

EDITORIAL

Peace Without Honour

"All these things happened for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Cor. 10:11.)

Seeking Peace

Jehoshaphat is described as a "good" king. He enjoyed a long and prosperous reign over Judah. He was pre-eminently a man of peace. As such he desired unity in Israel, of healing the breach that had taken place during the reign of Rehoboam.

He doubtless was applauded for attempting to do this. It seemed the right thing at the time. After all, both north and south were part of the covenant nation; they both worshipped the one God; they spake the same language. And did not Israel's greatest king write those compelling words: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Ps. 133:1)?

There were awkward problems, of course. There was "that woman Jezebel" (Rev. 2:20). She displayed open hostility to the teaching of Yahweh's prophets. There were others who had reservations about the Statement of Faith; and a few also who openly blasphemed the way of Truth established by the pioneers of the nation. But Jehoshaphat was convinced that he could handle those issues.

Moreover, there were a number of prominent men in Judah, who encouraged him to go ahead with his project. But subsequent history reveals something he never saw. Instead of consolidating the Kingdom upon a firm basis of truth and righteousness, his efforts made bad worse, and his interference ultimately brought tragic results. The union confirmed the northern Kingdom in its apostasy; and as far as Judah and Jerusalem were concerned the fruits of his policy led to violence, bloodshed and murder of such proportions as to jeopardise the continuance of the line of David.

The trouble was that Jehoshaphat travelled the wrong road towards unity. He got mixed up in his objectives. He confused union with unity. This has happened frequently, and is being repeated today. Of course, there is always the assumption that

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those possessing the Truth, like Jehoshaphat then, and many today, have the strength to keep in check any spirit of apostasy manifested by others who are drawn into the scheme proposed. There were false prophets in the days of Jeremiah who proclaimed peace when there was no peace, and dared to do so in the name of Yahweh (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). "We looked for peace," commented the prophet, "but no good came; and for a time of health, and behold trouble!" (Jer. 8:15).

On ascending the throne, Jehoshaphat commenced well. He carefully assessed the prevailing situation, and recognised the threat of apostasy from the north. He "strengthened himself against Israel" (2 Chron. 17:1). He saw that the standards of the northern kingdom under Ahab his contemporary, both in teaching and in practice, were

contrary to the ways of Yahweh, and in view of the danger he wisely set up barriers against the north by strengthening Judah. This is certainly the thing to do in such circumstances. Not merely by fortifying the walls of border-cities, but by confirming the hearts of the people. The record implies that Jehoshaphat did this. How best to apply the "ensample" today? By strengthening every member of an ecclesia in the Truth which is the foundation of worship. Take the doctrine of the Atonement, for example. It is under challenge today. There are those who describe the pioneers' teaching as "blasphemous"; and others who turn it aside as unimportant. There is need for the strengthening of individuals in its truth; a consolidation of the strength of ecclesias in that which unites them, and enables them to resist the onslaughts of error. It is not enough that they "keep" with an ecclesia; they need to endorse the policy and teaching of what is proclaimed. The principle of the Atonement needs to be worked out in action. Success in debate is only halfway to true reform. Each individual must be consolidated in knowledge and faith and taught the need of separating from error. Ecclesial members need to be alerted as to what constitutes the Truth, and the importance of maintaining it in understanding and application. The principles of knowledge must be proclaimed clearly and effectively, so that the youngest or newest member understands, and is capable of distinguishing light from darkness.

Defensive Preparations

In the beginning Jehoshaphat's policy was clear. There was no doubt nor hesitation in his mind as to the course that ought to be pursued. He did not simply think that it would be a good thing to

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strengthen the defences of his Kingdom against Israel and then put it aside; he did not momentarily plan what ought to be done, and then put it off for a more convenient season; he carried out his objective with purpose of heart, and in so doing challenged, or isolated, the northern Kingdom.

He did not openly declare war against Ahab. There was no specific act of aggression. There is nothing belligerent in the statement of 2 Chron. 17:1. He simply "strengthened himself". He prepared his kingdom against any eventuality. His action was not only judicious but pleasing to both God and man. It is commended in v.4: "he sought to the God of his father, and walked in His commandments, and not after the doings of Israel". He established a clear line of demarcation between the two Kingdoms. His subjects were not plagued by doubts; but united in confidence. They minded their own business; and followed the example of their King who "sought not unto Baalim" (v.3).

At that stage, Jehoshaphat was single-minded. He did not seek to do good whilst pandering to error. He did not strengthen himself against Israel, whilst considering that perhaps the northern kingdom could be changed with a little help. He did not delude himself with the idea that union would strengthen both Kingdoms against the heathen outside, even though they did not agree in policy. In short, he "did not do evil that good may come", a policy which Paul describes as worthy of condemnation (Rom. 3:8). It is easy to do this. Some would blunt the point of doctrine, or go halfway in fellowship in their search for union. They are prepared to do a little compromising to gain it. Jeremiah was warned of such a policy. He was told: "Let them return unto thee; but return not unto

them" (Jer. 15:19). He learned the mistake of turning to those who compromised. Later he prayed to Yahweh: "Remember that I stood before Thee to speak good for them, and to turn away Thy wrath from them" (Jer. 18:20). But it was in vain that he did so.

Meanwhile, Jehoshaphat found that the conduct of separateness paid dividends: "Therefore Yahweh stablished the kingdom in his hand; and he had riches and honour in abundance" (v.5).

His strength came from knowledge. He maintained a policy of instruction that his subjects might continue to be strengthened in the need for separateness, and the Kingdom united in worship. He conferred with his Arranging Brethren and organised a Special Effort. Certain skilled in the Word were sent throughout his realm:

"And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the Law of Yahweh with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people."

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Compromising

But how easy it is for men of sound principle to be deflected from a policy of strength, and reverse the very stand they previously, with vigour, endorsed. Especially when they have attained unto "affluence and honour in abundance". So it was with Jehoshaphat; and in this a great lesson is taught. As his power grew he became over-confident in his ability to resist the influence of Ahab whilst endeavouring to help him. The record significantly states:

"Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance, and joined affinity with Ahab" (2 Chron. 18:1).

To seek such an affinity was natural. Judah and Israel were substantially one. The covenants and promises included all twelve tribes. Surrounding them were powerful enemies who were preparing to attack. One could reason that wisdom and strength was in unity. It would bring to an end the constant friction between the divided people, and with their combined efforts they could better resist the enemy around. Perhaps by such means the northern kingdom could be induced to unite more completely with the worship in Jerusalem (though Ahab gave no such agreement). There is no doubt that Jehoshaphat's motivation would be good. But there was also no doubt, as history unfolded, that it was wrong. He had commenced by "strengthening himself against Israel" (Ch. 17:1), but he ended by joining affinity with Ahab in the unequal yokes of Marriage (Ch. 21:6), War (Ch. 18:2-34) and Commerce (Ch. 20:35-36). The line of demarcation was blurred to provide for this. Jehoshaphat explained to his princes and people the desirability of union with those against whom he had previously warned and strengthened them. And each of the three avenues of affinity completely failed.

The Failure Of Compromise

What is the lesson? We see it in the ecclesial world today. Is not the resistance of ecclesias being undermined by marriage problems, by lowering the barriers of fellowship to join hands with others in a war of propaganda against the heathen round about? Or to unite in fraternal gatherings? But has such a policy ever strengthened those within against those without? Do not we deplore the fall in true standards and doctrines with ecclesias today? Is there not need to "strengthen ourselves" against such pressures from within and

without?

The policy of compromise that Jehoshaphat initiated, resulted in

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the most disastrous consequences. It commenced by blunting the vigorous opposition he had previously manifested towards Ahab. The folly of his action was shown when the two kings jointly reviewed their troops. When he requested of Ahab that they consult the oracle of Yahweh through a prophet by name of Micaiah, Ahab protested: "He never prophesied good unto me, but always evil". Instead of Jehoshaphat administering a sharp rebuke at such a stupid and irreverent statement, he countered it with an innocuous, polite protest: "Let not the king say so!"

Even more disastrous was the consequences of his affinity with Ahab. For it resulted in marriage between Jehoram his son, and Athaliah the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. Athaliah was a true daughter of Jezebel. The evil of Ahab's house, far from being resisted by Judah, in time took over the southern kingdom. The alliance resulted in murder and insurrection against Yahweh. First, Jehoram, influenced no doubt by Athaliah to rid any challenge to his rule, murdered the sons of Jehoshaphat as well as numerous princes of the realm (2 Chron 21:4). Instead of strengthening the Kingdom, as his father had done, he "strengthened himself" (v.4). The leaven of Ahab's house was now felt throughout the southern kingdom. The fortresses could have kept the army at bay — but not the seductive doctrine and evil example of the house of Ahab which now penetrated the southern kingdom. The people "loved to have it so", and Jehoshaphat could not resist it; because he was dead. He was dead, but the folly of his policy of compromise lived on. Athaliah was a female monster who, on the assassination of her husband, determined to rule, and in order to rid herself of any competition, she murdered in cold blood "all the seed royal" (2 Chron. 22:10). With her mother she hated the worship of Yahweh, and used the threat of violence and the weapon of murder to ensure her rule. With the destruction of the seed royal what of the covenant that guaranteed the continuance of the Seed of David? The violence of the inhuman Athaliah had snapped the thread and destroyed the covenant. She had proved Yahweh to be ineffectual; for the line of David had ceased.

So some thought.

But Yahweh had "promised to give a light to David and to his sons for ever" (2 Chr. 21:7), and in spite of what people thought, so it proved.

Among the heap of bloodied bodies of the seed royal, thrown callously on one side, was a mere baby less than 12 months of age.

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Probably flung down to die, knocked unconscious, covered with the blood of his relations, he was considered dead. But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of Athaliah, observed a spark of life in him. She was a woman strengthened in her resolve to worship Yahweh by her strong-minded, fearless and faithful husband. She rescued the baby; hid him from his inhuman and vicious grandmother, and with her husband, the righteous Jehoiada, brought him up secretly until his seventh year. Then, after careful preparation, the child was

proclaimed king; and Athaliah was executed.

All this evil and bloodshed (and more was to follow), stemmed from Jehoshaphat's compromising policy of affinity with the house of Ahab. How careful we must be in our relationships. For these things were not recorded as mere interesting historical episodes, but as examples for us to apply in our worship of Yahweh. They are records of the past with clear lessons for the future. The offer of union is dangled before ecclesias today like carrots before donkeys. But not always on sound principles. We have sought to help the cause of unity where the issues are sound, but are opposed to mere union based on a policy of emotion, compromise of basic doctrines of the Truth, or refusal to implement the terms of fellowship. It is useless pressing the value of unity in the absence of what truly establishes it. Indeed there comes a time when it is best to stand aside, and for the benefit of all concerned, wait patiently for truth to prevail. There are many in different parts of the ecclesial world pressing for union, without proper regard for the requirements of unity: the elevation of Yahweh's ways in doctrine and fellowship. In the absence of such, the warning example of Scripture is recorded in the failure of Jehoshaphat's policy of compromise and it should be given careful consideration. To hasten the cause of mere affinity without the unifying influence of a mutual acceptance and application of the truth can set in train a course of action that can lead to disastrous results. We cannot risk that on the eve of Christ's return; we need to strengthen the things that remain, and until a sound basis for true unity is mutually accepted, await the coming of the Lord who will establish it on principles that will be honouring to Yahweh in doctrine and practice. The wisdom from above is "first pure, then peaceable" (James 3:17). Its fruits will be seen in the age to come.

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