June 25, 2016

Prison Ministry

**Prophets and Kings** (1917) Edition – Chapter 15 – “Jehoshaphat”

Until called to the throne at the age of thirty-five, Jehoshaphat had before him the example of good King Asa, who in nearly every crisis had done "that which was right in the eyes of the Lord." 1 Kings 15:11. During a prosperous reign of twenty-five years, Jehoshaphat sought to walk "in all the ways of Asa his father; he turned not aside."

In his efforts to rule wisely, Jehoshaphat endeavored to persuade his subjects to take a firm stand against idolatrous practices. Many of the people in his realm "offered and burnt incense yet in the high places." 1 Kings 22:43. The king did not at once destroy these shrines; but from the beginning he tried to safeguard Judah from the sins characterizing the northern kingdom under the rule of Ahab, of whom he was a contemporary for many years. Jehoshaphat himself was loyal to God. He "sought not unto Baalim; but sought to the Lord God of his father, and walked in His commandments, and not after the doings of Israel." Because of his integrity, the Lord was with him, and "stablished the kingdom in his hand." 2 Chronicles 17:3-5.

"All Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents; and he had riches and honor in abundance. And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord." As time passed and reformations were wrought, the king "took away the high places and groves out of Judah." Verses 5, 6. "And the remnant of the Sodomites, which remained in the days of his father Asa, he took out of the land." 1 Kings 22:46. Thus gradually the inhabitants of Judah were freed from many of the perils that had been threatening to retard seriously their spiritual development. {PK 191.1}

Throughout the kingdom the people were in need of instruction in the law of God. In an understanding of this law lay their safety; by conforming their lives to its requirements they would become loyal both to God and to man. Knowing this, Jehoshaphat took steps to ensure to his people thorough instruction in the Holy Scriptures. The princes in charge of the different portions of his realm were directed to arrange for the faithful ministry of teaching priests. By royal appointment these instructors, working under the direct supervision of the princes, "went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people." 2 Chronicles 17:7-9. And as many endeavored to understand God's requirements and to put away sin, a revival was effected.

To this wise provision for the spiritual needs of his subjects, Jehoshaphat owed much of his prosperity as a ruler. In obedience to God's law there is great gain. In conformity to the divine requirements there is a transforming power that brings peace and good will among men. If the teachings of God's word were made the controlling influence in the life of every man and woman, if mind and heart were brought under its restraining power, the evils that now exist in national and in social life would find no place. From every home would go forth an influence that would make men and women strong in spiritual insight and in moral power, and thus nations and individuals would be placed on vantage ground.

For many years Jehoshaphat lived in peace, unmolested by surrounding nations. "The fear of the Lord fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah." Verse 10. From Philistia he received tribute money and presents; from Arabia, large flocks of sheep and goats. "Jehoshaphat waxed great exceedingly; and he built in Judah castles, and cities of stores. . . . Men of war, mighty men of valor, . . . waited on the king, beside those whom the king put in the fenced cities throughout all Judah." Verses 12-19. Blessed abundantly with "riches and honor," he was enabled to wield a mighty influence for truth and righteousness. 2 Chronicles 18:1.

Some years after coming to the throne, Jehoshaphat, now in the height of his prosperity, consented to the marriage of his son, Jehoram, to Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. By this union there was formed between the kingdoms of Judah and Israel an alliance which was not in the order of God and which in a time of crisis brought disaster to the king and to many of his subjects.

On one occasion Jehoshaphat visited the king of Israel at Samaria. Special honor was shown the royal guest from Jerusalem, and before the close of his visit he was persuaded to unite with the king of Israel in war against the Syrians. Ahab hoped that by joining his forces with those of Judah he might regain Ramoth, one of the old cities of refuge, which, he contended, rightfully belonged to the Israelites.

Although Jehoshaphat in a moment of weakness had rashly promised to join the king of Israel in his war against the Syrians, yet his better judgment led him to seek to learn the will of God concerning the undertaking. "Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord today," he suggested to Ahab. In response, Ahab called together four hundred of the false prophets of Samaria, and asked of them, "Shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear?" And they answered, "Go up; for God will deliver it into the kings's hand." Verses 4, 5.

Unsatisfied, Jehoshaphat sought to learn for a certainty the will of God. "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord," he asked, "that we might inquire of him?" Verse 6. "There is yet one man, Micaiah to son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord," Ahab answered; "but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." 1 Kings 22:8. Jehoshaphat was firm in his request that the man of God be called; and upon appearing before them and being adjured by Ahab to tell "nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord," Micaiah said: "I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the Lord said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace." Verses 16, 17.

The words of the prophet should have been enough to show the kings that their project was not favored by Heaven, but neither ruler felt inclined to heed the warning. Ahab had marked out his course, and he was determined to follow it. Jehoshaphat had given his word of honor, "We will be with thee in the war;" and after making such a promise, he was reluctant to withdraw his forces. 2 Chronicles 18:3. "So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead." 1 Kings 22:29.

During the battle that followed, Ahab was shot by an arrow, and at eventide he died. "About the going down of the sun," "there went a proclamation throughout the host," "Every man to his city, and every man to his own country." Verse 36. Thus was fulfilled the word of the prophet.

From this disastrous battle Jehoshaphat returned to Jerusalem. As he approached the city, the prophet Jehu met him with the reproof: "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord. Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God." 2 Chronicles 19:2, 3. {PK 196.3}

The later years of Jehoshaphat's reign were largely spent in strengthening the national and spiritual defenses of Judah. He "went out again through the people from Beersheba to Mount Ephraim, and brought them back unto the Lord God of their fathers." Verse 4.

One of the important steps taken by the king was the establishment and maintenance of efficient courts of justice. He "set judges in the land throughout all the fenced cities of Judah, city by city;" and in the charge given them he urged: "Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts." Verses 5-7.

The judicial system was perfected by the founding of a court of appeal at Jerusalem, where Jehoshaphat "set of the Levites, and of the priests, and of the chief of the fathers of Israel, for the judgment of the Lord, and for controversies." Verse 8.

The king exhorted these judges to be faithful. "Thus shall ye do in the fear of the Lord, faithfully, and with a perfect heart," he charged them. "And what cause soever shall come to you of your brethren that dwell in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and judgments, ye shall even warn them that they trespass not against the Lord, and so wrath come upon you, and upon your brethren: this do, and ye shall not trespass.

"And, behold, Amariah the chief priest is over you in all matters of the Lord; and Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the ruler of the house of Judah, for all the king's matters: also the Levites shall be officers before you. {PK 197.4}

"Deal courageously, and the Lord shall be with the good." Verses 9-11.

In his careful safeguarding of the rights and liberties of his subjects, Jehoshaphat emphasized the consideration that every member of the human family receives from the God of justice, who rules over all. "God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; He judgeth among the gods." And those who are appointed to act as judges under Him, are to "defend the poor and fatherless;" they are to "do justice to the afflicted and needy," and "rid them out of the hand of the wicked." Psalm 82:1, 3, 4.

Toward the close of Jehoshaphat's reign the kingdom of Judah was invaded by an army before whose approach the inhabitants of the land had reason to tremble. "The children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle." Tidings of this invasion reached the king through a messenger, who appeared with the startling word, "There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria: and, behold, they be in Hazazon-tamar, which is Engedi." 2 Chronicles 20:1, 2.

Jehoshaphat was a man of courage and valor. For years he had been strengthening his armies and his fortified cities. He was well prepared to meet almost any foe; yet in this crisis he put not his trust in the arm of flesh. Not by disciplined armies and fenced cities, but by a living faith in the God of Israel, could he hope to gain the victory over these heathen who boasted of their power to humble Judah in the eyes of the nations. "Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the Lord: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord."

Standing in the temple court before his people, Jehoshaphat poured out his soul in prayer, pleading God's promises, with confession of Israel's helplessness. "O Lord God of our fathers" he petitioned, "art not Thou God in heaven? and rulest not Thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in Thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand Thee? Art not Thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before Thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham Thy friend forever? And they dwelt therein, and have built Thee a sanctuary therein for Thy name, saying, If, when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in Thy presence, (for Thy name is in this house,) and cry unto Thee in our affliction, then Thou wilt hear and help.

"And now, behold, the children of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom Thou wouldest not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them, and destroyed them not; behold, I say, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of Thy possession, which Thou hast given us to inherit. O our God, wilt Thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee." Verses 3-12.

With confidence Jehoshaphat could say to the Lord, "Our eyes are upon thee." For years he had taught the people to trust in the One who in past ages had so often interposed to save His chosen ones from utter destruction; and now, when the kingdom was in peril, Jehoshaphat did not stand alone; "all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children." Verse 13. Unitedly they fasted and prayed; unitedly they besought the Lord to put their enemies to confusion, that the name of Jehovah might be glorified.

"Keep not Thou silence, O God: Hold not Thy peace, and be not still, O God.

For, lo, Thine enemies make a tumult:

And they that hate Thee have lifted up the head. They have taken crafty counsel against Thy people,

And consulted against Thy hidden ones.

They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; That the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.

For they have consulted together with one consent: They are confederate against Thee:

The tabernacles of Edom, and the Ishmaelites; Of Moab, and the Hagarenes;

Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek. . . .

Do unto them as unto the Midianites; As to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kison: . . .

Let them be confounded and troubled forever; Yea, let them be put to shame, and perish:

That men may know that Thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, Art the Most High over all the earth."

Psalm 83.

As the people joined with their king in humbling themselves before God, and asking Him for help, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel, "a Levite of the sons of Asaph," and he said:

"Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou King Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the Lord unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them: for the Lord will be with you."

"Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the Lord, worshiping the Lord. And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the Lord God of Israel with a loud voice on high."

Early in the morning they rose and went into the wilderness of Tekoa. As they advanced to the battle, Jehoshaphat said, "Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established: believe His prophets, so shall ye prosper." "And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the Lord, and that should praise the beauty of holiness." 2 Chronicles 20:14-21. These singers went before the army, lifting their voices in praise to God for the promise of victory.

It was a singular way of going to battle against the enemy's army--praising the Lord with singing, and exalting the God of Israel. This was their battle song. They possessed the beauty of holiness. If more praising of God were engaged in now, hope and courage and faith would steadily increase. And would not this strengthen the hands of the valiant soldiers who today are standing in defense of truth?

"The Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten. For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, everyone helped to destroy another.

"And when Judah came toward the watchtower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multitude, and, behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped." Verses 22-24.

God was the strength of Judah in this crisis, and He is the strength of His people today. We are not to trust in princes, or to set men in the place of God. We are to remember that human beings are fallible and erring, and that He who has all power is our strong tower of defense. In every emergency we are to feel that the battle is His. His resources are limitless, and apparent impossibilities will make the victory all the greater.

"Save us, O God of our salvation,

And gather us together,

And deliver us from the heathen,

That we may give thanks to Thy holy name,

And glory in Thy praise."

1 Chronicles 16:35.

Laden with spoil, the armies of Judah returned "with joy; for the Lord had made them to rejoice over their enemies. And they came to Jerusalem with psalteries and harps and trumpets unto the house of the Lord." 2 Chronicles 20:27, 28. Great was their cause for rejoicing. In obedience to the command, "Stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord: . . . fear not, nor be dismayed," they had put their trust wholly in God, and He had proved to be their fortress and their deliverer. Verse 17. Now they could sing with understanding the inspired hymns of David:

"God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. . . .

He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; He burneth the chariot in the fire.

Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.

The Lord of hosts is with us;The God of Jacob is our refuge."

Psalm 46.

"According to Thy name, O God, So is Thy praise unto the ends of the earth: Thy right hand is full of righteousness.

Let Mount Zion rejoice, Let the daughters of Judah be glad, Because of Thy judgments. . . .

"This God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death."

Psalm 48:10-14.

Through the faith of Judah's ruler and of his armies "the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries, when they had heard that the Lord fought against the enemies of Israel. So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet: for his God gave him rest." 2 Chronicles 20:29, 30.

Next Mailing: **Prophets and Kings** (1917) Edition Chapter 16 - The Fall of the House of Ahab