakeh's arguments would appeal to many. Some defeatists were still saying that the king should give way; many were cowards at heart and would be made more so by the bold and boastful attitude of the Assyrians. Some had heard the prophecy of Isaiah in which he had declared that the Assyrian was the rod of Yahweh's anger (Isa. 10: 5-6) and would find confirmation of this in the last statement of Rabshakeh.

It was dangerous for the defence of Jerusalem for the people to hear such words as those.

And they were spoken in the hearing of many inhabitants of

Jerusalem, for the walls of the city were crowded with people who looked down in curiosity at the negotiations going on below.

Hezekiah's officers pleaded with the Assyrians that they speak in the Syrian language which they understood very well, but Rabshakeh contemptuously rejected their request.

"Do you think that my master has sent me to your master to speak these words?" he haughtily asked Eliakim. "He wants the common people of Jerusalem to hear what I have got to say, and then if they are forced to great extremities through the siege that will surely take place, they can only blame themselves."

So saying, he turned to the people that crowded the walls of Jerusalem, and with a loud voice he shouted to them:

"Do not let Hezekiah deceive you; he is not able to deliver you. Do not let him lead you astray by suggesting that Yahweh can deliver you. It is not possible that this city will escape the king of Assyria. Seek my favour by a present, and come out to me. You will then have security, and we will look after you. You will be taken to a land just like your own where you will have ample to eat. But beware lest Hezekiah persuade you by saying that Yahweh will deliver you. Have any of the gods of the nations delivered their countries out of the hands of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arphad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have the gods delivered Samaria out of my hand? What gods have delivered any nation out of the hands of Assyria, so why trust that Yahweh should deliver Jerusalem out of our hands?"

A deep silence followed this confident, boastful shout. The Jewish representatives did not answer the Assyrian, but returned to report to Hezekiah the result of their conference.

*In A.V. "pledge." But the Hebrew "aurob" signifies to traffic, barter, pledge; hence to wager or gamble.

They came into his presence with their clothes rent, and with all the marks of sorrow, to tell him the grim news.

Nor did the people answer the Assyrian, for the King had instructed them not to do so.

But though silence followed the shout of Rabshakeh, the conference had demonstrated one important factor that was of benefit to Hezekiah. The impudent, blasphemous, insulting speech of Rabshakeh had taken the quarrel from out of the hands of Hezekiah and placed it into the hands of Yahweh. It was no longer a battle between kings, but one in which the gods of Assyria versus the God of Israel.

There could be only one result from such a battle as that!

Yahweh's Comforting Reply

When Hezekiah heard the report of Eliakim, he rent his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the Temple to beseech the aid of Yahweh.

He also sought the help and guidance of Isaiah. A deputation comprising Eliakim, Shebna and the chief priests, clothed in sackcloth the garb of mourning, approached the prophet with the message of the king.

"This is a day of trouble, punishment and provocation," they declared. "For the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth.* It may be that Yahweh thy God will hear all the words of Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master has sent to reproach the

living God; and will reprove the words which Yahweh thy God hath heard: therefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that are left!"

Back to Hezekiah there came a wonderful message of comfort:

"Thus saith Yahweh, Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. Behold, I will send a blast[†] upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land."

The prophecy began to be fulfilled almost immediately.

When R a b s h a k e h returned to Lachish, he found Sennacherib had completed his conquest of the fortress, and was attacking Libnah, another city about 10 miles north.

He also learned that a report was current that Tirhakah of Ethiopia, who had gained power in Egypt, was marching north to attack the Assyrian army. In the fact of this new threat, the conquest of Jerusalem had to be delayed. Sennacherib massed his forces to meet the attack from the south.

But he was still determined to destroy Hezekiah. He sent a threatening letter to the king:

"Let not your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. You have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by destroying them utterly and shall you be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed? Where is the king of Hamath, of Arpad, of Sepharvaim, of Hena and Ivah?"

*Judah is represented as experiencing all the pain of childbirth without having the strength to deliver and bring to an end (2 Kgs. 19: 3).

†The word in Hebrew is "ruach," rendered elsewhere as "spirit." Yahweh would cause a spirit of fear to come on Sennacherib.

The letter mocked at Yahweh, and Hezekiah determined to place the issue in the hands of God.

He went up to the Temple, and spread it out, offering up a prayer for help. Full of fervor, he besought that Yahweh, whose presence in Israel was indicated by the light that shone in the darkness of the Most Holy Place, between the Cherubim and above the Mercy Seat, should manifest His power and aid his people.*

"O Yahweh God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubim, Thou art the God, even Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. Thou hast made heaven and earth.

"Yahweh, bow down Thine ear, and hear: open, Yahweh, Thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to re-

proach the living God.

"Of a truth, Yahweh, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands. And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them.

"Now therefore, O Yahweh our God, I beseech Thee, save Thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that Thou art Yahweh Elohim, Thou only."

In his prayer Hezekiah showed that only the God of Israel can protect, therefore Sennacherib's boast of what he had done to nations worshipping other gods had no point when he faced this mighty Protector. Yahweh is supreme over all.

He is also the Creator, for He made "heaven and earth." Sennacherib was therefore but

HEZEKIAH'S LIFE AS A TYPE

The life and times of Hezekiah are important. The Jews look upon them as typical of Messiah's times, and the prophecy of Isaiah shows that this is so. We will appreciate this better if we carefully ponder the circumstances of his life, and see in them the outline of events to come. The main incidents of his life, and their bearing on those of the Lord Jesus are as follows:

1. The sweeping reforms introduced into Divine worship at the inception of his rule — answering to the work of the Lord Jesus at his first advent.
2. The invasion of Sennacherib and the threatening challenge of his officers — answering to the opposition received by the Lord 1900 years ago (see Acts 4: 26-27).
3. The terrible infliction of leprosy — answering to the teaching of Paul: "Christ was made sin for us who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5: 21).
4. His remarkable recovery — answering to the resurrection and glorification of the Son.
5. The destruction of Sennacherib — answering to the coming overthrow of Gog.
6. The completion of his work of restoring Divine worship and the peaceful and prosperous conditions of his reign — answering to the setting-up of the millennium under Christ.

*It is good to carefully consider such prayers as this, in order that we may see how men of God approached the Father in such fashion. There was deep reverence expressed. There was no waste of idle words. There was no sense of familiarity in approach. Hezekiah obviously had very carefully prepared his mind to seek his God before he presumed to open his lips in prayer.

a creature of His creation.

He is All-seeing, and therefore knew all that Sennacherib said and did.

He is All-powerful and therefore able to cope with the Assyrian in spite of the latter's strength manifested by his successful conquests.

The King pleaded the help of that One Who alone could save.

Hezekiah had not long to await an answer to his prayer. Isaiah was sent to him with a message saying that God was pleased with him, and gave him an answer of peace that enabled him to defy the proud and mighty Assyrian. So beautiful is this answer, so significant are the words, that we set it out here in full.

Yahweh's Letter to Sennacherib

As Sennacherib had sent a letter to Hezekiah which he in turn placed before Yahweh in the Temple, so, in return, Yahweh sent a letter to Sennacherib through His servant Isaiah.

The virgin¹ the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee.

Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed?

Against whom hast thou exalted thy

voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high?

Against even the Holy One of Israel! By thy messengers thou hast reproached Yahweh, and hast said:

"With the multitude of my chariots I am come up to the height of the mountains,

"to the sides of Lebanon?

"and will cut down the tall cedar trees thereof,

"and the choice fir trees thereof: "and enter into the lodgings of his borders³

"and into the forest of his fruitful field.

"I have digged and drunk strange waters⁴

"and with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of besieged⁵ places."

Hast thou (Sennacherib) not heard long ago how I have done it, Of ancient times that I have formed it?

Now have I brought it to pass, That thou shouldest be to lay waste fenced cities into ruinous heaps⁶.

Therefore their inhabitants were of small power,

They were dismayed and confounded; They were as the grass of the field, As the green herb, as the grass on the house tops⁷,

As corn blasted before it be grown up. But I know thy abode,

Thy going out, and thy coming in, Thy rage against Me⁸

Because thy rage against me and thy tumult (Heb. = arrogancy) is come up into Mine ears,

Therefore I will put My hook in thy nose⁹,

My bridle in thy lips, And I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.

1 It was for these who had not polluted themselves with idols and false worship that Yahweh would move against the Assyrian.

2 Lebanon signifies "white." Its glory was emblematic of Israel, "the tall cedars" speaking of the principal men of the nation.

3 I.e., the extreme limits of his borders.

4 Occupied lands and made himself at home in them.

5 His soldiers were so numerous that the king claimed they drank up all available drinking water, bringing the inhabitants under severe privation.

6 Yahweh thus shows that the Assyrian had been His tool to execute His purpose. All that he had accomplished had been in fulfilment of the Divine purpose so that he was actually only the servant of the God of Israel.

7 Such grass with little root soon withered in the heat of the sun. The nations Sennacherib conquered had but small power.

8 The controversy was a matter of the god of Assyria versus Yahweh of Israel.

9 Notice the similarity of language in relation to God's dealings with Gogue of Ezekiel 38, of whom Sennacherib was a type — Ezekiel 38:

Isaiah also brought a message of peace for Hezekiah.

"This shall be a sign unto you," he declared. "You shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, and in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof."

The prophet showed that God would protect and defend His people.

"The remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall yet again take root downward, and bear fruit upward," he declared.

He told the king that the rem-

nant of Judah that had sheltered in Jerusalem would spread forth abroad, for "the zeal of Yahweh shall do this." Yahweh would conquer the Assyrian, so that he would "not come into the city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with a shield, nor cast a bank against it."

This message was very comforting to the people of Jerusalem, though they soon found that their troubles were far from being all over.

HEZEKIAH — A SUMMARY

General estimate of his character — 2 Chron. 31: 20-21; 2 Kings 18: 5. He opened the House of Yahweh after it had been closed (2 Chron. 29: 3), cleansed it after it had been desecrated. Restored its services according to the instructions of David (2 Kings 18: 3). Organised the songs of the Temple (Isa. 38: 20). Conducted a widespread revival of all Israel (2 Chron. 30: 26). Engaged in literary work for the benefit of the people (Prov. 25: 1). His grief at the prospect of death was because he would be cut off from this work (2 Kings 20: 8). The drama of his life is expressed in "his songs" (Isa. 38: 20), the "Shir Ram-ma'aloth" or Song of the Degrees — Psalms 120-134. These seem to have been selected by Hezekiah to express the events of his life from the shame caused by the blasphemous tongue of Rabshakeh (Ps. 120) until the glory of his kingdom is established after his victory (Ps. 134). Though these are Psalms of David, they were apparently used by Hezekiah for his own purpose (see notes in Companion Bible). Hezekiah's piety covered Judah and saved it from Sennacherib; his sickness and recovery gave the people hope in that an heir was provided for the throne. Like the Lord Jesus, "when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save him from death, he was heard in that he feared" (Heb. 5: 7). Through his experiences he led the people to God and succeeded in a prosperous reign.

HEZEKIAH FALLS SICK

An uneasy lull settled on the city of Jerusalem, as the people awaited the next move of Sennacherib. They were surrounded by evidences of the destruction wrought by the Assyrians throughout the land. They knew despite the message of assurance received from Isaiah, that they would be subjected to

further attacks, and that faith was required of them.

As though all this trouble was not sufficient, a rumour was now whispered around the city that cast the people into the deepest gloom.

Their leader, king Hezekiah was sick!

It was not an ordinary illness, but the dreaded scourge of lep-

rosy that afflicted him.*

Normally he would have been put outside the city, but that was not possible with the enemy encamped about it.

The king, himself, was desperately unhappy.

Leprosy was not only a dread disease, but because of the teaching of the Law of Moses in regard to it, it had a terrible stigma attached to it.

It was treated like sin, and the person contracting the disease was accounted unclean. So long as he had the disease, he was not permitted to go into the Temple to worship Yahweh (Lev. 13: 46).

Leprosy is a living death that slowly claims the whole body.

The leprous person was not without hope, however. Sometimes people were cured of it, and by offering a suitable sacrifice, were brought into the congregation again, and were permitted to worship God.

Perhaps that might be the fate of the king.

Hezekiah hoped so anyway!

But no! One day Isaiah the prophet presented himself to the king.

He had a terrible message from Yahweh.

Sad-faced and sorrowful, he

pronounced it:

"Thus, saith Yahweh, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live!"

This was a terrible message for Hezekiah. Not only would his work for Yahweh be curtailed, but, worse than that, he had no son to continue the line of David, and provide the continuity of the seed that would result in the promised Son of David.*

This was tragic indeed.

No man could help him in his distress.

On his bed of sickness, he turned his face even from Isaiah, and looking to the wall, he poured out his heart in prayer to his God:

"I beseech thee, O Yahweh," he prayed, "Remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight!"

He wept bitterly before his God.

15 Years Granted to Hezekiah

Having delivered his message, Isaiah had sorrowfully turned from the house of mourning. But he had not gone far, when he received a further message from Yahweh. God had seen the tears of Hezekiah and heard his prayer. He was prepared to grant the request of the king for the sake of David the man

*Two features we should note. As Hezekiah reigned 29 years, and an extension of 15 years was granted him after his sickness, it is obvious that his malady occurred the same year in which Sennacherib attacked the city (see 2 Kings 18: 13). Further, Yahweh's statement: "I will add unto thy days fifteen years. And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria: and I will defend this city" (Isa. 38: 5-6), shows that Sennacherib had not been overthrown when Hezekiah was smitten with his illness. It must have occurred between the visit of Rabshakeh and the final attack by Sennacherib. The sickness appears to have been leprosy, for the same word is used to describe it as is used for leprosy under the law (cp. Isa. 38: 21 with Lev. 13: 19-21).

*Manasseh was 12 years old at the death of his father 15 years later (2 Kings 21: 1).

after His own heart (2 Kings 20: 5). So the prophet was turned back with a five-fold message of grace. Hezekiah was told that Yahweh would:

1. Heal him;
2. Allow him to go up to the House of God on the third day;
3. Add unto his days 15 years;
4. Deliver him and the city out of the hands of Sennacherib;
5. Defend Jerusalem for His sake and that of David.

Isaiah prescribed the cure. The servants of the king were to make a poultice of figs, and place it on the boil, and the king would recover.

But whilst Hezekiah did not doubt what the prophet told him, he desired a sign to show that the normal provisions of the Law of Moses were to be waived to permit him to go up to the House of God on the third day (see 2 Kings 20: 8; Lev. 14: 1-10). In view of the fact that the whole city was expecting the impending attack by Sennacherib, it was important that his presence should be found as quickly as possible at the head of his people in their approach to Yahweh.

At his own request a sign was given him.

He had asked that the shadow of the sun, by which time was recorded in those days, should go back ten degrees, instead of forward as would be normal. And sure enough, as God promised, this happened. Though the sun continued to move across the sky in the normal manner, the shadow on the dial

went back instead of forward.

It was the sign that Hezekiah would not only recover, but would be permitted to worship in the Temple with the congregation after three days.

How joyful the king was now! The extension of life granted him would not only permit him to continue the work he was doing in restoring the true worship, but would also give him time to rear a family, and so keep alive the posterity of David through himself.

He expressed his pleasure in a Psalm of praise, recorded in Isaiah 38: 9-20, and described as "The Writing of Hezekiah, King of Judah, when he had been sick and was recovered of his sickness."

The Psalm records his experiences and feelings, as well as his vows for the future. It also shows that his sickness and recovery foreshadowed the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

DESTRUCTION OF SENNACHERIB'S ARMY

Meanwhile, Sennacherib had defeated the Egyptian forces that had marched against him, and was now ready to deal with Hezekiah.

Confidently the Assyrian army marched to Jerusalem and encamped around the city.

The anger of the soldiers was enraged at the obstinate resistance of its inhabitants. They were determined to ruthlessly destroy the city and its people.

But Yahweh had told Hezekiah: "He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow



Archaeologists discovered this obelisk depicting the exploits of Shalmaneser III. It mentions the name of Ahab, King of Israel.

there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into the city."

Sennacherib knew nothing of this. Outside the city, little realising the drama that would unfold in the next few hours, the soldiers made preparations for the night. Soon the people of Jerusalem were looking from the walls of the city towards a forest of tents in the distance.

But next morning there was something strange about the camp of the Assyrians.

There was not the usual appearance of activity about it.

Scouts were sent out to report on the matter.

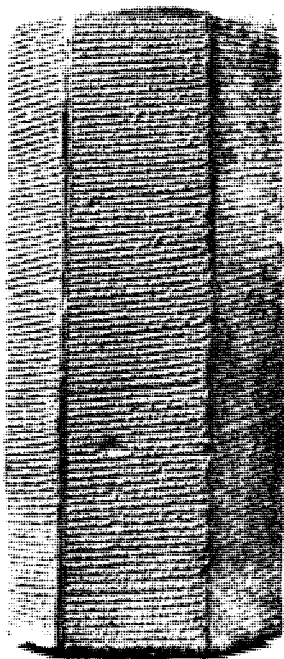
Cautiously they crept up to the camp, but soon they were seen hurrying back again.

They had a remarkable story to tell.

The besieging army was an army of dead men!

Yahweh had struck against His enemy. No less than 185,000 soldiers lay dead, including the leaders of the Assyrian host (2 Chron. 32: 21).

The angel of Yahweh had taken up the challenge that the impious king had flung down when he blasphemously stated that he would treat the God of Israel as he had the gods of the



Inscribed prism of Sennacherib records in stone his campaign against Hezekiah.

other nations, and by a means that is not disclosed had wreaked His vengeance.

The flower of Sennacherib's army had been destroyed. Sennacherib himself returned home, and several years later was murdered by his own sons as he was worshipping in the Temple of Nisroch his god. Another son, Esarhaddon by name, one of the greatest rulers of Assyria, came to the throne.

But for some time, Judah had peace. The destruction outside Jerusalem had so decimated the Assyrian forces that they did not return to complete the work of conquest.

History provides some confirmation of this terrible evidence of divine intervention. Herodatus, the Greek historian, speaks of it, though not in confirmation of the Bible story. Rawlinson, the historian, declares:

"Whatever the agency employed in this remarkable destruction — whether it was caused by a simoon, or a pestilence, or by a direct visitation of the Almighty, as different writers have explained it, the event is certain. Its truth is written in the undeniable facts of later history, which show us a sudden cessation of Assyrian attack in this quarter, the kingdom of Judea saved from absorption, and the countries on the banks of the Nile left absolutely unobstructed by Assyria for the third part of a century."

How the Poet Viewed—

THE DESTRUCTION OF SENNACHERIB

*The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.*

*Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green
That host with their banners at sunset were seen;
Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown!*

*For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed on the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still!*

*And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.*

*And there lay the rider, distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow and the rust on his mail;
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.*

*And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!*

—Byron

SENNACHERIB'S GLORY AND DEATH

The historian, Rawlinson, writes:

"Sennacherib was the eldest son of Sargon, and succeeded his father in the summer of B.C. 705. Born in the purple, and bred up as crown prince, his primary characteristic was an overweening pride and arrogance which shows itself in all his inscriptions. He calls himself 'the great king, the powerful king, the king of the Assyrians, of the nations, of the four regions, the diligent ruler, the favourite of the great Gods, the observer of sworn faith, the guardian of law, the establisher of monuments, the noble hero, the strong warrior, the first of kings, the punisher of unbelievers, the destroyer of wicked men.'

"He was mighty both in war and in peace. His warlike glories are attested by Herodatus, by other historians, and by his own annals. His peaceful triumphs are witnessed to by the great palace which he erected at Nineveh, and the magnificent series of sculptured slabs with which he adorned it, by his canals and aqueducts, his gate-towers and embankments, his Babylonian sculpture and his stele at the Nahr-el-keib. He was a worthy successor of his father Sargon, and of the second Tiglath-pileser, active in his military enterprises, indefatigable, persevering, full of resource. No more energetic soldier ever found himself at the head of a huge army eager for battle; no more vigorous administrator ever commanded the resources of a vast empire."

He was the Gogue of the ancient world!

The Babylonish inscriptions record the death of Sennacherib thus:

"On the 20th of the month Tebet, his son killed Sennacherib, king of Assyria, during a rebellion. For 23 years Sennacherib had exercised kingship over Assyria. The rebellion continued from the 20th Tebet to the 2nd month of Adar. On the 18th month of Adar, Esarhaddon, his son, sat on the throne in Assyria."

HEZEKIAH'S PRIDE IS HUMBLED

Hezekiah's character had yet to go through a further element of purging before his reign took on the final Messianic character which it typified.

In this he typifies the multitudinous Christ, the followers of the Lord, who will be raised from the dead to be brought before the Judgment Seat of Christ. There they will learn their failures and successes; all pride and arrogancy and self-seeking will be destroyed out of their hearts, and they will recognise the love of God in that they are granted a place in His Kingdom despite their weaknesses,

This was revealed in type to Hezekiah.

Ambassadors from Babylon

About this time, there reigned in Babylon a monarch who had revolted from the Assyrians and seized power for himself.

He is known in the Bible as Merodach-Baladin (2 Kings 20: 12; Isa. 39: 1), but his Babylonish name was Marduk-apal-iddina. Merodach was the god of war, and Baladin signifies "Bel (another god of Babylon) is his lord." He fancied himself as a warrior under the protection of the gods, and showed great hostility towards Nineveh and the Assyrians. In order to consolidate his power, he sought allies to help him in his

anti-Assyrian campaign.

He only reigned for a couple of years. He was then overthrown by Sennacherib on his return from Jerusalem, who placed his son Esarhaddon on the throne.

But those two years of power for Merodach-Baladin proved sad ones for Hezekiah!

In far away Babylon, news came through of the successful resistance of Hezekiah, of his remarkable recovery from leprosy, and of the sign God gave him (2 Chron. 32: 31). Merodach-Baladin listened to the report with pleasure. He saw in this an opportunity to gain an important ally against the Assyrians. He sent ambassadors to Hezekiah with a present, to congratulate him on his recovery and victory.

And Hezekiah was duped by these fawning visitors. It was such a contrast to receive a visit from some who praised him instead of criticising or threatening him, that the king was drawn out of his normal way of life. Trouble had forced him to seek God, but the flattering words of the Babylonish ambassadors caused him to forget God. Lifted up in pride, he showed the ambassadors the wealth and armaments he had stored up in Jerusalem.* He momentarily forgot that this was all from God, and displayed

it to the ambassadors as though he were responsible for it all.

He who had suffered the taunts of others because of his weakness found it an exciting experience to be praised as powerful.

It went to his head.

The king who had proved so faithful under difficulty, weakened in times of ease.

Trouble had driven him to his knees in prayer, had forced him to seek his God.

Prosperity caused him to forget!

How true that is of most people. Hezekiah's experience shows that the characters of the Bible were very human, everyday people.

The Bible teaches how often tragedy is bound up in the simple statement: "They forgot" (Judges 3: 7; 1 Sam. 12: 9; Ps. 78: 11; 106: 13, 21; Hos. 2: 13).

And this illustrates the significance of the words: "God chastens those whom He loves."

He does so in order that the best may be brought out of them for their ultimate good.

In this instance, Yahweh had left Hezekiah, to test him, that the inner recesses of the king's heart might be revealed.

Some people, reading this account of Hezekiah's life, feel that it is a pity he was given an extension of fifteen years'

*Critics of the Bible have asked, where did Hezekiah get all this wealth from seeing he had stripped the Temple and Palace to pay tribute to Sennacherib (2 Kings 18: 16). We put this question to Mr. Phillips. He replied that the answer is a simple one — from the spoil of the army destroyed outside the walls of Jerusalem. It would have in its possession the accumulated spoil of many nations over whom victories would have been gained, and this was shown by Hezekiah to his visitors as a token of the extent of the victory and his personal power.

life, for until that time, he had not been guilty of such folly. But the element of pride had always been in Hezekiah's heart, and this incident only brought into the open what had always existed but had not been given opportunity to develop. It was in the mercy of God that Hezekiah should be thus tested, for it is better to drive pride out of a man by such things as the king now experienced than that it should remain in his heart to be the subject of condemnation at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Isaiah Rebukes the King

The proud and haughty Babylonian ambassadors left Jerusalem feeling that they could rely upon a powerful ally in Hezekiah. But they had no sooner gone, than Isaiah the prophet demanded an audience with the king.

Hezekiah had to figuratively stand before the Judgment Seat, to make confession of his sin, to receive forgiveness, to experience the Divine mercy in that he would not be cut off from the Kingdom.

Sternly the prophet faced Hezekiah.

"Who are these men, and from what country do they come?" he abruptly asked.

"They are come from a far country, even from Babylon," replied Hezekiah.

"What have they seen in your house?" enquired the prophet.

"I have shown them every-

thing in mine house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them," was the frank confession of the king who now realised the wrong he had done.

"Hear the word of Yahweh," continued the stern-faced prophet. "Behold, the days come, that all that is in your house shall be carried into Babylon, so that nothing shall be left. And of thy sons which you shall beget, shall they take away to the palace of the king of Babylon."

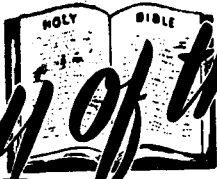
The words of Isaiah brought home to Hezekiah the folly of his action, but they also revealed the mercy of Yahweh in that He would not directly punish the repentant king.

Hezekiah recognised that the reproof he had received was good for him. He realised that God had not punished him to the extent that he deserved, and that he would be left unmolested to continue the work of consolidating and extending the true worship throughout Judah during his life-time.

He thanked God that "peace and truth" would thus continue to prevail even though the ultimate Divine judgment was sure.

Moreover, he humbled himself before Yahweh together with the inhabitants of Jerusalem (2 Chron. 32: 26), so that through his wise conduct good came out of his sin. He used it to help lead the people to God.

The Story of the Bible



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The Death of Hezekiah

Our last issue showed how the disastrous defeat which Sennacherib suffered outside of Jerusalem lifted the Assyrian oppression from off Judah. Hezekiah was left in peace to extend the power of his kingdom, and complete the work he had commenced in establishing the true worship.

Final Glory and Death of Hezekiah

The withered stem of Jesse had flourished once again as a typical fulfilment of Isaiah 11.*

Yahweh guided the work of the king, so that he had great success on every side. Jerusalem became the centre of worship, and world-wide pilgrimage as in the days of Solomon, and the king himself received the admiration of the surrounding nations because of the wisdom and prosperity of his rule (2 Chron. 32: 22-23).

To the people of those days, it was a picture of the Millennium in miniature.

He completed the work he

had set his hands to do. The Psalms were put in order (cp. Isa. 38: 20), and arranged for use in the public service of the Temple. He copied out many of the Proverbs (Pr. 25: 1) so that the people might have better access to these sayings of Solomon, and be guided by the wisdom thereof in their daily lives.

Wealth poured into Jerusalem (2 Chron. 32: 27). The nation was respected far and wide. After the terrible and mysterious destruction of the Assyrian army none dared invade the land.

He had married Hephzibah, and to her was born a little boy

*Notice how this prophecy of Messiah's kingdom follows on that which portrays the destruction of Sennacherib (Isa. 10: 24-34). Isaiah could see the great dramatic events of his day as typical of the greater drama that shall inaugurate the reign of Christ on earth. Notice how even the wife of Hezekiah comes into the prophetic picture (cp. 2 Kings 21: 1 with Isa. 62: 4).

whom Hezekiah called Manasseh. This name means "forgetting," and doubtless Hezekiah named him such because God had caused him to forget all his troubles.

But we shall see that Manasseh in turn "forgot" what was due to God.

Gradually the years passed away. At last, the fifteen years of grace came to an end, and Hezekiah knew that the time for him to die had come. He was not dismayed this time, for his work was completed. The nation was happy and prosperous, the temple thronged with worshippers, the worship of Yahweh was everywhere up-

held, he had a son to continue his reign, on all sides there were evidences of his wise administration.

But the death of Hezekiah was a matter of great grief to the people. They had learned to love their king. A solemn ceremony of mourning was conducted, and the people of Jerusalem especially "did him honour at his death" (2 Chron. 32: 33). He was buried in the "ascent of the sepulchres" (see Revised Version), a place of great honour among the kings of Judah and Israel.

Manasseh ascended the throne at the tender age of 12 years.

A Note from Mr. Phillips for Older Readers

HEZEKIAH AS A TYPE OF CHRIST

In Kings, Chronicles and Isaiah (Chps. 36-39), the Bible records the life of Hezekiah no less than three times, thus indicating the great importance of the events narrated. In Isaiah this is particularly significant, for the prophet suddenly breaks off his prophesying and turns historian. Why should he do this? Because the events he outlines in Chapters 36-39 form the historical basis or type of the prophecies that follow. They dramatise the final great controversy by which Yahweh will vindicate His power in the earth at Christ's coming, and usher in the Kingdom that He will establish.

This is shown particularly in the Psalm composed by Hezekiah after his sickness, which reveals many remarkable similarities to the great prophecy of Christ as the suffering servant of Yahweh recorded in Isaiah 53.

Hezekiah's Psalm (Isa. 38: 9-20)

Superscription v. 9

The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness.

Notes

This sickness was leprosy, indicated by the use of the word "boil" in v. 21. It is the word used in conjunction with leprosy in Lev. 13: 19-21. Leprosy is used as a symbol for sin. Of Christ it is said, "we did esteem him stricken, smitten, afflicted" (Isa. 53: 4). They treated him as unclean, as a leper. Hezekiah's sickness was cured when a poultice of figs was placed on the boil (v. 20). Israel is likened to figs (Jer. 24) and both the sickness and cure of Hezekiah (and of Christ) were for the benefit of Israel.

Life Cut Short vv. 10-11

I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave;

I am deprived of the residue of my years.

I said, I shall not see Yahweh,

Yahweh, in the land of the living;

I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world.

Notes

"Cutting off" is rendered "noontide" in the R.V. The Hebrew signifies "quiet." The idea is that in the midst of life, at the time when his usefulness is at a peak, Hezekiah was consigned to the grave. Link this thought with "the travail" of Isa. 53: 11 as applicable to Christ, and compare with Isa. 53: 9; Acts 2: 31. For "deprived of the residue of my days" see Isa. 53: 12 — "poured out his soul unto death."

Compare the phrase "land of the living" with Isa. 53: 8. What is said of Hezekiah can be applied to Christ.

The phrase "of the world" is a translation of the Hebrew word "hedel" which signifies "rejection" or "silence." It is from the same root as the word rendered "rejected" in Isa. 53: 3. This sentence of death was as rejection to Hezekiah. Without a posterity he was without hope.

Posterity Denied — vv. 12-14

Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent:

I have cut off like a weaver my life;

He will cut me off with pining sickness;

From day even to night wilt Thou make an end of me.

I reckoned till morning,

That as a lion, so will He break all my bones;

From day even to night wilt Thou make an end of me.

Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter:

I did mourn as a dove;

Mine eyes fail with looking upward;

O Yahweh, I am oppressed; undertake for me.

Notes

The Hebrew word "dor" rendered "age" in v. 12 is translated "posterity" in Num. 9: 10, and "generation" in Isa. 53: 8. It should be rendered "posterity" in both Isa. 38: 12 and Isa. 53: 8. Thus the expression belongs both to Hezekiah and to Christ. In the subsequent expressions, Hezekiah lamented that Yahweh would cut off his life suddenly and completely like a weaver takes his web from the loom by cutting the warp. He looked to the morning for relief, but relief did not come. His sickness threatened to destroy him as a lion crushes the bones of its prey. It seemed as though death would come from "day unto night," or within the compass of a day. So he mourned like a dove. But suddenly relief came in the reassuring message of Isaiah.

Assurance of Renewed Life — vv. 15-17

What shall I say?

He hath both spoken unto me, and Himself hath done it;

I shall go softly all my years

In the bitterness of my soul.

O Yahweh, by these things men live,

And in all these things is the life of my spirit;

So wilt thou recover me, and make me to live.

Behold, for peace I had great bitterness;

But thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption:

For thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back.

Notes

The statement of v. 15 is made in view of his request stated in v. 10: "I said . . ." He finds it difficult to adequately express his appreciation of the mercy extended him in the extension of life granted him. It is "by these things" (v. 16), by such experiences as reveal man's dependence on Yahweh and which humbles the flesh, that leads men to life.

Posterity Granted — vv. 18-19

For the grave cannot praise Thee,

Death cannot celebrate Thee:

They that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth.

The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day.

The father to the children shall make known Thy truth.

Notes

When this Psalm was first uttered, Hezekiah did not have any children to whom he could make known Yahweh's truth, but with the extension of life granted him there came also a posterity.

A Life Prospect of Praise — v. 20

Yahweh was ready to save me:

Therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments

All the days of our life in the house of Yahweh.

Notes

Delivered from sickness, figuratively raised from the grave, Hezekiah expresses his determination to come constantly into the presence of Yahweh with his songs of praise. How appropriate this is of the Lord, who rose from the grave, to appear in the presence of his Father in the heavens.

**Note these comparisons of Hezekiah in sickness with Christ:**

Leprosy set him as a man apart (cp. Isa. 53: 3). He was sick unto death (Isa. 38: 1, 9 cp. with Isa. 53: 12). He was brought to the grave (hell) (Isa. 38: 10, 18 cp. with Isa. 53: 9). He was cut off (Isa. 38: 10 cp. Isa. 53: 8). From the land of the living (Isa. 38: 11 cp. Isa. 53: 8). No posterity (Isa. 38: 12-14 cp. Isa. 53: 8). Brought from death (Isa. 38: 16 cp. Acts 2: 31). Oppressed, bitterness (Isa. 38: 14-15 cp. Isa. 53: 7, 11). No peace (Isa. 38: 17 cp. Isa. 53: 5). All sins put away (Isa. 38: 17 cp. Isa. 53: 12). A posterity granted (Isa. 38: 19 cp. Isa. 53: 10).



Questions on the above can be forwarded to Mr. H. Phillips, Box 226, G.P.O., Adelaide, South Australia.

Manasseh : THE KING WHO FORGOT

(2 KINGS 21; 2 CHRON. 33)

Isaiah had warned Hezekiah that though "peace and truth" would continue throughout his reign, ultimately Judah would be taken into captivity by the very nation (Babylon) to whose ambassadors the king had revealed his wealth and munitions (Isa. 39: 5-8). God thus indicated that the righteousness of Hezekiah's reign would give place to one of great wickedness — for otherwise Yahweh would not punish His people.

This came to pass in the reign of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah. He has the distinction of reigning longer than any other man upon the throne of David (he continued on the throne for 55 years), and the terrible record of being Judah's most wicked king. In the Bible narrative he is compared with Ahab (2 Kings 21: 13), for he was to Judah what Ahab was to Israel. He pursued a vigorous policy of idolatry, doing all within his power to root up the form of worship established by his father. Yet there must have been something of worth in his character, for after he had been dragged in chains to Babylon by the Assyrians, he repented, pleaded the forgiveness of God, and was restored to the throne. In the last years of his life, he made determined efforts to undo the wickedness of his former years. Time, however, was against him. He was not able to completely repair the evil of his early years; it remained, to become the cause of Judah's ultimate rejection and captivity (Jer. 15: 4).

Why did Manasseh receive such consideration at the hands of the God Whom he had so completely repudiated. We have suggested that there must have been some worth in his character that God was able to detect; but in addition to that, he probably received special consideration because of the love that Yahweh had for his father, Hezekiah. In that he is like Israel after the flesh, who are "beloved for the father's sake" (Rom. 11: 28). In the repentance and restoration of Manasseh, therefore, we not only witness an outstanding example of Yahweh's unfailing mercy, but a token of His intention with the nation of Israel. Whereas the reign of Hezekiah represents the coming glory of Christ's kingdom, that of Manasseh tells the story of the wickedness of Israel after the flesh, and the ultimate conversion and restoration of the nation.

Manasseh's name means "forgetting." He probably was so named because the birth of the little boy kept alive the line of David through Hezekiah, and was one of the gifts that Yahweh gave him during the 15 years extension of life granted him, by which he was caused to "forget" his troubles. But it also became appropriate to this wicked king who "forgot" the goodness of Yahweh to his father and the nation. How like Israel after the flesh was this king in his forgetfulness! How often do we "forget" and so sin against God!

The story of his life reminds us how deep and abounding is the love of God. Even though we might sometimes forget, He is ever ready to receive us, if we are truly repentant and turn to Him, confessing our sins and beseeching His forgiveness.

Let us listen-in to the conversation between Mr. Phillips and his family as they discuss the life of this king from 2 Kings 21, which chapter they have just read.

MANASSEH REJECTS HIS FATHER'S INFLUENCE

"I did not like that chapter a bit!" exclaimed Joan after the family had completed reading 2 Kings 21. "It was so exciting reading about Hezekiah restoring the true worship, and how Yahweh rescued Jerusalem by destroying the Assyrian army, that it is disappointing to read how wickedly his son behaved! I cannot understand the people turning from God so quickly."

"You forget that fifteen years had passed since that time," remarked her father. "The memory of the people was becoming dim. Consider! How much do you remember of what happened 15 years ago!"

"But I was only a baby then!" protested Joan indignantly.

"Manasseh had not even been born when Sennacherib's army was destroyed outside the walls of Jerusalem," said Mr. Phillips.

"But though Manasseh may not have remembered, surely others would!" urged Joan.

"Human nature is very fickle and forgetful," commented Mr. Phillips. "Fifteen years is a long time in a human life; memory becomes dim and with the pressure of life, we forget the goodness of God. Especially is this so when other problems arise to crowd it from our minds."

"What particular problems did Judah have to cause the people to forget?" asked Ann.

"We are not told in the Bible," said Mr. Phillips, "but from the history of the times we learn that Assyria was again exerting her influence. On the assass-

ination of Sennacherib, Esarhaddon came to the throne (2 Kings 19: 37). He invaded Judah and forced terms on the nation which the king accepted. On a stone inscription found by archaeologists in the ruins of Nineveh, it is recorded that Manasseh paid tribute to Esarhaddon the son of Sennacherib. Perhaps that fact provides us with a key to his life. As he was only twelve years of age when he came to the throne, it is obvious that he would be too young to decide affairs relating to the foreign policy of the nation. That would be in the hands of advisors who, in the face of Assyrian threats, had not the faith to continue the policy of Hezekiah. They reverted to the attitude of appeasement that Ahaz had followed, and as this was bound up in the national worship, so the people were found following "after the abominations of the heathen whom Yahweh cast out before the children of Israel." The bold, defiant attitude of Hezekiah was set aside; Judah lost its independence and became a vassal State under Assyria. Manasseh thus grew to maturity in an atmosphere of divided loyalty to the things of God. The worship of foreign gods was first permitted and then encouraged, until the king became openly hostile to the worship of Yahweh."

"Was it the worship of Assyrian gods only that he encouraged?" asked Ann.

"No, the king became the eager devotee of the gods of all nations, until at last their de-

grading rites were seen on all sides. It became an obsession with him. He plunged into all the mysteries of sorcery and magic (2 Kings 21: 6); he caused the terrible furnace of Tophet* to be rebuilt on an enlarged scale (Jer. 7: 31; 19: 5-6), and sacrificed his own child thereon (2 Kings 21: 6); he restored and enthusiastically followed the worship of the heavenly bodies, begun by Ahaz (Jer. 8: 2). The people imitated the evil example of the king. Soon, in gardens, and on the flat roofs of houses, were set up brick altars from which arose clouds of incense (Isa. 65: 3; Jer. 19: 13; Zeph. 1: 5); in the streets of the cities were built small furnaces for which children gathered wood, and in which their parents baked cakes as an offering to the goddess Astarte (Jer. 7: 17-18); the high places were restored (2 Kings 21: 3); the practise of human sacrifice became general (Jer. 32: 35); the firstborn of the family which Yahweh claimed as His own were offered on the altars of Molech (Ezek. 23: 37).

"Even the Temple was not exempt from the blasphemous pollutions of the deluded king. Two altars were set up in its courts and dedicated to the heavenly bodies (2 Kings 21: 5; 23: 12); an image to the vile goddess Astarte was erected in the sacred precincts themselves

(2 Kings 21: 7; 23: 13-14), whilst close by were the houses of those who lent themselves to the shocking rites of this abominable worship (2 Kings 23: 6-7). The Altar of Yahweh and the Ark were alike desecrated (2 Chron. 33: 16; 35: 3), whilst the sacred vessels were given over to the use of Baal (2 Kings 23: 4). In fact, Manasseh dedicated himself, with fanatical fury, to completely destroying the worship of Yahweh throughout the land. In a few years, most of what Hezekiah had restored, had been broken down."

ISAIAH PROTESTS — AND IS MURDERED

"Surely there were some left from Hezekiah's time to oppose the wicked king," said Ann as her father paused.

"Yes, we have read this even-
ing from 2 Kings 21: 10-15 of the courageous message of certain of the prophets who publicly protested against this wickedness, and warned of the terrible judgments that would fall on the nation in consequence. None would escape the Divine punishment, they declared. Whereas in the days of Hezekiah, Jerusalem had been defended by God, it would be given over to destruction by Him in the future judgment."

"Do you think that Isaiah would have influenced these prophets to oppose the king in

*The word means "drums," the valley of Tophet being the Valley of the Drums, so called because the noise of drums drowned out the shrieks of children offered as a burnt-offering to the image of Molech. This is said to be a metal image with arms outstretched upon which the children were offered. The inside was hollow and comprised a furnace which was heated up until the image was red hot. The valley is better known as the Valley of Hinnom, or Gehenna. It is situated just outside Jerusalem.

that way?" asked Graham, who was thoughtfully considering the chapter from Kings the family had read.

"Yes, I am sure he did," replied his father. "The indications are that Isalah was still living at the beginning of Manasseh's reign. Even before then, he could detect trends in the nation which he deplored, and against which he raised his voice. This is apparent if we read the Book of Isalah carefully. In the early flush of Hezekiah's reform, he proclaimed words of encouragement, but as time went on his language became increasingly severe. He began to accuse the people of hypocrisy (Isa. 48: 1-2), warned them not to make the mistake of believing that Yahweh did not know their hearts, reminded them that Jerusalem had been saved for Yahweh's own sake, not because of the righteousness of the nation (vv. 9-11). He saw about him signs of approaching apostasy (Isa. 56: 9-11). He knew that trouble faced the nation even as Yahweh had warned Hezekiah, and therefore grimly told the people that the death of the righteous was not a thing to lament under the circumstances, for they were 'being taken away from the evil to come' (Isa. 57: 1-2). With prophetic insight, he spake of the conditions Manasseh would establish in the land: idolatry would be encouraged, child-sacrifice would become common, Yahweh would be ignored and foreign aid sought, the wicked example of the king

would be followed by the people, the nation would become vassal to a power 'afar off,' and the people 'would abase themselves unto hell' (Isa. 57: 3-9).

"Harsh, stern words fell from his lips as he tried to warn the people of the future.

"He was encouraged in this by Yahweh: 'Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet and shew My people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins,' he was told (Isa. 58: 1).

"He carried this message to the nation:

"Behold," he declared, "Yahweh's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear" Isa. 59: 1-2).

"He attracted to the Divine cause a company of faithful Israelites who were like-minded. To them he gave a message of hope.

"If thou delight thyself in Yahweh," he told them, "He will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth (as rulers), and will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father" (Isa. 58: 14).

"He gave them a glorious vision of the future. He spake of a time when all nations will seek the God of Israel instead of Israel seeking the gods of the nations (Isa. 56: 4-8); of a time when all the tribes will be restored to the land, and in the reign of Messiah (Christ) the bright, penetrating light of truth shall beam forth from Zion to lighten all mankind (Isa. 60); of the year of Divine vengeance when flesh shall be

humbled before the mighty manifestation of Divine power, and Jerusalem and its people will become a rejoicing and a praise throughout the earth (Isa. 65: 17-18). He told that company of faithful ones that they will yet see this fulfilled if they continued to worship Yahweh in sincerity and humility (Isa. 66: 1-2), that the time will come when in Jerusalem there will be seen the complete vindication of the true worship (Isa. 66: 22-24).

"Isaiah's final message to the nation was given when Manasseh was seated upon the throne, and the epoch of idolatry had commenced. He saw the whole nation as completely given over to wickedness:

"From the sole of the foot even unto the head thereof is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores . . ." (Ch. 1: 6).

"He saw Judah in vassalage to Assyria:

"Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers . . ." (v. 7).

"He saw a nation completely changed from the days of Hezekiah:

"How is the faithful city become an harlot! It was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers . . ." (v. 21).

"He saw that there was no hope for the nation apart from the purging judgments of Yahweh, that it would be destroyed until the time of its redemption comes (vv. 25-27). He could see that apart from the mercy of Yahweh leaving a small remnant to faithfully testify to his truth, Zion would have been

completely destroyed as were Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 9). The 'small remnant,' in the days of Manasseh, were those faithful prophets who lifted up their voices against the king, as we read in the chapter this evening."

"Before you go any further, Dad," interrupted Peter, who had shown progressive signs of impatience as his father continued, "I would like to ask a question."

"Very well! What is it?"

"You have been quoting from Isaiah Chapter 1, haven't you?"

"That is true."

"Well, how can you say that that was Isaiah's final message, if it is his first chapter?"

"Because the first chapter was undoubtedly written last, and comprises a foreword, or an epitome, to the whole ministry of the prophet."

"How can you say this is 'undoubtedly' the case?" asked Peter, who delights to get what he calls "proof" for any such statement.

"We are told that in the first verse," answered his father. "That verse tells us that Isaiah prophesied until the end of Hezekiah's reign. With the rest of the first chapter it therefore comprises his last message, and must have been delivered in the early portion of Manasseh's reign. How else could he have said he would prophecy throughout the reign of Hezekiah?"

"Satisfied, Peter?" asked Ann, who is always pleased when her father scores off her brothers.

"Jewish tradition says that

Isaiah was murdered because of his outspoken words against the king," continued Mr. Phillips, overlooking the little exchange of compliments among the children. "They say that the king, ignoring the grand service the prophet had rendered the nation, had him put to death in the most terrible manner — by being sawn asunder. So died this great prophet, patriot, and hero.

"Is there any proof of that in the Bible?" asked Peter, who had ignored Ann's comment, and was busily writing notes.

"There is no direct confirmation in the Bible," answered Mr. Phillips, "although in Hebrews 11: 37, Paul makes reference to some being 'sawn asunder,' and he could well have had Isaiah the prophet in mind. But as that wonderful chapter on faith so clearly shows, such men did not die in vain. They had before them the glorious hope of a resurrection to life eternal. Isaiah had given expression to this, for he had declared: 'My dead body shall arise' (Isa. 26: 19). Therefore, though Manasseh might slay him, he knew that God will raise him from the dead to enter upon his inheritance.

MANASSEH UNLEASHES A REIGN OF TERROR

"Manasseh listened to the words of rebuke uttered by Isaiah and the other prophets with extreme displeasure. As king he believed himself above such criticism, forgetting that he was but regent for a greater Monarch in the heavens. Hav-

ing no argument whereby he could silence his accusers, he decided to do it by means of violence and death. He proceeded to fill Jerusalem with innocent blood, murdering those who believed they should obey God rather than man. Isaiah was but one of many who became martyrs to the faith. Manasseh sought out any who raised but the slightest criticism against his rule and policy, and gave them over to death.

"It was a massacre of righteous men which was long remembered (cp. 2 Kings 24: 3-4).

"With anger Yahweh looked down from heaven upon this unwarranted persecution of His saints.

"But what displeased Him most was not so much the action of Manasseh, but the attitude of the people in stupidly following the wicked king, and in looking on with calm indifference to the persecution of His prophets.

"This was one of the causes why Judah was taken into captivity (2 Kings 24: 3), though Manasseh himself was ultimately forgiven, after he had been severely punished.

"The life of Manasseh teaches us two things: 1—That nobody can touch Yahweh's true saints with impunity; and, 2—His love is great, and He will not reject any who turn to Him with true repentance, pleading His forgiveness."

"You are going too fast for me, Dad," complained Peter again. "Where do we read that Manasseh was forgiven? It is not contained in the chapter

we read this evening!"

"No, a further account of his life is given in 2 Chronicles 33. There we read of the captivity, repentance and restoration of Manasseh, details not given in the account in Kings.

TAKEN INTO CAPTIVITY

"In Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, Esarhaddon died, and Ashur-bani-pal reigned in his stead.

"It was an opportunity for which some of the nations in subjection to the brutal Assyrian power were seeking. Encouraged by Egypt, a number of Syrian nations confederated to throw off the yoke of Assyria. Among them could have been Judah. The ruthless and efficient Assyrian army went immediately into attack. They swarmed down through the northern countries, punishing the rebels, spreading a trail of ruin and devastation as they moved south. Over the border of Judah they marched. Manasseh found himself without defence. He had turned from Yahweh, he had rebelled against Assyria; he found himself deserted by God and man. A battle took place*; Judah was defeated and Manasseh taken captive.

"What now of the gods of other nations whom the king had preferred before Yahweh? Could they help him in his distress?

"Manasseh found that they could not. He was treated with

the greatest indignity. Ashur-bani-pal decided to make an example of him. Cruelly, in accordance with brutal Assyrian custom, hooks were crudely driven through the lips of the king, and he was ignominiously dragged back over six hundred miles to Babylon, where he was flung in a cell to await the Assyrian king's pleasure."

"I notice that 2 Chronicles 33: 11 says that the 'king of Assyria took Manasseh among the thorns.'" said Graham, who had turned to this passage when his father made mention of it. "What does that mean?"

"According to the 'Companion Bible,' the word 'thorns' should be rendered 'hooks,' and relates to what I have just told you about the Assyrian king dragging Manasseh to Babylon as a captive with hooks driven through his lips."

"Why should he take him to Babylon when Nineveh was the capital of Assyria?" asked Peter.

"Possibly to teach the Babylonians a lesson. They, too, had recently revolted against the Assyrians and had been punished. Perhaps Manasseh had been taken there to teach them the lesson that it does not pay to rebel against Assyria. He would provide a particularly powerful argument to that end, for the Babylonians had been ready to congratulate Hezekiah on his successful resistance in the days of Sennacherib; and to see the son of Hezekiah in bonds

*Mr. Phillips is here reconstructing the history of the times from the records of historians such as Josephus, and from archaeological research. Both confirm the Bible narrative and provide additional information.

would vindicate the reputation of the Assyrians.

MANASSEH IN BABYLON

"Manasseh, in Babylon, enacted the part which Judah as a nation was doomed to play a few years later, when, it, too, was taken into captivity. In his cell, he had ample time to review the events of his life, and to see in his degraded state, the failure of all his hopes. Perhaps he recalled something of the early training he must have received as a young boy in his father's home. Perhaps he considered more deeply the words of the prophets he had spurned in more prosperous times.

"Whatever the cause, Manasseh came to recognise the villainess and the stupidity of his actions. Moreover, he had sufficient knowledge of Yahweh and His truth to know what he must do. And, furthermore, he now manifested sufficient humility and courage to put it into execution. Humility had been forced upon him by the long, degrading march to Babylon, when he had been fed mile after mile, day after day, week after week, with the humiliating, painful hooks dragging at his lips, in the midst of his jeering unsympathetic captors.

"In this time of urgent need he turned to Yahweh in prayer. He poured out his heart, pleading with God to forgive, if possible, all that he had done amiss, to overlook even the murder of His prophets, to grant unto him the opportunity to make restitution.

"And Yahweh heard the prayer in the prison-cell, could

see that the man was truly repentant, and granted him his request.

"The doors of the prison swung open, and Manasseh was released and restored by the king of Assyria to his former position of power in Jerusalem. Historians can tell us why this was done. They say that the Assyrian king wanted to obtain an ally north of Egypt, and believed that this act of mercy to a fallen foe would secure his friendship. That might be the natural explanation of what occurred, but behind these man-made schemes was the hand of God guiding them in accordance to His will and purpose.

MANASSEH TRIES TO MAKE RESTITUTION

"Back in Jerusalem, Manasseh vigorously set about repairing the damage he had done. Jerusalem saw a changed king, and heard commands issue forth from his lips reversing all that he had done before. The idols he had set up were now broken down; the pagan altars that had been reared up were now overthrown; the high places that had been defiled were now cleansed; and the people who had been instructed in false worship were now "commanded" to worship Yahweh (2 Chron. 33: 16).

"But the true worship cannot be established by law; it must be in the hearts of people to be really effective. Manasseh's work of reformation was therefore a failure. The false ideas implanted by pagan worship over many years could not be eradicated in a moment of time.

The people still sought after the degrading evil worship Manasseh himself had established.

"And in that moment of frustrated reformation, he learned the full measure of his wickedness. For in destroying the prophets, he had slain those who could now have helped him; he had robbed Judah of the very teachers which might have made his reformation really effective, so that his life ended in a spirit of frustration and defeat.

"Politically he also realised that difficult times lay ahead. In Babylon, in Egypt, in other parts of the Assyrian empire, men were preparing for war, and it was obvious that soon the world would be plunged into conflict. Judah lay between the Empires of the North and the South, and would inevitably become involved. Manasseh gave attention to strengthening the defences of Jerusalem and the

other cities of Judah, whilst he sought to fulfil the vow he made in the prison in Babylon.

"He never captured the full affection of the people. They had seen too much contradiction in their king to really like him. His reign had been one of ruthless force against all reason; the nation had suffered foreign invasion through his folly; the people had been forced first to worship foreign gods and then Yahweh. Thus, though he reigned longer than any other king, he was not given a king's burial at his death. He was buried in a garden, called the Garden of Uzza, that he had acquired for himself. This may have been the place where Uzzah touched the Ark and was slain. If so, it is rather appropriate that he who had done such wrong in life should, in death, be buried in a place which celebrated the desecration of the Ark of God in the days of David.

Amon: The Pagan

The death of Manasseh was followed by the short reign of Amon. He continued on the throne for only two years and contributed nothing but evil to the record of Judah's history. His short reign ended in confusion and bloodshed.

A PRODUCT OF PAGANISM

Amon was a young man of twenty-two years of age when his father died, and he ascended the throne. Although he must have witnessed the great change that came over his father after he had returned from captivity in Babylon, Amon soon fell under the in-

fluence of a heathenizing party within Judah, which had been instrumental in causing previous kings to turn from the way of righteousness (2 Chron. 24: 17-22). It had doubtless been this party which had warped the mind of Manasseh in the early portion of his reign, and caused him to so strenuously

advocate paganism.

This party would no doubt use all the arts of flattery, misrepresentation and cajolery to obtain control over Amon. The King would probably be told that the remarkable return of his father to the true wisdom in the latter years of his reign was due to dotage in his old age, and every form of flattery would be used on him to cause him to revert to the earlier heathenism.

Amon's name was indicative of the early paganism of his father. Amon was the name of an Egyptian god — the sun god. Probably Manasseh was trying to woo the nation of Egypt at the time his son was born, and therefore named him after one of the most prominent gods of that nation of darkness.

Paganism was popular at the time; the people had little taste for the reforming zeal of Manasseh, and eagerly embraced the vile, immoral worship advocated

by his son as soon as he came to the throne. Amon plunged into this wickedness with steady resolve, and "trespassed more and more" against God (2 Chron. 33: 23).

This led to conspiracy, murder, civil war. Conditions in the Kingdom worsened under Amon's rule. His ministers determined on ruthless means to save the nation. They decided to kill the king and place a nominee of their own upon the throne.

A conspiracy was formed, and when the time was ripe, the king was murdered in his palace.

This action sparked off trouble throughout Judah. Many in the land rose against the murderers of Amon, and they in turn were killed. Then, by popular acclaim, Josiah, the infant son of Amon, was established in power.

Thus the evil reign of two years' duration ended in an orgy of bloodshed.

Josiah : The Frustrated Reformer

The reign of Josiah introduces us to a sad yet dramatic epoch of Israel's history. It is sad because it witnessed the last appeal of Yahweh to His people — an appeal which they rejected. It is dramatic because it tells of how an orphaned child was wisely brought up in the midst of wickedness to effect a great reform in the land.

The story must be considered from three standpoints: (1)—That of the historical background of the times; (2)—The viewpoint taken by the prophets who ministered during the reign of the king; (3)—The intensely interesting details relating to Josiah himself.

Historically, this period saw the beginning of the break-up of the great but brutal Assyrian Empire. Esarhaddon, the king of Assyria who lived in the early period of Manasseh, several times had invaded the land. He had transplanted captives from Babylon and established them

in Palestine (Ezra 4: 29). About 675 B.C., he invaded Egypt, and though forced to retreat by a sandstorm, he returned the next year and began a conquest that was completed three years later (671). Ashurbanipal, who succeeded him in 669, twice invaded Egypt. On the latter occasion Memphis was sacked and Thebes (the No-Amon of Nah. 3: 8; Jer. 46: 25) captured. The conquest of Egypt represented the height of Assyrian power. After these successes it rapidly broke up. The Cimmerians from the north, and the Scythians, attacked the Empire. Whilst Ashurbanipal was repelling these attacks, Egypt rebelled under a local governor Psammetichus, who between 658 and 651 drove the Assyrians out and gained their independence. In 652, Ashurbanipal's brother, a vassal king of Babylon rebelled, and was not defeated until four years later. The last years of his life were disturbed by family strife and sickness. He died in 626 B.C. His successor, Ashur-etil-ilani, had to fight for his throne, and the following year, Nabopolassar was established as independent king of Babylon. The brutal Assyrian power had fallen.

Both Jeremiah (Ch. 1: 1) and Zephaniah (Ch. 1: 1) prophesied during the reign of Josiah. They revealed the true character of the nation which was not manifested by the reform effected by the king. The reform was effected by law, and did not spring from the hearts of people. And the prophets spake of that, and warned the nation that such a hypocritical action could reap only one harvest: the stern punishment of Yahweh.

Nahum also prophesied about this time. He spake of the impending overthrow of Assyria and Nineveh. He exulted in the troubles that were about to fall upon that brutal nation. In vision he saw the approach of the enemy, saw the walls of the city breached, heard the triumphant shout of the invaders, the chariots clashing in the streets, the soldiers rushing with torches to set fire to the buildings until what was once a beautiful and magnificent city became a ruined waste (Nah. 2: 1-8; 3: 1-3). And he saw in the fall of this brutal, Gentile city a type of the ultimate destruction of Gentilism throughout the earth (Nah. 1: 14-15).

Through this troublous period, Josiah, the child king grew to maturity, and vainly strove to effect a reformation. On the surface his work seemed well founded and enduring, but the canker was there underneath, and the prophets revealed the nation for what it really was. Perhaps the greatest exhortation of the whole of the Bible is contained in the history of this time, as we will try and unfold as we consider the events surrounding the story of Josiah the frustrated reformer.

JOSIAH FULFILLS PROPHECY

The story of Josiah really commences some 340 years before he was born. It takes us back to the days of Jeroboam, who had led ten tribes away from their allegiance to Rehoboam, the grandson of David. Jeroboam not only set up a rival rule, but also a rival religion. He called all the people together to dedicate the altars he had set up for this purpose. At the

height of the ceremony, however, a man from out of the crowd of people interjected. He was a prophet from Judah, and he had been sent north with a message from Yahweh. He harshly shouted his message to Jeroboam as the king stood by the altar to burn incense.

"O altar, altar," declared the prophet, "thus saith Yahweh; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high

places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee" (1 Kings 13: 2).

The years had rolled by since the dramatic intervention of the prophet on that day when the false altar had been dedicated, and now a young child of that name, sat upon the throne of David as king.

As he came to maturity, his attention was directed to this prophecy (2 Kings 23: 17-18), and he set about fulfilling it to the very letter.

GOOD INFLUENCE OF HIS MOTHER

It was fortunate for Josiah that his father died so young, since he in this way escaped the corrupting and degrading influences which would otherwise have been brought to bear upon him as he passed from childhood to manhood. He was but "eight years old when he began to reign" (2 Kings 22: 1), and had thus remained still almost wholly under the charge of his mother, as was the custom among Jews. She is mentioned with some particularity, as if she was a person of some importance. Her name was Jedidah, which is the feminine form of David, and means Beloved. She was the daughter of Adalah, which means "Yahweh has adorned." Thus her full name signified The Beloved whom Yahweh has adorned. She came from the city of Boscath, a Judaeian town not far from Lachish, on the border of Philistia (Josh. 15: 39). The name

of this town signifies "stony ground," but apparently in this stony ground she grew to love and revere her God.

We can, perhaps, ascribe to her careful training and pious zeal, the religious bent of Josiah's character, for he manifested a love for God at a very early age. Her influence on his life may be the reason why she is so carefully referred to in the Bible account.

Eight years thus went by uneventfully. Josiah was carefully educated by his mother and ministers of the realm for the time when he must take over the kingdom independently of their oversight. This came about at the age of sixteen. He took over his duties completely, and began independently, at this young age, to seek to do the will of Yahweh.

In consequence of that he prospered. His reign illustrated the truth of the prophet Azariah's words:

"Yahweh is with you, while ye be with Him; and if ye seek Him, He will be found of you; but if ye forsake Him, He will forsake you" (2 Chron. 15: 2).

For four years Josiah consolidated his position in the land. He carefully surveyed the spiritual conditions of the kingdom, and as he saw the extreme wickedness he meditated a wholesale reform. Then, at the age of twenty, he felt himself secure enough on the throne to attempt that which must have been some time in his mind to do.

The Story of the Bible



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Josiah : The Frustrated Reformer

(Continued from page 48)

Josiah ascended the throne of David in Jerusalem when he was only eight years old. For a further eight years he was carefully nurtured by his mother and educated in Divine precepts. At the age of 16, he took over his duties completely, and sought to do the will of Yahweh independently. A further four years passed away during which he consolidated his authority in the land. Then, at the age of 20 years, he was ready to commence a work he must have contemplated for some time: to rid the nation of idolatry. In this he exhibited a fiery zeal.



THE FIRST REFORM

A reformation was, indeed, timely. Paganism in all its forms had again reared its head in the days of Amos after the partial reform by Manasseh. In the streets were seen the Chemarim (Zeph. 1: 5), or black-frocked priests as the word implies, ministering to the altars of Baal. On all sides incense arose to foreign gods, and people bowed down to their images. The abominable and immoral rites of this evil worship were freely practised.

Josiah determined to rid the land of it all.

He decreed a complete abolition of all these things.

The initial work was begun in Judah and Jerusalem, and was then extended to the territory of the northern kingdom (2 Chron. 34: 3-6). The king personally supervised it. Pagan altars were thrown down, images broken up, pillars cut down, idol-priests slain, and the holy places of false worship desecrated by the bones of the dead.

At the command of the king, the people busied themselves in the work, with every appearance of keen enthusiasm.

It must have seemed to many people as though the nation was on the crest of a wave of genuine reform, as though the wor-

ship of Yahweh was about to be established in spirit as well as in complete truth.

But then suddenly, unexpectedly, the stern, harsh voice of criticism was heard sadly denouncing the nation for hypocrisy.

This disturbing message came from a young man who was destined to come more and more into the full glare of public attention, until the nation was taken into captivity by the Babylonians in the days of Zedekiah.

His name was Jeremiah.

THE CALL OF JEREMIAH

Just north of the Mount of Olives, there was a city mainly inhabited by priests called Anathoth.

Among its inhabitants was a young priest by name of Jeremiah. He was of the family of Hilkiah. As the high priest in the days of Josiah was also called Hilkiah (2 Kgs. 22: 4-14), it may have been that he was son of the high priest.*

Yahweh had a most important work for this young priest to perform. And in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign, a year after he had commenced his reform (cp. 2 Chrn. 34: 3 with Jer. 1: 2), the word of Yahweh came to the young priest with the following message:

"Before you were born I knew you, and I set you apart and ordained you a prophet unto the nations," (Jer. 1: 5).

The young priest was taken aback by this message.

"Ah, Lord Yahweh," he replied, "Behold, I cannot speak well! And, besides, I am but a child, nobody will heed me!"

But Yahweh commanded him to go forth in courage, and not hesitate to speak all that he was commanded. Whatever he proclaimed concerning the nations would be fulfilled.

God told him:

"Gird up your loins, and arise, and speak unto the people all that I command you; be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them."

He was told that God would protect him in this work, so that no harm would come to him in spite of the messages he would deliver. He was told that he would be sent against the kings, the princes, the priests and the people (Ch. 1: 18). He was warned that they would bitterly oppose him and even reject his message, but that he must courageously continue to proclaim it.

"They shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee," Yahweh told him.

His First Message

And so, whilst the king and the people were busy smashing the pagan idols with every appearance of sincerity, Jeremiah commenced his first message.

He saw in vision the rod of an almond tree, and as he pondered the meaning of it, he heard the voice of Yahweh:

*This is disputed on the basis that Anathoth was a priestly city given to the family of Ithamar, whereas Jeremiah was of the line of Eleazar. But if this objection was completely valid surely Jeremiah would have indicated this in his introduction (Jer. 1: 1) for Hilkiah was very prominent in the reign of Josiah.

"Thou hast well seen, for I will hasten My word to perform it."

The Hebrew word for "almond" is "shaked" which signifies "The Watcher." It was so called because of its early blossom, it being the first of the trees to waken from the sleep of winter.

The word "hasten," used in the declaration of God to the prophet, is a similar word — "shoked" — so that there was a play on the words that Yahweh used to the prophet.

The message meant that time was short, what God intended to do would be done quickly.

The prophet then saw a great iron pot towards the north. A strong fire was causing that which was in it to boil and bubble, so that every moment, is threatened to pour over the sides.

He was told the meaning of this.

God was going to cause the Kingdoms of the north to pour down over the borders of Judah and besiege Jerusalem.

This was a terrible message to the people of the land. It told them that they were living in evil days when the punishment of God would overcome them. It reminded them that the time was short, and that it was urgent for them to seek their God.

But were not the people already engaged in a reform?

Were they not destroying the idol worship from out of the land?

It is true that they were under Josiah, but the prophet proceeded to show that their actions did not reflect the true attitude of their hearts; in fact, they were acting hypocritically. All that they were doing was not done out of love of Yahweh, but because the King commanded it, and used force to see that his law was obeyed.

Josiah must have heard Jeremiah's words with sorrow and amazement. He could see how important was the work to which he had given his hands, and he determined to redouble his efforts to make his reform truly effective.

Through the guidance of Yahweh, Jeremiah was able to detect what the King could not perceive, namely that the nation "had not turned unto God with her whole heart, but feignedly" (Jer. 3: 10). The reform did not reflect the true attitude of the people.* Many were still looking to Egypt for help (Jer. 2: 36). Some secretly preferred the pagan policy of Manasseh and Amon, quite a number were indifferent as to what form of worship was followed.

In harsh, stern language the young prophet listed the sins of the people. At the top of the

*The first 12 chapters of Jeremiah were contemporary with the reign of Josiah. They can be divided up as follows: Introduction, Ch. 1: 1-3. Instruction: Vv. 4-10. 1st Prophecy: Vv. 11-12. 2nd Prophecy: Vv. 13-19. 3rd Prophecy: Ch. 2: 3-5. 4th Prophecy: Ch. 3: 6, 4: 2. 5th Prophecy: Ch. 4: 3, Ch. 6. 6th Prophecy: Chps. 7-10. 7th Prophecy: Chps. 11-12. We will refer to some of the interesting personal incidents there narrated in our "Story of the Bible."

list was the sin of **HYPOCRISY**. In forthright language he accused the people of insincerity towards God. He told them that their very religious exercises were hateful to God because they were not done in love for Him, but only because the king's commandment demanded that they observe them.

Judah was observing a religion of force, of fear, and not of love.

The people served God because it pleased the king, and in the face of his fierce resolve to root out the slightest remnant of paganism, they feared to do otherwise!

THE KING READS AN AMAZING BOOK

Meanwhile, the king did all in his power to make the people religious. He demanded that they contribute money for the restoration of the Temple, and sent Levites into all parts of his realm, and even beyond the border into the land of Samaria, for this purpose. Money was freely given, for the people feared to oppose one so full of fiery zeal as Josiah. It was placed into the hands of Hilkiah, the high priest, probably Jeremiah's father, who divided it up among those who were appointed to perform the necessary labor.

Foremen had been selected who were so interested in the work of restoring the Temple that it was adjudged unnecessary to audit the accounts, "for the men dealt faithfully" (2 Kings 22: 7).

Thus Jerusalem became the scene of greatest activity. The Temple, so long neglected, and even desecrated, was cleaned out ready for the work of restoration. It was all conducted under the supervision of Hilkiah, who co-operated with Shaphan, the king's scribe, to that end.

On one occasion, when Shaphan approached Hilkiah with instructions from the king, he found the high priest with a long Scroll in his hands.

Shaphan looked enquiringly at the Scroll.

"I have found the Book of the Law in the House of Yahweh," declared the priest.

The Book of the Law comprised the five books of Moses, and was kept in the side of the Ark in the Most Holy Place (Deut. 31: 24-16). Every seven years, during the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel were gathered together, the priests had to read this book in the hearing of the people. In addition to that, whenever a king ascended the throne, the Law commanded that he write for himself a copy of this book, and read it daily that he might rule according to the will of God (Deut. 17: 18).

But in the reign of Josiah, for at least over half a century since the days of Manasseh, that had not been done.

The Temple had been closed up and mutilated; the Book of the Law had laid forgotten under the accumulating dust; the people had never heard of it; Josiah had never written out his copy; he had never read it!

Judah Threatened with Destruction

Full of curiosity, Shaphan took the book from the High Priest, and began to read it for himself (2 Kings 22: 8). He read of the laws that Yahweh had set before the people, the solemn warnings that He had issued to them should they disobey them; the curses that were thundered against them if they should commit certain sins.

And Shaphan knew that those very sins were part of normal life in the Judah of his day.

He realised the importance of the book that had been placed in his hands, and with the permission of Hilkiah, he hurried back to Josiah that he might show it to him.

Much of it the Godly king would know. He knew the record of creation, the call of Abraham, the beginnings of the nation, the wonderful deliverance from Egypt, many aspects of the law. . . .

But then Shaphan commenced on the book of Deuteronomy; the last warning message of Moses given just before his death. It warned the people that if they worshipped idols, if they turned from Yahweh, great and severe punishments would fall upon them. The book recorded the covenant to which the nation had bound itself, the terrible curses which would fall upon it if it proved guilty of certain sins.

"Cursed shalt thou be in the city, cursed shalt thou be in the field . . . Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, the flocks of thy sheep.

Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out. Yahweh shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, rebuke, pestilence, consumption, sword, invasion, war, drought, famine, DESTRUCTION! . . ."

Horror-stricken the king listened to the voice of Shaphan as it droned on.

"Thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and NO MAN SHALL SAVE THEE . . ."

Hour after hour the reading continued:

"Blessings if they do good, cursings if they do evil . . . plagues, sicknesses, the land desolate . . . like Sodom and Gomorrah . . . the heat of great anger . . . What is the meaning? Because they have forsaken the covenant of Yahweh God of their fathers . . . the anger of Yahweh kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curses that are written in this book . . . before you Life and death . . . Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day . . . it is not a vain thing for you, it is your life . . ."

And to these curses the nation had proclaimed the word: "AMEN" — "So be it!" It had pronounced its own judgment should it fall into the error of committing the sins enumerated.

And the horrified king knew that Judah was even then committing the very sins outlined. He had heard Jeremiah announce that the time of punishment was at hand.

Horried, the king listened to the reading of the Law for the first time.

As curse after curse was pronounced, his concern mounted.

At last he could stand it no more. With a cry of grief, he tore asunder his royal robe as

a sign of mourning, symbolically indicating that he had no cover for his feelings.

He knew that the nation was already beginning to suffer some of the things threatened; for the first time he began to fully understand the significance of the signs of the times of his day.

"The great wrath of Yahweh is kindled against us because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book!" he declared to Shaphan (2 Kings 22: 13).

He appointed a deputation of the leaders of the nation, and with Hilkiah and Shaphan, he instructed them to enquire of Yahweh whether the punishments pronounced would indeed be administered.

But to whom could they go?

There was the young man Jeremiah, who had proclaimed one or two prophecies in the name of Yahweh, but he was not yet fully established as a prophet in the eyes of the nation, and, moreover, he did not dwell in Jerusalem.

The high priest could not help, for as yet the Temple was not in a fit state for proper approach to Yahweh.

There was a woman of high spiritual standing living in Jerusalem close to the Temple. Her name was Huldah, and she was a prophetess. It was not normal for the nation to seek the aid of a woman in interceding with God, but the king must have realised in that time of need how few there were in Judah to whom he could really turn for help. The leaders of the nation had proved unworthy of their trust, so finally

the deputation was sent to this woman for assistance.

This action of the deputation really endorsed the message of Jeremiah. So low had the nation sunk, in spite of all the activity and excitement of apparent reform, that Yahweh would converse through no other in Jerusalem than Huldah the prophetess!

Her name signifies, "fleeing," as though as to underline the fact that time was short and the matter urgent.

To her the deputation went and explained its mission.

Through her came back the answer of Yahweh.

"Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and all the inhabitants thereof, even all the curses written in the Book found by the King. Because they have forsaken Me and worshipped idols, My wrath shall be poured upon this place and shall not be quenched. But as for the king who sent you, because his heart is tender and he has humbled himself before Me, behold, he shall be gathered to his fathers in peace, neither shall his eyes see the evil I will bring upon this place!"

A very subdued deputation left the home of Huldah to convey this message to the king.

A Ray of Hope

Grim as this message was, there was a ray of hope. God, indeed, threatened to punish the nation, but the very fact that the king's humility and zeal had delayed the pouring out of this judgment, showed that any individuals who likewise sought Yahweh in truth would similarly find mercy.

If sufficient such individuals could be multiplied might not the nation be saved?

SHAPHAN'S FAMILY: A RECORD OF USEFULNESS

Hidden throughout the Bible are the biographies of men and women who have served Yahweh well in their day and generation. One such in the times of Josiah, was Shaphan the Scribe. He and his family are noted for good in the Bible accounts. Eight of Shaphan's relations are mentioned: his grandfather, Meshullam; his father, Azaliah; four sons: Ahikam (2 Kings 22: 3, 12), Gemariah (Jer. 36: 10), Elasaah (Jer. 29: 3), Jaazaniah (Ezek. 8: 11); two grandsons: Michaiah (Jer. 36: 11, 13), Gedaliah (Jer. 39: 43).

Shaphan: was in the confidence of Josiah. He was intermediary between the king and the high priest in the work of restoring the Temple (2 Kings 22: 3). To him Hilkiah delivered the Book of the Law (v. 8), and after reading it, he took it to the king, recognising the importance of its contents. He was trusted by the King, and sent to Huldah concerning the intentions of Yahweh. The King obviously relied upon him. He could have been an influence for good behind the throne during the infancy of Josiah.

Ahikam: was of prominence in the realm, and sent with his father to Huldah. He continued to be of prominence through to the reign of Jehoiakim, and when Jeremiah was in danger, it was his care that saved him (Jer. 26: 24). Earlier Jehoiakim had sought to slay Jeremiah, but the elders of the nation prevented this crime (Jer. 26: 17), and it could have been the influence of Ahikam that saved him on this occasion also. Ahikam's family was of prominence in the kingdom for Gedaliah his son was made governor by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25: 22).

Gemariah: was a prince of the realm in the days of Jehoiakim (Jer. 36: 12) and occupied a room attached to the Temple (v. 10). His son Micaiah was likewise prominent, and seemingly in the confidence of Jeremiah (Jer. 36). Gemariah with two others protested against Zedekiah burning the scroll of Jeremiah (Jer. 36: 25).

Elasaah: Jeremiah entrusted this member of Shaphan's family with a letter to the exiles in Babylon which was not calculated to increase the popularity of the bearer — for it called upon the captives to establish themselves in Babylon for they would remain there some time (Jer. 29: 3).

Micaiah: Son of Gemariah. To him Baruch read the Scroll of Jeremiah and he reported its contents to the elders (Jer. 36: 11-13).

Gedaliah: A son of Ahikam honored by Nebuchadnezzar and made governor of Jerusalem after the captivity (2 Kings 25: 22). He received Jeremiah out of prison and cared for him (Jer. 39: 14). He set up his residence at Mizpeh, and called upon the people to serve the Chaldeans as Jeremiah had. He was a man of integrity and of trusting nature, and was duped by Ishmael. He refused to believe that Ishmael was intriguing against him and rejected the offer of Johanan to assassinate his enemy, and was himself treacherously murdered by Ishmael (Jer. 40: 15; 41: 2).

Jaazaniah: Most families have a black sheep among their members, and this was the black sheep of the family of Shaphan. He was a man of prominence who used his position for evil, for in the days of Zedekiah he was prominent in leading the people back to idolatry (Ezek. 8: 11).

Underneath the drama of these times that brought the nation to its end there were individuals, like those of Shaphan's family, who courageously manifested faith and obedience despite the difficulties with which they were surrounded. Their names are written in the Book of Life, and they will receive their reward with Jeremiah and other worthies at the coming of the Lord Jesus.

As the King thought upon this, his enthusiasm for reform became even greater.

Carefully he examined the newly discovered Book, and determined he would carry out the instructions to the very letter.

What was the cause of failure? The Book declared: "Because they have forsaken the covenant of Yahweh" (Deut. 29: 25).

The king decided the first thing to be done must be to bring the people back to a consciousness of the Covenant.

He called for a general gathering of the representatives of the nation: princes, priests, Levites, commoners were assembled together in the court of the Temple.

The king stood upon the great brazen platform that had been erected by Solomon* so that all could see him. When all was ready, the great scroll was unfolded, and with all eyes centred upon him, the king solemnly read the words of the covenant.

Now the people heard for the first time the blessings and cursings that Moses had pronounced: blessings for obedience, cursings for disobedience (Deut. 27: 28). They heard how they would be involved in a growing crescendo of trouble if they turned from the covenant. First they would be affected in the city, then in the country, then by drought and famine, then by plague and pestilence,

then by war and invasion, then by defeat and violence, then by captivity and scattering. They heard how the nation had entered into covenant with Yahweh, had proclaimed "AMEN" ("So be it") to the blessings and cursings listed (Deut. 27).

They knew that they were guilty of the things condemned.

The king called upon them to re-affirm that covenant and to keep the Law; he warned them of the dire results which they could expect if they did not do so.

With all due solemnity, the people agreed to do so (2 Kings 23: 1-3). They realised that if they did not, they would not only have God to deal with, but the king also.

And, unfortunately, the people feared the king more than they did God.

That is just where the reform of Josiah failed.

He tried to force the people to love God by law; but love cannot be created by law. Love of God comes as we count our blessings, as we appreciate what God has done for us, when we learn of His love towards man in providing a way of escape from the very evils that man himself has brought about.

The people did not seek to learn about the love of God and therefore never developed a love for Him.

There was one man, at least, who recognised this. Jeremiah made reference to this newly-

*See 2 Kings 23: 3. The Hebrew "al Haammud" can be rendered "upon the stairs," i.e., upon the brazen platform of Solomon (2 Chr. 6: 13). The R.V. renders: "Upon the platform." A similar provision will be made for the King of the Future Age in the Temple then to be built (see Ezek. 46: 2).

discovered law:

"Why do you say, We are wise, and the law of Yahweh is with us? Lo, certainly in vain made He it" (Jer. 8: 8).

The prophet meant that it was made in vain for all the real use that Judah made of it. As for himself, he declared: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart; for I am called by thy name, O Yahweh God of hosts" (Jer. 15: 16).

Jeremiah stood for a class in the nation which was, unfortunately, in the minority.

THE SECOND PURGE (2 Kings 23)

The king now looked upon himself as the saviour of the nation. He was determined to rid the land of idolatry. With tremendous energy and fury of zeal, the King swept through the land, determined to ruthlessly destroy every semblance of opposition to the Law he had just read.

He did to the nation what every Jew does to his home just before the celebration of the Passover.

Before this feast, Jews diligently search their houses to make certain that there is no leaven in the home. During the Feast itself they eat only unleavened bread.

Leaven (a form of yeast) was forbidden during the Passover, because it is used in the Bible as a symbol for corrupt doctrine

(Matt. 16: 11; Mark 8: 15) and wickedness in the heart (1 Cor. 5: 6-8). It also reminded Jews of the haste with which their forefathers left Egypt with the dough in their troughs (Exod. 12: 39), and taught the lesson that the wickedness of Egypt should likewise be left behind in service to God.

Only a little leaven is necessary to leaven a lot of dough, for it continues to grow and spread; and where small sins are permitted to remain unchecked their influence will grow and corrupt until an entire Ecclesia or a nation becomes affected.

So unleavened bread was eaten during the Passover to press home this vital lesson.

Josiah had determined that the nation would again keep the Passover as commanded, and such a Passover as had never before been celebrated. He would make sure that no leaven of wickedness would remain by himself going throughout the land to completely crush it.

He started on Jerusalem.

At the entrance to the Temple there had been placed horses and chariots dedicated to the sun: these were now destroyed by command of the King (v. 11).

In the Temple there were vessels that had been used in worship to Baal. They were publicly taken out and burnt as the law required* (v. 4).

*The careful student will notice that Josiah was guided by the Law so recently discovered. This is shown in the reform recorded in 2 Kings 23. Cp. v. 4 with Deut. 7: 25. V. 5 with Deut. 12: 2. V. 7 with Deut. 23: 17-18. V. 8 with Deut. 12: 5. V. 9 with Deut. 18: 8. V. 10 with Deut. 18: 10. V. 11 with Deut. 17: 3, etc.

In the deep valley of Tophet, the great metal image of Moloch with outstretched arms still stood. Before the reign of Josiah this image used to glow red with the fires inside it, and the beat of the drums used to fill the valley to drown the screams of children offered in sacrifice in this horrible worship. Every remnant of the idol was now smashed up, and the place of worship defiled by order of Josiah (v. 10).

In parts of Judah high places had been dedicated to an irregular form of the true worship. These were now defiled, and the priests who had served in such worship were not permitted to attend at the Altar in Jerusalem, though they partook of the benefit of the tithes (vv. 8-9).

On the Mount of Olives there still remained the places of worship that Solomon, over 400 years before, had permitted to be built for the pagan worship of his foreign wives, turning the Mount of Olives into the Mount of Corruption. These were now removed forever (v. 13).

Throughout Judea, from Geba in the north to Beersheba in the deep south, the king sent his men to search out and destroy all forms of idolatry (v. 8).

Having cleansed Judah, he

turned his attention to Samaria in the north.

Pagan priests trembled as they heard of the intentions of the king. They did well to do so. With cold ruthlessness, he systematically stamped out their worship without mercy, for they were beyond it (v. 20). He slaughtered the idolatrous priests†, burnt their bones on their own altars, defiled their places of worship, smashed down their altars, idols, pillars, and statues, ground to powder the images that had been worshipped, and cast the dust on the graves of the people to show his contempt for these things.

He avenged the reign of terror that Manasseh had instigated against the true prophets of God when he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, a persecution which these very priests had assisted (2 Kings 21: 16).

He fulfilled the prophecy that had been proclaimed over 360 years before, when Jeroboam had set up the false altar in Bethel. A prophet had been sent up with the message that Yahweh would raise up a king, Josiah by name, who would burn the bones of idolatrous priests upon the very altar then set up (1 Kings 13: 1-3). Josiah now fulfilled it to the very letter.

As he did so, he saw a lonely sepulchre by which was a

†Notice margin. The word "chemarim" is from "camar" — "to be black," thus "black-frocked priests" in contrast to the white-gowned Levites. Adam Clarke comments: "Why should we imitate in our sacerdotal dress those priests of Baal is strange to think and hard to tell." The answer is that the priests of the Apostasy today are the anti-type of those priests of Baal whom Josiah destroyed.

monument.* Full of curiosity, he enquired as to its purpose. He was told that it was the last resting place of the prophet who had predicted his advent by name, and had said that he would perform the very things he had done at that time.

How impressive it must have been for the king to be told that he had been named by Yahweh over 360 years before, to do the very work he was so thoroughly performing.

It must have shown the king the importance of his labours.

He commanded that this sepulchre should not be touched, though others belonging to false prophets were desecrated.

At last the crusade of the king was over.

A clean sweep had been made of all idolatry. Not even smoking ruins remained, for all had been completely obliterated.

Thus Josiah avenged the reign of terror that Manasseh had unleashed against the true prophets of Yahweh (2 Kings 21: 16). The people saw in the king and his followers, a party equally fierce and ruthless in its determination to restore the worship of Yahweh. Whereas the idolatrous princes of the realm had probably favoured Manasseh and supported his policy of paganism, the priestly class had aided Josiah and assisted him in his reform.

But, unfortunately, they were more interested in the formal-

ism of the Temple worship than in the Truth itself, as Jeremiah later told them.

JOSIAH CELEBRATES THE PASSOVER (2 Chron. 35)

It was now close to the beginning of the Jewish religious year. On the 14th day of the first month, the Passover was appointed to be held.

For many years, however, this had been neglected.

With the Book of the Law in his hands, Josiah determined that it must be restored.

He decided it must be kept according to the strict letter of the law.

Carefully he studied the instructions in Exodus and Deuteronomy. He then turned to the writings of David and Solomon (vv. 4-6), where are set down the arrangements for the work of the Priests and Levites at such a time, and he instructed them what they must do.

Public announcement was made that the Passover was to be re-instituted, and the people invited to attend.

With the evidences of Josiah's fiery zeal still fresh in memory, the people dared not refuse.

In due time a great number, representing at least 30,000 family groups, assembled in Jerusalem. The king had provided the animals necessary, and his generosity had been imitated by the priests and princes of the realm.

*The word "title" (2 Kings 23: 17) is rendered "erection" by Rotherham, and probably denotes a monument, perhaps set up by the prophet of Samaria to commemorate the work of the prophet of Judah (see 1 Kings 13: 31).

The animals were herded together on the 10th day of Abib, as required by the Law, and carefully inspected by the priests to ensure that they were without blemish. This was commanded by Law to teach a very important lesson. The Passover Lamb pointed forward to Jesus Christ, the "Lamb of God" offered for the sin of the world" who was himself without blemish of character.

On the 14th day of the Month, on the very day of the year on which Jesus died, thus fulfilling the type, the lambs were slain.

All was done according to the Law. The Priests and Levites took their places in the court of the Temple. The normal daily sacrifices were offered. The heads of family groups, on this occasion 30,000 in number, assembled at the Temple in relays. As each group was ushered into the Temple court, they saw a sight that had not been seen for over 50 years. The Priests and Levites were assembled in their proper places; the former ready to preside over the slaying of the lamb (which each Israelite did on his own account) and to receive the blood and dash it on the altar,

the latter to assist by flaying the animal, and giving the necessary portions back to the offerer who returned to his place in the assembly awaiting dismissal. Others of the Levites played instruments of music, or chanted the Passover psalms. After each service, the heads of the family groups returned home with his animal, where it would be roasted and eaten that evening as commanded.*

Relay after relay of men presented themselves at the Temple to slay the Passover Lamb on behalf of the family group over which they presided.

But at last the long procession came to an end, the final animal had been slain, the concluding Psalm had been sung, the first part of the service was over.

In thousands of homes the lambs were roasted, the family groups assembled around the table, and the story of Divine mercy and deliverance was told.

Children heard for the first time the story of the Exodus, of the great deliverance that had been effected through Moses. The lamb was eaten with bitter herbs, with unleavened bread. The youngest one present asked

*Josephus says that the Passover was kept in companies of no less than ten (Wars 6: 9) and that it was not lawful to eat it singly. At the time appointed (from approximately 3 to 6 p.m.) representatives of each group brought their animal to the Temple, the gates of which were closed when the allowed number were inside, and were not opened again until the next relay. The priests stood between the slaughter place and the altar to officiate over the slaying, and to assist one another. The people acted as priests and slew their own offering. The Levites stood at their places (cp. 1 Chron. 25) singing Psalms 113-118 repeatedly. The seemingly endless slaughter of animals, the stream of blood poured out, the singing of significant psalms, would impress those assembled with the awful consequences of sin, and that without the shedding of blood there was no remission.

the question traditionally asked at such a time:

"Wherein is this night different from all other nights?"

The head of the group commenced the instruction:

"On all other nights, we may eat either leavened bread or unleavened, but on this night only unleavened; on all other nights we may eat other kind of herb, but on this night only bitter herbs. . . ."

"What mean the testimonies, and statutes, and the judgments which Yahweh our God hath commanded you?"

"We are Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt; and Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; He shewed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh. . . ."

So the explanation went on, in 30,000 homes that night.

The Passover had been celebrated strictly according to the Law.

It was the culminating point of Josiah's reform; he could look back satisfied at that which he had attempted.

He had done what he could for the nation.

He had destroyed the external evidences of idolatry; had brought the people back to the Law; had laid the foundation of righteousness for the people.

It was not his fault that they did not fully respond to his lead.

WHERE JOSIAH FAILED

The Phillips' family had read together the story of Josiah, and were now discussing it together.

"I have a difficulty to reconcile," declared Peter to his father. "In 2 Kings 23: 25 we read that there was 'no king before or after Josiah who turned

to Yahweh so completely' as he did, and yet in 2 Kings 18: 5 these same words are said of Hezekiah. Which is right?"

"Both are right," answered Mr. Phillips, with a smile.

"That's impossible!" said Ann, who had turned up the two references, and no matter how much she likes to argue with her brother, was forced to agree with him in this.

"It is true!" declared Mr. Phillips.

"How can it possibly be true?" asked Peter.

"I have told you repeatedly that when you find what seems to be a contradiction in the Bible to very carefully read the context," said Mr. Phillips. "Notice that 2 Kings 23: 25 says that Josiah was greater than any other king in a particular way, namely, 'according to all the law of Moses.' He observed the Law more strictly than did Hezekiah, but in accordance with 2 Kings 18: 5, Hezekiah was the greater king."

"I suppose the same explanation applies to 2 Chronicles 35: 18, where we read that the Passover Josiah kept was greater than that kept at any previous time," remarked Graham.

"Yes. When you read, 'there was no Passover like to that,' it does not mean that more people celebrated it in the time of Josiah, or that it was kept with more enthusiasm, or did more good, but rather that there was none kept so meticulously according to the Law as that conducted by Josiah. Notice the comments of vv. 1, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16 of the chap-

ter you have quoted. See how carefully the record states that everything that was done was according to the commandment. In fact, I feel that it was in this direction that his reform failed."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Josiah had discovered the Book of the Law and tried to put into practice all he read therein with the greatest enthusiasm. In that, he was helped by the priests and prophets of Judah. Their interest, however, was mainly political, and rested in the formalism of the Law. Like the Jews of Christ's day, they looked at the letter of the law and discerned not its spirit. Jeremiah warned them of this. He told them not to trust in lying words, saying, 'The Temple of Yahweh, the Temple of Yahweh, the Temple of Yahweh are these,' using the Temple as a mere talisman (Jer. 7: 4). They believed that so long as the people attended the Temple all was well, and God would not destroy the building he had caused to be erected. Thus they relied on externals in religion, on strict attendance to formalism without discerning the spiritual lessons behind these necessary things (Matt. 23: 23). There was no spirit or love of Yahweh in their worship. On the other hand, Hezekiah saw beyond the mere letter of the Law. In his day they 'did eat the Passover otherwise than it was written' (2 Chron. 30: 18), but through the intercession of the King they were forgiven any such infraction of the Law. Thus, in

Hezekiah's day, the people recognized that they had broken the Law, and saw the need of seeking forgiveness; but in Josiah's day, the law was so meticulously set before them that the people felt themselves covered by it, and became self-righteous. They forgot that the Law could not save them, and, in fact, cursed them."

"Don't you think Josiah was a great king?"

"Most assuredly I do! We are told that he was a great king. His work actually foreshadows that of the Lord Jesus. As he ruthlessly destroyed idolatry, slaughtered the black-frocked priests, restored the Temple worship, provided the Passover Lambs for the people, so also will the Lord Jesus at his coming. It was not his fault that the people refused to respond to the teaching of the law."

"That explains why Jeremiah denounced the people during the time of Josiah," suggested Graham.

"That is so. One of the most important verses in the Old Testament is Jeremiah 1: 2. It tells us that this great prophet began to prophesy in the 13th year of Josiah. This was when the great reform had commenced. The first twelve chapters of Jeremiah record prophecies given in the times of Josiah, at a time when people were flocking into the Temple, when they were celebrating the law as it had never been kept for centuries, when idolatry had been destroyed, the pagan temples and idols broken up, the false prophets and priests

slain. From an external viewpoint, the nation looked spiritually prosperous and united, but Yahweh reads the heart, and there the picture was not so good. He could see that the people did not want this reform: they preferred to go their own ways; He could see that they were hypocritical in attitude, and that the sweeping reforms of the king were not really to their liking. Jeremiah expressed the viewpoint of God. He was sweeping in his bitter condemnation. He told them that they were a nation of adulterers, that they had been completely unfaithful to their God, Whom figuratively they had married in the Covenant made at Sinai (Jer. 3: 1-5). He warned them that the very book of the Law they had discovered cursed them, and that upon them would assuredly come the terrible punishments there recorded. He threatened and pleaded with them to turn wholeheartedly to Yahweh, to serve Him in such a way that the judgments pronounced therein might be averted."

"But why do you say that Jer. 1: 2 is such an important verse?" interrupted Peter.

"Because it tells us that the indictments of Jeremiah was given when the greatest religious revival in the history of the nation was taking place. We are thereby shown very clearly that it is not in externals that Yahweh takes pleasure, but in the heart. We are taught that true religion cannot be forced by law, is useless to God when it relies upon man-made stimu-

lus in the absence of the spirit of the Truth, or is induced by the commandments of men. By its very attitude Judah showed that it feared Josiah not God and this was abhorrent to Him. All that is implied in the simple, mechanical statement that Jeremiah prophesied in the 13th year of Josiah!"

JEREMIAH AT THE TEMPLE

"I don't like the Book of Jeremiah much," remarked Ann. "It is such doleful reading; chapter after chapter of complaints!"

"You don't like reading his message, and Jeremiah hated proclaiming it," answered Mr. Phillips. "But this is a book that really grows on one the more it is studied. Most people prefer Isaiah, because of the glorious language in which his prophecies are delivered. But whereas Isaiah predicted the sufferings of Christ in such chapters as his 53rd, Jeremiah manifested them in the things he endured and the message he proclaimed. It is always easier to think or speak of sufferings than to endure them! Jeremiah was a wonderful and remarkable type of Christ!"

"Jeremiah had warned the people that Yahweh requires more than mere formalism in worship, that if they really wanted to serve Him in truth they must seek Him completely with all their hearts. It was true that they had given tithes to restore the Temple, it was true that they were reverting to the form of worship laid down in the Law, it was true that they were offering the pre-

scribed sacrifices, and attending the necessary feasts. They did all this because the king demanded it, not because of their love of God. Therefore there was little true spirit in their religion.

"But the exhortations of Jeremiah made no impact upon the people."

"At the command of Yahweh he began to use more dramatic methods.

"On one occasion, some time after the celebration of the Passover, when the people were flocking into the Temple for some service, they saw the prophet standing in the court gate. He faced the people, with his back to the Temple, as though he were guarding it from their polluting presence. Then, when sufficient had gathered around him, he addressed them:

"Hear this, all you that enter these gates to worship Yahweh," cried the youthful prophet and priest, "Thus saith Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place!"

"The people could hardly believe their ears. What did he mean? Were they not worshipping Yahweh? Had they not changed their ways?

"The prophet declared they had not. As they thronged around him in the Temple, he showed that their actions were dictated by the commands of men and did not reflect a love of God. He told them they put too much confidence in the Temple as though God would never destroy it, and he warned them that Yahweh would destroy both the Temple and the Nation if the people did not

change.

"You trust in lying words, that cannot profit," he said. "You steal, murder, do all manner of evil, and then come and stand before Yahweh in this house and say, 'We are delivered to do all these things. IS THIS HOUSE, WHICH I HAVE CALLED BY MY NAME, BECOME A DEN OF ROBBERS IN YOUR EYES? Behold, I have seen it, saith Yahweh' (Jer. 7: 11)."

"I am beginning to see what you mean when you say Jeremiah was a type of Christ," said Graham interrupting his father. "Those were the very words that the Lord used when he entered the Temple, and overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of them that sold doves, and said: 'This house shall be called of all nations a House of Prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves' (Mark 11: 17). I can imagine how the people would look on Jeremiah with anger as they did also on the Lord."

"The Lord was quoting both Isaiah and Jeremiah on that occasion," replied his father. "Isaiah predicted the time when the Temple shall be called a House of Prayer for all nations (Isa. 56), but Jeremiah actually enacted the very incident itself. It was this action of Christ that caused the priests to conspire to destroy him, and in like manner, Jeremiah's exhortation in the Temple caused the people to hate him. It was the beginning of a long discourse that occupies Chapters 7 to 10 of his book, and in which he showed that the very Book of the Law they had discovered warned them of dire punishments to come."

The Story of the Bible



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Josiah : The Frustrated Reformer

Though Josiah instituted wide-sweeping reforms they did not really touch the hearts of the people. The people did what the king demanded because they feared him, and not out of love for Yahweh. Because of that, Josiah's reforms were not really effective, and Jeremiah was set the task of warning the people that if they did not change in heart before God they would be destroyed from off the land. We interrupted Mr. Phillips last month as he was discussing some of the incidents recorded in the Book of Jeremiah.

Opposition to Jeremiah

"There is even a more interesting incident recorded in his 11th chapter," continued Mr. Phillips. "It has as its background the Covenant with which Josiah had bound the nation to serve Yahweh. You remember the incident, don't you?"

"Yes, it is recorded in 2 Chronicles 35: 31-33," replied Peter.

"Well, some time after that, the Voice of Yahweh came to the prophet, reminding him of the implications of that covenant. 'Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of the covenant which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them out of the land

of Egypt. Obey My voice and do My commands that I may give you a land to live in,' Yahweh declared.

"And as Jeremiah heard these words, he confirmed them, saying: 'So be it' or 'Amen' (Jer. 11: 5).

"This was the response that Israel was commanded to give when they heard the words of the Covenant. It meant that they were bound to them and would truly receive the blessings or the cursings there outlined according to whether they obeyed or disobeyed.

"Jeremiah was told to take this message to the people. Like the Lord Jesus, nearly 700 years later, he commenced a tour of the cities of Judea (vv. 6-8),

warning the people that the very covenant they had entered into could destroy them unless they obeyed it in the letter and in the spirit.

"It was not a pleasant tour that he made. The people came to hate him for his straightforward talk. They did not want to hear of curses; they wanted only blessings. They were well satisfied with their ways, and manifested the greatest impatience at his criticism.

"The prophet told them that they were completely disloyal to Yahweh: 'According to the number of their cities have been your gods,' he declared (Jer. 11: 13). And though the idols had been destroyed, the hearts of the people remained unchanged. So completely apostate had they become that Yahweh refused to hear any prayers on their behalf unless they changed their ways (v. 14).

"He reminded them that though Israel is likened to a 'good olive tree,' Yahweh would break off its branches and burn them (v. 16), language that the Apostle Paul borrows in Romans 11: 19.

"He spoke of the growing hatred of the people for himself, and likened himself to 'a favorite lamb led to the slaughter' (v. 9)* a term used of the Lord Jesus (Acts 8: 32).

"His journey led him back to his own city of Anathoth, just as the journeyings of Christ

took him back to his hometown of Nazareth. And there, Jeremiah, like Christ, proclaimed his message. And like Christ, he found these people more angry with him than any others. 'We do not want to hear you!' they stormed at him. 'Do not prophesy in the name of Yahweh, or we will kill you!' (cp. Jer. 11: 21 with Luke 4: 24).

"Even the members of his own family joined in the hue and cry against him. And when they found that anger and persecution did not move him, they tried flattery and fair words — but all in vain (Jer. 12: 6). How like the Lord Jesus, concerning whom it was said, that 'even his brethren believed him not' (Jhn. 7: 5)!

"Sad and despondent, the prophet turned to Yahweh. 'Why do the wicked prosper?' he asked (Ch. 12: 1). He desired to know the purpose of all his sufferings. He could see that though Yahweh was 'near in the mouths of the people, He was far from their inward feelings' (v. 2). He could see that even then the beginnings of punishments predicted in the Law were being felt. Severe drought was troubling the land (v. 4), and he wondered if it were to continue.

"He was told that worse things were in store for the nation. Jerusalem would be overthrown by the Gentiles, though ultimately the 'time of the Gentiles*' would come to an

*See Rotherham's translation.

*The Gentiles are styled "Mine evil neighbours" in Jer. 12: 14 because Yahweh is represented in Scripture as dwelling in the midst of Israel.

end, and Israel would be restored.

"In short, this message of Jeremiah, in his 12th chapter, is strikingly similar to that warning prophecy which Christ delivered on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24), in which he also predicted famine, civil war, invasion, destruction for Judah, and the downtreading of Jerusalem 'until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.'

"Thus Jeremiah anticipated the work of the Lord Jesus. As far as we know, this was his final prophecy in the lifetime of Josiah. Shortly after this, political events developed to a crisis in which the life of the Godly king was brought to an end."

ZEPHANIAH'S DRAMATIC WARNING

Whilst Jeremiah was busy touring the cities of Judah, scorned and derided of men because he set their sins plainly before them, the voice of another prophet was heard, warning the people of impending judgments.

It was the voice of the prophet Zephaniah.

His name means "Yahweh Has Hidden," and his words show that Yahweh, indeed, had turned His face from His people.

He was a relation of King Josiah, being a descendant of

Hezekiah, and he prophesied, as a young man, in the closing years of Josiah's reign.*

His book only contains three short chapters, but they are full of meaning and power.

He endorsed the words of Jeremiah.

Some had rejected the message of that prophet, claiming that "Yahweh will do neither good nor evil!" (Zeph. 1:12).

"You people who are 'settled on your lees' and say such things, shall be carefully searched out and punished," was the prophet's sarcastic reproof to those who spake in that way.

He warned the materialistic-minded merchants of Jerusalem that their trust in wealth would avail them nothing in the day of crises that was rapidly approaching. They would be cut off in spite of their riches (Zeph. 1:11).

He saw the tragic farce of the people's unconcern; he heard the sickening thud and rumble of approaching judgment and war. Loudly he called his theme-cry in the streets:

"Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord Yahweh: for the day of Yahweh is at hand: for Yahweh hath prepared a sacrifice, He hath bidden His guests" (Zeph. 1:7).

Judah was to be carved up like a sacrifice; the Gentiles were invited as guests to a feast to come and feed off the nation!

*"Hizkiah" (Zeph. 1:1) is the same in Hebrew as Hezekiah. The long genealogical line, so unlike the prophets, points to this being Hezekiah the king, and Zephaniah being in the line of David as was Josiah. The date of his prophecy is implied in the statement of Ch. 1:8 in which all classes of society are condemned including the "king's sons"—the king alone being excluded. This suggests that Zephaniah must have commenced to prophesy fairly late in the reign of Josiah by which time the king's sons had grown to maturity, to earn this rebuke.

It was a horrible urgent message — if only the people would heed it.

In dramatic, compelling language he drew a picture of the impending disaster:

*The great day of Yahweh is near!
Near! SPEEDING APACE!!*

*A day of wrath, of woe, of anguish,
A day of stress and distress, of
darkness and gloom,*

*A day of cloud and thunder-cloud,
A day of trumpet-blast and battle-
cry,*

*Against fortified towns and high
towers,*

*Bringing distress upon men,
Causing them to grope like the
blind, desperately.*

*Because against Yahweh they re-
belled,*

*Their blood shall be scattered like
dust,*

Their flesh like dung,

*No silver, no gold will avail to pro-
tect,*

On the day of Yahweh's wrath.

*The fire of His fury will consume
the whole land;*

*For a full end, yea a fearful end,
Will Yahweh make of all that dwell
in the land."*

(Zeph. 1:14-18).

And what an all-embracing day of trouble he predicted.

Commencing with Judah, he systematically showed how the nations on west, east, south and north would in turn be involved*

Guilty Judah would become the very centre of the cauldron of trouble into which all nations would be plunged. It would be ringed with an iron band of judgment and woe that would bring it to utter destruction.

But his message was not unrelieved darkness. Like all the other prophets, he also had a vision of fut-

JEREMIAH'S TEMPLE PROPHECY — Chps. 7-10

"They had found a copy of the Book of the Law" (2 Kings 22: 8). This book became the text-book of Josiah's reform, but Jeremiah showed how the curses of the Book would come upon that generation. In doing so he stood as a type of Christ. Thus he stood as a bridge linking Moses and the Lord. Note the following references to the Law in his Temple discourse, and how his words anticipate those of the Lord Jesus. He, like the Lord, condemned the people out of the Law.

MOSES	JEREMIAH	CHRIST	MOSES	JEREMIAH	CHRIST
	Ch. 7: 4	Mat. 24: 2		Ch. 8: 8	Mat. 15: 6
Deut. 24: 14	Ch. 7: 6		Deut. 28: 36	Ch. 8: 10	
Deut. 6: 14-15	Ch. 7: 6		Lev. 14: 44-45	Ch. 8: 12	
Deut. 4: 40	Ch. 7: 7			Ch. 8: 13	Mat. 21: 19
Deut. 6: 14	Ch. 7: 9	Mat. 23: 21-23	Deut. 29: 18	Ch. 8: 14	
	Ch. 7: 11	Mat. 21: 13		Ch. 8: 21	Mat. 8: 17
Deut. 12: 11	Ch. 7: 12	Luke 21: 24		Ch. 9: 1	Luke 19: 41
Deut. 9: 14	Ch. 7: 16	Jhn. 17: 9		Ch. 9: 2	Mth. 16: 4
Deut. 6: 3	Ch. 7: 21-23	Heb. 10: 8-9		Ch. 9: 4	Mth. 10: 36
	Ch. 7: 26	Mat. 23: 30-31	Deut. 28: 23-24	Ch. 9: 10	
Deut. 17: 9	Ch. 7: 28	Mat. 23: 13	Deut. 31: 29	Ch. 9: 13	
Deut. 17: 3	Ch. 7: 32	Mat. 23: 33	Deut. 28: 64	Ch. 9: 16	
	Ch. 7: 34	Luke 23: 28		Ch. 9: 23	1 Cor. 1: 31
Deut. 4: 19	Ch. 8: 2		Deut. 30: 6	Ch. 9: 26	Rom. 2: 25
Deut. 28: 34	Ch. 8: 2		Exod. 15: 11	Ch. 10: 6-7	Rev. 15: 3
Deut. 28: 6-6	Ch. 8: 3		Deut. 32: 9	Ch. 10: 16	

*Notice the systematic treatment of nations in Zephaniah's prophecy. First Judah as the centre of the Divine purpose (Ch. 1:2-2:3), then Philistia to the West (Ch. 2:4-7), Moab and Ammon to the East (v.v.8-11), Ethiopia (and Egypt) to the South (v.12), and finally Assyria to the North (vv.13-15),

ure glory. His final words comprise a prediction of healing and of hope (Zeph. 3: 9-20). He saw the people returning to the land, worshipping Yahweh in truth, manifesting shame at their former iniquities, seeking the Divine favor. He saw Zion transformed, the enemy expelled, Messiah the King applauded as the victorious warrior, Israel regathered and glorified, receiving praise and fame in all lands where previously they had been put to shame.

What a wonderful message of hope it is! How it must have encouraged those faithful few who in the midst of the terrible wickedness of Jeremiah's day, still sought to obey the Truth.

It was a royal message for the royal prophet to deliver for the benefit of those who still delighted in "the sure mercies of David". (Isa. 55: 4).

A WORLD IN TURMOIL

Some time after the 18th year of Josiah's reign when he had celebrated the Passover for the first time (see p. 59), an event occurred of the greatest importance.

It comprised a warning to the self-satisfied kingdom of Judah; it also completely altered the balance of power among the nations, setting in motion the train of circumstances that finally led to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Asia was invaded by the Scythians.

The Bible barely mentions this marauding, warlike nation, but it played quite an important part in the history of the times. The Scythians appeared suddenly from the mysterious north, from behind

the long mountain barrier formed by the Himalayan, Caucasian and other ranges, which completely cut off that which lay beyond from the civilised world of the times.

The Scythians suddenly and unexpectedly appeared: fierce, uncivilised, uncouth, to fall upon the soft, sophisticated cities of the south.

One division swept along the coastal plains of Palestine towards Egypt, penetrating Philistia to the southern border of Palestine. It was met and induced to stop by Psammetichus of Egypt after sacking the Temple of Astarte at Ascalon. The Egyptian leader bribed the rough, crude-looking invaders to retire.

Bought off by Egypt, they returned north, ravaging the country, burning, plundering, bringing terror to the inhabitants. They left but one permanent trace of their passage as they retired along the plain of Esdraelon. The city of Bethshan, on its eastern extremity, from them received the name it afterwards bore of Scythopolis.

Within ten years they had retired behind their mountain barrier, having disappeared like an evil apparition.

The terror that had so swiftly struck and retired, was like a warning to Judah of what it could expect when its time came.

But for the moment the nation escaped. The Scythians passed it by. For some reason, Jerusalem, apparently, was not attacked.

Historians wonder why this was so. The Bible supplies the answer. God had promised Josiah, through Huldah the prophetess, that he

would have peace during his lifetime.

The fierce, brutal Scythians — murdering, plundering, destroying, but passing Judah by — was a warning and a token to many watchers in the land.

ASSYRIA COLLAPSES

Although the Scythians attacked Assyria, and weakened the nation, they actually delayed the fall of the Empire.

Two other Powers were awaiting the opportunity to attack, but feared to do so whilst the fierce, savage fighters from the north were ravaging the land.

They were the developing powers of Media and Babylon.

To the north-east of Assyria, in the Province of Media, a king by name of Cyaxeres had come to power. He proved an efficient military leader, and made preparations to throw off the yoke of Assyria.

Meanwhile, in the south-east, Nabopolasser founded the Babylonian Empire, and also awaited an opportune moment to seize the spoils of the decaying empire of Assyria.

The retirement of the Scythians behind their mountain barrier provided the opportunity both were seeking.

They bore down on the Assyrians on two fronts. Nineveh was caught in a joint-attack that crushed it as in a vice. One by one the protecting fortresses fell, until, in the year 614 B.C. the remaining stronghold had been taken.

Cyaxeres had reached there first, and Nabopolasser met him in the ruins of the city. Both

kings pledged each other to a mutual agreement. Amid the ruins of Ninevah they divided up the Assyrian Empire.

Media annexed the north and north-east.

Babylon lay claim to the south and south-west.

By this momentous decision Syria, Palestine Egypt came under the sphere of Babylon rule.

EGYPT MOVES AGAINST BABYLON

In Egypt a ruler had come to power called Pharaoh Neco II.

He heard of the fall of Ninevah, and the pact of mutual agreement entered into by Media and Babylon.

But he had no intention of quietly being adopted into the family of nations that Babylon desired to establish.

He believed that it was to his advantage to help the fallen Assyrians.

It was true that for many years Egypt and Assyria had been bitter enemies, that their armies had clashed time and again, that Palestine had been constantly disturbed by the arguments between the powers of the north and south.

But Neco preferred to have a weakened Assyria sufficiently strong enough to withstand Babylon, rather than having a powerful Babylon emerge to threaten Egypt.

He decided to march to the help of Assyria.

It was a momentous decision that he made, destined to prove disastrous to the little kingdom of Judah, and the family of Josiah in particular, as Mr. Phillips ex-

plained to his family when discussing 2 Chronicles 35.

The Battle of Megiddo

"We discussed the Passover celebrated by Josiah last evening," (see p. 61) said Mr. Phillips to his family, "and now I want to outline to you the final incidents in Josiah's life.

"With his death came the sunset on Judah's glory; for now the kingdom was hastening to its doom.

"Thirteen years had flown by since the great Passover had been kept with such enthusiasm, and . . ."

"How do we know that?" interrupted Peter.

"Oh, work it out for yourself!" exclaimed Ann impatiently. "2 Chronicles 34:1 says that he reigned 31 years, and in 2 Chronicles 35:19 we are told that the Passover was celebrated in his 18th year. Eighteen from thirty-one leaves thirteen!"

"Alright Ann! Keep your hair on!" answered Peter cheerfully.

"Nevertheless, it is good to work these things out for yourself," remarked Mr. Phillips.

"When you tell me, it saves me the trouble," said Peter with a grin at the indignant Ann.

"We know very little of the events of those thirteen years, apart from what we learn in the record of Jeremiah," said Mr. Phillips, who, being a family man, has learned to ignore the little arguments that sometimes arise.

"Apparently, Josiah enjoyed a measure of prosperity until about the closing year of his reign, when apparently severe drought was ex-

perienced, causing Jeremiah to ask, "How long shall the land mourn?" (Jer. 12:4).

"It was also a year of international tension. From the north were heard reports of the fall of Assyria and the success of two new Powers: Media and Babylon.

"And then, closer home, was heard the tramp of Egyptian soldiers, as the army of Pharaoh Neco moved north to help the Assyrians."

"I do not find that in the Bible," interrupted Graham. "2 Kings 23:29 reads that he went up 'to fight against Assyria.' How can you say he went up to help the Assyrians?"

"That verse is better rendered 'he went to' as it is in the RSV," answered Mr. Phillips. "Neco went to fight in support of the Assyrians against the rising powers of Babylon and Media. Archaeologists have found inscriptions confirming the Bible record in this. They are today preserved in the British Museum, and state that 'the King of Assyria procured a large Egyptian army and marched against Haran to conquer it! The Assyrian monarch hoped to make Haran his headquarters from whence he could reconquer his own territory from the Medes and Babylonians with the help of the Egyptians.

"But it was a forlorn hope.

"He obtained the Egyptian help but could do nothing with it. Haran was besieged for two months, but it did not fall, and when Neco saw how weak the Assyrian forces were, he retired to Carchemish on the Euphrates which he made his border, and de-

fied Nabopolassar the king of the Babylonians, to dislodge him.

"Thus, for a time, Syria, Palestine and the adjacent countries came under the control of the Egyptians.

"But, before this, a most tragic event occurred as we read in 2 Chronicles 35.

"Josiah attempted to stop the mighty Egyptian army. Perhaps he was encouraged with the thought of Sennacherib's overthrow; doubtless he wanted to keep his country free from foreign domination, and realised that if Egypt were successful in the north, Judah would fall under its influence.

"Whatever were his real motives he decided to oppose Egypt. Courageously he pitted his small army against the mighty forces from the South.

"He failed, however, to seek Divine guidance in this crucial and fateful decision, and this led to his undoing.

"Neco treated the small Judian forces with contempt."

"What have you to do with me, O king of Judah?" he asked. 'I have not come out against you but against my own enemy. God has commanded me to make haste. Therefore, stop interfering with God, Who is on my side, lest He destroy you!'

"Unconsciously, Neco was uttering the counsel of God in thus speaking.

"But Josiah did not heed the voice of wisdom.

"Disguising himself, he set his chariots in battle array and made ready to oppose the astonished and now angry Egyptian.

"It was in the historic vicinity of Megiddo, not far from where

Barak had discomfited Sisera, and Gideon with his 300 men had defeated the Midianites the day the battle took place.

"Megiddo signifies 'The Place of Troups', and soon the normal peaceful valley resounded with the clash of troops, the battle-cries of men in mortal combat, the groans of men wounded unto death.

"Josiah was in the forefront of the battle, commanding the chariots. The Egyptian bowmen directed a cloud of arrows at the advancing Israelites. One among their number shot his arrow blindly, at a venture, in the direction of the disguised king. Swiftly the shaft flew to its target, striking the king a mortal blow. Josiah slumped in his chariot.

"Take me away, I am badly wounded,' he gasped.

"Swiftly the servant wheeled the chariot out of the battle line. Tenderly he lifted his beloved king out of the small war-chariot into a larger one in order to carry him to Jerusalem.

"But the king was beyond any help. Josiah had fought his last battle, had introduced his last reform. His record had been closed in death until the resurrection.

"He died at peace with God. He died just in time to escape the trouble that was looming on the political horizon and which almost immediately began to affect Judah.

"Thus God had fulfilled His promise made through Huldah. The threatened punishment on Judah was delayed until the death of good king Josiah.

"Meanwhile, the tiny army of Judah was swept out of the way. Without waiting to consolidate his

victory (for his prescence was urgently required in the north) Pharoah Neco pressed on to the assistance of the fallen Assyrian Empire."

The Morning for Josiah

"Slowly, mournfully, the body of the king was conveyed back to the city.

"Fearfully the people had awaited news of the battle. As the broken remnants of the army were seen the apprehension mounted. The mournful appearance of the returned soldiers, the subdued look of the leaders, the absence of the king in his chariot, and finally the news that the king had been slain, revealed to them how disastrous was the defeat.

"The whole nation gave itself over to mourning.

"It was as though every family had lost a beloved son.

"The streets were deserted, families sheltered in their homes mourning the terrible loss the nation had suffered, throughout the land a cry arose because a beloved king had been tragically taken from his people.

"But no one mourned so earnestly as Jeremiah.

"He knew, as no one else, how much the nation had lost.

"He realised that the death of the king removed that which restrained the outpouring of Divine anger and judgment on the wicked nation."

"Before you go any further," remarked Peter as his father paused, I am going to challenge you on what you have just said. You told me I must work out things for myself, but I have read

the accounts in both 2 Chronicles 35 and 2 Kings 24, and they say nothing about the people gathering in families to mourn as though they had lost a son, as you have said. Are you just exercising your imagination?"

"By no means! I have told you before, that when you study a section of the Bible, you need to take a concordance and look up every reference to it and link them together, to get the full picture. You will find the mourning of Josiah referred to in Zechariah 12: 11. Link the references in Kings and Chronicles with that in Zechariah, and you will find the description is exactly as I have said. Moreover, you will find that this mourning is said to be similar to a mourning that will overcome the Jews in the days when the Lord Jesus shall appear in the earth. They will then mourn as they did in the days of Josiah. They mourned because their king was dead; but when Christ returns they will mourn because they will realise that they put to death their king 1900 years ago!"

"I know that it says that Jeremiah lamented for Josiah (2 Chron. 35: 25), but is there any record of what he said?" asked Ann.

"No. This was possibly a funeral lamentation which has not been preserved. However, Jeremiah did make mention of the death of Josiah. In Lamentations 4: 20 he declared:

*The breath of our nostrils,
The Anointed of Yahweh,
Was taken in their pits.
Of him we said,
Under his shadow we shall live,
Among the heathen.*

"Again. in Jeremiah 22: 10 he wrote concerning Josiah:

*Weep ye not for the dead,
Neither bemoan him.*

"He spake thus because he knew that greater troubles were shortly to fall."

"Is Megiddo and Armageddon the same?" asked Graham.

"No, the word 'Armageddon' is a different word entirely. It is said that Armageddon signifies the Mountain of Megiddo, but it was in the valley of Megiddo that Josiah lost his life, and the Bible is silent concerning a mountain of that name. 'Armagedon' should be spelt with only one 'd' as in the R.V., and its meaning sought for in the Hebrew tongue. In 'Eureka' vol. 3, pp. 603-604, Dr. Thomas says it is compounded of three Hebrew words: 'Arma' which he links with 'arema' meaning 'a heap of sheaves'; 'ge' or 'gai' meaning 'a valley,' and 'don' or 'dun' signifying 'judgment.'"

"What does all that mean?" asked Ann.

"Accepting these meanings, Armageddon signifies, 'A heap of sheaves in a valley for judgment.'"

"I still cannot see what you are driving at," said Ann with a frown on her face.

"Give Dad time and he'll get there finally," murmured Peter.

"Armageddon relates to the judgment of the nations, and the word signifies that God will gather all the nations as sheaves

into a valley for judgment."

"Yes, but what I want to know is whether that valley is the valley of Megiddo!" said Ann impatiently.

"That cannot be," remarked Graham, "because Zechariah 14: 2 says that God will gather the nations to Jerusalem for battle, and will there pour out upon them His great judgments."

"Graham is quite right" said his father. "Outside of Jerusalem there is a valley, called the Valley of Jehoshaphat, or the Valley of Yahweh's judgment. This will be the focal point of conflict among the nations when God gathers them together for battle. We learn that in Joel 3. Notice verse 2 says that "all nations" will be drawn to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and that there Yahweh will judge them. In v.12, he declares: "For there will I sit to judge all the nations round about. He likens this place to the 'valley of threshing' (v. 14 mg.), and states that the nations will be gathered thereinto like heaps of sheaves into the threshing floor.

Micah predicts the same event, but in language even more in line with the word Armageddon. He declares that God will gather the nations 'as the sheaves into the floor' for judging (Micah 4:12). The word 'Armageddon,' therefore, has its roots in Old Testament prophecy, but is to be identified with Jerusalem more than the valley of Megiddo."



Jehoahaz : KING OF THE RETRIBUTION

With the death of Josiah, the judgments of Yahweh fell fast and heavy on the guilty nation, until it was taken into captivity by the Babylonians. The centre of interest turns from the kings to the prophets of the period—men such as Jeremiah and Habakkuk.

THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE

Three sons were left to mourn the death of Josiah. They were Eliakim, a young man of 25 years of age (2 Kings 23:36), Shallum who was 23 years of age (2 Kings 23:31; 1 Chron. 3:15; Jer. 22:11), and a young boy of ten years of age named Mattaniah (2 Kings 24:17-18), who is better known as Zedekiah.

The people elected Shallum king by popular vote.

Why they did not make the eldest son king is not properly known, but it is probable that Eliakim was taken captive by Pharaoh Neco at the Battle of Megiddo, leaving Shallum as the obvious choice.

Neco was in too much of a hurry to assist the Assyrians in the north, to delay to put the affairs of Judah in order. Therefore, Jerusalem had a three months' respite, whilst the Egyptian army moved north to finally take up its position in Carchemish.

This three months' respite was the full length of Shallum's reign.

The people had such high hopes of him, however, that they changed his name to Jehoahaz.

Shallum means "retribution," whereas Jehoahaz signifies "Yahweh upholds."

This second name proved ironical, for Yahweh was not prepared to uphold him. As Zephaniah had earlier predicted, there were severe punishments reserved for Josiah's sons (Zeph. 1:8). Jehoahaz was destined to be the first of these sons to reap the result of their own folly. He was to be king of the Retribution, and thus live up to his proper name of Shallum. He commenced to reign at a time when the long-threatened, long-delayed punishment of Yahweh began to fall upon his disobedient, God-defying people.

The record states that "he did evil in the sight of Yahweh."

He did not manifest the qualities of Josiah. He probably pleased the people by relaxing the extreme religious demands that his father had made. But he did not please God by so doing.

He was, perhaps, the best of the sons of Josiah. The people saw him as Ezekiel describes him: "a young lion" well trained to "catch the prey" (Ezek. 19:3). They hoped that he might restore the fallen fortunes of Judah (Ezek. 19:5).

His three months' reign saw troubles increase. In the days of Josiah the beginnings of a severe drought had been felt, and this

continued throughout this period. Day after day the sun beat down out of a cloudless sky, and the ground became hard and parched. Ploughing was useless. Cattle became famished for want of grass. Wild animals deserted their young, streams of water dried up, the springs failed.

The whole country became stricken with drought. Jerusalem became a city of gloom. The gates of the city, where people commonly met for business and conversation became places of mourning as knots of grave-faced people discussed the political and climatic crisis facing them (Jer. 14: 1-6).

Jeremiah sought to intercede for the people, but was told that they were not worthy of it.

"Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be towards this people: cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth." Yahweh told him.*

He was told that this was but the beginning of distress; that Jerusalem as the Mother City was to experience terrible privation and bereavement from among her sons (Jer. 15: 6-9); that the famine the land suffered was but a token of the spiritual famine manifested by the people (Jer. 17: 8; Amos. 8: 11-12).

False prophets were saying that the drought would soon break (Jer. 14: 13), but Yahweh's reply was that "sword and famine shall consume those very prophets" (v. 15).

At the end of three months, Pharaoh Neco demanded that Jehoahaz present himself before him at Riblah in the land of Hamath (2 Kings 23: 31).

It was in this region that David enjoyed one of his greatest victories by which his great faith was vindicated (2 Sam. 8). Now the descendant of David had to come to this very spot, and humbly crouch before the proud and haughty Egyptian.

Imperiously, Neco told Jehoahaz that he was not allowed to reign in Jerusalem. He was taken prisoner and sent in chains to Egypt.

Neco then appointed Jehoahaz's elder brother Eliakim as king in Jerusalem, changing his name to Jehoiachin.

Many in Jerusalem lamented this disgrace that so quickly followed on the disaster of Josiah's death. They hoped that Neco might experience some reverse that would restore their banished king to them again. But Jeremiah told them that such hopes would never be realised. He called upon them to dry their tears for Josiah, and reconcile themselves to the fact that Jehoahaz (or Shallum) had gone away for good.

"Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him; But weep sore for him that goeth away; For he shall return no more, Nor see his native country. For thus saith Yahweh, Touching Shallum the son of Josiah king of Judah, Which reigneth instead of Josiah his father, Which went forth out of this place; He shall not return thither any more; But he shall die in

*Why are Moses and Samuel specifically referred to? Because they were known by the people of Jeremiah's day as the mighty intercessors of heroic times whose mediatorship had proved effectual (cp. Exod. 17:11; 32:11; Num. 14:13; 1 Sam. 7:9; 12:16; Ps. 99:6; Isa. 63:10-11).

the place whither they have led him captive, And shall see this land no more." (Jer. 22: 10-12).

In thus being taken away to die in the land of dispersion, Shallum, the King of the Retribution, en-

acted the retribution that Yahweh would exact of the nation over which he ruled.

The time was not far distant when Judah would be no more.

An Outline of the Prophecy of Jeremiah



A great surprise is in store for anybody who systematically sets out to study the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah. At first glance, the book seems to be little more than a monotonous repetition of complaints, lamentations, indictments, gloomy forebodings, and harsh, critical judgments on the prophet's contemporaries. So much is this so, that his name (which really signifies, Whom Yahweh Upholds) has given birth, in the English language, to the word *jeremiad*, which signifies a lamentation: a tale of grief: a doleful story.

Even among Bible students there is a natural tendency to turn from that which at first sight seems such a gloomy book to one that is more exciting, such as the glorious predictions of Isaiah or the thrilling apocayptic forecasting of Ezekiel. But we need to remind ourselves, that if it is monotonous to read chapter after chapter of indictment such as we find in Jeremiah, it must have been far more monotonous to deliver a continuity of such messages.

But sandwiched in among these indictments there are exciting incidents recorded, and wonderful foreshadowings of the work of Christ. Thus the book grows on one the more and closer it is studied. We see the prophet-priest as a wonderful type of the suffering Messiah, as an outstanding exponent of the newly discovered law, as a careful historian setting before us the details of one of the most significant epochs of Jewish history, as a prophet presenting a glorious message of hope in an age of evil and despair, as a courageous, faithful, patient, persistent witness to truth not only proclaiming the Divine will but revealing it in his life.

Jeremiah as a Character Study

Jeremiah was a timid, retiring man (Ch. 1:6), so deeply sympathetic and with such an intensity of feeling, that he lived, felt and suffered the message he delivered (cp Ch. 9:1-4; 15:10, 18; 20:14-18). He entered into the feelings of both Yahweh and the people. His sympathy with the people was like that of the Apostle Paul, who could wish that he, himself, were accursed that they might be saved. Jeremiah pleaded with God, almost suggesting that the threatened chastisement was too severe (Ch. 4:10, 19, 20; 10:23-25; 14:7-13). But there came a change, as he found the people refused to respond to his message. He found them stubborn, he suffered their derisive mockery, he heard them proclaiming lies in the name of Yahweh, he discovered their thankless

plots against his life, he endured their degrading persecution and cruel treachery.

All this made him realise that Yahweh's punishment was not only warranted, but necessary. If it did not come, the whole nation would be destroyed, both righteous and wicked. Therefore, Jeremiah was caused to cry out that Yahweh punish them—not in a spirit of revenge, but because he could see that justice demanded it, and kindness required it. (Ch. 11:19-20; 18:18-23; 20:10-12; 42:20-22).

His love for Yahweh and his fellowmen resulted in the manifestation of the most patient perseverance in the face of the most ungrateful repudiation of his message that it was the lot of a prophet to receive. He bravely persisted despite the humiliation heaped on him by an unheeding people. Here was love, "suffering long, bearing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things."

He was completely faithful. Though his sensitive nature shrank from the task set him, he continued it to the bitter end, feeling the pain of his message, yet determined to do the bidding of Yahweh though none should take heed (Ch. 1:19; 7:27).

Jeremiah as a Type

Among the prophets, he was pre-eminently the "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." What Isaiah predicted concerning the Lord Jesus as the suffering servant of Yahweh, Jeremiah manifested.

His life was a dramatic foreshadowing of Christ's life.

Time and again, incidents of Christ's life are seen in that of the prophet. The messages he delivered are similar to those of the Lord, the reaction of the people to his teaching was similar to the reaction afforded the teaching of Christ, and time and again, in incidents in his life there is found a remarkable similarity to incidents in the life of the Messiah.

He commenced to minister about 40 years before the destruction of Jerusalem—as did the Lord. He was foreknown to Yahweh before birth (Ch. 1:5), as was the Lord (John 17:3). He was under divine protection (Ch. 1:8), as was also Christ (John 16:32; 19:11). Of him, Yahweh said: "I have put My words in thy mouth," and of himself, Christ said: "The Father gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (John 12:49; 7:16). He bore the reproach of men (Ch. 15:18), as did the Lord (Ps. 69:20). He visited the Temple and proclaimed it a den of thieves (Ch. 7:11), as did Christ (Mark 11:17). He confirmed the covenant, travelled Judea preaching in the cities, described himself as a lamb to the slaughter, was hated by his countrymen, was despised by the people of his own city, was rejected by his own brethren (cp. Ch. 11:21; 12:6 with Luke 4:24; Jhn 7:5). He was condemned by the chief priests and scourged (Ch. 20). He was put in a pit and left for dead (the symbol of death), and drawn out of it again (resurrection). He was carried into Egypt where he proclaimed the Message of God.

Thus this sorrowing, suffering prophet dramatises the greatest of all prophets who is described as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

Jeremiah as Historian

He lived at a time when all things in Judah were rushing down to the final and mournful catastrophe of national destruction. Political excitement was at a peak, the worst passions swayed the various parties, and the most fatal and foolish counsels prevailed.

It was Jeremiah's lot to see his own people, whom he loved with the greatest affection, plunge over the precipice in complete and utter national ruin.

His writings are interspersed with references to the times. He is like a reporter, telling the story of Judah's disgrace from the standpoint of God, so that we clearly see why the catastrophe had to come. He makes no less than twenty-three references to Jehoiakim, whilst Josiah, Shallum, Coniah, Zedekiah also come up for comment.

Though he lived through all these reigns, he was the dominant figure of them all. In fact, he protrudes himself more completely on the historical background of the times than any other prophet. There he ever is, warning the king, pleading with the people, dramatically setting before them in symbolic action and parable the dangers that threatened them, so that to understand his book properly it is necessary to have some understanding of the crucial, tragic, important years that led to Jerusalem's fall.

He tried, by every possible means, to stem the tide of folly that was sweeping the nation to disaster — but in vain. With indomitable courage, he publicly voiced his protests, in the public places of the city, in the precincts of the Temple, at the very gates of the Palace, and defied death itself in order that he might set before the people "a more excellent way" — the way of Divine love and righteousness.

Jeremiah as a Prophet

The Book of the Law had been recently discovered in the days of Josiah. Huldah the prophetess had proclaimed the decree that the judgments threatened therein would be carried out. Jeremiah's prophecy is a wonderful interpretation of that very Book. He makes scores of references to Deuteronomy. He expounds the Law, shows what it means, reveals the outworking of its judgments, proclaims the significance of the blessing and cursing it sets before the people.

He revealed that "not one jot or tittle of the Law" would fail.

He shows how that the drought, famine, invasion, war, captivity, destruction, scattering, and rebukes threatened by Deuteronomy 28 would be experienced by that very generation.

Christ, of course, did the same to his generation.

Jeremiah has his version of the Olivet Prophecy, his version of Matthew 23 and its indictment on leaders and people.

And yet, with the threat of punishment, there is promise of restoration. In fact, the message of his book could well be summarised in the statement: "I will punish — I will restore." The stupidity and criminal folly of the nation would bring failure, but ultimately the love of God will triumph in the restored nation.

This prophet who indicated Judah so completely, is the prophet who proclaims the promise of the New Covenant whereby both Israel and Judah will be saved (Jer. 31:31).

Jeremiah as a Book

There is no true chronological order in his book. Chapters 35 and 36 are before Chapter 21 in point of time. Some chapters (chps. 21 to 39) are particular and dated; others are not. But even in these places, there seems order and system. For example, Chapter 21 (which is after chaps. 22 to 27 in point of time) speaks of the terrible disaster which shall overcome the nation in the days of Zedekiah, whereas the succeeding chapters show the events that lead up to that time.

All the chapters from 1 to 39 are before the fall of Jerusalem.

Here is a brief outline: INTRODUCTION — Ch. 1 PROPHECIES, GENERAL AND UNDATED — Chps. 2 to 20. PROPHECIES, PARTICULAR AND DATED — Chps. 21 to 39. PROPHECIES AFTER THE FALL OF JERUSALEM — Chps. 40 to 44. PROPHECIES UPON GENTILE NATIONS — Chps. 45 to 51. CONCLUSION — Ch. 52.

The key to the book is found in Chapter 30 : 15-18: "Because thy sins are become immense I have done these things unto thee . . . Yet all they that devour thee shall be devoured . . . For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith Yahweh."

Many of the personal incidents experienced by the prophet, and which make up a great part of his book, will find their place in our Story of the Bible.



The Story of the Bible



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Jehoiakim : The Frivolous Egotist

It is said that Nero fiddled whilst Rome burned. If that be the case, then in Jehoiakim we have the Nero of Judah. At a time when war-clouds were banking up on the political horizon, when Judah itself was faced with severe internal crises including a long protracted drought and heavy taxation to meet tribute exacted by Egypt, this conceited young coxcomb, this frivolous, foolish king, oppressed the people even more greatly in order to maintain the pomp and extravagance of his court.

At a time when Judah was faced with utter destruction, he occupied his time in glamorising the palace.

At a time when God's prophets solemnly warned that the only sane, sound policy was a firm and bold return to the ways of Josiah (Jeremiah 22), he permitted many of the heathen practises of Manasseh to be restored.

He earned the most scathing rebukes of Jeremiah, but they meant nothing to this frivolous egotist. So lightly did he esteem the Word of Yahweh, that when Jeremiah's words were read to him, after having been written in a scroll, he contemptuously, and with light-hearted indifference, burnt the roll containing the sacred Word of God.

We read but the bare outline of his history in the records of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, and it is in the pages of Jeremiah's prophecy that the full iniquity of the king is made apparent and complete details of his reign are revealed. The very incidents that revealed the stupidity of the king also brought the prophet to the fore, and revealed him in his most courageous moments.

VASSAL OF EGYPT

We are now rapidly approaching a great catastrophe, which has been twice over enacted in the history of the Jewish people.

It is the overthrow of the Jew-

ish State and the destruction of Jerusalem.

Forty years after Jeremiah's voice was first heard, forty years after Christ's voice was heard, the city was given over to the enemy,

in circumstances that were very much similar.

The voice of warning and rebuke sounded forth, as courageous men sought to turn the nation from its folly, but with headstrong will it plunged on into disaster.

As we read of the events of Jehoiakim's times, it is obvious that we are looking upon the dying agonies of an expiring nation.

Jehoiakim was established in power by decree of Pharaoh Neco, so that Jerusalem witnessed the disgrace of seeing one reign on the throne of David who was set there to do the will of his Egyptian overlord.

And faithfully he performed his duty.

But faithfulness to Egypt meant disloyalty to Yahweh.

And in manifesting this characteristic, Jehoiakim plunged Judah deeper into the mire of trouble.

Originally his name was Eliakim (El Establishes), but Neco changed it to Jehoiakim (Yahweh Establishes). Probably the Egyptian ruler made him swear fealty by Yahweh, and pre-fixed the Divine name to his name to remind him always of his oath.

Neco likewise demanded heavy tribute which Jehoiakim raised by a poll-tax (2 Kings 23:35). As Judah was experiencing severe drought at the time (Jer. 14:1), this heavy taxation imposed greater strain upon the resources of the people.

As though all this was not sufficient, the king further impoverished the country by heavy taxation on his own account. He wanted to live in luxury and

pomp as he thought befitted his position. The palace was not grand enough for his liking, and he demanded that it be rebuilt (Jeremiah 22:13-15). He did not care how the money was obtained, so long as he got it. Thus the nation was plunged into deeper trouble.

JEREMIAH IN THE TEMPLE

Early in the reign of Jehoiakim (Jer. 26:1), as the people were flocking to the Temple from all parts of Judah, Jeremiah publicly took up his stand in the court to speak to the people.

They were words of warning and rebuke that he publicly proclaimed:

"Thus saith Yahweh: If you will not hearken to Me, to walk in My law, which I have set before you, then I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth . . . (vv. 4-5).

The people knew what this meant. The Tabernacle was established at Shiloh in the days of Eli the priest and the youthful Samuel, but because of the wickedness of the sons of Eli, it had been given over to destruction.

The presence of the Tabernacle had not saved Shiloh.

And now Jeremiah threatened that the same curse would fall upon the Temple that they revered so much.

The priests and prophets in the Court of the Temple were attracted by the words of Jeremiah, and joined the people gathered around him.

They could hardly believe that he would dare to speak such things in such a place. Angrily they turned on him,

"You will surely die for this!" they declared. "How dare you say that Yahweh will destroy this house and city!" (v. 8).

They roused the people against Jeremiah, and roughly hustled him outside the gate of the Temple. Here some of the princes were gathered together, and the priests and prophets accused Jeremiah before them.

"This man is worthy of death," they declared, "for he has prophesied against this city."

But Jeremiah was ready to defend himself.

"Yahweh has sent me to prophesy against this Temple and against this city all the words you have heard," he replied. Therefore change your ways and your doings, obey the voice of Yahweh, and escape the punishment that will otherwise come upon you. As for me, I am in your hands, and you can do with me as you like. But you know that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves, your city, and the inhabitants of it."

The priests, prophets, princes, and people looked at the courageous, uncompromising prophet. They knew he spake the truth. He had nothing to gain by so boldly setting before them these things. And there were some in their midst who believed what he said.*

Among them was a man named Ahikam who was the son of Shaphan who had been of so much help to Josiah. He, with others, stood up in the defence of Jeremiah. They pointed to the example of Hezekiah who had been induced to seek Yahweh's mercy through the words of Micah the prophet.

"Micah prophesied in the days of

Hezekiah saying that Zion shall be ploughed like a field, and Jerusalem become heaps," they said. "But did Hezekiah put him to death? Did he not call for prayer, and seek the help of God? And did not God help Hezekiah? But if we kill Jeremiah, we might bring great evil against ourselves!"

Others agreed with Ahikam, and for a time Jeremiah escaped the enmity of the priests. But many harboured hatred against him.

SHOCKING MURDER OF URIJAH

Though the intercession of his friends has saved Jeremiah from the anger of his enemies for a time, his life was in real danger. Jehoiakim, the king, was an evil man who was not prepared to tolerate any criticism of his actions. He had already shown the lengths to which he was prepared to go by arranging for the murder of another prophet who had dared to remind him of judgments which Yahweh had threatened against the nation.

The prophet's name was Urijah (Yahweh is Light). He had repeated some of the sayings of Jeremiah, warning the people of impending judgment against Judah and Jerusalem.

Jehoiakim, in company with the princes and leading men of his realm heard him proclaiming this message, and it stung the king to anger.

He determined that Urijah must die.

The prophet heard of the intention of the king, and fled into Egypt.

*Notice how closely this incident foreshadows that recorded in John 7:14-53 when Nicodemus (like Ahikam) stood up in defence of the Lord.

He could hardly have sought refuge in a worse place.

Jehoiakim was subject to Egypt and therefore had access to Pharaoh Neco. He sent Elnathan*, a prince of Judah, to seek out Urijah and bring him back for punishment. The prophet was dragged in disgrace back to Jerusalem, and brought before the cruel, impious king. Jehoiakim did not waste any time on Urijah. He commanded him to be slain with the sword, and his dead body to be thrown into a common grave.

Thus Urijah died for doing his duty; he was vilely cast into a common, communal grave as a token that both he and his message were worthless and contemptible.

But "precious in the eyes of Yahweh is the death of His saints." A terrible retribution was awaiting the evil king. He did not realise this. He imagined that he was completely rid of his enemy. Little did he know that such blasphemous actions were to play a part in his own destruction (Jer. 19:4). The eyes of Yahweh were upon all that happened, and He was not indifferent to such crimes. He is just in all His ways, and Urijah's record of faith is preserved in the Book of Life. He is one of those heroes mentioned in Hebrews 11:37 whose faith triumphed over death even though they were "slain with the sword." He will rise from the

grave at the return of Christ to receive that "better thing" that is held in reserve for all those who serve God in life unto death (Rev. 2:10). Urijah's triumph is yet to come.

The murder of Urijah (Jer. 26) must have impressed Jeremiah with the great danger into which a faithful testimony of the Word could bring him. In this there is another great similarity between the life of the prophet and that of the Lord Jesus. In the case of Christ, the murder of John the Baptist, under similar conditions, caused the Lord to seek that strength that comes only from communion with his heavenly Father in prayer (Matt. 14:12-13). Jeremiah, likewise, had recourse to similar means to strengthen him for the task set before him.

JEREMIAH CALLED UPON TO DENOUNCE JUDAH'S WICKEDNESS

Meanwhile, Jeremiah felt depressed at the spiritual conditions surrounding him. He discovered that the proclamation of God's message brought little response from the people. He became bitterly hated and opposed, and was even threatened with violence.

He found himself "a man of strife and contention to the whole earth" (Jer. 15:10). And though Yahweh promised that it would be well in the end with him and the remnant that followed him

*Elnathan (El-God-hath given) was father-in-law to Jehoiakim being the father of Nehushta the queen (2 Kings 24:8; Jer. 36:12,25), and therefore a prince of high standing. He was used by the king on several missions of importance. He does not appear to have been depraved as some of Jehoiadah's other ministers, however, and on one occasion tried to stop the king burning the scroll of Jeremiah. Perhaps his position as father-in-law to the king gave him privileges greater than the other ministers had,

(v. 11), the constant opposition he received, the hatred that was heaped upon him day after day, oppressed and depressed him.

On the one hand, as he meditated upon the Word of God, he derived the greatest pleasure; on the other hand, when he proclaimed it to the people, he found only sorrow. The lonely prophet, poured out his heart unto God, seeking some relief from his distress:

"Thy words were found, and I did eat them"; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by Thy name, O Yahweh . . . And then: **"Why is my pain perpetual, my wound incurable, wilt Thou be altogether unto me as a deceitful brook, as waters that fail?"** (Jer. 15:16-18).

In his misery, in his depression, in his indignation with his godless contemporaries, the prophet became a little impatient with God, for he was human, and subject to the failings that are part of us all. He was gently reminded by a merciful and understanding God, that if he desired to "stand before" Yahweh as a servant, he must not adopt the attitude of the people with whom he mixed, but to carefully perform all that he was commanded (Jer. 15:19-20).

"Let them return unto thee," he was told, "but return not thou unto them!"

Later, explaining how deep-seated was the iniquity of Judah, Yahweh told the prophet:

"The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of

a diamond; it is engraven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of their altars" (Jer. 17:1).

Whatever may have been the outward appearance of the people, whatever may have been pleaded on their behalf, in heart (which only Yahweh could see) they were desperately wicked.

Jeremiah Becomes a Man Apart (Jer. 16, 17)

The prophet was now called upon to enact the words that he was proclaiming unto the people. He was forbidden to marry, told to refrain from entering the house of mourning, commanded to abstain from any festivity (Jer. 16).

Like the Lord Jesus, he became a man separate and aloof from those about him. His separateness became a parable for the times, the significance of which would be discerned by those who thought upon it.

Why was he forbidden to marry? Under normal conditions, children were esteemed a blessing (Deut. 28:4), but that had ceased to be the case in the period that faced Judah in the days of Jeremiah, for they would be involved in the general trouble that was about to engulf the whole nation. Therefore Jeremiah was told to remain single.

Why not mourn? Under normal conditions, death would be mourned by a people who recognised its reality, but so terrible were the conditions about to be experienced by guilty

*These are words of the greatest significance when considered in the light of the times. Josiah had found the book of the Law which had been lost for so long, and this book Jeremiah had figuratively "eaten". Whilst others in the nation had merely read it, he had absorbed it into his very being, so that his thoughts and outlook were coloured by its teaching.

Judah, that death would be preferred to life. Therefore Jeremiah was told not to enter the house of mourning.

Why abstain from feasting? Under normal conditions, times of blessedness would be celebrated by feasting and joy, but so heavy with calamity would be the future of Judah that any such celebrations were out of place. Therefore Jeremiah was told not to join in such functions.

He became a marked man, a man apart. A period of solitary watchfulness and strict separation commenced for him. Day by day he enacted a parable which provided a warning of the greatest significance to a people who attached the highest importance to marriage, the permanence of the family, the reality of death, the recognition that true joy springs from attachment to the things of God. As the people saw the lonely prophet, and learned that God had commanded him not to marry, not to mourn, not to join in their celebrations of joy, the thoughtful among them must have been induced to ask the question, WHY? Jeremiah's action proclaimed more loudly than mere words could do the Divine warning that offspring was no pledge of permanence, that widespread death was awaiting the condemned nation, that the people were soon to be cut off from the Source of true joy.

And because people hate to see anybody acting differently to themselves, and especially in a way that adversely reflects upon them, they came to hate the prophet more than ever.

Jeremiah, as a true servant of

Yahweh, took this burden upon himself faithfully. He no longer complained at the Divine will, and the suffering he was called upon to endure. He saw that he must refuse even natural and innocent pleasures for the sake of God's cause; that he must faithfully proclaim the calamity and ruin that faced the nation, even though it made him unpopular; that he must unceasingly denounce sin, and sacrifice his own will to that of his God, for the sake of the cause. He stood as a fortress of Truth in an age of shame, and for Truth he was prepared to give all, even life itself.

Jeremiah Rebukes the King (Jer. 17:19-27)

Shortly after this, an incident occurred which brought the prophet again face to face with the king. He was told to go down to the main gate of the city where the people gathered to conduct business, or to gossip together, and where the king used to enter the city, and there to publicly proclaim a solemn warning.

He did so. The people must have been startled, when, as the king with his ministers were entering the city, the voice of Jeremiah was heard from the crowd, bidding him and the people to return to ways of righteousness.

"Hear ye the word of Yahweh, ye kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that enter in by these gates . . ." he declared.

He called upon them to observe the sabbath in its true spirit. It was the token of the covenant that God had made with Israel through Moses, the

token of the covenant proclaimed in the Book of the Law which Josiah, the father of the then reigning king, had found and tried to impress upon the nation. To obey the sabbath correctly, was to seek to obey the whole law of God.

But it was even more significant than that. The sabbath also commemorated the time when Yahweh broke the bonds of Egypt, and freed His people (Deut. 5:12-15). It was particularly apt for Jeremiah to bring this to the notice of the nation at that time, for not only was Jehoiakim a vassal to Egypt, not only was Judah in bondage again to that nation, but the people were greatly influenced by Egypt's godless ways (2 Kings 23:35).

Jeremiah warned the king and the people that to return to the spirit of the Sabbath law would bring salvation to Judah; but to continue to disobey would bring the city and people to utter ruin.

We are not told how the haughty king reacted to this public declaration of the prophet. We are told that God protected him (Jer. 15:20). Though Jehoiakim was doubtless embarrassed by his action, he perhaps felt it better to ignore the words of the prophet for the time being.

Jeremiah Rebukes the People (Jer. 18)

At the command of Yahweh, Jeremiah enacted another parable before the people.

He was told to go down to the house of the potter, and carefully

consider the work being done therein.

He did so. He thoughtfully watched the potter at work. He saw how he took up a piece of clay, and skilfully moulded it upon the wheel of the machine in front of him until it took the shape of a beautiful vase.

But as Jeremiah watched, he saw that one vessel was spoiled. Something went wrong; the clay did not react to the skill of the potter. The purpose of the potter was not defeated, however, for setting aside the spoiled vessel, he took up another piece of clay, and soon had another vessel to replace the one marred.

It was easily and quickly done.

As Jeremiah watched, the Voice of Yahweh came to him, explaining the meaning of the parable.

The great Potter is Yahweh. Out of the clay of human-kind, He is moulding men and nations to His purpose. But sometimes they do not react to His commands as He desires. Like the vessel that Jeremiah saw in the hands of the potter, they become marred. When that happens, God sets them on one side, and uses others more pliable to His intentions. In that, He is like the potter whom Jeremiah watched, and who produced many vessels that witnessed to his skill.

Jeremiah warned the people that God could act towards them as the potter did towards the marred vessel. They had proved disobedient and stubborn to the moulding influence of God's word and law, and if they did not mend their ways and become pliable to Him, they would be

set aside as vessels unto dishonor (Jer. 18:11). He warned them that there was no hope for them if they resisted God in the way they did. But they mocked at him. They took his very words in their mouths, and declared:

"You say there is no hope! Very well, we will walk after our own desires and thoughts. If there is no hope we will not be any the worse by so doing" (Jer. 18:12).

"Act like that and God will desert you," replied the prophet. "He will scatter you before the enemy, and will not assist you in the day of calamity."

The people did not like such straightforward talk. They developed an intense hatred for him. They accused him of being a false prophet, declaring that such things as he threatened would never happen to them. They began to conspire among themselves against him (v.18). They acted towards him as later their descendants acted towards the Lord Jesus (cp. John 9:24).

"Let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words," they said.

To whom could the prophet turn at such a time? There was but One who could help. Hated and detested by man, he lifted up his voice in prayer to Him Who reads the heart.

"Give heed unto me, O Yahweh! Hearken to the voice of them that contend with me!"

It can truly be said of Jeremiah, as it is said of the Lord: "They hated him without a cause (John 15:25).

As we read this portion of the Story of the Bible, let us bear in mind that God is today "calling out of the Gentiles a people for His name" (Acts 15:14). If we

answer that call, we will set ourselves as clay under the moulding hand of the Divine Potter. His Word, His influence on our lives can help shape us for His kingdom if we make ourselves pliable to His will (see 2 Cor. 4:7). On the other hand, if we act as did Judah and resist His influence, we will become a vessel unfit for glory and one fit only for "dishonor" (2 Tim. 2:20).

Judah's fate should remind us that true happiness and joy results from allowing ourselves to be moulded according to the Divine pattern.

Jeremiah Rebukes the Priests (Jer. 19)

The next paprable that Jeremiah enacted turned the priests against him.

He was told to choose some elders of the priests and people as witnesses, and take them to a place in Jerusalem called, The Gate of the Potsherds (Jer. 19:2, RV). This city gate gave access to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom which runs on the west and south sides of Jerusalem.

The Valley of Hinnom had a horrible reputation. It was set aside as a place sacred to the worship of Molech, the cruel, vile pagan god which Yahweh seemed to hate more than any other. It is said that this god was made of metal, which was heated to red heat by internal fires. On the outstretched arms of this red-hot god were placed children given in human sacrifice. As this was done, the loud beating of drums sounded throughout the valley to drown the shrieks

of the poor children. Thus the valley was also called Tophet, which comes from a Hebrew word signifying "drums".

Good king Josiah had destroyed this vile, wicked worship,

and had defiled the so-called "holy" place (2 Kings 23:10). Since that time, it had become a dumping ground for rubbish, including the broken sherds from vessels rejected from the pot-

JEREMIAH AT THE GATE OF THE POTSDHERDS

In the words and parable of the prophet, proclaimed and enacted against the priests and elders of the people whom he gathered together as witnesses, there is set forth a remarkable type of the betrayal of Jesus Christ. Notice firstly, the words that were **spoken** by Jeremiah recorded in Matthew 27:9-10, though not included in his **written** prophecies, and with these in mind, follow through the remarkable words and incidents recorded in Jeremiah 19, in the light of history's greatest crime: the betrayal of Christ by Judas.

Jeremiah said: "Ye have filled this place with the blood of innocents" (v.4).

Christ declared: "Fill ye up the measure of your fathers" (Mat. 23:30-32).

Judas lamented: "I have betrayed the innocent blood" (Mat. 27:4).

The Priests answered: "What is that to us?"

Jeremiah said: "This place (Valley of Hinnom or Gehenna) shall be called the Valley of Slaughter."

Christ declared: "How shall ye escape the condemnation of Gehenna" (Mat. 23:33).

Matthew comments: "That field (the very place where Jeremiah took his witnesses — see v.7 with Jer. 19:2 RV mg) was called, The Field of blood."

Jeremiah said: "I (Yahweh) will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place, and I will cause them to fall by the sword . . ." (Jer. 19:7).

Christ declared: "Behold your house is left unto you desolate . . ." (Mat. 23:38-39).

Compare Jeremiah 19:11 with Matt. 24:15; Luke 21:24. Note how that following this prophecy, Jeremiah taught in the Temple (v.14), incited the anger of the priests (Ch. 20:1), was scourged, imprisoned, restored (vv.2-3), and see a like repetition in the life of the Lord.

This incident took place at the Pottery Gate Jer. 19:2, RV mg). It was the potter's field that the priests purchased with the betrayal money (Mat. 27:7), and it was there that Judas committed suicide and met his end in a manner reminiscent of the vessel broken by Jeremiah (Acts 1:18): The death of Judas appears as a foreshadowing of the suicide of the whole nation in their rejection and betrayal of the Lord. A careful consideration of Jeremiah's wonderful book will reveal many similar foreshadowings of the Lord's life as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

ters' workshops. Hence the significance of the name of the Gate: The Gate of the Potsherds.

Purchasing an earthenware bottle, Jeremiah led the men he had selected to this valley until he came to the very site of this terrible worship. Though the idols had long since been destroyed, he knew the people were as idolatrous in hearts as they had been before the days of Josiah. In heart they still worshipped such blasphemous idols as Molech, and in such murders as that of Urijah, had filled Jerusalem with "the blood of innocents" (Jer. 19:4). Sternly the prophet turned to the priests and elders he had brought with him and told them what God proposed to do because of this.

"Behold, the days come, saith Yahweh, that this place shall no more be called Tophet, nor the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter!"

These were words of the grimdest foreboding. The word "Hinnom" signifies that which is overlooked. Jeremiah's words seem to imply that the sin of Judah would not be overlooked, nor would there be drums enough to drown the shrieks of pain and dismay that would be uttered by the disobedient and God-defying people when the nation would be given over to slaughter.

Jeremiah poured out the contents of the bottle*, declaring, as he did so, that God would empty out the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem so that it would prove useless in the face of the enemy

into whose hands the people would be surely delivered.

Then came the most dramatic action of all. He took the bottle up, and crashing it on the ground, broke it into pieces. There was no hope of repairing that bottle. Then turning to the priests and elders, the prophet sternly declared:

"Even so will I (Yahweh) break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again; and they shall bury them in Tophet, till there be no place to bury" (v.11).

In short, he predicted such complete and utter ruin for the people as only Yahweh could heal (cp. Jer. 31:28).

Apart from the redemptive work of God, Judah would be completely ruined for ever.

Having shown the priests and elders by word and action what Yahweh intended them to know, Jeremiah returned to Jerusalem and entering the Temple, commenced to warn the people in similar terms.

But he had not gone very far with his discourse before he was rudely interrupted.

One of the chief priests, a man by name of Pashur, whose position demanded that he maintain order in the Temple, angrily called upon Jeremiah to cease, and commanded that he be scourged and flung into prison (Jer. 20:2).

This was done. Sore with the cruel beating he had received, Jeremiah lay in the uncomfortable prison all night. Next day he was again brought before Pashur.

*This is implied by the words of Jeremiah -- Ch. 19:7. "Make void" signifies to "empty out" and is so rendered in the Revised Version margin.

Pashur doubtless expected to see the prophet submissive and apologetic, crushed and despondent after suffering the pain and indignity of his experience, and ready to plead for mercy. If that were so, Pashur was disappointed. As the haughty chief priest stood before Jeremiah in all his resplendant robes of office, he found the bruised and suffering servant of Yahweh courageously defiant, and heard words which decried him as an enemy of Yahweh and of the State:

"Yahweh has not called your name Pashur (the multiplier of liberty), but Magor-missabib (Terror all around)," declared Jeremiah. "For thus saith Yahweh, Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself, and to all your friends, and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and your eyes shall behold it! You and all your house shall go into captivity; and you will die in Babylon!"

Whatever Pashur must have thought of such a defiant speech as this, he evidently did nothing about it. Perhaps the boldness of the prophet frightened him; perhaps he could see that Yahweh was with him, and therefore it would be best for him if he let him go. In any case, the indignant prophet was allowed to go free again.

Jeremiah Rebukes the Whole Nation (Jer. 22)

Once again set at liberty, Jeremiah was called upon to do something even more courageous, an action well calculated to bring him quickly back into prison again!

He was told to go down to the very palace itself, and out-

side its gates, to pronounce publicly the Divine judgment against the wicked king, Jehoiakim and his family.

This involved the prophet in considerable risk. He had already been scourged and imprisoned; he knew what had happened to Urijah and others, and realised that it could be his fate as well.

But he was the servant of Yahweh, and determined to do His will.

He presented himself outside the Palace gates, and in the hearing of the people, proclaimed the message of Yahweh.

Publicly he warned that unless the king changed his ways the whole nation would be involved in disaster. He contrasted the vile wickedness of Jehoiakim with the goodness of Josiah his father. He decried him for wasting the public money in building an elaborate palace at the expense of the people. He accused him of oppressing his own workmen, and of robbing them of their wages.

He predicted the death of Jehoiakim. He would be given the burial of an ass, "drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem." Nobody would lament his end, but rather rejoice that a tyrant had been justly punished.

Jeremiah declared that the godless example of Jehoiakim would bring the whole family to ruin. His son, Coniah, would prove worthy of his father, and would walk in the same path of evil. He, too, would be involved in calamity:

"Thus saith Yahweh, Write ye this

man childless*, a man that shall not prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah" (Jer. 23:30).

We can imagine what a sensation such an inflammatory speech as this must have caused, especially as it was publicly proclaimed outside the very gates of the King's palace.

But with every word of denunciation and criticism, Jeremiah also had a message of hope.

Thus in this discourse, whilst he condemned the leaders of the nation, and spake of the calamity which would sweep away the ungodly kings from the throne of David, he also predicted the time when "Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely," and "a

King (a righteous Branch of David) shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth" (Jer. 23:5-6)†.

Thoughtful people, gathered around the gate of the king's palace and listening to Jeremiah's words, must have wondered at the glory of such a prophecy. Judah and Israel joined as one! A righteous king on the throne of David dispensing judgment and justice! The nation experiencing peace, prosperity and happiness! The Passover changed so that it will celebrate not merely deliverance from Egypt, but deliverance from the north country and from all countries where Israelites were scattered!‡

*The word "childless" in Hebrew signifies "bare," or "destitute." The Septuagint renders the word "an ejected or expelled man," "an outcast." Coniah had 7 sons (2 Chron. 3:17), and through him is traced Messiah (Matt. 1:11-12), but none of his sons sat upon the throne of David. Nebuchadnezzar deposed Coniah and appointed Mattaniah, his uncle, as king, changing his name to Zedekiah (2 Kings 24). But will not Christ sit on the "throne of David in Judah," and is not he of the seed of Coniah in the light of Matt. 1:11? Christ will sit on the throne of David, but it will not then be limited to Judah, but embrace the whole of Israel as Jeremiah himself was careful to point out in the very same prophecy (Jer. 23:5-6). His words undoubtedly mean that none of the sons of Coniah would sit upon the throne of David as it was then constituted, "ruling any more in Judah." His words were thus fulfilled to the very letter.

†The Book of Jeremiah is not a continuous narrative, but is made up of a series of independent incidents and prophecies which are not set out in chronological order. Some of these end in the middle of a chapter, and it is helpful to note where this occurs in order that the power of his words may be better appreciated. For example, the prophecy of Chapter 22 continues on to Chapter 23:8 where it is brought to a thrilling conclusion in the vision of the righteous Branch who is destined to ascend the very throne disgraced by Jehoiakim and Coniah.

‡Notice the language of Jer. 23:8-9. The words that "shall no more be said" are words repeated when the Passover is celebrated. In the future age they will be superceded by words which shall commemorate the deliverance from all the lands of dispersion. The writer well remembers a Jewess in northern Galilee (on the occasion of a visit to Israel) telling him that in the centre where she belonged they had modernised the celebration of the Passover, that they celebrated it not as commemorative of the deliverance from Egypt, but from the whole world! She said this in ignorance of what Jeremiah predicted. Not that the custom of her Kibbutz is the fulfilment of the prophecy, but it is indicative of how much fulfilment can be naturally brought about.

This was the message of hope that the people heard on the momentous day when Jeremiah took up his stand outside the palace gate of the haughty and indifferent king of Judah.

On the one hand he showed that Coniah's sons would not sit on the throne of David, and at the same time, spake of the future glory of this throne when all tribes shall be again gathered together in one under Christ. He spake of a great regathering of the people of Israel from all parts of the earth, of a great deliverance that will supersede the deliverance under Moses, and of the restoration of the Kingdom in its glory (Jer. 23:7-8).

The people thus heard not words of sedition but of true patriotism, they heard not only of the folly of their leaders, but had presented to them a vision of great glory under the greatest of all leaders, the promised seed of David. This vision could help them in times of difficulty which were then about to fall upon them, and enable them to see beyond them.

The partial return of Jews to their homeland today, 2,500 years after Jeremiah's dramatic speech outside the palace of the king, not only reveals how true are his words, but constitutes a token fulfilment indicating that the time is at hand for the true restoration of Israel under the Lord Jesus, their king.

Thus Jeremiah's words live today.

CARCHEMISH: ONE OF THE WORLD'S DECISIVE BATTLES

Whilst Jeremiah was valiantly

waging a war of words on the people of Judah, the international crisis among the nations reached a climax.

The Babylonians had consolidated their power, and believed the time was ripe to lay claim to the lands of Syria and Palestine.

But Egypt stood in the pathway of Babylonish ambition.

We have traced (see p. 69) how that Paroah Neco had marched north to the help of Assyria, brushing aside the tragic attempt of King Josiah to stop him at the Battle of Megiddo. Though Neco had been unable to restore Assyrian power as he desired, he had successfully resisted the efforts of the Babylonians to extend their influence south of the river Euphrates. Instead, Neco had seized all the lands of Syria and Palestine for himself, and was busy gathering in rich tribute from each one.

The aged king Nabopolassar of Babylon was unable to dislodge the Egyptians from Carchemish on the Euphrates which was the spearhead of their power.

Thus the Euphrates constituted the northern border of Egypt at that time, and all the kings south of it paid obeisance to the haughty Egyptian Pharaoh.

Four years passed by. They were not spent idly by the Babylonians. Every preparation was made for the clash with Egypt that they knew must come. At the head of the army was a brilliant military leader of which much was destined to be known: Nebuchadnezzar, the crown prince of Babylon. In the third year of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar at the head of the army, left

Babylon for Carchemish (Dan. 1:1).²

The mighty Babylonian army was on the march.

In Egypt, Neco heard the news without much concern. He, too, had been preparing, and believed that he was more than a match for the Babylonians. He had defeated them in the past and would do so again! Perhaps on this occasion, however, he could make the battle decisive, and push beyond the Euphrates. Great preparations were made in Egypt, which Jeremiah graphically described with great poetic vigor:

*What is this, rising like the Nile,
with tossing floods?
'Tis Egypt shouting, 'I will engulf
the world,*

I rise to sweep off its inhabitants!

*Prance on, horses! rage away,
chariots! charge on, warriors!*

*The Ethiopians and the Libyans
that handle the shield;*

*The Lydians, that handle and
bend the bow. (Jer. 46:8-9).*

As Neco reviewed his troops he thought only of success. Little did he realise that in the impending battle the purpose of the God of despised Judah would be vindicated, and that Egypt would fall.

*But this is the day of Yahweh of
hosts.*

*A day of vengeance on His foes;
A day of vengeance for the
sword;*

*It shall be filled and made drunk
with their Blood;*

*For Yahweh of hosts hath a
sacrifice,*

*In the north country by the river
Euphrates (v.10).*

As Neco left Egypt, he was determined that the battle would be decisive, and decisive it was. The battle of Carchemish (as it came to be called) is recognised as a battle that altered the course of history. Egypt was destined to suffer a blow from which it would not recover until Christ returns. For centuries, before the battle of Carchemish, Egypt had played a most important part in history. It had contested world power with Assyria from the north, it had dominated Palestine, it had been feared by nations near and far.

That fear was about to end, in a most unexpected defeat.

Neco knew nothing of this as confidently and proudly he led his large army from the land of the Nile northwards towards the Euphrates.

He marched through Palestine and Syria and his progress was like a triumphal procession. Throughout the land the kings all acknowledged him as their overlord, and made their obeisance to him.

Neco must have swelled with pride as he marched northward, but it was a pride that preceded one of the most disastrous falls in all history.

At Carchemish he found the Babylonians massed against him. Neco knew not that the brilliant young strategist at their head had been described by Jeremiah as "Yahweh's servant" to accomplish His purpose, and that he

²The word "came" in Dan. 1:1 is the Hebrew "bo" signifying "to go." Nebuchadnezzar was sent, or went, in the third year of Jehoiakim, but took Jerusalem in the fourth year as recorded in Jeremiah 25:1.

had predicted his unqualified success.

It was early in the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign that the battle took place (Jer. 46:1). The Egyptians were overwhelmingly defeated. They fled ignominiously from the field of battle, panic-stricken as death struck at their ranks. In disorderly disgrace they sought to escape the Babylonians, but were rounded up in another attack that almost completely annihilated the numerous army gathered together. The kings of Syria and of Palestine who had previously acknowledged the might of Neco, now viewed with consternation the scattered remnants of his army, fleeing in disorderly array through the land.

In Judah, the people heard the jeers of Jeremiah, mocking at the defeat of this nation that had exerted such an evil influence over Israel. He saw in this disgraceful retreat the predicted punishment of the God of Israel:

*You may get balsam from Gilead,
My lady Egypt!
But all your salves are vain,
For there is no healing.
The whole world has heard of thy
shame,
Thy cry has filled the land;
For one soldier stumbles over
another,
And both drop to the ground"*
(Jer. 46:11-12).

Judah had been warned of the folly of putting confidence in Egypt, and in the fleeing remnants of the fear-stricken army, there was evidence of the value of such advice. What was to be the future policy of Judah? The presence of Babylonish troops soon solved that problem! Nebu-

chadnezzar's army poured down through the land, chasing the fleeing Egyptians, until he came to the very valley of the Nile. Then news was received that forced Nebuchadnezzar to call a halt. Back in Babylon his father had died. His presence was urgently required in the capital in order that he might secure the supreme power for himself. He had no time to invade Egypt. He demanded that the nations of Palestine and Syria acknowledge him as their Lord. Among them Jehoiakim was anxious to comply. What else could he do? He had not the courage of Josiah, or the faith of Hezekiah, to pit his miserable forces against the might of Gentile power.

Jehoiakim quickly changed sides, accepting Nebuchadnezzar as overlord, and offering him his allegiance (2 Kings 24:1). Certain demands were made on him. Judah had to supply to Babylon a number of hostages, and in addition, Nebuchadnezzar demanded that some of the sacred vessels of the Temple should likewise be sent back home to grace the temple of his god.

Jehoiakim readily agreed to these demands. The desecration of the Temple meant little to him, nor was he greatly concerned over the fate of hostages, so long as he did not suffer.

Among those sent to Babylon at this time were four young princes called Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (Daniel 1), together with a strange group of people who had taken refuge in Jerusalem at this time called the Rechabites.

**JEREMIAH PRAISES THE
RECHABITES (JER. 35)**

As the army of Nebuchadnezzar swept southwards, many people who normally lived outside of the cities, took refuge behind the stout walls of those that were fortified.

Among them was a group of people called Rechabites, after one of their number whose name was Rechab.

They were not true Israelites according to the flesh, but were descendants of Jethro, the Kenite father-in-law of Moses. The Kenites had joined forces with Israel when they had left Egypt for Sinai (see Story of the Bible, vol. 2, p. 18). Since then they had remained a separate group in the midst of the nation (Jud. 4:11). Jael, who destroyed Sisera, was the wife of Heber, a descendant of Jethro (Jud. 5:23-27). Jehonadab, the son of Rechab, who showed such zeal for Yahweh in the days of Jehu, was likewise of their number (2 Kings 10:15). The Bible tells how this group of Gentiles who had embraced the hope of Israel, became identified with the royal tribe of Judah (2 Chron. 2:55), and remained faithful to their calling.

Jehonadab, in particular, ruled them with a rod of iron. He insisted upon them following certain precepts designed to remind them constantly of their high calling. He lived in a time of great apostasy which he realised must end in Israel being driven from the land. He recognised that there was "no continuing city" in the Kingdom as it was then constituted, and to remind his followers of this, he insisted that they live as pilgrims in the land, abstaining from the settled pursuit of agriculture, and like the priests in the holy place, or Israelites under the Nazarite vow, refusing to partake of wine (Lev. 10:9).

These Gentiles were thus more truly Israelitish than the people of Judah. They were a standing reproach to the more worldly-minded Jews. They looked to the time when the Kingdom would be established in perpetuity. They refused wine because they considered themselves to be like the priests, a people dedicated to the will of God.

The invasion of the Babylonians had forced them to seek refuge in Jerusalem, and their presence in the city was used by Yahweh to enforce a lesson on the people, as well as to encourage the Rechabites themselves.

The Story of the Bible



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WONDERFUL EXAMPLE OF THE RECHABITES

To impress upon Judah the full extent of its wickedness, Jeremiah was commanded by God to visit the company of Rechabites that had taken refuge in Jerusalem and bring them before the elders of Judah, and offer them wine to drink. The Rechabites were Gentiles who had embraced the Hope of Israel, and followed the commandment of one of their leaders to abstain from wine. (See last issue).

Accordingly, Jeremiah approached Jaazaniah, the leader of the Rechabites, and induced him to bring his followers to the Temple, to the chamber of the sons of Hanan who were of the prophetic order. This chamber was close by where the Sanhedrim met, and the rooms where dwelt the "Keeper of the Threshold" of the Temple, whose duty was to guard it against pollution (Jer. 35:4).

The Rechabites were therefore brought into the presence of the leaders of the land: the prophets, princes and priests.

When all was ready, Jeremiah took pots full of wine and set it before the Rechabites.

"Drink this wine," he invited them.

But they refused.

"We will not drink wine," they answered, "because Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine,

neither ye, nor your sons for ever; neither shall you build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any; but all your days you will dwell in tents; that you may live many days in the land where ye be strangers. We have obeyed the voice of Jonadab . . ." (Jer. 35:6-7).

The attitude of obedience shown by the Rechabites was in great contrast to the state of disobedience manifested by the people of Judah. Jeremiah impressed this upon the leaders gathered together to witness his action, by pointing out how that in five directions these Gentiles had proved themselves more righteous than the Israelites:

1. They had hearkened to an earthly father of limited wisdom; the men of Judah had rejected the counsel of an heavenly Father of infinite wisdom.

2. Jonadab was dead, and thus ignorant of the obedience or otherwise of his descendants — they could not pain him by their disobedience; but Yahweh lived, and could see the wickedness of His sons.

3. The Rechabites had no one personally sent from their leader to remind them of their responsibilities; but Yahweh had constantly sent messengers to His people.

4. Jonadab could neither reward nor punish his followers; but Yahweh could do both.

5. Jonadab had brought severe restrictions on his followers which demanded severe sacrifices, yet they were obeyed; Yahweh did not do this to His people, but they disobeyed the laws He did give them.

So Jeremiah warned the leaders of Judah:

"Receive instruction from these things. They obey their father; you do not obey your Father. Therefore, God will punish Judah, the nation will be scattered and destroyed."

Turning to the Rechabites, the prophet declared:

"Because you have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father . . . Therefore thus saith Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel: Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever."

This has proved true in two senses: in a natural way and a spiritual way. History has proved that the Rechabites have remained separate down through the ages, and tribes of Rechabites are in existence today.

But the true fulfilment awaits the future. To "stand before me" (Jer. 35:19) implies attendance upon royalty. When the Prince, the Lord Jesus, is in the earth again, Jonadab and his followers will be brought from the grave and clothed upon with immortality. They will be among the attendants of the Lord Jesus. And though, in the past, they lived in the land as strangers and Gentiles, it will be said of them that they have been truly "born in Zion" (Ps. 87:5-6).

It will be in that day that the promise of Jonadab to his followers will be fulfilled, and they will "live many days in the land where they were strangers" (Jer. 35:7).

Meanwhile, some of their number were apparently included among the hostages sent to Babylon at this time. The Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) has an inscription to the 71st Psalm which states that this Psalm was "sung by the sons of Jonadab, among the first that were taken captive."

But though taken captive with Daniel and others, it was, as Jeremiah later showed, "for their good" (Jer. 24:6). They had an opportunity to testify to their faith in the land of their captivity, and this shall stand them in good stead in the Age to Come.

JEHOIAKIM BURNS THE BIBLE

Jeremiah commanded to write his Prophecies in a Book.

The shocking wickedness of Jehoiakim came to a climax in a dramatic incident recorded in Jeremiah 36, by which the foolish king tried to show his contempt for Yahweh.

It took place in the 4th year of his reign, after the city had been captured by Nebuchadnezzar, and some of its people taken into captivity (v.1).

This partial fulfilment of Jeremiah's warnings should have caused any thoughtful Israelite to take heed to his ways. It was followed by an act of great mercy on the part of Yahweh by which the lesson was brought home more directly to the people. He instructed

Jeremiah to record his prophecies in a book, or a scroll, and read them before a gathering of the people as a last, final appeal.

"It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and sin," declared Yahweh.

These words must have been encouraging to the prophet, for they showed that there was some hope for the nation he loved so dearly.

That hope was to be destroyed by the stupid action of the king.

Meanwhile, Jeremiah called for the help of his friend Baruch.

Baruch was a scribe, and thus skilled in writing. The two friends settled down to the work before them. Jeremiah repeated all the prophecies he had uttered,* and Baruch carefully wrote them in a book.

But as the work proceeded, Baruch became depressed. For the first time, perhaps, the full enormity of Judah's sin came home to him as he saw before him, in the words of the book he had written, all that the people had done, and what God threatened against them.

He put down his pen with a troubled face, and sighed for the iniquity of the people. He realised that the words he had written proclaimed the destruction of the nation.

But Jeremiah had words of encouragement for him. It was true that terrible punishments would fall upon the guilty nation, and that it would be completely broken up if it continued in the paths of folly. But whatever the fate of the nation, or of "all flesh" against which warnings were proclaimed, men like Baruch would be saved. To the faithful scribe, Jeremiah uttered the promise of God:

"Thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest" (Jer. 45:5). **

Yahweh is not unjust to destroy the righteous with the wicked!

Having written the book, the troubled Baruch next learned that he also had to publicly read it to the people.

"I am shut up,†" declared Jeremiah. "I cannot go into the House of Yahweh. Therefore you go and read what you have written from my mouth in the ears of the people, upon the fast-day when they gather from all the cities of Judah" (Jer. 36:6).

This "fasting day" had been appointed for the next year (v.9). It probably commemorated the overthrow of the city of Nebuchadnezzar that had taken place the year before.

Baruch Publicly Reads the Book

Knowing full well that his action would bring down upon his head the wrath of the people, but full of courage and faith, Baruch did

*How was the prophet able to recall all the prophecies he had uttered over the 22 years of his ministry? The answer is found in John 14:26. The Holy Spirit brought them all again to his remembrance.

**The 45th Jeremiah follows in sequence the 36th chapter (see v.1), but it is placed where it is because the following chapters record the additional words given the prophet at that time. See Jer. 36:32.

†We are not exactly sure what Jeremiah meant by this. He was not imprisoned at the time as is shown by the instructions of the princes that he should hide himself. There must have been another cause—sickness, legal defilement, or some other reason—that prevented him going into the Temple at that time,

as he was told. He took up his stand in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan (see p.55), which overlooked the court of the Temple, and probably from a window or balcony, he read the prophecies of Jeremiah to the people gathered below.

They had come together to solemnly lament the evil that had fallen upon the city and nation, and in the words read to them by Baruch, they heard the real cause of all their misery. They heard again the bitter lament of Jeremiah, and the accusations he thundered against them, they were again reminded that even greater punishments were threatened against them.

Among those who heard this reading was Michaiah, the son of Gemariah. Filled with concern at

the seriousness of the charges that Jeremiah had laid against the nation, he reported the matter to the assembly of the princes.

They desired to hear what Jeremiah had to say, and demanded that Baruch come and read the book to them.

He did so. Quietly the princes listened to the long list of sins charged against the nation, of the dire punishment threatened against it signs of which were already in evidence around them, and gradually they realised the importance and seriousness of the words read to them.

They became afraid.

"Let us tell the king of these words," they declared among themselves.

Turning to Baruch, they enquired how he had come to record the prophecies.

A QUESTION FOR MR. PHILLIPS

In searching through the Bible to find difficulties with which to challenge his father, Peter found that the name of Jehoiakim was omitted from the genealogy of the Lord Jesus given in Matthew, chapter 1. He asked his father why this should be so, and here is Mr. Phillips' reply:

"Matthew does not undertake to give a complete list of all the rulers who reigned. For example, four rulers are excluded between Joram and Uzziah in v.8, and the reason for this we discussed at the time (see "Story of the Bible" vol. 5). We saw that they were not really of the line of David, but were treated as of the house of Ahab.

"Notice that Matthew divides the genealogy into three sections of fourteen rulers each (v.17). The first makes reference to those who came before the kingdom was set up, the second to those who ruled during the kingdom, the third to those who came when the kingdom was in dispersion. In the second group, Athaliah, Ahaziah, Joash and Amaziah were excluded, for they are treated as being linked with the house of Ahab as I said before (2 Kings 8:27). Jehoiakim is also excluded from this second group because the independence of the kingdom came to an end with the defeat of Josiah at Megiddo before his time. He never received mention in the third group because he never went into exile. He therefore could not be included in the three divisions into which Matthew set the genealogy of Christ, and is therefore rightly excluded. He never received personal mention because his great apostasy, and that 'which was found in him' showed that he was not truly of the seed of David in heart (2 Chron. 36:8)."

"Jeremiah spake them unto me, and I wrote them in this scroll," he replied. "Go, hide, both you and Jeremiah whilst we take this scroll to the king," the princes commanded.

They well knew what type of man Jehoiakim was, and realised that the lives of the prophet and his scribe would be in dire danger once the king knew the contents of the scroll.

Jehoiakim Contemptuously Burns the Scroll

It was winter time in Jerusalem, towards the latter end of November or early December, and the king was seated in the Winter House of the luxurious palace he had built for himself.

In front of him there was a fire burning, and before him, on a table, were the implements for writing, including the knife of the scribe, used in those days for cutting paper.

Solemnly the princes made their way into the presence of the king, and explained their mission. Jehudi, a prominent member among them, commenced to read the scroll of Jeremiah. He read the sacred words of Yahweh, proclaimed by the prophet since the days of Josiah. He read of the sins of the people, of the threatened judgments upon a guilty nation, of pleas for reform that were rejected, of warnings of terrible punishments that were ignored, of tearful exhortations by which the prophet had sought to cause the people to return to ways of sanity and righteousness.

These words had made even the hardened princes fearful.

But they meant nothing to the luxurious-loving, God-defying, self-centred king.

In his selfish conceit he thought up a dramatic action to show his princes they should not heed such words. If they were frightened, he was not! Taking up the scribe's knife on the table before him, he hacked at the scroll in the hands of Jehudi, and threw the pieces in the fire.

"Do not heed these words," he declared. "The king of Babylon shall not come and destroy this land!" (v.29).

A few of the princes looked on in dismay and tried to save the burning scroll. To their credit, Elnathan (the king's father-in-law), Delaiah, and Gemariah dared the king's displeasure by protesting at his insulting action towards the great King of the Heavens.

But most of the princes were unconcerned. In fact, they were comforted by the bold action of the king. They found little pleasure in the words of Jeremiah that Baruch had read to them. The king's impious action, his bold, contemptuous words, emboldened them, and made them feel a little ashamed of their previous fear.

Thus the ungodly example of the king caused ungodliness to grow in his princes.

They no longer cared about the fate of Jeremiah and Baruch. The king issued a command that they should be executed for daring to proclaim such things, and some of the very princes who previously had warned them to hide, now hurried away to find them and drag them before the king.

But they could not be found. Yahweh still had a work for them to do, and hid them from their enemies.

The nation, through its king, had thus contemptuously rejected

the mercy of Yahweh and His offer of forgiveness, and now but one thing remained: the execution of the threatened punishment.

Jehoiakim had not only rejected the words of Jeremiah, but also the wise sayings of his predecessor, Solomon. He could have found faithfully recorded in the Book of Proverbs the fate of such a stupid attitude as he had adopted.

"When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you; then shall you call upon Me, but I will not answer; you shall seek Me early, but shall not find Me; for that you hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of Yahweh: you would none of My counsel; you despised all My reproof" (Prov. 1:27-30).

"Thou shalt mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof" (Prov. 5:11-12).

"Whoso despiseth the Word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded" (Prov. 13:13).

"There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of Yahweh, that shall stand" (Prov. 19:21).

"There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against Yahweh" (Prov. 21:30).

"He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Prov. 29:1).

The stupid, egotistical king, anxious to impress his fawning princes, contemptuous of the love of God or the true welfare of his people, burnt the Bible, and thus showed that he "despised knowledge." We likewise "despise knowledge" when we leave the Bible unread; when we forsake the mercy of Yahweh by failing to do those things He requires of us. Christ laid down three things as the fundamentals of acceptable service leading to life eternal: (1)—Belief of the Gospel; (2)—Baptism into the Name; (3)—Continued obedience of his precepts (Mark 16:16; Mat. 28:20).

Let us heed these words, and solemnly revere God's Holy Book, carefully treasuring its message in our hearts, and striving to obey His precepts from day to day. We shall find the way to please Him

REMARKABLE LINK BETWEEN JEREMIAH AND DANIEL

In the very year (perhaps the very time) when Jehoiakim burnt the Bible in contempt of Yahweh, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the supremacy of the God of Israel.

This is shown by a comparison of the dates given.

The first year of Nebuchadnezzar was the 4th of Jehoiakim (Jer. 25:1). Therefore the 5th of Jehoiakim (when he burnt the Bible—see Jer. 36:9) was the 2nd of Nebuchadnezzar when the Gentile king had his dream of the great metallic image, and learned of the purpose of God throughout the ages leading to the establishment of Christ's Kingdom on earth (Dan. 2:1, 44). This led the king to exclaim: "Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a Revealer of secrets (v.47). It is very significant and dramatic that at the very time when a king on David's throne was rejecting the counsel of Yahweh, a king on a Gentile throne was accepting it and testifying to its truth. There are several such interesting and significant links in the combined work of the three prophets: Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.

if we seek Him through His Son, the Lord Jesus (Phil. 4:13).

The Scroll Re-written

Jehoiakim had burnt the book, but the words still remained. He had not destroyed God when he put the book from him. All that he had done was to add to the work of the prophet and his scribe. Another scroll was obtained, and in their hiding place, Jeremiah and his faithful friend replaced the burnt portion of the Bible.

We can take up those very words ourselves today, when we open the Bible at the Book of Jeremiah. Isn't it significant, that the prophet's words still LIVE, though the foolish king has been DEAD these many years, and the very book he burned records the full measure of his own folly and fate!

Additional words were added to the new scroll. Among them was the following terrible threat:

"Thus saith Yahweh of Jehoiakim king of Judah: He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David*; and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. And I will punish him and his seed and his servants (the princes who sought Jeremiah's life) for their iniquity, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah I will bring all the evil that I have pronounced against them" (Jer. 36:30-31).

These words were fulfilled to the very letter shortly after this.

MISERABLE DEATH OF JEHOIAKIM

He Rebels Against Nebuchadnezzar

For three years Jehoiakim continued to pay the tribute demanded by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:1), and then events occurred which led him to refuse to continue the heavy payments.

Nebuchadnezzar led an army down to Egypt with the intention of invading the country. In desperation the Egyptians rallied around their king, and fought off the Babylonians, so completely defeating them that Nebuchadnezzar had to retire back home in order to recover and re-equip his forces.*

Jehoiakim joyfully heard the news. It seemed to him as though the Babylonian power was on the wane. As he learned how the crestfallen and defeated Chaldean troops had to retreat back to Babylon, he promptly refused to pay the tribute any more.

This action became the means of his own undoing, and led to the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecies against him.

Jerusalem Again Besieged

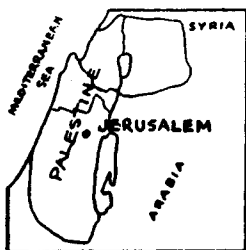
At first, Nebuchadnezzar was content to punish Jehoiakim by sending against him small bands of soldiers recruited from the other nations round about Judah, and

*The word "sit" is from the Hebrew "yashab" signifying "to dwell," "to remain at length." Jeconiah his son came to the throne, but was removed in three months in fulfilment of Jeremiah's words.

We do not read of this in the Bible, but only in contemporary history. The Bible merely says that he rebelled after three years servitude (2 Kings 24:1), but contemporary history gives us details which indicate the causes which led him to rebel.

strengthened by some of his own troops from Chaldea. But Judah's revolt, being followed by other nations, demanded more decisive action on the part of Nebuchadnezzar if he were to retain his control of Palestine.

From Josephus' history of the times, we learn that Ithobal, the king of Tyre, also rebelled about this time, and Nebuchadnezzar in-



vaded Syria at the head of a large army. Tyre and Jerusalem were both besieged at the same time, but whilst Tyre resisted with great obstinacy, Jerusalem was soon overthrown.

The haughty, Godless Jehoiakim now found himself at the mercy of the Babylonians. He was placed in fetters, and dragged before Nebuchadnezzar himself. As he humbly bowed before his conqueror, Nebuchadnezzar was disposed to spare his life and take him to Babylon (2 Chron. 36:6). For a moment, it seemed as if Jeremiah's prophecy would not be

fulfilled (Jer. 22:18). But at the last moment Nebuchadnezzar changed his mind. He ordered him to be executed, and given the "burial of an ass." His dead body was cast outside the city of Jerusalem to remain day and night for some time in full view of the people. Nebuchadnezzar intended it as warning to the people of the fate of those who dare act treacherously towards Babylon. But the more thoughtful in Judah, remembering the words of Jeremiah, and the Godless action of the King, were warned that this is the fate of those who reject the counsel of Yahweh. Later his remains were gathered and buried out of sight.

Terrible miseries were thus experienced by the people because of their foolish attitude towards the things of God. Their idolatry, their contempt of Yahweh's prophets, the murders committed against such righteous men as Urijah were receiving their just desserts in the evils the nation now experienced.

As a further lesson, Nebuchadnezzar took some 3,023 Jews (or perhaps families of Jews) as captives to Babylon (Jer. 52:28). Gradually the nation was breaking up, as the weeping Jeremiah could see.

Jehoiachin

—A Despised and Broken Idol

Coniah was 18 years of age when his father was miserably executed by Nebuchadnezzar. He was permitted to ascend the throne, but only reigned for a little over three months in Jerusalem. He was then taken to Babylon where he lived for many years, to be finally treated with great kindness by the son of Nebuchadnezzar. His mother appears to have been a very dominant woman.

She was the daughter of the powerful noble, Elnathan whom Jehoiakim employed on various missions. Jeremiah makes reference to the queen-mother on several occasions (Jer. 13:18; 29:2 etc). Mr. Phillips discussed the story of Jehoiachin with his family after they had read Jeremiah 13, and we reproduce the discussion below.

JEREMIAH TAKES A LONG JOURNEY (Jer. 13)

"This is a very dramatic story," remarked Mr. Phillips enthusiastically after finishing the chapter. "From the statement of v.18, it seems obvious that it took place in the reign of Jehoiachin, and in order to understand it better, we need to have the background of the times. For several years Judah had been troubled with small armies invading her territory and bringing misery on the people. The king (Jehoiakim) had proved a traitor both to God and to man. In spite of the warning of Jeremiah, he had gone his headstrong way, until disaster caught up with him. Nebuchadnezzar had invaded the land, had besieged Jerusalem, had slain the king, had taken a large number of people into captivity.

"But he allowed Coniah, the 18 year old son of Jehoiakim to remain in control, together with the queen mother.

"Coniah, whose name means 'Establish,' changed his name to

Jehoiachin which means, 'Yahweh will establish.'

"The people hoped that this would prove true, but shortly after Nebuchadnezzar had left, Jeremiah showed that it would be otherwise by dramatically announcing that he, like the Jewish captives, was going to take a long, lonely journey also. It was a journey he did not want to take, but which God commanded him to do. But before he left, Yahweh had commanded him to wear a linen girdle and to keep on wearing it even if it became soiled. He was not to wash it on any account. God desired to teach the people an important lesson through this means."

"What was the lesson?" asked Ann who was taking notes.

"Linen is used in the Bible as a symbol of righteousness, and a girdle is a symbol of truth," explained Mr. Phillips (see Rev. 19:8; Eph. 6:14). "Thus the linen girdle spake of righteousness based on truth. It was an ornament used by the priests of Israel (Exod. 28:39; Lev. 16:14), and therefore be-

came a fit emblem for the nation as a whole, for it was likened to 'a kingdom of priests' (Exod. 19: 5-6; Deut. 7:6-8). Yahweh had given the nation laws to keep, and if they were kept then it would be as an ornament of righteousness reflecting the glory of Yahweh to the whole world (Deut. 4:6; 28:9)."

"Are you sure that is the right explanation?" asked Peter who tends to become a little critical.

"Yes, for in verse 11, Jeremiah explained its meaning. He declared:

"As the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel and of Judah, saith Yahweh; that they might be unto Me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory."

"In other words," suggested Graham, "God called Israel out of Egypt that they might reflect to His glory."

"That is true," replied Mr. Phillips, "and it is a most important lesson to learn. Some think that God called Israel out of Egypt to save them. Whilst that is true, it is only half the story. They had first of all to **be made worth saving**. That was the purpose of the law with all its instructions in righteousness. If Israel had obeyed those precepts they would have reflected to the glory of their Creator, and been worth saving. Israel thus becomes an object lesson for us. For if God refused to save His people unless they reflected His glory, He will likewise refuse to save us. Yahweh chose the people, guided them, educated them, revealed His will to them, in order that they might reflect His glory, and that they might be equipped to pass on to others the

message of His plan. If they had obeyed Him, they would have been like the gleaming white girdle — an ornament of grace. But notice that Jeremiah adds the words: 'they would not hear.' And because they would not hear, they became like the dirty, soiled girdle he was wearing; a disgrace to the wearer! Thus, before Jeremiah took his long journey, he walked around Jerusalem with the filthy girdle on his loins, explaining to all who were interested the meaning of his action.

"He then took the journey commanded by Yahweh. He had been told to take the girdle to the River Euphrates, and hide it in a hole of the rock. It involved a long, tiring journey of about 350 miles, and it symbolised the journey into captivity which some of the Jews had already taken, and others were destined to take. Later he was told to recover the girdle. Again, Jeremiah made the tiring journey. He found the girdle alright, but it was now completely marred, and good for nothing.

"Yahweh is going to mar your pride like this girdle is marred," declared the prophet as he displayed the filthy, rotten garment to the people.

"He warned the people that their folly would result in terrible trouble coming upon the nation. It was acting as though it were silly with drink, and he told them that they would be left to stagger around until they were completely broken as a nation. He pleaded with them:

"Be not proud," he exhorted the people. "Give glory to Yahweh before He causes darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark^o mountains, and whilst you look for light, He turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness."

"He told the young king and his queen mother not to make the mistake of placing confidence in help from Egypt:

"Humble yourselves, for you will be deposed," he declared. "Egypt will not help you. Judah shall go into captivity at the hands of the northern power" (Jer. 13:18)*

NEBUCHADNEZZAR ATTACKS JEHOIACHIN

"Was Judah seeking the aid of Egypt?" asked Graham as his father paused.

"The words of Jeremiah 13:18 suggest that it was," replied his father. "That is possibly the cause of the next move in the drama of the times, for a little over three months after the king came to the throne, the tramp of Babylonish soldiers were again heard, and people saw the foreign army marching towards the capital."

"Where do we read that?" interrupted Peter.

"We must now turn from Jeremiah 13 to 2 Kings 24 or 2 Chronicles 36 in order to trace the events of the times. There (2 Kings 24: 10-12) we learn that Jehoiachin quickly gave way to Nebuchadnezzar. 'The king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he and his mother.' Whether they liked it or not, they were compelled to 'humble themselves,' as Jeremiah had predicted.

"On this occasion, Nebuchadnezzar treated Judah with much more severity than he had done three months before. A wholesale deportation of some 10,000 of the very elite of the nation were taken back to Babylon (2 Kings

24:14). All the military leaders, most of the princes, many of the priests, great numbers of skilled workmen were included. They left, as we read, only "the poorest sort of people in the land."

"Nebuchadnezzar also violated the Temple and the Palace, taking therefrom all the vessels of gold to grace his temple in Babylon.

"But he did not completely destroy the nation. He gave it one last chance. Though Jehoiachin was taken captive to Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar set over Judah another king whom he called Zedekiah."

"Did Jeremiah go into captivity?" asked Joan.

"No, he remained in the city. Nevertheless some very prominent men of the Bible went into captivity at this time. Among them were Ezekiel the prophet, and Mordecai the uncle of Esther."

"Where do we learn that?" asked Peter.

"In Ezekiel 1:2 and Esther 2:6."

"Was Jehoiachin slain?", asked Ann as she busily took notes.

"No, he was taken to Babylon with his mother, and there flung into prison. Some 37 years later, however, the son of Nebuchadnezzar took pity on him, and honored him in Babylon (2 Kings 25:17-30). Meanwhile he had married, and among his grandchildren was a son destined to come to great prominence in leading the people back from captivity. His name was Zerubbabel (1 Chron. 3:17-19; Haggai 1:2)."

*Mr. Phillips has paraphrased Jeremiah 13:18. It implies what he has said, though it does not directly state it.

The Poorest Sort of People Remain

"Did Jeremiah have any other adventures during the reign of Jehoiachin?" asked Ann.

"No, but he had a vision which helps us to understand some of the circumstances of his day a little better."

"What was that?"

"It is recorded in his 24th chapter. He saw a vision of two baskets of figs. One basket contained good figs, but the other basket contained figs that were good for nothing. He was told that the basket of good figs represented those Jews that had been taken into captivity, for they had been taken away for their own good. On the other hand, the basket of bad figs represented the Jews who remained in the land. God had allowed them to stay there because they were deserving of more punishment. Jeremiah

was told that both the nation and its king were destined for greater evils to come."

"Is that what is meant by the statement of 2 Kings 24:14 that 'none remained, save the poorest sort of people of the land?'" asked Graham.

"Yes, they were poor in every sense; not only in material riches, but in spiritual matters also. Yet they thought that they were favored by God in being left to dwell in the land. They vainly imagined that those taken into captivity had been justly dealt with by God because of their sins. This feeling was even shared by some of those who had been taken into captivity, and the early part of Ezekiel's work was to destroy this belief among the people in exile.

"This vision, seen by Jeremiah, showed that the nation was doomed, and that shortly even greater punishments would fall upon it."

Zedekiah

—Breaker of Covenants

The tragedy of the Kingdom of God in the past came to its climax in the reign of this weak, vacillating King. Zedekiah had no policy, and therefore lacked the indispensable qualifications for true leadership. He was easily persuaded to rebel against the Chaldeans (2 Kings 25), and yet under Jeremiah's advice surrendered the city to them (Jer. 21:9-10).

His troubled reign ended in tragedy. Zedekiah attempted to escape from the disaster Jeremiah predicted, but was overtaken and brought before Nebuchadnezzar, who slew the captive king's children before his eyes, then blinded the king himself and sent him in chains to Babylon.

Zedekiah's reign was a period of great activity for Jeremiah. He knew that time was limited, and therefore strove all the more to win a few over to righteousness, and save them for the Kingdom of the future. Thus the history of this period looms large in his writings. There are almost fifty references to Zedekiah in the Book of Jeremiah, and they reveal many dramatic incidents as the prophet opposed the policy of the king and the people.

Zedekiah was the third of Josiah's sons to become king. His original name was Mattaniah (Gift of Yahweh), but Nebuchadnezzar re-named him Zedekiah (Righteousness of Yahweh). He probably thought that by so renaming him that the king would remain true to the oath of allegiance that he had sworn to Babylon.

There is a drama about the name of Zedekiah. It is compounded of two words: Zedek and Yah, and signifies YAHWEH IS RIGHTEOUS. He was the last king to sit upon the throne of David, and it seems that Jeremiah made a play on his name as he described the glory of the NEXT king to sit upon this throne, giving him (Christ) a similar name:

"Behold the days come, saith Yahweh, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby he shall be called, YAHWEH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer. 23:5-6).

The Zedekiah of the future will provide a great contrast to the Zedekiah of the past.

Meanwhile, the events of the Zedekiah of the past are important, for they provide a background to the wonderful words of the prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

The Nation Zedekiah Ruled

Zedekiah reigned over an impoverished and debased kingdom. "The poorest sort of people" were his subjects (2 Kings 24:14). The Temple and the Palace had been robbed of its treasures; little of true glory remained.

And the king himself was but a vassal to the haughty Nebuchadnezzar who delighted to be known as a "King of kings" (Dan. 2:37).

The pitifully weak state of Zedekiah's political power was known to all. Before he left Jerusalem the Babylonian monarch had demanded that Zedekiah come humbly before him in front of all the people, and take a public oath of allegiance to Babylon (Ezek. 17:13). This was designed to impress all with the fact that Judah was a base kingdom, and must submit to its overlord. (v.14).

Having thus humiliated Zedekiah and extracted this promise from him, Nebuchadnezzar left

him to his poverty-stricken little nation.

Jeremiah Writes to the Exiles (Jer. 29)

Shortly after he ascended the throne, Zedekiah had cause to send to Babylon two nobles on affairs of State (Jer. 29:2-3). It provided Jeremiah with the opportunity of writing a letter of exhortation to the Jews in exile.

He wrote under the direction of God, and called upon the two nobles to place it before the exiles in dispersion. In it he told them to seek the peace of the city to which they had been taken, because God was behind their captivity, and they would remain there a long time.

"Build homes, plant gardens, marry and bring up your children," he advised them, for there was to be no early return (v.5).

This was contrary to the advice that the people had received from false prophets at home and abroad,

for they were busy telling them that they would soon be restored to their land.

Jeremiah denounced such false teachers:

"Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed," he wrote.

They were letting their wishes run away with them, and dreaming dreams of restoration, repeating it one to the other as though Yahweh was behind these dreams. Jeremiah told them that seventy years would pass away before there would be a return, but at the end of that time, Yahweh would visit them and restore them to their land again. In his letter, he included some words directly from Yahweh, which are among the most beautiful words found in the Bible:

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith Yahweh. Thoughts of peace, and not of evil to **MAKE YOUR LATTER END AN OBJECT OF HOPE.*** Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith Yahweh; and I will turn away your captivity" (vv. 11-13).

What beautiful, tender words are these! They breathe the very spirit of Divine love. Notwithstanding all the insults Yahweh had suffered from the people, His heart was toward them; He was anxious to help them. He felt their sufferings (Isa. 63:9), and hated the thought of them being oppressed. Like a Father to His children, He would have delighted to bring about their restoration, but in His

wisdom He knew that they must learn through painful discipline to forsake their evil ways. He was prepared to overlook their wickedness, their base ingratitude, their foolish thoughtlessness, if they would but turn to Him with their heart, and not merely with words upon the lips.

Let us remember that this is the character of God, and learn to approach Him with every confidence.

In his letter, Jeremiah warned that greater troubles were about to fall on Jerusalem, and that Zedekiah, together with the remnant of the people, would go into captivity. They would become like the vile figs he had seen in his vision. (Jer. 29:17; Jer. 24).

Second Letter to Babylon

Many of the Jews in exile must have been comforted by the letter of Jeremiah, but he also had enemies amongst them. To them the message of the letter was depressing. They did not want to believe that they must remain in Babylon for so long. They replied to Jeremiah, saying that they had prophets in Babylon who had predicted that there would be an early return; that Babylon was about to fall. Among these prophets were two notable ones named Ahab and Zedekiah.

Jeremiah vigorously replied to this letter. He warned the people against the wicked teaching and false comfort that these so-called prophets were providing. He declared that they would be delivered into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar

*See margin. These words can thus be rendered.

who would burn them to death.*

On this occasion, Shemaiah the Dreamer (Jer. 29:24—margin), one of those against whom Jeremiah had warned, replied. He wrote to Zephaniah the priest in Jerusalem complaining at the letters of Jeremiah, declaring that he must be mad to write in such a way (v. 26)**. He called upon Zephaniah to throw Jeremiah into prison and restrain him with fetters.

Jeremiah Warns Shemaiah

Jeremiah wrote again to Babylon, this time warning the people not to heed Shemaiah.

"He is causing you to trust in a lie," he wrote.

As for Shemaiah who was predicting an early return, he would not only himself die in exile, but none of his posterity would see the promised good that Yahweh had reserved for many of the exiles, for "he hath taught rebellion against Yahweh" (v.32).

This ended Jeremiah's correspondence with the exiles in Babylon as far as we are aware. But it was the prelude of a wonderful prophecy of ultimate restoration of Israel back in the land at the second coming of Christ, which is contained in Jeremiah 30, 31. This prophecy gives a vision of hope out of trouble, of rejoicing out of sorrow, of strength manifested out of weakness. It shows how the nation will be re-established in its greatness, how the Temple will be built in its glory, how Jerusalem will be restored as the seat of power.

He received this vision whilst he was asleep, and he records:

"Upon this I awaked, and beheld; and my sleep was sweet unto me" (Jer. 31:26).

The false dreamers of Babylon were speaking of a mere return to former conditions; Jeremiah saw a glorious vision of a true restoration when the glory and power of David and Solomon's times will be eclipsed under Messiah.

No wonder his sleep was sweet unto him in spite of all his troubles.

JEREMIAH WEARS A YOKE (Jer. 27, 28).

Zedekiah Influenced by False Prophets

Four years went by. The shock of the invasion and captivity lessened in the minds of the people. They began to congratulate themselves that they had not been affected, and to cast about for a reason of this favor. False prophets seized upon the general attitude by spreading the idea that those left in the land, those "poorest sort of people" were really the favored of God, whilst those who had been taken away in exile had been justly punished for their misdeeds (Ezek. 11:15).

The deadly dope of this false teaching had the effect of blinding the people left in the land to their own false attitude to Yahweh.

Zedekiah was influenced by such flattering teaching. His pride was also fed when ambassadors came

* Cp Jer. 29:22 with Daniel 3 where the faithful Jews "quenched the violence of fire" by their faith (Heb. 11:34). Apparently Ahab and Zedekiah were likewise thrown into a fiery furnace, but did not escape.

** Thus again foreshadowing the experience of Christ—see John 7:20, 10:20, 39,

to his capital from the surrounding nations. Stimulated by Egyptian intrigue, the smaller nations were plotting to oppose Babylon. Flattered by such attention, the weak king was disposed to forget the oath he had so easily entered into with Nebuchadnezzar, and join this new anti-Chaldean coalition.

But he was arrested in so doing, by a remarkable action performed by Jeremiah the prophet.

Jeremiah's Yoke

Jeremiah had oftener angered the people by his words, and puzzled them by his actions. On several occasions he had acted the prophecies he had proclaimed. He did so on this occasion. As the king was contemplating joining the league against Babylon, Jeremiah was walking the streets of Jerusalem wearing wooden yokes around his neck. In explanation of what this meant, he sent a yoke to each of the ambassadors who had come to Jerusalem with the following message:

"Tell your masters, that I, Yahweh, who made the earth and all that is in it by My great power, and outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto Me, have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My slave . . . And it shall come to pass, that the nation that will not serve him, that will not put its neck under the yoke I have sent it I will severely punish with sword, famine and pestilence. Therefore, hearken not to the false prophets that speak otherwise, for they prophesy a lie unto you" (Jer. 27:9-11).

The ambassadors were doubtless surprised at the eccentric appear-

ance of Jeremiah and his unpromising message. It was also embarrassing, perhaps, to Zedekiah, but before he could do anything about it, he was boldly confronted by the prophet himself, still wearing the wooden yoke. Harshly and abruptly Jeremiah addressed the king:

"Why will you die, you and your people, by the sword, the famine, the pestilence! That will be your fate if you do not serve Babylon. Don't hearken to the prophets that speak otherwise, for they prophesy a lie unto you!"

In the face of this fierce attack, the weak vacillating king reversed his policy. Jeremiah continued his agitation. Jerusalem re-echoed with the voice of the prophet warning the people against the false prophets that were leading them astray. One phrase occurred time and again; it became the theme of his discourses in the public places of the city, in the courts of the Temple.

"They prophesy a lie unto you!" was his fierce, challenging theme.

Some of the false prophets were predicting that the vessels of the Temple that Nebuchadnezzar had taken to Babylon would shortly be restored. Jeremiah treated such prophecies with sarcastic contempt.

"If they be true prophets," he rejoined, "let them intercede with Yahweh that the vessels which remain might not be taken, for Yahweh declares that all will be removed and the Temple itself destroyed."

The only thing that could stop this prophecy being fulfilled was a change of heart and action on the part of the people.

The Story of the Bible



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Zedekiah

--Breaker of Covenants

In introducing the reign of this king (see p. 108 of our last issue), we left out one or two words in a sentence which altered its meaning. We wrote: "He was easily persuaded to rebel against the Chaldeans (2 Kings 25), and yet under Jeremiah's advice surrendered the city to them". This is not quite correct.

We should have written: "... under Jeremiah's advice he was almost persuaded to surrender the city to them." Unfortunately for Zedekiah, he did not follow the prophet's advice. He would have liked to have done so, but "fear of the Jews" prevented him (see Jer. 38:18-19).

We concluded last month by showing how Jeremiah wore a yoke of wood around his neck to emphasise his message that Judah would come under the yoke of Babylon, and the message of the false prophets would prove untrue.

Hananiah Breaks Jeremiah's Yoke (Jer. 28)

Jeremiah's forthright action had angered the false prophets, and one of them now stood forward as their champion.

His name was Hananiah.

He accosted Jeremiah in the Temple, and in front of the assembled people and priests, he boldly refuted the message of the prophet.

"Thus speaketh Yahweh," declared Hananiah, "I have broken the yoke of Babylon. Within two full years I will bring back into this place, all the vessels of the Temple that Nebuchadnezzar took away into Babylon. And I will also bring back Jehoiachin with all the captives of Judah."

This was a message such as the people delighted to hear, but it was

not true. It was a complete contradiction of Jeremiah's warning, and the people now looked curiously at the prophet with the wooden yoke hanging around his neck, wondering how he would re-act to the challenge of Hananiah.

Vigorously Jeremiah made his reply:

"Amen to those words," he sarcastically rejoined. "Let Yahweh act as you say! Nevertheless, hear this. Prophets before me and before you have prophesied of great evils that Yahweh will bring upon this nation! But the prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall it be known, that Yahweh hath truly sent him."

The people knew that prophets such as Joel, Amos, Hosea, Micah and others had predicted evil

against Jerusalem, and therefore their words supported those of Jeremiah. But as Jeremiah had often told them, these evils could be averted if the people responded to the will of Yahweh. Therefore, his words were conditional upon the re-action of the people. On the other hand, Hananiah's prophecy was unconditional, and Jeremiah drew his attention to the words of Deuteronomy 18:22 asking if he was prepared to submit to the test there laid down.

Hananiah knew what that meant. The Law prescribed death for a false prophet (Deut. 17:12), and a false prophet was defined as one whose words did not come to pass at the time laid down.

But Hananiah was too incensed with Jeremiah to reason properly. Snatching the yoke from off the neck of Jeremiah, he broke it, and turning to the people he declared:

"Yahweh has said that He will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar from the neck of all nations within two years!"

Jeremiah refused to answer such a foolish and impious prophecy. Time would tell where the truth lay. He quietly withdrew from the Temple leaving the people to ponder over all that had taken place.

But later there came a private message for Hananiah. He was told that instead of yokes of wood there would be yokes of iron for the people. He was told that because he had made the people trust in a lie, and had taught apostasy to them that he would die, not within two years as he had speci-

fied, but within two months!

And two months later Hananiah was dead; a terrible warning to the people. It was the seventh month, the month in which the Day of Atonement was celebrated wherein the sins of the people were forgiven. But there was no forgiveness for such a blatant lie against the truth as Hananiah had committed. It was blasphemy against the Holy Spirit word (Mark 3:29), and for it he died.

JEREMIAH CAUSES A REMARKABLE BOOK TO BE THROWN INTO THE RIVER EUPHRATES (Jer. 51 : 59-64)

The Book is Written

In the fourth year of his reign, Zedekiah travelled to Babylon to personally present his tribute to Nebuchadnezzar.

Why he was forced to do this, we are not told. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar had heard that ambassadors of surrounding nations had visited Jerusalem to conspire with the king of Judah to break the yoke of Babylon (Jer. 27:3), and to forestall any such move, commanded his vassal to come to Babylon and again renew his vows of allegiance.

Whatever the cause, the king made the journey (Jer. 51:59), and took with him a prince of the realm named Seraiah*. This provided Jeremiah with an opportunity of sending a message of encouragement to the Jews in exile, that they might remain true to the ways of God. For Seraiah was

*He is described as a "quiet prince" (Jer. 51:29). The Hebrew word rendered quiet is "menucha" signifying "peace". Perhaps he carried the tribute by which Zedekiah hoped to purchase his peace with Nebuchadnezzar. One translation renders the phrase: "Seraiah carried a present" thus conveying the idiom of the original into the translation.

well-known to the prophet. He was brother to Baruch, the close friend of Jeremiah (cp. Jer. 51:59 with 32:12), and was willing to convey the message of Yahweh to the people in exile.

In due time, Jeremiah delivered to Seraiah a small scroll, and gave him careful instructions as to what he was to do with it when he arrived at the city of Babylon. It contained the prophecy that we can today read in Jeremiah chapters 50 and 51. In it, Yahweh revealed that despite its mighty power, Babylon would ultimately be overthrown never again to rise. When that happened, those Jews who remained true to their trust, would return and restore their nation.

This implied that there was more enduring strength in captive, broken Israel than in mighty, powerful Babylon.

One vivid passage reads as follows:

"Thus saith Yahweh of hosts: The children of Israel and the children of Judah were oppressed together; and all that took them captives held them fast; they refused to let them go. Their Redeemer is strong; Yahweh of hosts is His name; He shall thoroughly plead their cause, that He may give rest to the land and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon" (Jer. 50:33-34).

The Book is Read

Babylon, the mightiest city of antiquity, was then at the height of its pomp and glory. In the massive walls of this great city, in its glorious architecture, in its hanging gardens and lavish display, the captive Jews saw about them the material evidence of fleshly might. It all looked so permanent and powerful, and emphasised their poverty and helplessness,

It was in such circumstances, that Seraiah called the Jews together as Jeremiah had commanded him, and read them the scroll that the prophet had prepared.

It proclaimed that Babylon would be completely destroyed so that it would never again be inhabited. It spoke of the fear that would fall upon the king of Babylon when the time of judgment came so that his hands would wax feeble (Jer. 50:43). It outlined the vengeance of Yahweh against a people who had violated His Temple (Jer. 50:28). It decreed the ultimate restoration of Zion (Jer. 50:19-20).

Among those who hearkened to the reading of the scroll were Daniel and his friends. They must have listened with intense interest and pleasure to the predicted overthrow of the enemy of their people. We know that Daniel was greatly influenced by the writings of Jeremiah (Dan. 9:2). As he listened to Seraiah read this scroll he would have heard much to confirm the prophecies he had already received from God.

After he had completed the reading, Seraiah, as Jeremiah had instructed him, led the assembled Jews in a short public prayer:

"O Yahweh, Thou hast spoken against this place, to cut it off, that none shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but that it shall be desolate for ever!"

The Book is Thrown Away

By both the prophecy and the prayer, the captive Jews were taught neither to envy the pomp of Babylon nor to fear its power, but to look with contempt on all its false glory and illusive pleasure, seeing beyond these things

to the ultimate purpose of God: the destruction of Babylon and the redemption of Israel.

They were taught that there is nothing permanent in fleshly glory, it all shall finally come to an end.

The same exhortation is powerful today, when on every side there are seen the tokens of modern Babylon's power (Rev. 17). We are taught, by the words and action of Jeremiah, to see beyond these things to the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth (Dan. 2:44).

Still following the instructions of Jeremiah, Seraiah next tied a stone to the scroll, and as the Jewish exiles watched, he cast it into the River Euphrates. As it sank beneath its waters, he turned to the people, and declared:

"Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her . . ." (Jer. 51:64).

The Book Revived

About 700 years after the dramatic incident thus described had taken place, a lonely man who had been banished to the rocky island of Patmos in the Mediterranean because he had fearlessly proclaimed the truths of God, saw a similar vision. He saw not ancient Babylon, but a modern Babylon—the world about us, particularly in its religious power—and he was shown how it, too, will be brought to an end like the ancient city. He described what he saw:

"A mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, 'Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all'" (Rev. 18:21).

How important it is for us to learn the lesson that Jeremiah tried to impress upon the captive Jews

so long ago—that there is nothing enduring in the way of life about us, and that ultimately the way of God will triumph in all the earth (Num. 14:21).

How powerfully impressed a man like Daniel must have been as he listened to such words being read. At the very time when Seraiah was reciting words that spelt the doom of Babylon, Zedekiah, the last king to sit on David's throne was humbling himself before its proud king!

His name means: "Yahweh is righteous." The prophecy which Jeremiah set before the captives has never yet been fully fulfilled, but it will be when King Jesus returns to destroy modern Babylon. In that day, the king of Israel will not humble himself before the Gentiles, but rather they will prostrate themselves before him. One of his titles will be similar to Zedekiah, for he will be called: Yahweh our Righteousness (Jer. 23:5-7). Thus there is a link between the name of the last king to sit on David's throne and the next one to do so (Ezek. 21:25-27).

NEBUCHADNEZZAR ATTACKS.

Zedekiah Breaks His Word.

"I have been trying to trace the events that led to the destruction of Jerusalem in the days of Jeremiah, but I find it very difficult to do so," remarked Graham one evening after the family had completed some reading from the Book of Jeremiah.

"There is a general outline in 2 Kings 25, and 2 Chronicles 36 which is very easy to follow," replied his father, "but a great deal of care is necessary if you desire to fill in all the details supplied by

Jeremiah, for the chapters in his book do not follow in chronological order."

"Yes, I have noticed that," said Graham. "For example, chapter 21 is really after chapter 37 in point of time. What puzzles me at this moment, however, is why Nebuchadnezzar should suddenly attack Jerusalem in the 9th year of Zedekiah (Jer. 52:4). After all, Nebuchadnezzar had placed him on the throne! Had Zedekiah revolted against him after going to Babylon and paying the tribute money as recorded in Jeremiah 51:59?"

"Yes, he had. It was in the 4th year of his reign that he had gone to Babylon with the tribute money, and swore that he would remain true to Nebuchadnezzar. But Zedekiah did not keep his word. He lied both to God and man. He was a weak man, and many in Judah were pressing him to seek assistance from Egypt, and throw off the yoke of Babylon. The time seemed ripe for such an adventure. A young and enterprising prince by name of Pharaoh Hophra (see Jer. 44:30), who is known to historians as Pharaoh Apries, had just ascended the throne of Egypt. The Jews thought he might help them in a struggle for independence. Zedekiah sent ambassadors to his court, offering his allegiance, and asking that troops might be sent to his assistance should Babylon attack (see Ezek. 17:15.) A secret treaty was probably signed, and about the 9th year of his reign, Zedekiah took the plunge. Despite the warnings of Jeremiah, he broke his fealty with Babylon and openly raised the standard of revolt (2 Kings 24:20; 2 Chron. 36:13), an act which is described by Ezekiel the prophet as a heinous crime and

as typical of the loose way in which this weak king treated his word (Ezek. 17:15-25).

"Nebuchadnezzar did not lose any time. He immediately set his troops in motion. He had an army stationed on the coast of Syria, occupied in the siege of Tyre. But this could not be spared from its appointed task. Nevertheless he did not minimise the importance of Zedekiah's revolt. He decided to come in person himself, and sit down before Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:1). Judah was not his only, nor his principal enemy. Moab, Ammon, Edom and Philistia were all in a state of revolt against him, possibly spurred on by Egypt. At first Nebuchadnezzar was in a quandary as to which he should first attack, and by severe punishment, provide an example for the others. He pondered whether he should attack Ammon or Jerusalem. For a time, the fate of the Jews rested in the balance. At last the marching Babylonish troops came to the crossroads where a decision had to be made. Here they paused whilst Nebuchadnezzar made up his mind. Ezekiel the prophet describes how he made use of divination. This pointed in the direction of Jerusalem. The fateful decision having been made, Nebuchadnezzar commenced his march south against the City of God."

"Where do we read that in Ezekiel?" asked Peter.

"In Ezekiel 21:21. In the same chapter, the prophet addresses the king and shows how he would be deposed from the throne, 'until he comes whose right it is; and I (Yahweh) will give it him' (v. 27). You, of course, know who that is!"

"It is the one promised to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-16," remarked Joan.

"That is correct, but who is that?"

"The Lord Jesus Christ."

"True. At his birth, his mother was told that he was the one destined to fill this honored role:

"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32-33)."

Zedekiah Appeals to Jeremiah

"Did the Egyptians assist Zedekiah?" asked Graham anxious to obtain a clear outline of the events leading to the tragic destruction of Jerusalem.

"Not at first," replied Mr. Phillips. "The Jews waited in vain for a sign of them, and as news of the approaching Babylonians reached Jerusalem, the king panicked. At that moment of crisis there was but one man who could help him: Jeremiah! Perhaps he recalled the action of Hezekiah. When the Assyrians attacked the city he had sent for Isaiah the prophet and by their joint prayers had saved the city. In any case, Zedekiah sent a deputation of princes and priests to Jeremiah with the following message:

"Enquire, I pray thee, of Yahweh for us; for Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon makes war against us; perhaps Yahweh will deal with us according to all his wondrous works, that he may leave us!" (Jer. 21:2).

"That was rather hypocritical after the way the people had turned to idolatry," remarked Peter.

"Yes," agreed his father. "This weak, foolish king, who had con-

stantly refused to heed the message of Jeremiah, expected Yahweh to work a miracle for him, now that his stupidity had resulted in the Chaldeans attacking him!

"But he received no sympathy from Jeremiah. The time for that was gone. He clearly told Zedekiah what the outcome of the war would be. The weapons of war which the Jews had prepared for the battle would be rendered useless; the city would fall and the king would be taken captive by the Babylonians; famine, pestilence and the sword would play havoc with the defenders. The prophet warned, that the only thing to do, was to flee the doomed city when the enemy approached."

"That is very similar to the advice of the Lord Jesus to his disciples when the Romans attacked the city (see Matt. 24:15-21)," remarked Graham.

"Yes. Jeremiah's words and advice to the king are very similar to those of the Lord when speaking to his disciples on the Mount of Olives. As Christ warned his followers to flee Jerusalem on the approach of the Romans, Jeremiah did likewise on the approach of the Babylonians. As Christ warned that resistance would prove vain, so did Jeremiah on this occasion (Jer. 21:8-9). And as the Romans temporarily withdrew after besieging the city, allowing Christians to escape to Pella, so did the Babylonians, as we will see as we check through the events of the times (Jer. 37:5). This permitted those who listened to his advice to escape. And those who listened to the advice of Christ in his day and who were familiar with the history of Jeremiah's day, would be able to see a foreshadowing of these

events, and would be impressed with the importance of following Christ's advice.

How Zedekiah Acted on Jeremiah's Advice.

"In addition to this warning, Jeremiah gave the king some good advice. He urged him to put trust in Yahweh, and do His will by executing judgment, and delivering the oppressor (Jer. 21:12). By such means Zedekiah might avoid the greatest evils. But, warned the prophet, unless the king acted quickly, destruction would come fast and heavy upon the guilty nation."

"Did Zedekiah act upon this advice?"

"Yes, he did. As the army of Nebuchadnezzar moved south, and nothing was heard of the supporting Egyptian forces that had been promised, the weak, vacillating king panicked. He decided to act on Jeremiah's advice.

Hastily he called together a general meeting of the people, and bound them to a covenant to keep the Law of Moses. Jeremiah had told him to 'Execute judgment, and relieve the oppressed,' and the king instructed that this should be done. He commanded that all who had slaves, should let them go free as the Law commanded should be done in the year of liberty (Jer. 34:14). He warned the people of the seriousness of the crisis that faced them, and reminded them that as their Egyptian allies had failed, God alone could help them. But God would only help if the people turned to Him and demonstrated their genuineness by such an action as he suggested. The

people agreed to all that was suggested. The covenant was endorsed by a most solemn sacrifice. A calf was offered in confirmation of the covenant. As was normal on such occasions, it was divided into two parts, and the leaders of the nation, as its representatives, passed between the pieces as a token that the covenant was accepted (Jer. 34:18)."

"What does that mean?" asked Ann.

"The two parts of the sacrifice represented the two parties who had agreed to the covenant," explained Mr. Phillips. "The passing through of the two pieces by the people, indicated that they were joined in agreement with God to fulfil the terms of the covenant. It was a most solemn rite, and indicated that if they failed to fulfil their obligation, the fate of the animal would be theirs. That was the way that contracts or covenants were agreed to in ancient days. In Hebrews 9:16, the Apostle shows that Christ's offering was regarded in a similar manner. He represented himself to his Apostles as the covenant victim, and those who partake of the bread and wine which is representative of that, 'eat and drink condemnation to themselves' unless they strive earnestly to fulfil the terms of the covenant (see 1 Cor. 11:26-29). Yahweh entered into a covenant with Abraham by a similar sacrifice as is recorded in Genesis 15."*

"Did this avert the danger to the city?"

"As a matter of fact, it did, temporarily. In due course, Nebuchadnezzar encamped outside its walls, and lay siege to the city. Within

*Write to Mr. H. Phillips, Box 226, G.P.O., Adelaide, South Australia, if you would like further details of this matter.

the walls the ceremony had taken place, and the nation proclaimed its readiness to obey the terms of Yahweh's covenant, and give freedom to the slaves. Then news was heard that at last the Egyptians were on the march. Suddenly Nebuchadnezzar withdrew his forces and rapidly moved south to meet the new threat. The people of Jerusalem went wild with joy. It seemed to them as though the false prophets, who had predicted the failure of the Babylonish attack, were right after all, and that Jeremiah, who had denounced any trust in Egypt, was wrong! Many of the nobles began to regret that they had been so hasty in proclaiming that they would release all the servants that they had in their power, and went back on their agreement. Jeremiah was shocked at this blatant violation of so solemn a contract. He raised his voice in protest. He dearly loved the city of Jerusalem, and his heart ached for the misguided people. He warned them that the results of so acting in regard to the covenant would be disastrous. The nation would suffer the fate of the sacrificial calf if it did not remain true to its word. There would be no help from God if the people turned from their covenant and sought the help of Egypt.

"But his protests were in vain. People did not want to hear his warnings of doom. They became impatient with him. Finally he went to the king with a last warning that his folly would result in national destruction (Jer. 37:7).

"And then he put into practice the very advice he had given the people.

"He tried to flee the city, and

reach the refuge of his city of Anathoth (Jer. 37:12).

"He was discovered by some of the princes of the Kingdom. Falsely they accused him of deserting to the Chaldeans. They scourged him, and then put him in prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe."

Jeremiah in Prison

"It seemed strange to turn the house of a scribe into a prison, don't you think?" asked Graham.

"It does seem strange to us," answered his father, "but it was the custom of the day for those in authority in a town to set aside a section of their house as a prison, and even appoint one of their servants to act as jailor. Sometimes a deep pit was dug in the middle court around which a large house would be built; in the sides were scooped out niches in which to sleep, and down into these dungeons the prisoner was placed. It was like being buried alive to be placed into one of those horrible places, and, in fact, the same word is used for grave as is used for such dungeons."

"Wouldn't the rain beat into such a pit?" asked Peter.

"Yes, they became very damp and soggy in the winter, very hot and unbearable in the summer. Sometimes they became filled with soft mire, and prisoners would sink into the mud:

"Into such a prison Jeremiah was now flung. But something soon happened which sent Zedekiah the king hurrying to him for advice. The Babylonians returned to besiege the city. The Egyptians had been easily turned back, and now the Chaldeans were bent on vengeance. Secretly Zedekiah came to the dungeon and called for Jere-

miah:

"Is there any word from Yahweh?" he asked.

"There is," replied Jeremiah, "You will be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon."

"Having waited for a moment to let that message sink in, the prophet continued:

"What have I offended against you, or against your servants, or against this people, that you have put me in prison? Where are now your prophets which prophesied unto you, saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land? Therefore hear now, I pray you, O my lord the king: "Let my supplication be accepted before you; that you cause me not to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there!"

"Zedekiah realised that if he wanted the help of Jeremiah, he must be prepared to assist the prophet. He therefore commanded that he be transferred to the court of the prison in his own house, and that he should be given a ration of bread in common with all the people. For now the siege was becoming felt. It was realised that it would be of long duration. Food was carefully rationed, and every preparation made to withstand the Babylonians."

Jeremiah Invests Some Money Wisely

"The incidents we have been discussing are recorded in Jeremiah 37," said Mr. Phillips as he continued the story of the prophet. "From there we must turn back to Jeremiah 32 for the next dra-

matic incident in the life of the prophet. An event occurred of the greatest significance to Jeremiah, and which is going to stand him in good stead at the time of Christ's coming.

"He was shut up in the court of the prison in the king's house. It was the tenth year of Zedekiah, the year before the city fell. The Babylonians were now besieging the city, and the future looked very grim indeed. One day, a man named Hanameel, a cousin of Jeremiah, visited the prophet and offered to sell him his field in Anathoth.

"The right of redemption is yours, and the redemption is yours, buy it for yourself!"

"But what was the use of the field to Jeremiah? It was then in the hands of the Babylonians, and would under normal conditions have to be returned to Hanameel at the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:25; Num. 35:2)* 'Jeremiah could not occupy the land until he was freed from prison, and the Babylonians ejected from the land. And he knew that that would not occur for many years to come (Jer. 29:10).

"The price was cheap enough! All Hanameel asked was seventeen shekels of silver (Jer. 32:9)—about £2-10-0! But under the circumstances, even that cheap price was more than it was worth.

"But Yahweh had told Jeremiah that Hanameel was about to make this offer, and he was to accept it. So he called for the title deeds

*The Law of Moses directed that land once given for a possession should never be completely sold. If the possessor became poor and had to raise money, the land had to be given back to him freely in the year of Jubilee. If he died in the meantime, it went to the next of kin. That is what will happen in the case of Jeremiah and Hanameel in the coming great Year of Jubilee when all Israel shall return, as Yahweh proceeded to tell the prophet (Jer. 32:36-44).

of the property, and a contract of the purchase (v.11) and having completed the transaction before witnesses, he delivered the documents into the hands of his friend Baruch the scribe, and explained unto the witnesses the reason why he made the purchase:

"Yahweh has commanded me to take these evidences, the title-deeds and contract, and place them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days. For thus saith Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land."

"He then delivered it into the hands of Baruch with instructions to place this evidence where it would be preserved for many days. Then Jeremiah prayed unto God that He would give him further enlightenment as to why He had commanded him to make the purchase.

"He was told that though the nation would be punished, yet it would not be entirely destroyed; that the time would come when it would be restored to the land, and an 'everlasting covenant' (v. 40) would be made with it. At that time the people would return to enter into the inheritances that they possessed in the land. Thus if any are able to produce evidence that a certain piece of land belongs to him he will be able to possess it (v.44)."

"Does that mean that Jeremiah will possess that piece of land he bought so long ago?" asked Graham.

"Yes, it means that for a little over £2 he purchased an everlasting inheritance. On the other hand, Hanameel was so concerned with the presence of the Babylonians that he was prepared to sell his

divinely given inheritance for a mere pittance."

"But didn't you say that the land would have to go back to Hanameel in the year of Jubilee?" insisted Peter.

"Under normal conditions it would," replied his father. "But in this case, Hanameel was not there to claim it, therefore it reverts to Jeremiah who possesses the title deeds."

"Will he yet receive it?" asked Ann.

"I believe he will, at Christ's return. The city of Anathoth is north of Jerusalem. It will be portion of the land given over to immortal priests when Christ rules on earth (see Ezekiel 48:10-11). We are told that Christ will divide the land by lot* for inheritance (Ezek. 45:1). We know that Bethel has been promised to Jacob (Gen. 28:13), and Schechem to Joseph (Gen. 48:22), and now it seems as though Anathoth will be given to Jeremiah."

"I notice that Baruch was told to so place the title-deeds that they may 'continue many days' (v.14)," remarked Graham. "Do you think that they will be recovered at Christ's return?"

"I do," replied his father. "I think it will be a moment of triumph for Jeremiah when he produces the title-deeds, before the Lord Jesus and the company of the redeemed in that day. Those title-deeds will be an evidence of his great faith. In fact, his faith, will constitute the real signature thereon. In that regard, we can link up the 32nd of Jeremiah in a wonderful way with Hebrews 11: that great chapter on faith. For in Hebrews we read: 'Faith is the

*By "lot" does not mean by chance, but by Divine direction.

substance of things hoped for. Scholars tell us that the Greek word rendered 'substance' is "hypostasis," and that this was a legal term indicating the right to property. Thus the phrase can be rendered: 'Faith is the title deeds of things hoped for.' Faith is like a title deed indicating our right to the inheritance promised us. In Jeremiah's case, he has real title deeds to produce that are indicative of his great faith in a time of difficulty and persecution."

Jeremiah Again Cast Into the Dungeon

"Whilst these incidents were taking place, the Babylonians were besieging the city, and the state of the Jews was worsening every day. As the battering-rams thundered against the walls of the city, the Jews used the rubble to erect another wall of defence (Jer.33:4). But this determined resistance only resulted in the greater slaughter.

"They come to fight with the Chaldeans, but it is to fill them with the dead bodies of men, whom I have slain in mine anger and in my fury. Because of all the wickedness I have hid my face from this city."

"So declared Yahweh to the people through Jeremiah (Jer. 33:5). He pointed to the far distant future, when Israel would be purified from its evil, and submit to the King whom God would provide them. Meanwhile, he told them that to fight on was hopeless."

"Was Jeremiah still in the prison court of the king's house when he proclaimed this?" asked Graham.

"Yes, the people evidently had access to him, and came to enquire of him concerning the war."

"The leaders of the Jews would not be very pleased with him

speaking such words as those to the people, would they?" asked Peter.

"No, they were not. From chapter 33 we must turn over to chapter 38 to read the sequel. A powerful faction among the priests and princes of the people heard the words of Jeremiah and were bitterly offended by them. They heard him warning the people that it would be better for them to 'go forth to the Chaldeans,' than to remain in the city. They angrily demanded of the king that Jeremiah should be slain:

"Let this man be put to death," they declared, 'for he weakeneth the hands of the men of war that remain in the city, as well as the hands of the people. He does not seek the good of this people, but their hurt.'

"The weak king did not want to have the responsibility of putting a prophet of Yahweh to death; at the same time he did not have the strength of character to oppose the princes. Weakly he (like Pilate before the angry Jews in Christ's day) washed his hands of the matter, declaring:

"I can do nothing against you!"

"Thus encouraged, the princes took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of the king. This was a most evil place. The bottom was soft in mire, and as the prophet was flung therein, he sank deeply in the mire . . .

"And there they left him without food or protection."

"In my Bible it does not say that Malchiah was the son of Zedekiah," said Peter.

"It does if you look in the margin," replied his father. "The word 'Hammelech' signifies 'the king.' He was therefore a son of Zedekiah, and though only in his teens,

he was evidently dominated by the evil influence of the faction opposed to Jeremiah."

A Gentile Helps Jeremiah

"But at this time when those who should have known better were busy persecuting the prophet of Yahweh, a Gentile came to his rescue. He was Ebed-melech the Ethiopian. Ebed-melech signifies the servant of the king, and this was evidently the position he occupied. He saw with sorrow the heartless attitude of the king's young son towards the aged prophet, and interceded with Zedekiah.

The king was sitting in the gate of the city as Judge. Ebed-melech went to him, and pleaded the cause of Jeremiah:

"These men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city!"

"The city was rapidly approaching its lowest extremity. Death, famine, pestilence were awaiting it. In such circumstances, the case of Ebed-melech himself would have been grave enough, and most people would be more concerned with looking after their own good than that of an unpopular prophet of doom. But not so this man. Though his skin was black, his heart was white; though he was a Gentile by birth, he was a true Israelite in belief and action; though (as Jeremiah himself had earlier said — (see Jer. 13:23) 'the Ethiopian cannot change his skin', he can change his character. At a time of great personal difficulty, and of risk of his own life, this humane and noble-minded man raised his voice against a most

powerful and intolerant faction in the stricken city in the support of an unpopular cause.

"The king was touched by the appeal. He gave command that Jeremiah was to be taken out of the dungeon. In case the princes attempted to prevent the rescue by force, he told Ebed-melech to take thirty men with him, and draw the prophet out of the mire.

"So Ebed-melech took some worn-out garments and pieces of wood. He went to the deep dungeon where the poor prophet was sunk deep in the mire, and calling upon Jeremiah to place the clouts of wood and the garments under his arm, they drew him out of the dungeon."

"Once out of the miry dungeon, Jeremiah was again retained in the court of the king's house. This was not pleasing to the princes who feared his influence with the king, and their anger was turned on Ebed-melech. But he was given a personal message of encouragement. He was told not to fear, for he would be delivered from the men that sought his life, and though the city would assuredly fall, he would save his life."

"Where do we read that?" asked Peter.

"In Jeremiah 39:15-18."

"He was like Rahab in Jericho," suggested Ann.

"That is a very good illustration," replied her father.

"I am afraid that I am still confused," said Graham. "We seem to dodge about from chapter to chapter in Jeremiah without any sequential order. Can you set the chapters out for me?"

"Yes, I will write you out a guide to those chapters later on," replied his father.

Zedekiah Sinks In The Mire

"Still the siege continued. For eighteen long, terrible months it continued. It continued until all the food was eaten, until people were famished, and walked around the city like living skeletons, until all feelings of humanity towards one another were driven out by the urgent desire for food. Conditions became so bad, that people were prepared to murder one another for food, but they were not prepared to give way to the Babylonians. They remained inflexible in their determination to continue the hopeless fight, manifesting a courage worthy of a better cause. Dreadful sights were daily seen in the stricken city. It became common to see men and women wasted with famine collapsing in the streets to die, or to see corpses black with pestilence dead in the streets. But still the Jews would

not give way. With weakened hands the soldiers defended the walls, with mad hatred in their hearts they murdered anybody who tried to escape, with stupid obstinacy they battled on in the hopeless struggle

"The king sought a further audience with the prophet. Secretly he spake with him where nobody could see them conversing together (Jer. 38:14). He sought council from Yahweh. He received it, but would not act upon it. Jeremiah demanded that the king should surrender the city to the Babylonians. Zedekiah was willing to do so, but he feared the Jews (v. 19). Despite the awful evidence of famine and pestilence about him, despite the fact that in the streets there could be seen those dying 'stricken through for want of the fruits of the field' (Lam. 4:9), with faces blacker than coal, with skin

THE CHAPTERS OF JEREMIAH IN HISTORICAL SEQUENCE

Mr. Phillips promised his family he would outline the historical chapters of Jeremiah in sequence as they relate to the reign of Zedekiah. Here is what he prepared:

Zedekiah's oath of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar at his accension —Ezek. 17:11.

Letter of Jeremiah to exiles, and embassy of two nobles from Jerusalem to Babylon (Jer. 29).

4th year—Jeremiah advises him to reject the ambassadors suggesting that he revolt (Jer. 27).

Jeremiah opposes the false prophets for the same reason (Jer. 28).

Zedekiah goes to Babylon with tribute the same year. (Jer. 51:59).

Deputation to Jeremiah in 9th year Zedekiah (Jer. 21).

Further prophecy as Nebuchadnezzar sweeps south (Jer. 34).

Jerusalem besieged, Egypt advances, siege raised (Jer. 37).

The Broken Covenant (Jer. 34:8-22).

Jeremiah attempts to flee—the prophet imprisoned—the siege renewed (Jer. 37:6-21).

Jeremiah taken by Zedekiah from the dungeon to the court of the prison (Jer. 37:21; 32:1-2). He purchases the field of Hanameel (Jer. 32).

From Jeremiah 38 to 44 the narrative follows historical sequence.

cleaving to their bones, with famished bodies 'become like a stick' (Lam. 4:8), he had not the courage to oppose the powerful faction of princes who would not give way.

"Jeremiah warned him that his folly would bring greater retribution on himself and his household. He told him that his friends who had 'set him on' could not help him. Plainly he declared to the king: 'YOUR FEET ARE SUNK IN THE MIRE!' (Jer. 38:22).

"Thus both prophet and king had sunk in the mire: one literally in the dungeon, the other figuratively in the troubles that encompassed him (Jer. 38:6, 22); one because he had faithfully proclaimed the Word of God, the other because he had followed the foolish wisdom of the flesh.

"The King was too weak to follow the advice of Jeremiah. He still feared the princes, and told Jeremiah not to reveal to them any of his conversation. He commanded him that if they did approach him, he was merely to say that he presented his supplications to the king that he might not be put back into the dungeon.

"Thus, when the princes approached the prophet to enquire of his conversation with the king, threatening him with death if he did not disclose what he had said, he told them what the king had commanded him. This was the truth, and nothing but the truth, but it was not the whole truth. Jeremiah had not the liberty to tell them what the king had prohibited him to say, and so the matter was not known.

EZEKIEL — MESSENGER OF HOPE.

Whilst Jeremiah was ministering to the people in Jerusalem, Daniel and Ezekiel were proclaiming their message to the Israelites in exile. Daniel, like Jeremiah, is full of historical detail, and we hope to tell the story of his adventures shortly. But few personal experiences of Ezekiel are revealed to us, so that in our story we propose merely to summarise his message.

CONDITION OF THE JEWS IN CAPTIVITY

Ezekiel was taken into captivity with the third deportation of Jews that were led away, this being the time of "king Jehoiachin's captivity" (Ch. 1:2).

There were at least six deportations of Jews: 1.—4th year of Jehoiakim (Dan. 1:1); 2.—6 years later when 3023 were taken captive. (Jer. 52:28); 3.—the following year in the reign of Jehoiachin when 10,000 were taken (2 Kings 24:12-16); 4.—Ten years later, when a further 832 were taken (Jer. 52:29); 5.—The following year when there was a further deportation of the upper classes (2 Kings 25:11-12); 6.—Four years later (23rd Nebuchadnezzar) when a further 745 persons were taken (Jer. 52:30). Some of these numbers might relate to families rather than individuals.

The Jewish exiles were distributed into different settlements throughout Babylonia where they formed small communities with certain organization and freedom of worship.

One such colony was at Tel-Abib (Ezek. 3:15), and in it Ezekiel must have been a dominant personality. The elders of the community came to highly regard him for his message (Ezek. 8:1), and to delight to hearken to him expound the purpose of Yahweh (Ezek. 33:31).

At this time, in Jerusalem, Jeremiah was battling against the deadly dope of the false prophets (see Jer. 27:9; 28:1-11) who had spread the idea that those who remained were Heaven's favourites, that the city would be Divinely protected, and they would not be removed (Ezek. 11:15; 33:24).

This idea even spread to those in exile. There, infatuated Jews were seized with the idea that their captivity would soon end (Ezek. 13:16, 19) in spite of the messages of Jeremiah to the contrary. Their teaching was supported by the false prophet of Jerusalem, Hananiah, who predicted that they would return in two years with the vessels of the Temple (Jer. 28). Jeremiah wrote to the exiles warning them to take no heed (Jer. 29). His letter was replied to by one of the exiles—Shemaiah—who suggested that the priest Zephaniah should imprison Jeremiah as a madman (Jer. 29:24-28).

But the death of Hananiah, the ministry of Ezekiel, successive captivities, soon destroyed all hopes of a speedy return.

EZEKIEL THE MAN

He was a man of determination who refused to be deterred by opposition (Ezek. 3:8-9). He was commanded to proclaim the Word whether people hearkened or not, and this he did. (Ezek. 2:5-7). He was not a fluent man, and words did not come easily from him (Ch. 3:26), but when they did they were weighty and impressive. Later, after the fall of Jerusalem, when his prophecies had been vindicated in part, he found himself speaking much more fluently (Ch. 33:22).

He seemed to have been held in respect by the Jews though they did not heed his word (Ch. 33:21). He gives the impression of being rather austere, standing aloof from what took place about it, condemning the attitude of the Jews both by word as by symbolic action.

His name signifies: "God (El) will strengthen," and as he uses the title "Son of Man" nearly one hundred times we have the joint thought: God will strengthen the Son of Man. Thus our attention is drawn to the Lord Jesus who is described as the "Son of Man, whom Thou (Yahweh) madest strong for Thyself." (Ps. 80:17). He thus types the Lord Jesus, so that in some of the prophecies relating to the glory of the Lord in the age to come, Ezekiel is shown as enacting the very things that Christ will then do.

Ezekiel was a priest, and (again like Christ) commenced to prophesy at the age of thirty (Ezek. 1:1). He was married (Ezek. 24:16-17), and lived in his own house at Tel-Abib (Ezek. 8:1). He dramatised the message he delivered to the people, lying on his side for a period of 430 years whilst he enacted the siege of Jerusalem (Ezek. 4), shaving his head to indicate that the Nazarite nation had "defiled the head of its consecration" (Ezek. 5; Num. 6:9), and so on. The sudden death of his dearly-beloved wife came as a shock, but he was commanded not to mourn (Ezek. 24:16-17) as on the same year Jerusalem (Yahweh's wife—Isa. 54:4) had likewise come to its death.

EZEKIEL'S THEME

The re-occurring statement of his prophecy is: "They shall know that I am Yahweh". It occurs 29 times in recording punishment on Jerusalem, 24 times in recording punishment on Gentile nations, 17 times in recording the restoration and final blessing.

The Book of Ezekiel can be summarised as follows: Chapters 1-3 describe his call and commission; chapters 4-24 outline Jerusalem's im-

pending judgment; chapters 25-39 foretell judgments on the Gentiles intermixed with the restoration of Israel; chapters 40-48 take us into the final glory when the Kingdom of God will be restored.

Ezekiel is noted for two major themes: that of the Cherubim and the Temple of the Age to Come. In the symbolism of the Cherubim he saw the Yahweh's glory depart from Jerusalem (Ezek. 9:3; 10:4; 18; 11: 23) only to return in a new form in the future age (Ezek. 43:1-2). In his indictment on Jerusalem he predicted the defilement and destruction of the Temple, whilst his latter chapters describe its restoration as a House of Prayer for all nations in the Age to come.

Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel comprise the Apocalypse (Book of Revelation) of the Old Testament. There is hardly a theme in the Revelation that is not dealt with by these prophets. Jeremiah predicted the complete downfall of Babylon in language similar to that in which John records the overthrow of mystical Babylon. Ezekiel wrote of the Cherubim, as also does John in the book of Revelation. Ezekiel was given a little book to eat (Ezek. 3:1-4), as was also John in Patmos (Rev. 10). Ezekiel spake of Gouge and Magog, as also did John. Ezekiel had a vision of a material Temple, and the Revelation reveals John's vision of a spiritual Temple. And as Ezekiel concludes with the statement: "Yahweh is there" (Ezek. 48:35), John ends his with the prayer: "Even so come, Lord Jesus!"

Ezekiel performed a valuable service in exile: his ministrations prepared a generation which was fit to return to the land after the 70 years' captivity predicted by Jeremiah had been completed. A study of his writings can help fit us for a place in the Kingdom that Christ will set up on earth when he returns to restore the throne of David as predicted by Ezekiel the prophet (Ezek. 21).

