

# JOSIAH AND REVIVAL

by W.W. Fereday

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*W.W. Fereday traces the life of King Josiah and the revival he led in Judah, applying its lessons to spiritual renewal in every age.*

31 Chapters

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## Josiah and Revival

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## Foreword

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There is a widespread feeling of disappointment amongst the children of God at the present time because of the apparent non-success of their Gospel labors. The masses are less and less disposed to accept our invitations, and come together to hear the marvelous story of God's grace. The Sunday newspaper, the radio, and the many facilities for fleshly indulgence such as our fathers never dreamed of, are doing their deadly work in every direction. Even Britain, so long favored with an open Bible, is rapidly becoming a pagan land. In conversation with individuals, one is frequently amazed at their absolute ignorance of even the outlines of Divine truth. An officer recently asked me who Moses was, for he had never heard the name before! Possibly the people in Central Africa are now more familiar with the things of God than the people of Britain. The need for revival is anxiously expressed. The following pages may serve to point the way to a true revival in spiritual things.

Some years ago the English religious denominations organized a "Come to Church Campaign." The aim was to fill the "Churches" for at least one occasion. But much more than this is needed if souls are to be eternally blessed. In our Lord's familiar parable of the Great Supper in Luke 14, the man who spread the feast said, "that my house may be filled" (Luke 14:23). Generous grace! But the house of the parable is not a Parish Church, but the festal hall above. God wants that place filled.

Josiah was able to accomplish wonderful things for God in a particularly difficult time, because (1) he sought the Lord with all his heart; (2) because he was determined to be obedient in every detail to the written Word of God; and (3) because he, set himself diligently to cast away from himself and from the sphere of his influence everything that was inconsistent with the divine law. Given these conditions in any locality, we might see great things yet, so gracious is our God. But shortened addresses, solos, choruses, and other unapostolical methods are poor substitutes for the spiritual features which characterized King Josiah, and which drew forth such blessing from God in the closing days of Israel's sad national history.

The careful reader will probably notice some repetitions and a few minor errors in this book. Kindly consideration for old age and infirmity will excuse these things. Even the youngest reader may become old himself some day and lose his alertness!

## For a Memorial

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That night in Egypt was to be kept in perpetual remembrance by the people of Israel. That it might never be forgotten, the Passover was to be observed annually as a feast to Jehovah throughout their generations. “Ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever” (Ex. 12:14). There is a dangerous tendency in the human heart to forget, particularly in matters relating to God. How often in Deuteronomy—that book which gives us Moses’ final addresses to the people—we come across such admonitions as “Beware lest thou forget” (Deut. 6:12), and “Take heed that ye remember.” Peter’s last epistle was written in order that his readers might after his departure have his teaching “always in remembrance” (2 Pet. 1:2). One of the marks of a backslider, according to this apostle, is his having “forgotten that he was purged from his old sins” (2 Pet. 1:9).

The Lord’s Supper comes to mind here. The Savior was on the eve of death when He instituted it. His wonderful course on earth was ending, and He was about to undergo the supreme anguish of Calvary. Only by His death could atonement be effected and salvation be made possible for sinful men. Yet even One so divinely unique as He, and a sacrifice so stupendous as the sacrifice of Himself, would be in danger of being forgotten by His own. Accordingly He gave to His disciples first the bread, and then the cup, saying, “This do in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19-20). Years after His return to heaven’s glory, the Holy Spirit reiterated His words in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25, adding, “as often as ye eat the bread and drink the cup, ye do show forth the Lord’s death till He come.” Thus during the whole period of His absence on high, the Lord’s Supper remains with the Church as the memorial of her once-slain Lord and Savior. The absurdity of encouraging any to partake thereof who have no saving knowledge of Christ should be apparent; for how can I recall to remembrance a person I have never known?

Year by year the Passover feast was to be observed in Israel. In this way the goodness of God was to be kept alive in the minds of the people, and the mighty fact that He redeemed them from the bondage of Egypt, taking them into relationship with Himself on the ground of the blood of the lamb. Connected with the Passover there were to be seven days of unleavened bread. Leaven is everywhere in Scripture the type of evil. Thus, in God’s picture book, as elsewhere in the plainest language, He insists upon purity of life and doctrine in all whom grace has sheltered beneath the Savior’s blood.

The children of the Israelites came into the divine thought also. They were to be carefully instructed as to the meaning of the Paschal feast. The case is supposed in Exodus 12:26-27 of the children inquiring at a later date, “What mean ye by this service?” The parents were to reply “It is the sacrifice of Jehovah’s Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when He smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses.” Let us in this day see to it that we are not only ourselves under the shelter of the blood of the Lamb, but that our children are also in the same position of divine security. The wrath of God against all ungodliness is a tremendous reality, from which nothing can screen either ourselves or our children but the Savior’s blood.

## The Child-King

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Solomon, in his book of Ecclesiastes (which contains much sound wisdom concerning “things under the sun”) says, “Woe to thee, O land, when thy King is a child (Eccl. 10:16). In earlier days than those of Josiah, Jehovah said with regard to Israel: “I will give children to be their princes, and with childishness shall they rule over them” (Isa. 3:4). This was judgment upon a people who did not value His word, and who had no desire to walk in His ways. It is hard to say which is worse for a nation, a child in years or a man with a childish mind. In the book of Ecclesiastes we read again: “Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished” (Eccl. 4:13). God’s thought in connection with kingship is expressed in His description of David in Psalm 78:72: “He fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands.” A land blessed with such a ruler is blessed indeed; but David was far from perfect, and God’s ideal King will not be seen until our Lord Jesus returns from heaven.

It is startling to read in 2 Chronicles 34:1: “Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign.” This was surely not as it should be! Every nation needs strong and sound leadership, that evil may be suppressed, and that righteousness may prevail. What could a child of eight do with a turbulent people far advanced in iniquity, and dangerously near to overwhelming, judgment? The sequel will show that Jehovah had mercy on the child, and also upon the nation. Josiah shines upon the page of inspiration as one of its brightest lights. His name means “Given of Jehovah.” This is suggestive. Such a pious and conscientious king was a priceless gift to the people of Judah at a critical juncture. Through him Jehovah made a last tender appeal to his erring people before expelling them from the land. Would that the reign of Josiah could have been a long one! Alas, his own folly cut it short!

This young king’s father Amon was murdered at the early age of twenty-four. He was a very wicked man who profited nothing by Jehovah’s stern dealings with his own father Manasseh. The doings of these kings must be kept in mind if we would understand the wonderful work of the Spirit of God in Judah during the thirty-one years of Josiah’s administration (2 Chron. 33:21-25).

Manasseh was twelve years old when he succeeded his father Hezekiah. He was therefore born during the fifteen years of extension of life which were granted to Hezekiah in answer to his prayers and tears (Isa. 38:5). There can be no doubt that Manasseh was carefully instructed in the ways of God, for Hezekiah said: “the father to the children shall make known Thy truth” (Isa. 38:19). Let every Christian father note this carefully, and follow Hezekiah’s good example (read also Psa. 78:1-8). In spite of his early advantages, Manasseh became the wickedest king that Judah had ever known. His enormities made it impossible for Jehovah to tolerate the presence of the people in His land. Manasseh practiced every form of idolatry; he indulged deeply in spiritism; and he freely slaughtered all who dared to oppose his evil ways. After many years of these devilries, in defiance of many warning messages sent to him by Jehovah, the king of Assyria was allowed to come up against him. In the days of Hezekiah, an earlier king of Assyria came against Jerusalem and its king to his own ruin. But it was otherwise with Manasseh; the invader dragged

him from his throne, and carried him away to a prison in Babylon. (Babylon at that time was not an independent kingdom, but was subject to the king of Assyria). Manasseh's downfall brought him to his senses. "When he was in affliction, he besought Jehovah his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him: and He was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that Jehovah He was God" (2 Chron. 33:12-13). His energy after his return to his own country was remarkable. He sought to extirpate all the evils that he had set up; he repaired the long-disused altar of Jehovah, and "commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel" (2 Chron. 33:16). But whatever good Manasseh may have accomplished in his later years he failed to influence Amon his son. He had taught him to serve the devil, and he persisted in that dread service. "He humbled not himself before Jehovah as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more" (2 Chron. 33:23). When he ascended the throne of Judah after his father's long reign of fifty-five years, his ways were so abominable that he was murdered within two years. It is written of both these kings that "he was buried in the garden of Uzza" (2 Kings 21:18, 26). Thus beneath centuries of accumulated rubbish there lie these two kings-Manasseh and Amon, father and son. The father was sixty-seven years old when he died, and the son was twenty-four; the father has gone to heaven, and the son has gone to hell; and, awful thought, his father taught him the way to hell. Gladly would Manasseh have undone the mischief that he had wrought in his unconverted days, but it was impossible. The evil had gone too deeply into the hearts of the people and of his own son in particular, to be eradicated by his influence. It is easier to put souls upon the downward road than to pull them off it again.

The early manifestation of piety in Josiah arrests us. His father, as we have seen, was an exceptionally wicked man, and of his mother we know nothing, save that she was "Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath" (2 Kings 22:1). From whence then did the child Josiah get spiritual instruction? From his grandfather Manasseh, undoubtedly. The thoroughness with which the latter sought to undo the evil work of his former years would fill him with concern for his grandson. If Amon scoffed at his father's entreaties and plunged still more deeply into iniquity, there was hope that the child would pay heed. Josiah was six years old when Manasseh died. What is implanted in the mind during the first six years of a child's life is not easily uprooted. Timothy owed much to his pious mother and grandmother. Of his father nothing is recorded save that he was a Greek. So carefully was Timothy trained spiritually that Paul could say to him later on: "From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 3:15). It has been said that filling the mind of a child with the Scriptures is like the laying of a fire, which a simple match will cause to blaze up. Let a Christian parent who may read these lines not neglect this service. Children are a serious responsibility concerning which we must give account in the day of the Lord Jesus.

A number of years ago I baptized a man eighty-five years old and a lad of fifteen. The contrast impressed me deeply, and in my address I remarked that I scarcely knew for which of these we should be most thankful to God. In the one case we had a soul saved, but a life lost, and in the other we had not only a soul saved, but a life saved also. In Manasseh and Josiah we see something similar. The former we shall undoubtedly meet in Heaven—a sinner saved by grace, but his life was largely wasted; we shall also meet Josiah in heaven, but with him there was a life saved, which was fruitful for God during many years.

## Many Gracious Revivals

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Israel's history after the death of Joshua was a very sorrowful one. His conquests put the people in possession of the land of promise. It was divided up under the guidance of Jehovah, and many cities were allotted to the various tribes that were still occupied by the enemy; but divine power was available for the expulsion or destruction of all those, if only the people of God had faith to use it. In Judges 1:1, we read: "Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked Jehovah, saying, who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them? And Jehovah said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand." Had Israel continued on this line, all would have been well, but poor flesh can never be trusted. Accordingly the book of Judges is a story of miserable failure. Again and again Israel turned their back upon Jehovah, and worshipped idols, and as frequently He delivered them into the hands of their foes. But the Book of Judges not only tells us of repeated failures; it also tells us of various spiritual revivals in the mercy of God. From time to time men of faith were raised up (Gideon being the brightest of them all) who laid hold upon God on behalf of His wayward people, and they were used of Him to deliver them from their oppressors, and to lead them back to their God.

David's day was the greatest revival of all. Everything was in ruins when Jehovah took him from the sheep folds, and made him king over His people. The priesthood had broken down both morally and spiritually, and the king of the people's choice had been slain, and the excellent Jonathan with him. "Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine" (Psa. 78:65). In David and Mount Zion He gave His people a new start in grace. But the effects of every revival were but transient. Of later revivals those in the days of Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah may be specially mentioned. Josiah was the last instrument thus graciously raised up by God before He suffered "the boar out of the wood to waste His vineyard, and the wild beast of the field to devour it" (Psa. 80:13). Since that awful catastrophe, which upset the whole order of nations as established by the Most High, the people of Israel have not been in possession of the land. All claim to it has been forfeited, whatever Jewish pride and self-will may say in our time. The people will not again possess the good land until He comes whose right it is to reign. Then grace will give what righteousness now refuses, and the seed of Abraham will enjoy rest and peace forever.

In speaking of Josiah as Israel's last revivalist, I am not over the fact that he was King of Judah. His little kingdom included (territorially) the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, which alone remained to the house of David after the great disruption which followed the death of Solomon. The ten tribes which revolted at that time and made Jeroboam the son of Nebat their king have not been re-united to their brethren to this hour. At various times the kingdom of Judah received valuable additions in exercised souls who left the Northern Kingdom because of its appalling evils, and migrated to the South, where (at least under certain pious kings) the Word of God was still somewhat respected (2 Chron. 11:13-17). The spiritual energy that leads to separation from real evil is always precious in the sight of God (2 Tim. 2:19-22). Mere quarrelsomeness He hates (2 Tim. 2:24).

Although the majority of the people of God did not acknowledge his authority (and indeed many of them were no longer in the land, having been carried away by the kings of Assyria) Josiah, being a man of faith, regarded his tiny remnant of a nation which was once as numerous as the sand of the sea, as representative of Israel. The unity of the people of God was very real and precious to him, notwithstanding centuries of grievous failure. Upon the holy table in Jerusalem's sanctuary there still stood the twelve loaves with pure frankincense upon them (Lev. 24:5-9; 2 Chron. 13:11), teaching that His own are always under the eye of God and covered with all the acceptability of Christ. What God saw in His grace, Josiah saw in the simplicity of his faith. On the same principle Paul, several centuries later, spoke of "our twelve tribes" (Acts 26:7), and James addressed his Epistle to "the twelve tribes that are scattered abroad, greeting" (James 1:1).

Josiah lived in the late evening of Israel's national history; we are living in the late evening of the history of the Church. For Israel, the time of divine repudiation and banishment was near (Hosea 1:9; 9:3). For Christendom something analogous is impending. He who is holy and pure will shortly spew out of His mouth the unreal mass who profess to be Christians and are not (Rev. 3:16). The fruitless branches will be cut out of God's olive tree (Rom. 11:22). All who are truly Christ's will be caught up to meet their Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17). In his day, Josiah was confronted with division, confusion and every evil work. The same things confront us now. The young king was profoundly moved by the written Word of God when it was brought before him and he was determined to be obedient in all things thereto. The feeling that the hour was late, and that the position was hopeless, did not check in Josiah's soul the sense of responsibility. Hoary customs were cast aside, and every trace of evil in the land was stamped out to the best of his ability. Many professed to follow the king in his holy zeal, but Jehovah who knows the secrets of all hearts, said, "Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly" (Jer. 3:10). In all ages the people love to move with the tide. If the tide is flowing in the right direction (as in the Protestant Reformation), many will go with it—outwardly; but if the tide is flowing in the wrong direction the mass will go with it eagerly. The latter was seen in the days of Israel's worst kings, and we have seen it also in Christendom.

The Scriptures which influenced Josiah so wonderfully were principally the five books of Moses. We are immeasurably more favored than he, for we hold in our hands the complete revelation of God. Is it our habit to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest? Or is it possible that the bustle of the twentieth century, with the many side attractions that the restlessness of flesh has provided for everybody, is diverting us from the study of the Word of God? Foolish souls are we, if this is so. The Scriptures, as we meditate upon them, bring us into the presence of God; they lay bare our consciences and they quicken our spiritual affections. They enrich us divinely. Enjoyment leads to action. Every evil thing in our lives is cast out. We scrutinize our ecclesiastical associations; will they stand: the test of the Word of God? Religious organizations and fellowships which betray the human hand we renounce as earnestly as Josiah renounced and destroyed the many religious evils which filled his realms. The Church rises up before our souls, in its wondrous unity as Christ's body and God's habitation, and in the light of it we seek by grace to walk while we wait for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## Seeking the Lord

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Having been brought to God myself in early youth, it has been somewhat of a habit with me, in moving about in the world, to inquire of any friends at what age they were converted, and it has been deeply interesting to learn that the great majority of them were saved in their “teens.” Some could trace their spiritual history even further back. A lady of exceptional piety living in a town in Staffordshire told me in her seventy-eighth year that she had been “breaking bread” seventy years! This means that she confessed the name of the Lord and was accepted by her brethren for baptism and assembly fellowship when only eight years old! Such a case is doubtless very rare, but it proves to us what the grace of God can do. In October, 1945, I was told of the triumphant death of a man who was saved through my instrumentality in London in 1883! He was twelve years old at that time. Many years ago I baptized two girls, each thirteen years of age. Some feared that I was somewhat venturesome in doing so; but their after history, as in the two cases already mentioned, proved that they were true disciples of the Lord Jesus. One died of consumption after several years of bright Christian life; and the other, at the moment of writing, is an exemplary Christian in her fifty-seventh year.

Our Savior-God delights to pardon and bless transgressors advanced in years. Manasseh in the Old Testament, and the Philippian jailor in the New, are examples of this. But our Lord’s attitude towards children when here upon earth shows how deep is His interest in the young. Many who were rescued early by His grace have distinguished themselves in His service later. We recall David and Jonathan in the Old Testament, and Timothy in the New. No more pious persons have ever sat upon the throne of England than Edward VI and Lady Jane Gray (the nine-days Queen); but both were only about seventeen years old at the time of their death!

I write these things for the encouragement of workers amongst the young. It has long been my conviction that our best Gospel work is wrought in the Sunday Schools and Bible Classes. Let none regard these as mere side-lines of service, for they are indeed our most fruitful fields.

Concerning Josiah we read: “He did that which was right in the sight of Jehovah, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father” (2 Chron. 34:2-3). There is no mention of any spiritual helper for Josiah as in the case of Joash more than a century earlier. The latter was favored to have about him for many years his pious uncle Jehoiada (2 Chron. 24:2). With Josiah there was probably more direct dealings with God. This would account for his sturdy faith and his amazing energy in service for God. But whether it were Joash or Josiah, or the present writer and his readers, all is grace. Every scrap of good that has ever been seen in any of us is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Thus at the interesting age of sixteen Josiah began to seek after the God of David his father. Man being a lost sinner, having by his love of sin strayed from his Maker into hopeless darkness, is always under responsibility to return to God, who has a righteous claim upon the love and obedience of all His creatures, as He has Himself expressed it in the law of Sinai. “Seek ye the

Lord while He may be found” (Isa. 55:6), is His command to the wayward. His forbearance with sinners will not continue indefinitely. Some day men may wish to “find” Him, and will discover that He is no longer “near” (Isa. 4:6). Paul, when addressing the wise men of Athens, told them that men should seek after God, and he added “though He be not far from everyone of us” (Acts 17:27). Precious words, when rightly understood! The many shrines which met the Apostle’s eyes in the Greek capital suggested to him that one god was as good as another in the minds of the people there. Therefore he preached unto them the one true God and Jesus whom, He raised from the dead.

But although it is ever the duty of men to seek after God, actually they refuse to do so. How tremendously solemn are the words of Psalm 53:2-3, “God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. Everyone of them is gone back they are together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” The great and gracious Creator surveyed the whole human race and He could not see one that wanted Him, or that even understood the purpose for which he was created! This is confirmed in Psalm 14:2-3 and Romans 3:11-12. To this we would add Psalm 10:4, “The wicked through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.”

This being the true condition of things, all would perish in their appalling folly, but for the activity of God in grace. If men do not want Him, He wants them! Immediately after the rebellion in the garden, the voice of God was heard, saying, “Adam, where art thou?” (Gen. 3:9). The Gospel tells us (Oh, blessed thought!) that God is now the seeker after men. This is the meaning of the coming amongst us of His beloved Son. Accordingly, in the New Testament sinners are never charged to seek the Lord (although it is still their responsibility to do so); instead, they are told that God is seeking them. When the Lord Jesus was found fault with for receiving sinners and eating with them, He gave utterance to the delightful parables of Luke 15, wherein He delineated the grace that seeks the lost, and that welcomes the penitent. He likened Himself to a shepherd “going after that which is lost until He find it.” When again complained of for entering the house of Zacchaeus the tax-gatherer, He said: “the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost” (Luke 19:10). The grace which seeks (oh, so unweariedly!) those whom righteousness might well condemn, is marvelous! What a God is ours! Yet how cruelly misrepresented by Satan to foolish men whom he would fain keep in eternal distance from the God who loves them! It is noticeable that when the Lord Jesus spoke of little ones He omitted the word “seek.” All He said was: “the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost” (Matt. 18:11). Even the youngest is lost by nature; but some have not had time enough to willfully stray from their God. Yet they need to be saved.

Well, it is an unspeakably happy thing to be led to Christ in early youth, before the diabolical tendencies which are in all our hearts lead us into transgression and sin like the prodigal of Luke 15. C. H. Spurgeon, the most notable evangelical preacher of the last century, preached his first sermon at the age of sixteen! He subsequently described his spiritual history as follows—“I looked to Him: He looked on me: and we were one forever.” Simple, sweet, and expressive! But the position would be more correctly stated thus—

“He looked on me:

I looked to Him:

And we were one forever.”

Man being at enmity with God, not God at enmity with man, the first step towards reconciliation should come from man, but it never does. God is the seeker, not man. What a God! How marvelous is His grace! The grateful Paul, once bold in his hostility, but now rejoicing in God's salvation, said, “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord....the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant” (1 Tim. 1:12-14).

## Israel's "High Places"

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At the age of sixteen (as we have seen) Josiah turned to God. Then followed four years of spiritual exercise concerning the condition of things around him. His position as king made Josiah feel that it was not sufficient for him to be right with God personally; he also felt that he must purge the land of its abominations, and lead the people back to God. In this day we are not called upon to be iconoclasts. It is not our duty to go round with axes and hammers and destroy images and other things which we know to be hateful to God. All this will be dealt with by the Lord Jesus when He shows Himself from heaven in Kingdom-power and majesty. Our present duty is two-fold: (1) to get our own souls right by testing all our ways and associations by the written Word; and (2) to use our influences to help others to return to the "old paths" (Jer. 6:16). The latter we can do by personal conversation, and by definite public ministry if God has qualified us for such work. Mere addresses, carefully planned, with points, divisions, anecdotes, and alliterations may be entertaining; but it is doubtful if they reach hearts and consciences concerning the evils from which men should purge themselves. Time was when many Christians carried in their pockets a supply of booklets, some suited for Christians and others for unbelievers. We wonder if this is done to any extent today?

At the age of twenty Josiah began to move. Five verses in 2 Chronicles 34:3-7 are packed with the Holy Spirit's record of his courageous deeds. Although surrounded by people whose attitude was doubtful, he went forward energetically. Images were smashed, altars were broken down, and the bones of idolatrous priests were burnt upon their altars. Thus the young king expressed his abhorrence of evil practices and of the men who led the way in them. Josiah did not limit himself to the territories of Judah and Benjamin, although he commenced there. At all times the servants of God should first testify near home. Having done this, Josiah pushed northward, and acted with vigor in Manasseh, Ephraim, etc. The ruling power in the North must have been weak for such action to be possible; but the young king took risks, confiding in God. Bold testimony in regions where the truth is most needed is called for today; but how far are we willing to move away from the warm shelter of gospel halls and other places of comfortable service? Yet why should "evangelists" abandon their earthly calling if they are unwilling for pioneer work such as the Apostle speaks of in Romans 15:18-24?

It is particularly noted that Josiah "began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places" (2 Chron. 34:3). These were very offensive to Jehovah, because they were the expression of the people's neglect and even contempt for His chosen center. He definitely commanded the people to destroy all the images of the Canaanites and to devastate their high places (Num. 33:52). At this point the reader would do well to lay down this book and read Deuteronomy 12. In that chapter Moses told the people before he died that they would find the land full of idols, with places of worship "upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree." All this was the expression of self-will of people who knew nothing of God and who were under the blinding influence of Satan. But the people of God must not be like them. They must listen to His voice, and obey Him in all things, especially in matters relating to divine worship. He would choose His own

center, and thither the tribes of Israel were to bring their sacrifices and offerings. Shiloh, in Ephraim, was Jehovah's first dwelling-place (Jer. 7:12), later, he chose Zion (Psa. 78:60-68). The sin of the people, which caused the ark of the covenant to fall into the hands of the Philistines, threw the relationships of the people with Jehovah into confusion, for the ark never returned to the tabernacle. David brought it up to Zion out of the house of Obed-Edom to a tent that he had prepared for it (1 Chron. 15), but the tabernacle was at Gibeon (1 Chron. 16:39). During the years of confusion, even pious people worshipped at "high places." Samuel did this (1 Sam. 9:12-25). But such irregularities became sin after the temple was built, and filled with the cloud of Jehovah's presence. The very builder of the temple led the way in this great sin. Solomon built high places for Chemosh and for all the gods of his pagan wives (1 Kings 11:1-8). From Solomon's day onward, worship at high places became intermittent. Some kings sanctioned (or, at least tolerated) it; and others suppressed it. Sennacherib in his heathen ignorance, thought that Hezekiah had displeased his God by destroying the high places which the people had dedicated to His worship (2 Chron. 32:12).

Coming now to ourselves—have we learned to be obedient in all things to the Word of God, or are we in any degree held by the unscriptural practices of Christendom? It has been said that just as a man is entitled to choose his own lawyer and his own baker, so he is entitled to choose his own "minister" and place of worship! This is rank self-will. Not only is God dishonored by it, but it is injurious to the soul. The marvelous blessings and privileges which are characteristic of Christianity are to a large extent unknown to those who pursue such a course. Surely He has not left us to our own devices in matters of the utmost sacredness! Surely He has spoken! He who was so precise in the smallest details connected with the worship of His earthly people is not indifferent in His dealings with His heavenly saints! Shall we not, then, in the spirit of deep humility, search His Holy Word with care and seek grace from Him to obey what is written therein, cost what it may?

No more delightful unfolding of the subject of worship, with special reference to our own time, can be found than in our Lord's words to the Samaritan woman in John 4:21-24. His pointed and heart-searching words made the woman feel the seriousness of having to do with God; and she desired to learn from Him where God could be found, for there was much controversy in the land concerning this subject. Her fathers had worshipped for centuries on Mount Gerizim, but the Jews affirmed that in Jerusalem was the place where men ought to worship. She was stating her difficulty to the One who could best answer it. He was the Father's well-beloved Son, who had come from heaven to lead willing hearts into sweeter intimacies than had ever before been known. He said "Woman, believe Me." Oh, that men had been willing then; oh, that men were willing now, to listen to the Son, and believe every word from His gracious lips! Instead, many listen to the voice of religious leaders, and follow them blindly. "Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." The day for material religious centers is past. Those who point to a building and speak of it as the "house of God" are two thousand years behind the times in their thoughts. God being now revealed as Father, He will be satisfied with nothing but the overflowing of the heart from those who are in the conscious relationship of children. "Worship in spirit and in truth" is what He desires, and "the Father seeketh such to worship Him." Costly buildings, gorgeous ritual, and elaborate vestments are an offense to Him, for they are relics of Paganism and Judaism. Any simple building, even a private house, will

suffice as meeting-places for God's saints during the Christian era. The true rallying center is indicated in Matthew 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Let us beware of men's "high places." We are not called upon to destroy them, as Josiah did in his day; but it is our duty to reject them, and to be obedient in all things to the Word of our God.

## The Land Purged and the House Repaired

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The more we meditate upon the activities of Josiah, the more remarkable it seems that a young man of twenty should have attempted and accomplished such great things for God. There is no hint in the sacred records of any backing on the part of the leaders of the people; and as for the people themselves, the early chapters of the book of Jeremiah reveals that their hearts were not with the king in his godly efforts, although they did not actively oppose him. It is a story of individual faith in God, on the part of a young man who perceived that things were very wrong round about him, and who earnestly desired, by the help of God, to put them right.

The Word of God contains much encouragement for young men. Some of the outstanding characters in the Bible were young. It is sufficient to mention that Joseph, Jonathan, David, Elihu and Timothy in addition to Josiah (Jeremiah and Zechariah, among the prophets, were both young men). We are living far down the dispensation, and departure from God and His truth is widespread. Also there is a deplorable lack of spiritual energy in the work of God. We would appeal to the young men to get to their Bibles, and exercise their minds and hearts about what they find there. You must not allow yourselves to be discouraged in your efforts by the criticisms of old men. We should always treat with respect what others may say to us, but we must not allow it to break our hearts and cast us back from useful service. Old men are apt to become set in their ways, and limited in their outlook. With them too often what has been should still be; no reconsideration of the situation can be tolerated! The grip of tradition can be very firm and injurious even over those who have long stood aloof from the hoary evils of Christendom. It is possible to reject traditions a thousand years old and yet be slaves to traditions of scarcely fifty years standing.

Dear aged brethren, it is an old man of long and wide experience who is addressing you. Do not discourage young men. Do not snub the Josiahs of twenty years old. You may perhaps feel within yourselves that things are not as they should be, and possibly there is with you a feeling of weariness due to declining strength which may dispose you to settle down to things as they are, rather than speak and act boldly for God. Give yourselves to prayer that God may be pleased to raise up faithful young men; but beware how you damp their energy when it begins to operate. It is admitted that young men can be forward and troublesome in the assemblies; but so can men who are far from being young. Have we not seen brethren assuming the work of oversight with no spiritual qualifications? And have not such men, by displays of petty authority sometimes blocked spiritual activities? Young men should never despise the counsel of the aged, and the aged should never discourage the zeal of the young. Let us help one another to a better understanding of the will of the Lord.

Josiah was desirous of keeping a Passover unto Jehovah. This was Israel's great foundation feast. Under the shelter of the blood of the lamb the people were spared the judgment which fell upon the Egyptians. God would have this kept in perpetual remembrance by a grateful people. Alas! the feast lapsed frequently. The paschal lamb was typical of Christ who has been "sacrificed

for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). The Lord's Supper differs somewhat from the Passover in that it is not a mere memorial of a great deliverance, but a remembrance of the Person who wrought the deliverance for us. "This do in remembrance of ME," were our Lord's words (Luke 22:19).

Josiah's Passover was kept in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he was twenty-six years old (2 Chron. 35:19). The purging of the land and of the temple took a considerable time. The king rightly felt that Jehovah must be worshipped in pure surroundings. "Exalt Jehovah our God, and worship at His holy hill; for Jehovah our God is holy." Thus spake the Psalmist (Psa. 99:9). In Hosea 11:9, God spoke of Himself as "the holy One in the midst of thee." Every householder in Israel was responsible to search his house for any trace of leaven before the Passover could at any time be properly kept (Exodus 12:15). In Josiah's day the land was full of abominations; not only the idols themselves, but also the filthy practices which are always connected with idolatry. It apparently required eight years of energetic action to clear all this away. No evil should be glossed over if Josiah could prevent it; but he could not look into the hearts of the people, where, alas, in many cases the evils were still loved. Josiah's order of procedure is instructive; first he purged the land and the temple; next, he "repaired the house of Jehovah his God" (2 Chron. 34:8); then he felt ready to call the people together to keep the feast. A century earlier Hezekiah kept a great Passover in Jerusalem; but there was much irregularity connected with its observance, for which Hezekiah humbly sought the pardon of Jehovah for His people (2 Chron. 30:18-20). But Josiah was careful that everything should be done strictly according to the written Word. Jeremiah commenced his prophetic ministry in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (Jer. 1:2). His seventh chapter should be carefully read at this point. Jeremiah was divinely commanded to stand in the gate of Jehovah's house and speak solemnly to the people about their unreality, and of the judgments which must come upon them. The house in Jerusalem would soon be divinely forsaken as was the tabernacle in Shiloh long before. But it is always God's gracious way to give warning before He lifts His hand to destroy.

The story of Josiah's activities has a voice to us today. Christendom has long been filled with religious abominations, and seeing that brighter light has shone there than Israel ever experienced, the guilt is greater. The call to separation in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 has primary reference to religious admixtures; "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean things." Paul's last inspired Epistle makes plain the path that faithful souls should tread now. After speaking of dangerous doctrines, and the deplorable confusion of vessels to honor intermingled with vessels to dishonor, the Apostle says; "If a man purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (2 Tim. 2:21). As in Josiah's day, so in ours, purging is necessary if God is to be glorified. The Corinthian assembly was charged to "purge out the old leaven" (1 Cor. 5:7). The words of the Holy Spirit through the Apostle stirred their consciences, and the wickedness was judged. In his second epistle, he was able to say, "In all things ye have proved yourselves to be clear in this matter" (2 Cor. 7:11). But when evil becomes established individual action is imperative, and the man who would go on with God must purge himself out. This is the plain teaching of 2 Timothy 2. But he (or she) who is brought to this painful necessity must then look around for others who are likewise desirous of walking in "the ways of the Lord." "Follow righteousness, faith, love, peace with them that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart." It is not the mere taking up of a more correct ecclesiastical position. A deep inward spiritual work is

indicated which affects one's whole deportment in every sphere of life. The neglect of these moral excellencies in those who boast of separation from ecclesiastical evil is inconsistency of the greatest possible character.

No purging, however, is once for all. Those who have publicly repudiated Christendom's grievous departures from the will of God, should watch their conduct continually, "cleansing themselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). Particularly is this necessary when we go up into the assembly of the saints. We should examine ourselves (1 Cor. 11:28). A servant of Christ once said that it would be well if all God's saints would spend a quiet hour every Saturday evening in spiritual exercise and preparation for the services of the Lord's Day. This is worth considering. Josiah would have said, "Holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, forever" (Psa. 93:5). To this let us add our own reverent AMEN.

## Faithful in That Which Is Least

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Concern for His house and its due order is always precious in the eyes of God. Since the notable Pentecost of Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit came down from heaven, the house of God has not been a material structure such as the temple in Jerusalem; it is a spiritual building, composed of living stones, men and women partakers of eternal life through grace. The Apostle Paul in his first epistle to Timothy tells us plainly what the house of God is in the Christian era: "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:14-15). God delights to dwell amongst the people whom He has redeemed, whether Israel or Christians; but He insists upon purity and order. Oh, that we all may be as zealous as the young king Josiah that God may be glorified in His own house!

The repairing of the Temple was carried through most expeditiously. The work appears to have been commenced in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, and the Passover was kept in the same year (compare 2 Chron. 34:8, with 2 Chron. 35:19). Yet the Passover was a Spring feast, appointed to the month Abib. In Hezekiah's time the feast had to be deferred until a month later because neither temple nor people were ready (2 Chron. 30:13-15); but Josiah and his people "killed the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month" (2 Chron. 35:1); according to the original divine order (Ex. 12:18). This proves that the workmen put their hearts into the work of getting the house ready for Jehovah their God. It is written in Ecclesiastes 9:10, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." In Colossians 3:23, even slaves are told, "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not unto men." This is not acceptable doctrine in our day. The "working" classes (so-called) seem bent on squeezing the maximum of pay for the minimum of work! Let God's saints beware of the disorderly spirit prevailing around them, and give heed to yet another exhortation from the pen of Paul the Apostle, "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father by Him" (Col. 3:17). This puts everything in its true place, and faithful workers may be assured that the Lord will commend them in His day, which will be ample recompense for any reproaches which may come upon them from their fellow-men meanwhile.

When the wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt after the return of the remnant from captivity, Nehemiah records, "the people had a mind to work" (Neh. 4:6). Josiah would have said the same of the men employed by him. Some years ago a number of brethren in a Scottish town built an excellent hall for their services with their own hands. When they had put aside a good sum of money for the purpose, the works in which they were all employed had to close down for lack of orders. The brethren judged that this was God's time for building the hall. Accordingly they wrought with a will early and late for many weeks in order to get the roof on, and the building as far as possible finished before the works re-opened. Fifty or more men whose wages were at a standstill toiling for love's sake! What a spectacle for men and angels! "The people had a mind to work" (Neh. 4:6). A Popish priest in the locality is reported to have said that if he had a band of men about him like those builders he would move Scotland! in the mercy of God, no such men were available for him.

The less of Popery the better for Scotland, and for every other land.

What a contrast in the condition of things in the days of Haggai! Because the people met with some discouragement in the re-building of the temple, they ceased operations, and labored to build houses for themselves instead. "Thus speaketh Jehovah of hosts, saying, This people say, the time is not come, the time that Jehovah's house should be built." Such indifference was very displeasing to the One who had been so good to His erring people, and He sent them a remonstrance by Haggai the prophet, saying: "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses and this house lie waste?" (Hag. 1:1-4). Jehovah found it necessary to chasten His people for their apathy and all blessing was withheld until they recommenced their work upon the temple, and proceeded vigorously with it in faith. Then their barns filled up again with good things.

We are impressed with the Holy Spirit's record that in Josiah's day the men were so conscientious that no account was kept of the money expended, the amount of which must have been considerable. The word "faithfully" is used in a two-fold way (1) "the men did the work faithfully" (2 Chron. 34:12); and (2) "there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully" (2 Kings 22:7). Such men are worthy of imitation. Theirs was no mere "eye-service as men pleasers;" they worked "in singleness of heart, fearing God" (Col. 3:22). Britain could do with millions of such workers today. The housing problem would then be quickly solved, and what excellent work would be put into the houses! And if also the men could be trusted to use the money subscribed, purchasing the best possible materials, and taking no more in wages than is just—but perhaps we are dreaming! If such conditions may not be expected generally until the millennial age, may all who fear God and reverence His Word seek to be like Josiah's workmen meantime.

In nothing perhaps are the children of God so commonly unfaithful as in the stewardship of money. Too much spent on luxuries, and too little dispersed abroad, and even that not always wisely. When shall we learn to neither spend nor give without seeking the guidance of God? In Luke 16 the Lord Jesus, after speaking of the unjust steward who so skillfully manipulated his circumstances for his own advantage, said, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much" (Luke 16:10). "Least?" Is that how men regard money? Note also our Lord's further words, "that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God!" (Luke 16:15). In 1 Timothy 6 the Apostle has much to say about this serious matter. In 1 Timothy 6:9-11 he warns saints who are not rich, but who aspire to be, that there are dangers ahead. Men in the world who pursue such a course frequently "drown themselves in destruction and perdition" and money-loving saints pierce themselves through with many sorrows." In verses 17-19 the Apostle charges those who are already rich not to "trust in uncertain riches, but in God who giveth us richly all things to enjoy," and to be ready "with open hand for every good work." There is nothing wrong in possessing wealth (mark the word "enjoy") if the wealth comes to us honorably; but when we consider that He to whom we owe our eternal all had not where to lay His head, and when we also remember that He is still "despised and rejected by men," to be holders of large sums of money puts us in a position of grave responsibility, in the discharge of which we need daily and hourly grace. Referring again to Luke 16 we can "make to ourselves friends by the mammon of unrighteousness," if our hearts so dispose us (Luke 16:9) or we may make enemies by the same means. Those who are generous and kind are beloved; but those who are selfish and haughty by reason of their wealth are disliked. Oh, that it may be said of us, as of Josiah's workmen "they

dealt faithfully!"

## No Accounts Kept!

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The condition of the temple was deplorable when Josiah moved to refit it for divine worship. His wicked predecessors, in their contempt for everything that was of God, had wrought havoc with the sacred building; but willing hands and devoted hearts quickly put things right, as we have seen. We gather from 2 Chronicles 34:8-13, that the relations between the carpenters and masons and their overseers were cordial and harmonious. These verses make pleasant reading, and they remind us of how agreeably Boaz and his harvest-men wrought together (Ruth 2:4). What lessons these records contain for all who would please God in these turbulent days!

We return to the statement that there was no reckoning with the men who handled the money “because they dealt faithfully.” This is found in the “King’s” account, written earlier than the books of the Chronicles. It is noticeable that the same thing is said of the workmen in the days of Joash and Jehoiada (2 Kings 12:15; 2 Kings 22:7). The question will naturally arise “Is this how God would have things done habitually? Should the example of these people of long ago be the pattern for us to follow today?” The answer is “No.” The times of Joash and of Josiah were exceptional. In each reign a great spiritual revival was in progress. After many years of grave transgression the people (or at least a remnant of them) were turning back to their God. Hearts and consciences were in exercise concerning His Holy will. This being so, precautionary measures against fraud were scarcely necessary.

But our God is above all kings, a God of order, and He delights to see His people careful in all their ways, and particularly where money is concerned. It is of course possible to become methodical in such matters, and the assembly of God should never be shackled by mere forms and rules. But appearances must be considered; we must “provide things honest in the sight of all men” (Rom. 12:17). In Mr. Darby’s excellent translation there is a footnote to the word “provide”—“taking care by forethought that there should be what is comely and seemly.” In the days of the Apostle Paul, large sums of money were contributed by various Gentile assemblies for the relief of their needy brethren in Judea. It was not unnatural that they should desire Paul to carry their gifts to Jerusalem, for he was the spiritual father of these Gentile Christians, and those were not days of bank drafts and postal orders. But Paul, although delighted to have part in this work of grace, insisted upon having companions—men carefully chosen by the assemblies for the purpose. Chapters 8 and 9 of his second Epistle to the Corinthians are worthy of very careful reading. These chapters have been described as “Paul’s charity sermon.” The tone throughout is delightful. The Lord Jesus is brought forward as our great example in the matter of generous giving. “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.” With such words ringing in our ears and in our hearts we shall be liberal, realizing that we owe infinitely more than we shall ever be able to give. David said “Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given thee” (1 Chron. 29:14). Paul says concerning the Macedonian saints who had given money for brethren in Judea, “They first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God” (2 Cor. 8:5). Deborah said of

some in her day, “the people willingly offered themselves” (Judges 5:2,9). It is recorded of one of Jehoshaphat’s officers that he “willingly offered himself unto Jehovah” (2 Chron. 17:16). In all these cases it was God who was uppermost in their minds; they yielded themselves and all that they had to Him, in appreciation of His grace to them.

The Macedonian saints were poor by comparison with their brethren in Corinth, but their “deep poverty” was accompanied by abundant joy in the Lord (2 Cor. 8:2). It has frequently been observed that the poor give far more in proportion to their means than the rich, the widow with her two mites leading the way in this grace (Luke 21:1-4). About fifty-five years ago, when a general collection was being made for a special object, the brother who consented to act as treasurer in the matter called at my office in London one morning and produced two letters for me to read. One was from a brother holding a good government post, (with no family to support), enclosing sixteen shillings with an apology for the smallness of the amount, because (as he said) “our assembly is not large!” The other was from an aged woman, who subsisted by taking in washing (for there was no old age pension in those days), enclosing five shillings with deep regret that she could not send more! I am not ashamed to confess that the brother who brought the letters, and I also, dropped a few tears in my office that morning. “God bless the dear woman,” we said with one accord. Brethren, don’t be mean! Remember that your Lord gave His all—yea, Himself for you!

The Apostle said of the brethren who were to accompany him to Jerusalem with the offerings of the Gentiles, “they are the messengers of the assemblies, and the glory of Christ” (2 Cor. 8:23). What higher commendation could any of us have this side the Judgment Seat of Christ? The men referred to had been carefully selected by their brethren as stewards in whom they could have full confidence. In contrast to this, the case of Judas Iscariot comes to our minds. How came he to be treasurer for the apostolic band in the days of the Lord Jesus? It is unthinkable that the Lord Himself chose him for such service. Did He not once say “one of you is a devil?” (John 6:70). Was He not aware, as the reader of all hearts, that love of money was the particular snare of Judas? Would He, who is always tenderly considerate and compassionate because of the frailty of poor flesh, expose any man to special temptation? Did He not teach the disciples to pray “lead us not into temptation?” (Matt. 6:13). How then did Judas become keeper of the bag? His companions must have chosen him for this service; certainly not for his spiritual grace, but rather for his business ability. Fatal blunder! it worked disastrously as we know. Many years after the unhappy Judas had “gone to his own place,” the Apostle John wrote of him: “not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein” (John 12:6).

Possibly it was with the terrible case of Judas before their minds that the Apostles bade the saints in Jerusalem to look out amongst themselves seven men to distribute their funds; but they must be “men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3). These are admittedly high qualifications, but God can only be acceptably served by men of spiritual power and grace. Men should not be allowed to push themselves into positions of prominence merely because of their standing in the world. This is sheer carnality, and no good can result from it. It is as important to have Spirit-filled men to handle the finances as to preach and teach publicly the things of the Lord Jesus. Many companies of God’s saints would do well to exercise themselves before God about this matter.

We conclude therefore that God would have His saints orderly in their accountancy, both individually and collectively. Our own books should be so kept that the Inspector of Taxes, if he has occasion to examine them, may see at a glance that we are honorable men; and the books of the gathered saints should be so ordered that everything may be above reproach.

Once more we would remind ourselves that Josiah's laborers in their work and in their handling of the people's money "dealt faithfully." The Holy Spirit says in 1 Corinthians 4:2, "it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful."

## The Book of the Law Found

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It was a blessed thing for young King Josiah to “seek after the God of David his father” (2 Chron. 34:3). God is readily found by those who want Him; but the full revelation of Who and What He is could not be until the Only Begotten Son Who is in the bosom of the Father came from heaven to declare Him. Before His coming the faithful in Israel knew and trusted God as the Jehovah. We who live on the resurrection side of the cross, and who have received the anointing of the Holy Spirit know God as Father, and we have the assurance that we are His children, sons, and heirs. The Father loves us, as He loves His Son. We have learned this sweet truth from the lips of the Son Himself, (John 17:23).

But although Josiah came to know God early in life, and soon began to serve Him amongst the people, it was some time before he came into contact with God’s written Word. Those were not days of printed Bibles, making it possible for all who will to possess copies of the Scriptures. Neither were the Scriptures, yet fully written. Do we realize how favored we are in this day, with God’s Word in its entirety abundantly printed, and obtainable at a reasonable cost? Are we alive to the fact that immense spiritual wealth is within our reach if only we have the sense to value it? Gold and diamonds are not found without labor, and how willingly will men endure hardships in order to fill their bags with these precious things, which, after all, only have a time value! Oh, that we were half as diligent in our search for the great and wonderful things contained in the book of God. These have eternal value.

While the temple repairs were proceeding, “Hilkiah the priest found the book of Jehovah given by Moses” (2 Chron. 34:14). He reported his great discovery to Shaphan the scribe, “I have found the book of the law in the house of Jehovah. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it” (2 Kings 22:8). Shaphan did wisely, for a Bible unread is useless to anybody. This man’s son became a leader in idolatry (Ezek. 8:11). Over him evidently the Word of God had no power.

What was it that the High Priest found, and which so deeply moved the King when Shaphan read it before him? Was it the original book of the law written by Moses in the wilderness? After the return from captivity in Babylon copies were made of the law, and were read on the Sabbath days to the people in synagogues built for the purpose. Our Lord freely used these buildings, in which liberty was given to anyone to exhort the congregation if competent to do so. The Apostles also used the synagogues for the same purpose (Luke 4:17, Luke 4:44; Acts 9:20; Acts 13:14). But there is no clear evidence that synagogues with copies of the Word of God in them, existed in the days of the kings. Was then the book that Hilkiah found in the temple the original work of Moses? An interesting question, but difficult to answer.

The early history of the written Word may profitably be considered here. The first recorded command to put Jehovah’s commandments to His people into writing is found in Exodus 17:14, “Jehovah said unto Moses, write this for a memorial in a book and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua; for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.” Soon after this, Jehovah Himself put something into writing. The tables of stone, containing the ten

commandments were written with the “finger of God.” These (the second tables), were called “the testimony,” for in them God spoke to men, and they were deposited in the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 25:16; Ex. 31:18). When Moses completed his fifth book he, “commanded the Levites, which bare the Ark of the Covenant of Jehovah saying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the Ark of the Covenant of Jehovah your God that it may be there for a witness against thee” (Deut. 31:25-26). We learn from this that the book of the law was preserved in the house of God, in the Most Holy place. Thus Hilkiah found the sacred book just where it might be expected to be found. But it was evidently very little known for many years prior to the reign of Josiah. It appears to have been lost, covered over with rubbish in the very house of God, and so little valued that no search was made for it! What a picture of what has happened in Christendom! The house of God as established on the Day of Pentecost is “the assembly of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). In the days of the Apostles the truth was loved, and earnestly propagated in every direction; but as the centuries passed, “the Church” became so grossly unfaithful and worldly that the truth was well-nigh lost. Priestly pretensions and ecclesiastical ordinances governed the whole situation, displacing the Word of God almost entirely. For all practical purposes the Word was buried under accumulations of rubbish, very much as in the days of King Josiah.

One of the happiest results of the Protestant Reformation was that the Scriptures became available to the people in many lands. Once more men were allowed to listen to the voice of their God apart from human interpolations. How eagerly did the poor resort to English Parish “Churches,” where Bibles were chained by order of the king, with permission for all to read them who desired to do so! With what delight did those who could not read for themselves listen to those who could read. The memory of these doings is a reproach to us today. Bibles are plentiful and cheap, but it may be that in some homes they exist only on the top shelf, as dusty as the precious volume which Hilkiah found in the temple! Brethren, let us consider carefully our attitude towards the Word of God. Therein is written the whole story of God’s dealings with man, past, present and future. The counsels of His love are revealed therein, the knowledge of which makes humble children of God wiser than statesmen and others who are sorely bewildered by the problems of their times. Such knowledge imparts moral dignity to all who possess it. Yet, although all this is true (and much more might be said) these do not appear to be days of careful Bible study.

Let’s return to Hilkiah’s important “find.” The God of Israel told Joshua, the leader of His people after the death of Moses, “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein, for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Josh. 1:8). This notable military commander, with great responsibilities resting upon his shoulders, must make time, not only to read, but to meditate on God’s word. It was vital to his prosperity in every way. Do we “make time” for reading and meditation?

Although the existence of the book of the law seemed unknown to the men of Josiah’s time until the eighteenth year of his reign, it was known to earlier rulers. Of Asa it is written that he “commanded Judah to seek Jehovah the God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandments” (2 Chron. 14:4). Jehoshaphat sent the Levites throughout his dominions, “and they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of Jehovah with them” (2 Chron. 17:9). Amaziah,

when he came to the throne, put to death the murderers of his father, “but he slew not their children, but did as it is written in the law in the book of Moses, where Jehovah commanded, saying, the fathers shall not die for the children, neither shall the children die for the fathers, but every man shall die for his own sin” (2 Chron. 25:4). This king was far from being a good man, but he had respect for the book of the law and its divine instructions. When the boy king Joash was crowned two hundred and fifty years before the time of Josiah, as part of the coronation ceremonies, they “gave him the testimony” (2 Kings 11:12). These Scriptures suffice to refute the assertion of some in our time that the book which Hilkiyah found in the temple was of comparatively recent compilation, with the name of Moses attached to it to give it authority in the eyes of the king and his people. The assertion is as absurd as it is wicked. That which was brought to light once more was God’s own revelation to His people, against which, unhappily they so frequently transgressed. In the stirring times of Josiah, when the Spirit of God was working to give Jehovah’s poor fickle people one more opportunity, the re-discovery of the book of the law had tremendous effect upon the heart and conscience of the king; and, we may hope, upon the hearts and consciences of many of his subjects.

“The more we consider the Word the more we shall see its importance. Analogously to Christ the living Word, it has its source on high, and reveals what is there, and is perfectly adapted to man down here, giving a perfect rule according to what is up there, and, if we are spiritual, leading us up there, our conversation is in heaven.” (J. N. Darby)

## Thine Heart Was Tender

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It was a great moment in the spiritual history of Josiah when his Secretary of State brought in the book of the law and read it before him. Would that we could hear of similar doings in high places in this twentieth century! Josiah had never seen the sacred scroll before, nor had he heard it read. How different from ourselves who possess the complete Word of God, and who may read it as often as our hearts desire! The book of the law had a great effect upon Josiah. He realized, as never before, how unfaithful Israel had been, and how seriously the commandments of Jehovah had been neglected. Worse—they had been openly defied! “It came to pass, when the King had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes” (2 Chron. 34:19). He did still more—he “wept.” (2 Chron. 34:27). These particulars are recorded in both the “Kings” and “Chronicles” accounts of Josiah’s reign, proving how acceptable to God was the humiliation of His servant. (Not every detail of Josiah’s doings is written in both books). Yet this king was no mere sentimentalist. He was a strong character, at that moment in the prime of life, and he was despotic in rule, accustomed to carrying all before him—happily in the right direction. High station and the possession of power, tend to puff up poor flesh, and make it undisposed to listen to rebuke, even though it may come from the Creator Himself. It is said of the first Napoleon that on one occasion when he was speaking of his ambitious plans to a group of his Marshals, one of them gravely remarked, “Sire, man proposes, but God disposes,” Napoleon retorted, “I propose and I dispose.” But he finished in St. Helena, in spite of all his boastful pride. But Josiah, like Hezekiah before him, was childlike before his God. Delightful examples for us all to follow!

Jehovah appreciated the attitude of Josiah. In answer to his anxious inquiry, He said: “Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, concerning the words which thou has heard; because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heartiest His words....and humbledst thyself before Me and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before Me; I have even heard thee also, saith Jehovah” (2 Chron. 34:26-27). The heart of man is naturally hard in relation to God. Note the Apostle’s words, “having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart” (Eph 4:18). The Lord Jesus, in His parable of the Sower, spoke of the good seed of the Word falling by the wayside (Matt. 13:4). What could be harder, or less likely to be productive? In contrast with this, Josiah’s heart was impressionable, gracious work of the Holy Spirit of God, assuredly. The divine Word is likened to a hammer in Jeremiah 23:29, “Is not My Word like as a fire? saith Jehovah, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” The Philippian jailor needed the hammer when Paul and Silas first had to do with him; not so king Josiah. His heart was already tender.

Those of us who are privileged to live in Bible-reading lands need to exercise ourselves as to our attitude towards the “living oracles” (Acts 7:38). That which is easily obtained is apt to be lightly regarded. Familiarity with sacred things may cause them to become common in our eyes. Every time we open our Bibles, we enter (as it were) into the presence chamber of the Divine Majesty. In the written Word (which suits every age, for it is never out-of-date) we hear the voice of God. This being true, we should seek preparation of heart (which only the Holy Spirit can give) before we

read even a single page. "My heart standeth in awe of Thy Word," says the Psalmist (Psa. 119:161). "Receive with meekness the implanted word," is the counsel of James 1:21. In the days of Isaiah, when the land of Israel was full of hypocrisy—men boasting of their religious privileges but utterly regardless of their spiritual condition—Jehovah said, "to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word" (Isa. 66:2). Let us not miss the word "trembleth." It is not slavish dread but a sense of the greatness of the One who speaks to us, and of the gravity of disobedience to His voice. After the return from the captivity, when it was found that some in Israel were again setting at naught the commandments of God concerning inter-marriage with the heathen, Ezra records "Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the Words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice" (Ezra 9:4). This holy trembling led to prayer and confession resulting in drastic action to clear away the evil.

In the Lord's messages to the assemblies in Revelation 2 and 3 we meet repeatedly with the word "Repent." Even to Loadicea, the last of the series, the Lord said, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Rev. 3:19). Love waits for repentance as long as it is righteously possible. The door stands open until the last hour before righteousness must act in judgment. If Josiah felt so keenly the grievous disobedience of Israel through nine centuries, how should we feel as we review our own history during nineteen centuries since Pentecost? What a record of departure from the Word of God! And what is the condition of things around us at this moment? Are our hearts tender? Do we know anything of holy trembling at the Word of God?

It will be good for us to consider a little further the solemn subject of repentance, especially in its relation to ourselves. The principle of corporate responsibility throughout the dispensation is not as well understood as it should be. We may learn a lesson from Daniel as to this. Although personally a holy man, reverencing God and His Word above many, he felt keenly the guilt of the nation to which he belonged. Israel was God's chosen heritage. As a people they stood in a relationship to God such as no others have ever known. Upon Israel He lavished His favors; to Israel He entrusted His Word; and upon Israel as His vine in the earth, Jehovah bestowed all the care that divine Wisdom could devise (Isa. 5). But it was all in vain. Thus we hear Daniel pouring out his soul in humble confession of guilt, "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from Thy precepts and from Thy judgments" (Dan. 9:5). In his prayer the prophet traced the history of his people from the deliverance from Egypt until the destruction of Jerusalem and its sanctuary by Nebuchadnezzar. From first to last Jehovah had been faithful and gracious; but Israel had been persistently rebellious and evil. But Daniel, knowing something of the heart of God, nevertheless pleaded for mercy.

This is the spirit that we should cultivate. Daniel looked back over the centuries, and we should do likewise. The Spirit of God came from heaven at Pentecost to form something far more blessed and favored, and therefore far more responsible than the nation upon which the Lo-Ammi sentence was then resting, and is still resting. The Church is the body of Christ, set up in the world to represent Him during His absence, and to be the vehicle by means of which He could work for the glory of God, and for the blessing of men. The Church is also the house of God, in which He dwells, where His power is known, and from which His power goes forth for the good of all. No one pressed these important truths more earnestly than the Apostle Paul, yet he lived to see unfaithfulness spreading in every direction. His warnings to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:17-35,

and his second letter to Timothy are full of foreboding. What has been the history of the succeeding centuries? The will of God has been set at naught, and the will of man has prevailed. Ecclesiasticism with its heavy hand has oppressed the people of God. The divine call to REPENT has been ringing out through the years, but how few have responded to the call! As surely as Josiah lived in the late evening of Israel's national history, so are we living in the late evening of the Church on earth. But it is never too late for those to return to God and His Word who desire to do so. Josiah felt this and acted accordingly. Shall we not do the same?

"Cease to do evil; learn to do well" (Isa. 1:16-17). Do not be satisfied to follow the footsteps of your fathers. Such a life will not do for God. Each individual confessor of Christ has his own personal responsibility to Him. Examine all your associations and practices in the light of Holy Scripture. Resolutely abandon everything that will not stand this test; and then God who guided Abraham step by step when he followed Him out into the unknown, will not fail to guide you also (Heb. 11:8). "The meek will He teach His way" (Psa. 25:9). We need not doubt that the Lord will preserve for Himself a remnant true to His Word until the end. Until His coming there will still be the two or three gathered in His name. But repentance means far more than a mere change-over from one order of things to another. It involves a severe judgment before God of all the unscriptural things in which we have participated, and a humble casting ourselves upon His grace to preserve us from ever countenancing them again. Truly repentant souls are not difficult to walk with; mere camp-followers can be a burden too heavy to be borne.

## Huldah's Solemn Message

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With heart and conscience thoroughly aroused, Josiah sought guidance from Jehovah concerning the words which had been read to him. It was clear that the people had long been disobedient to the law of their God, and Josiah rightly felt that the position was grave in consequence. It should be equally clear to us that the Church has long been disobedient to the written Word. As we read of the spiritual power and order of Apostolic days, and compare those days with our own, grief should fill our hearts, and we should turn as anxiously to the One against whom we have offended, as did the king of Judah long ago.

But the course that Josiah adopted arrests our attention. He sent a deputation of five leading men in his realm to consult Huldah the prophetess as to what Jehovah would have done. The leader of the deputation was Hilkiah the High Priest! The religious head of the nation sent by the King to a woman for counsel! Why was this? When priesthood was first established in Israel, Jehovah warned Aaron and his sons against the use of strong drink that they might be able to “put difference between holy and unholy and between unclean and clean.” They were to “teach the children of Israel all the statutes which Jehovah had spoken unto them by the hand of Moses” (Lev. 10:8-11). At a much later date it was said, “The priest’s lips should keep knowledge and they should seek the law at his mouth, for he is the messenger of Jehovah of Hosts” (Mal. 2:7). Here the high privileges and the spiritual distinction of the priesthood stands out clearly. Their special nearness to God should fit them to be His mouthpiece to the people. This would be particularly true of the High Priest. Yet Josiah sent the High Priest with others to learn the mind of God from a prophetess! Hezekiah did something similar in a time of national peril. The powerful Assyrian was at the door, and the King, “sent Eliakim who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amos” (2 Kings 19:2). Although in this instance, the elders of the priests formed the bulk of the deputation, they were not sent to the High Priest, who is not even named in connection with the matter!

These facts must be understood if we would have intelligence in the ways of God. They show us how completely the priesthood had lost its original standing as the medium of communication between Jehovah and His people. The unfaithfulness of Eli and the wickedness of his sons brought about an entire change in God’s dealings. The priesthood passed into the shade. Instead of the King walking by his counsel, the High Priest was placed in subordination to the King. “He shall walk before Mine anointed forever” (1 Sam. 2:35). Doubtless in the days of the child-king Joash, Jehoiada the High Priest stood well to the fore, and was indeed the savior of the royal house, and of the nation, but this was exceptional (2 Chron. 24:2, 16); and the case of Jehoiada illustrates two important principles, (1) the sovereignty of God, who works through whomsoever He pleases, and (2) the honor that He delights to put upon individual fidelity wherever He sees it. But God never re-establishes an order of things which has failed in the hands of men. In His exceeding grace He goes on to something better; and all that in which man has proved so incompetent will be seen in perfection in Christ in the day of His manifestation.

Hezekiah in his need sent to a man (Isaiah); but Josiah sent to a woman! Huldah had a husband; his name is recorded, but nothing more is said about him. The prophetess Deborah, in an earlier day, also had a husband, but in his case also nothing is stated but his name (Judges 4:4). Neither Lapidoth nor Shallum were used of God in moments of national emergency. Does all this perplex the reader, particularly in viewing the words of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:10-11? In these passages of Scripture women are charged to be silent in the assembly of God, and to learn “with all subjection.” Such Scriptures need to be carefully considered by all who fear God and tremble at His word. Lawlessness is increasing in the world, and the Church is affected by it in a greater or less degree, due to the unwatchfulness of saints and neglect of the Word of God. Women are becoming less and less disposed to fulfill the duties which properly belong to their sex, and are determined to push into positions of leadership and rule. The nations of the world are yielding to this; “the emancipation of women” has become a popular cry. In the professing Church we hear now of women “ministers” and “elders.” Such positions are a degradation to the women and a still deeper degradation to the men who “sit under” them, for the man “is the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of the man” (1 Cor. 11:7). God in His wisdom has placed the woman in the delightful position of nearness to the man as his counselor and helper; but headship belongs to the man alone. Eve was built up from a rib taken from Adam’s side (Gen. 2:22); a simple fact with a great lesson. Several reasons are laid down in Scripture why the woman should be subject to the man, and in no wise intrude into leadership.

1. “Man is not of woman, but woman of man” (1 Cor. 11:8). “Adam was first formed, then Eve” (1 Tim. 2:13). These passages carry us back to the beginning of our race.
2. “Man was not created for the woman, but woman for the man” (1 Cor. 11:9). Thus the woman was intended to supplement the man, not the man to supplement the woman.
3. “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in transgression” (1 Tim. 2:14). It does not lessen Adam’s guilt that he was not deceived (it rather increases it); but the fact is placed before us that it was the woman who was beguiled by the serpent. Throughout human history, women have proved themselves particularly susceptible to deception, and in cases where they have gained the ears of the public, their influence has been disastrous. Witness Madame Blavatsky, Mrs. Besant and Mrs. Baker Eddy. The spiritual devastation wrought by these dupes of Satan is incalculable.

In the days of Isaiah, Jehovah said of His poor foolish people Israel, “My people children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people, they which lead thee cause thee, to err, and destroy the way of Thy paths” (Isa. 3:12). This is the language of divine sorrow.

Christian women—whoever may read these lines—seek to be obedient in all things to the Word of your God. Be contented with the place which He has assigned to you. Follow not the ungodly in rebellion against His will. Cover your heads in the presence of men in recognition of their headship; dress neatly, be willing to learn, and do not seek to teach. One of the Lord’s, gravest rebukes in the early days of our era was addressed to the assembly in Thyatira thus: “Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess, to teach” (Rev. 2:20).

But although the foregoing is true, the sovereignty of God must never be lost sight of. He works as He pleases, and gives no account of His matters. Particularly is this the case when everything is in

confusion amongst His people. Why Jehovah chose to speak through Huldah to the King, and to the High Priest is known to Himself alone. Jeremiah was already in His service, for he began his prophetic ministry in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (Jer. 1:2), and the book of the law was not found until five years later. Yet Jehovah spoke through Huldah on that occasion with which we are dealing and not through Jeremiah! God's saints need spiritual judgment in order to discern His sovereign actings. If it is important not to "lay hands suddenly" on a man, it is still more important that we should not "lay hands suddenly" on a woman (1 Tim 5:22). This laying on of hands is not ordination, but sympathetic identification with the worker. After the war of 1914-1918, a woman who had been a political agitator ("Votes for Women") suddenly became a lecturer on prophecy, and attracted many hearers. There was no time after the great change in her life to digest the great principles of God's ways, which lead to separation from the world, with humility of spirit; but the lady's alert brain nevertheless grasped a good deal of prophetic truth. Evangelical leaders sat behind her on public platforms, and acclaimed her as the "modern Deborah." Much disappointment ensued for many of them.

The word of Jehovah was undoubtedly with Huldah the prophetess. She was the divine mouthpiece at a most serious moment in the history of Israel. Storm-clouds were gathering over the guilty nation; everything was breaking up; the kingdom was about to be extinguished; and David's throne was soon to be overturned, riot to be set up again until the day of the Lord Jesus. At such a moment the word of prophecy flowed from the lips of Huldah. Her message was in two parts: The word of Jehovah to the man who sent the deputation is given in 2 Chronicles 34:23-25; and her message to "the King of Judah who sent you to inquire of Jehovah" is given in the three verses which follow. The first part spoke of the ruin impending for the nation. Its cup of iniquity had been filling up for centuries; Manasseh's defiance of Jehovah's Word, and his excessive evil had caused the cup to overflow. In 2 Kings 21:10-15, we have a summary of Jehovah's messages to that wicked king. He had gone beyond the Amorites in sin, and in consequence Jehovah was "bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle." Jehovah would "wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down." He would forsake His people, and cause them to "become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies." They had provoked their God to anger "since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt." It was thus persistent and hopeless evil. Josiah's personal piety was a delight to God, but it could not annul His righteous judgment. "Notwithstanding, Jehovah turned not from the fierceness of His great wrath wherewith His anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked Him withal. And Jehovah said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said My name shall be there" (2 Kings 23:26-27). Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are two of the most terrible chapters in the Word of God. Therein, with a mass of fearful detail, Jehovah set before His people ere they entered the land what must be the consequences if they rebelled against Him. It was probably those very chapters which so alarmed Josiah, causing him to rend his clothes and weep before God. Israel's course from first to last had been sinful. From time to time Jehovah had sent messengers to them, "rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place"(2 Chron. 36:15). But it was all in vain. "They mocked the messengers of God and despised His words, and misused His prophets until the wrath of Jehovah arose against His people until there was no remedy." Pious kings had sought to lead the people aright, but their hearts never were with their kings in their endeavors. This is

specially recorded of the days of Josiah (Jer. 3:10). Judgment must now take its course. Manasseh, who over-filled Israel's cup of iniquity is doubtless, in Heaven, a sinner saved by grace late in life; but the governmental consequences of his transgressions remain unto this day. Josiah was told by Huldah that wrath was about to "be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched" (2 Chron. 34:25).

While this page is being written, the Jews are clamoring with violence for the possession of Palestine. They have no claim, either politically or religiously, to the land. What their industry has accomplished there since 1918 is truly marvelous; but all their labor will be destroyed in the world's last crisis by the King of the North (Daniel 11:40-43; Joel 2:1-11). God is not in the movement of our time, but He is watching it with interest (Isa. 18:4). The Jews who may get possession of the country (for a Jewish State will doubtless be set up) will prepare it for the Antichrist, not for the Christ of God. The unbelieving mass share the overthrow of the arch-deceiver. A remnant only will be saved (Rom. 9:27). Pray for the benighted children of Jacob who long for a home in Palestine, but will only find there a grave. That land will be the greatest of all sufferers when the judgments of God are abroad.

The second part of Huldah's prophetic message was personal for Josiah. The kindness of the heart of God is expressed in it. We must quote it in full:

"Thus saith Jehovah the God of Israel, concerning the words which thou hast heard, because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest His words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before Me, and didst rend thy clothes and weep before Me, I have even heard thee also, saith Jehovah. Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same" (2 Chron. 34:26-28).

God deeply appreciated the piety of individual souls, particularly in days of abounding evil. Shall not both writer and reader cultivate to have always a heart tender and humble before God? The value of Josiah's personal piety was inestimable to the nation. He had the promise of God that the judgments should not be poured out while he lived. He was twenty-six years old when Huldah spoke. Humanly speaking, many years of sovereignty lay before him. Oh, why did he not walk warily, knowing that so much depended upon his life? Oh, why did he, at the age of thirty-nine, plunge into a quarrel which did not concern him, and risk—yea, sacrifice—his precious life? How foolishly can even the choicest of God's saints behave if they get away for a single moment from the controlling influence of the Word of God! What sorrow they can bring upon themselves and upon others! But the fact is thus emphasized that no one is absolutely trustworthy but God's blessed Son, our Lord Jesus.

"I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29).

## A Fresh Covenant

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Josiah did not sit down in despair because of the serious things which Huldah made known to him. The judgments would not descend just yet; meantime, the energetic young king would do his utmost to lead the people back into “the old paths.” It is never too late to be obedient to the Word of God. Our own position is solemn indeed. The spewing out of Revelation 3:16, the cutting off of Romans 11:22, is near, with the total apostasy of all that now calls itself “Christian”; but it is our responsibility to learn and do the whole will of God as long as we remain here. Philadelphian faithfulness will continue alongside Laodicean heartlessness until the last. Let us seek to be Philadelphian in character that the Lord may be able to say to us, “thou hast kept My Word, and hast not denied My name” (Rev. 3:8).

Josiah convened a great national gathering in Jerusalem. Elders, priests, Levites, prophets, and a multitude of people small and great responded. The plural word prophets should be noted. Evidently other men besides Jeremiah were active in the land for God, yet He chose to speak through Huldah! We are quite unable to interpret all the details of the ways of God but we desire to be subject to His perfect wisdom.

“The King went up into the house of Jehovah.... and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of Jehovah” (2 Kings 23:2). Delightful spectacle for God and the angelic host to behold! What a joyful thrill we should experience if we could read in the public press of kings and presidents calling mass meetings in their respective capitals that they might read to them the sorely neglected Word of God, pointing out with all earnestness and gravity those things wherein the people have gone astray, and appealing to them to return humbly to their God! This would produce incomparably better results than the anxious discussions of statesmen who endeavor to find formulas whereby they may bring about the semblance of peace for a season. The times in which we live are more serious than those of Josiah. Then one Kingdom was tottering to its fall (dragging other Kingdoms down with it), but now the whole world-system is rushing to its doom.

“All the words of the law” suggests a considerable amount of reading. The meeting was thus lengthy. What a contrast to the short sermons that are barely tolerated in the Twentieth Century! This is the more deplorable seeing that we now possess the complete Word of God, containing the revelation of all His wonderful counsels of grace and glory which find their center in Christ. Why are we satisfied with so little of this spiritual wealth that is within our reach?

Josiah not only read to the people the law of Jehovah, but he declared his own intention to be obedient to it. “The King stood in his place, and made a covenant before Jehovah, to walk after Jehovah, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies, and His statutes, with all his heart, and with all His soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book” (2 Chron. 34:31). This is excellent. An ounce of example is worth more than a ton of precept. Joshua, in his final address to Israel, spoke similarly “As for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah” (Josh. 24:15). Paul urged Timothy to be “an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in love, in

faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). When the Lord Jesus was on earth the Jewish people had many teachers—Scribes and Pharisees—whose teaching was good, but their own lives were bad. “All therefore whatsoever they bid you, observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not” (Matt. 23:3). Mr. Spurgeon once spoke of a minister who was so good in the pulpit, but so questionable in his manner of life, that the people said that when he was in the pulpit it was a pity he should come out of it; and when he was not in the pulpit they said it was a scandal that he should be allowed to enter it! Brethren, let us above all things be real! God forbid that we should proclaim to others truths of which we know not the power in our own souls. Paul could say to one who knew him intimately, “Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, patience” (2 Tim. 3:10).

Josiah, in his earnest zeal, went beyond telling the people of his own intentions; “he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it” (2 Chron. 34:32). The king meant well, but how feebly he understood the fickleness of the human heart! Other pious kings before him had caused the people to utter good resolutions before God; but how quickly they returned “to their wallowing in the mire” (2 Peter 2:22). Yet Josiah’s subjects expressed no misgivings; “all the people stood to the covenant” (2 Kings 23:3). It was the old sad story of Sinai repeated. Never having learned the depths of their own evil, nor the holiness of God, at the burning mount “all the people answered together and said, “All that Jehovah hath spoken we will do” (Ex. 19:8). Paul learned to have “no confidence in flesh” (Phil. 3:3), but his nation has not to this day learned the lesson. While Josiah lived the people’s behavior was outwardly correct. “The inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers...they departed not from following Jehovah, the God of their fathers” (2 Chron. 34:32-33). But outward correctness will not do for God; Jeremiah’s sad pages tell us how little the people’s hearts loved the will of God. Quite a wave of enthusiasm passed over Jerusalem during one of our Lord’s early visits to that city; but He who was able to look beneath the surface and put no confidence in the people’s words. “Many believed in His Name, when they saw the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for He knew what was in man” (John 2:23-25). The famous Lord Protector of the British Commonwealth, Oliver Cromwell, sought to create a “Christian” nation by statutes and restrictions; but how fearful was the reaction, the plunge into licentiousness, when his powerful hand was removed!

After the return from Babylon, Nehemiah, perceiving that things were very wrong with the remnant, made a great effort to put the people upon a sound footing with God. In the ninth chapter of his book we have a great meeting in Jerusalem similar to that in the days of Josiah. The book of the law of Jehovah was read publicly to the people; they confessed their sins from the beginning of their national history; and they solemnly vowed to do better in future. Their vow is given in seven parts in Nehemiah 10, “We make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites and priests seal it.” Eighty-four persons, as representatives of the people, signed and sealed the solemn deed:

1 Nehemiah himself, 17 Levites

22 Priests, 44 Chiefs of the people

Alas for good Nehemiah’s expectations! Even such a strong body of signatories could not make the covenant sure. We have only to turn over two pages of Nehemiah’s book to find the people as

lawless as before. Neither royal decrees nor documents solemnly signed and sealed will make flesh anything different from what it is, “the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:7-8).

It is one of the cardinal truths of Christianity that God, in the work of the Lord Jesus, has not only dealt with our sins, but also with the life and nature which produced them. These two points are dealt with separately in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, which another has described as “the most weighty document which ever was placed in the hands of men.” This description is just, because this Epistle lays down the foundations of our relationships with God. Until this is understood, at least in measure, there will be no settled peace and joy, and the great matters of Divine Councils will not be apprehended. The question of our sins—or personal guilt—is dealt with by the Apostle down to Romans 5:11. This is very properly treated first, because the soul when awakened by the Spirit of God, becomes alarmed about guilt and its righteous judgment. The evil of his nature will be learned later. So perfectly have our sins been expiated by the blood of Jesus (Rom. 3:23-26), that God is able to say your “sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb. 10:17), and the believer himself is entitled to say (with all his brethren) “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). Thus we no longer dread the One against whom we have offended, but we exclaim, “We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Rom. 5:11). Blessed climax to the first part of the Apostle’s great subject.

But many souls who are clear as to the question of their sins are sorely troubled concerning the evil life and nature which produced them, never having learned the completeness of the work of God on their behalf through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. Sin is defined in 1 John 3:10 as “lawlessness” (Darby’s translation). Lawlessness is just self-will—the love of having our own way, and the determination to get it, if possible. This wretched principle is inherent in “flesh”; hence the Apostle’s words “sin in the flesh” in Romans 8:3. In the sacrifice of Christ God “condemned” this. On the awful day when His blessed Son hung upon Calvary’s tree God took into account all our evil, and disposed of it righteously. Tree and fruit were both judged. The believer in Jesus, accepting this in faith, not only sees his sins gone, but himself — the man born of Adam’s stock—gone also. “I am crucified with Christ” (Gal. 2:20). This being so, he seeks no more to improve his flesh; its evil is as ineradicable as the leopard’s spots. His confidence in flesh is finished. Although the flesh is within him still, and must remain there until the great transformation at the Lord’s coming. He no longer regards it as an integral part of himself, but as an alien foe to be kept in chains perpetually. Instead of looking at self, and hoping for better things there, the instructed Christian looks away from self to Christ risen and glorified, to whose image he will ere long be conformed. Thus holiness, that is, Christ-likeness, develops. The man described in Romans 7:7-24, had not learned this lesson. Until he reaches the end of the chapter he is occupied with self. Personal pronouns, “I,” “Me,” “My,” abound. He longs to do the right thing, but finds himself continually doing the wrong thing. All his efforts, by rules and regulations, to curb the workings of his flesh produce no good result. Instead, the poor distressed soul finds himself, as it were, sinking ever more deeply into the mire. In verse 24 he cries out, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?” The pronoun “Who” reveals that he realizes that help must come from outside himself. Soon he is able to say, “I thank God through Jesus Christ

our Lord.” This is not victory over self—of which some pious souls dream, but deliverance from self—a very different matter. Having learned that God dealt with all his evil in the death of Christ, his mind and heart now live in a new world. “To me to live is Christ” says Paul in Philippians 1:21.

The question is sometimes asked, “Does Romans 7 describe Paul’s experience?” Doubtless in the early days of his spiritual life he learned these great lessons with God; but when he wrote the Epistle to the Romans he was certainly not in the gloom and perplexity of chapter 7; he was in the liberty and joy of the great chapter which follows. The God of all grace has not called us to make us “wretched,” but the rather to “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8).

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It was not possible for either Josiah or Nehemiah to know the wonderful things which come before us in the New Testament epistles. The Savior had not yet come to earth; His great sacrifice for sin had not been offered; and His mighty triumph over every foe had not been effected. But they should have known enough of poor flesh not to saddle it with fresh restrictive covenants. Nothing but disappointment could be expected. But in the happy day that is not far distant, when Jehovah establishes His new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah He will write His law in their very hearts. This means new birth; then the will of God will be their real delight.

## From Dan to Beersheba

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For earnest zeal in the work of God, and for steady perseverance therein, it would be difficult to find a man who could excel Josiah, king of Judah. From such a one we can all learn valuable lessons; also remembering the words of the Apostle in 2 Thessalonians 3:13, "Brethren, be not weary in well-doing." The work of Josiah was very different from that which has been entrusted to us today. We have not been charged by the Lord Jesus to go through the earth with axes and hammers and destroy every abominable thing that meets our eyes; our service is to proclaim the sweet story of God's grace to a world of perishing sinners. We shall find, as we pursue our studies that Josiah did not limit himself to his own small kingdom, but went far beyond Judah's boundaries in his zeal for God. What have we to say concerning the regions beyond the land of our birth? Beloved Christian reader, think of the many lands where Christ is scarcely named, where the need is desperate, where souls are passing into eternal darkness every hour. Why go over and over again ground which has been well traversed? Why not cultivate the pioneer spirit that was seen in the Apostle Paul? Why not sit down quietly before God, and ask Him what "the world" means in the familiar John 3:16? France, for example, is very near the shores of Britain. Popish superstition and atheism fill that fair land, but to what extent are the favored Christians of Britain exercised about the need of the French people?

The zeal of Josiah recalls to our mind another zealous king, Jehu, the son of Nimshi; but the contrast between the two men is very great. Each was a divine Commissioner for the work of destroying Baal-worship, and other horrible things which disgraced the land of Israel; but the motives of the two men differed considerably. With Josiah the Word of God was the governing factor. The reading of it in his ears laid bare before him the evil of many things by which he was surrounded, and it was as a man obedient to the Word that he set to work. But in Jehu we behold considerable fleshly activity, for personal ambition had a large place in his mind even when he was doing that which was right in the eyes of God. When he met his friend Jehonadab the son of Rechab, he said, "Come with me, and see my zeal for Jehovah" (2 Kings 10:16). True souls do not parade their good deeds thus. Men's approval and admiration matters little to them (1 Cor. 4:3); it is enough that the Lord sees their zeal in His service. Note the Lord's words in Matthew 6:1-4. Jehu's heart was never right with God. But worship had been re-introduced amongst the people after Elijah's departure. Jehu, by divine command, destroyed it utterly, but he "took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin" (2 Kings 10:31). He maintained and worshipped the golden calves! Such glaring inconsistency is a warning to us. It is possible to denounce sternly certain evils in ourselves and others, and yet tolerate other things equally serious in the eyes of God. How treacherous is flesh! "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). Let us seek to be whole-heartedly obedient to the will of God in all our ways, after the pattern of Him who said, "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29).

The reader is aware that the Holy Spirit has given us two accounts of Josiah's reign. As we compare them with each other, certain differences are observable. In the "Chronicles" prominence

is given to the notable Passover which Josiah held in Jerusalem, while in “Kings” it is mentioned quite briefly; but his energetic purging of the land from its idolatries from Dan to Beersheba is dealt with at great length in “Kings,” and is barely noticed in “Chronicles.”

To 2 Kings 23 then we turn for our present purpose. We have noticed already that Josiah purged the temple before he repaired it (2 Chron. 34:8), yet we read in 2 Kings 23:4, “The king commanded Hilkiah the High Priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of Jehovah all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the lost of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Bethel.” This appalling list of abominations still in the house where Jehovah had set His name suggests that the first purging was not very thorough; but the second purging cleared every vile thing out. But why was the second purging more thorough than the first? Because the Book of the law had come to light between the two movements, and the hideousness of things which had long been tolerated was now perceived, at least by the king. He now had divine understanding to keep the law, and he sought to observe it with his whole heart (Psa. 119:34). Josiah could have said with David “Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever for they are the rejoicing of my heart. I have inclined mine heart to perform Thy statutes always, even unto the end” (Psa. 119:111-112). Energetic action must needs follow when the heart is thus going out towards God and His Word. “I made haste, and delayed not to keep Thy commandments” (Psa. 119:60). It may be that some believers today continue in unscriptural associations because the Word of God has not been set before them concerning these things. Evil is none the less evil because, through inattention to the teaching of scripture, its true character is not perceived; but when once the Word is brought to bear, God expects prompt action from His saints. Leviticus 5 lays down this principle clearly.

The task which Josiah undertook in faith was colossal, and he gave himself no rest until he had destroyed every vestige of idolatry out of the whole land of Israel, although he was only ruler over Judah and Benjamin. Jerusalem—Jehovah’s chosen center—was first cleared. It is specially noted that “he brought out the grove from the house of Jehovah without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron, and burnt it at the brook Kidron, and stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people” (2 Kings 23:6). “The grove” appears to have been an image of Astarte. Imagine such a horror being set up in the house of Jehovah, concerning which He once said that His eyes and His heart would be there perpetually (2 Chron. 7:16)! Adjoining the temple were the house of the Sodomites! Horror upon horror; how low Israel had fallen that such bestiality should be found in the most sacred spot on earth! The history of Christendom has been quite as fearful. One writer has said that its annals are “the annals of Hell.” Idolatry, blasphemy, immorality, and cruel persecution of the godly all practiced by men who, with high-sounding ecclesiastical titles, claimed to be the successors of the Apostles, and the only authoritative ministers of the Word of God and the sacraments!

In the Spirit’s record of Josiah’s activities special mention is made of the accumulation of abominations which his predecessors of David’s royal line had set up in and near Jerusalem. “He took away the horses that the Kings of Judah had given to the sun; at the entering in of the house of Jehovah.... and the altars that were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the Kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of Jehovah, did the king beat down, and brake them down from thence, and cast the dust of them

into the brook Kidron” (2 Kings 23:11-12). But still worse! We wonder not at the enormities of such men as Ahaz and Manasseh, but one of the greatest of Israel’s royal transgressors was Solomon, the man who built the temple of Jehovah, and whose prayer at the dedication thereof seemed to anticipate every evil and danger that might arise! His wide range of monstrosities are set before us. “The high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the King of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites; and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon, did the King defile” yet all this was left untouched by such pious Kings as Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah! Neglect of the Word of God is the only possible explanation of this. Our own experience of Christians around us proves that pious persons are not necessarily painstaking students of Holy Scripture.

Before Israel entered the land, Jehovah enacted that when the time came for the people to have a king, “it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites; and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear Jehovah his God, to keep all the Words of the law and these statutes, to do them: that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel” (Deut. 17:18-20). If each successive ruler in Israel had obeyed this injunction, and had prepared his own copy of the law, and had read therein all the days of his life, the formidable array of devilries with which Josiah had to deal would never have existed. Nor would the original of God’s holy law have become buried under rubbish, so that the finding of it was a real discovery.

Neglect of the Word of God is an evil more serious, and more disastrous in its results, than is generally realized. Things are tolerated in ourselves, and also adopted without question from our fathers, which would be judged and abandoned if we were more familiar with the Scriptures, and if the Scriptures had supreme authority over our souls. The growing habit of reading a short “Union” portion, with a few comments from persons not too well instructed in the mind of God must not be confounded with Bible study. The latter involves careful examination of every book in the Bible (not mere portions selected for us by others), seeking enlightenment from the Holy Spirit as to the scope of each book, and also as to the relation of each book to every other, for the Holy Scriptures are an organic whole. Thus we are led into the counsels of grace and glory, earthly and heavenly, which our all-wise God has placed in the sacred volume for our instruction and delight.

In his great work for God, Josiah dealt with what some might regard as a small evil compared with the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth. We refer to the high places for religious purposes which seemed to abound in Jehovah’s land. It was apparently the custom of the Canaanitish nations to establish places of worship for their false gods on various heights which they selected according to their own Satan-controlled desires. Deuteronomy 12 should be carefully examined by the readers of these pages. Jehovah told His people of the ways of the heathen and forbid them to imitate them. The Word must alone govern them in all matters relative to divine worship, as indeed in everything else. Jehovah would choose His own center, and thither His people must come with their burnt-offerings and sacrifices. The Israelites were to destroy all the high places of the heathen, and thus express their abhorrence of their wicked ways. But flesh is no better in those who are near to God than in those who are far from Him. The time soon came, alas, when Israel

chose high places for themselves. Some of these were idolatrous worship, and some for the worship of Jehovah. But all the high places, whatever might be the motives of use who established them, were offensive in His sight, for they were the expression of creative self-will, of hearts not subject to His commandments. Some of Judah's choicest kings tolerated high places, not those which were dedicated to idols, we may be sure, but those at which Jehovah was professedly worshipped. This weakness is specially recorded of Jothan (2 Kings 15:35), Asa (2 Chron. 15:17), and Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:33). Asa's doings were strange indeed in their inconsistency. He deposed the queen-mother from her exalted station because of her idolatrous practices, and he utterly destroyed her works, yet the high places of the people were allowed to remain (2 Chron. 15:16-17). When shall we learn that God expects obedience in all things from the souls that He has redeemed?

The energetic Josiah cleared away all the high places, and he brought away from them all priests who had burned incense upon them, but in view of their disobedience to the Word of Jehovah they were not allowed to exercise priestly functions in Jerusalem. "The priests of the high places came not up to the altar of Jehovah in Jerusalem, but they did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren" (2 Kings 23:8-9). Even unfaithful men must not be left to starve! Shall we not learn from all this that God expects His Word to be obeyed by His people? Is every reader of these pages able to quote "chapter and verse" concerning his religious exercises? Or is it possible that some choose for themselves where and how they will worship and serve their God? Josiah has left us a fine example. When the long neglected law of Jehovah was brought before him, he was determined to carry out all that was written therein. Never was the written Word more respected than by Josiah, and never was Jehovah's land and sanctuary more thoroughly purified of everything that was contrary to His will. How pleasant to God!

"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Rom. 15:4).

## Josiah at Bethel

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The great work of destruction, to which Josiah committed himself in faith, must have occupied considerable time; how long is not recorded. The earnest young king swept through the land from the territory of Simeon in the south to territory of Naphtali in the north (2 Chron. 34:6), smashing up and consigning to the flames everything that he knew was detestable in the sight of the Holy One of Israel. It was the book of the law, and nothing else, that influenced his movements. No false motives are discernable in the Spirit's report of what he did. With Jehu, as we have seen, it was otherwise. By him a useful work was performed but his motives were not pure.

It may surprise some that Josiah was able to act so freely in Northern Palestine seeing that it had been for about one hundred years a province of the kingdom of Assyria. The explanation is that the latter power was declining; its day was drawing to a close. In Ezekiel 31 the Assyrian is described "as a cedar in Lebanon, with fair branches, and with a shadowing shroud and of a high stature." The system of nations that existed in that day by divine permission is called "the garden of God." The Assyrian exalted himself exceedingly amongst the other trees (that is, nations), but his downfall was approaching. Assyria, had striven for world-supremacy ever since the days of Asshur (Gen. 10:11). Such a position properly belongs to Israel in the ways of God. Israel's unfaithfulness was now causing God to hand over supreme power to the Gentiles; but it was not to Assyria that He intended to give it. Babylon was the destined head of the great image which set forth symbolically Gentile Imperialism as a whole, from first to last. Assyria had a solemn warning when Jonah marched through the streets of Nineveh with his terrible message of judgment. The King was moved by it; and the nation (or at least its capital city) bowed low before the Creator, and was spared in mercy. But nothing permanent resulted. Evil returned in full force, and in Josiah's day Assyria's destruction was near. The central government was no longer strong enough to hold effectively its distant conquests; hence Josiah's liberty of action in Northern Palestine. Proud Nineveh was soon to be a desolation, never to be rebuilt while the earth, lasts. "Jehovah hath given a commandment concerning thee, that no more of thy name be sown" (Nahum 1:14). Such was the divine decree.

In the goodness of God no external complications arose while Josiah was engaged in his good work. The movements of nations are under divine control. Elihu said truly, "When He giveth quietness, who can make trouble?" and he added that this applies to nations as well as to individual men (Job 34:29). When David gave his charge to Solomon he told him what Jehovah had said concerning him: "Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. He shall build an house for My name" (1 Chron. 22:9). A war-less reign enabled Solomon thus to serve his God. In Jehoshaphat's reign "the realm was quiet for his God gave him rest round about" (2 Chron. 20:30). On the contrary Jehovah allowed Israel to be invaded at a moment when Saul had almost captured David. "There came a messenger unto Saul, saying, Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land. Wherefore Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philistines" (1 Sam.

23:27-28). Is it not better to confide in God than to seek safety in treaties, and alliances? Useful work, even of a social character is hindered by the waste and turmoil of war. Even God's saints find their important service hampered by the world's strife; although in their case God graciously overrules the circumstances to send the gospel where otherwise it might not have gone. Josiah had thirty-one years of peace in which to serve God in Israel. Alas, it was his own folly which brought the peace to an end!

Amongst the many idolatrous centers which were visited by Josiah, Bethel is specially mentioned, and some remarkable incidents are noted. Bethel had an important place in the ways of Jehovah, and it had tender associations for the hearts of the godly in Israel. Nearby was Abraham's first camping-ground when he entered the land. In that neighborhood he pitched his tent and built his altar (Gen. 12:8). After his mistaken journey into Egypt, Abraham returned to the place where he built his altar at the first (Gen. 13:3-4). Communion with God was thus restored. It was at Bethel where Jacob rested for the night on his journey from Beersheba to Haran. The vision of the ladder set up from earth to heaven, with the angels ascending and descending upon it, and Jehovah speaking to his poor wayward servant from the top of it, is familiar to us all. Early in the morning Jacob "took the stone which he had put for his pillows and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of the place Bethel" (Gen. 28:10-22). Bethel means "house of God." After years of wandering, Jacob returned thither, and learned precious lessons concerning the God with whom he had to do (Gen. 35:1-15). Several centuries later Jehovah referred very touchingly to Jacob's second visit to Bethel, "There he spake with us, even the Lord God of hosts; Jehovah is his memorial" (Hosea 12:4-5). Mark how the Triune God appreciated the fact that "there he spake with Us." Bethel became one of Jeroboam's chief seats of idolatry. He did his utmost to prevent the people speaking with their God, as their father Jacob did. Indeed the proximity of Bethel to Jerusalem looks as though Jeroboam deliberately established Bethel as a religious center in order to obstruct the way of the people to the sanctuary of Jehovah.

Bethel was a hot-bed of iniquity from the time of Jeroboam to the days of Josiah. In Amos 4:4, Jehovah says sarcastically to His wayward people, "Come to Bethel and transgress." But in the next chapter of the same prophet we hear a pleading voice, "Thus saith Jehovah unto the house of Israel, Seek ye Me, and you shall live; but seek not Bethel... Seek Jehovah, and you shall live, lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it; and there be none to quench it in Bethel" (Amos 5:4-5). When Jeroboam was granted dominion over the ten tribes because of the unfaithfulness of Solomon, Jehovah told him that if he would hearken unto His commandments and walk in His ways, and do that which is right in His sight, He would be with him, and build him "a sure house" (1 Kings 11:38). But who can God trust save the Lord Jesus? Solomon was unfaithful; so likewise was Jeroboam. When the latter fled into Egypt to escape the wrath of Solomon, he saw the people there worshipping the god Apis; this probably suggested to him the golden calves that he set up in Bethel and in Dan. From the same source Aaron and the children of Israel got the idea of the golden calf (Ex. 32). Egypt is a type of the world in its independence of God; let the children of God beware of copying its ways!

The general condition of the Northern districts of Palestine was deplorable when Josiah marched through on his mission of judgment. When the Kings of Assyria removed considerable numbers of the ten tribes from the land, they replaced them with colonists from Babylon and other provinces, who brought with them their heathen gods. This sorry admixture is described in 2 Kings 17. From

that time there was a strange blend of Israelites and Gentiles, and of paganism and Judaism in the land which Jehovah loved, and over which His beloved Son will yet reign gloriously. What confusion as the result of disobedience to God!

Never was idolatry so thoroughly extirpated anywhere as by Josiah throughout the length and breadth of the land of Israel. He slew all the priests, burnt their bones upon their altars, and then destroyed the altars themselves, reducing them to powder. Such thoroughness God loves. The Corinthian saints were very slow in dealing with wickedness in the assembly while active in avenging their personal wrongs, even taking one another into the world's courts, (1 Cor. 5:6). A worldwide clearance will be effected by the Lord Jesus at His appearing. "The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:41-42).

When looking around the sepulchers in Bethel, one in particular attracted Josiah's attention. "What title is that that I see? And the men of the city told him, It is the sepulcher of the man of God, which came from Judah, and proclaimed these things which thou hast done against the altar of Bethel. And he said, Let him alone; let no man move his bones. So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet, that came out of Samaria" (2 Kings 23:17-18). A remarkable story is here recalled. The men of Bethel were speaking of a visit to their city three and a half centuries earlier. The memory of it lingered in the district, and the people recognized the fulfillment of the words of the man of God in the terrible doings of Josiah.

Is there such a thing as prophecy? The modern mind rejects the suggestion with scorn. But the Scriptures are full of prophecy. That which has been already fulfilled constitutes a great mass of divine testimony. Concerning Christ Himself: His birth—the fact and the place of it; His ministry and miracles; His rejection by Israel; His sufferings at the hands of men and of God; His death, burial, resurrection and ascension; and His present session in manhood at the right hand of God, were all put into writing by the Holy Spirit centuries before He came into the world. Concerning Israel and the nations in general—their downfall and sufferings were predicted while they were at the height of their prosperity, and in some instances long before they rose to power at all. If so much has been fulfilled to the letter, faith confidently expects the full accomplishment of all that yet remains. Man is incapable of forecasting the future, for he is but the creature of a day; God, on the contrary "callesh those things which be not, as though they were" (Rom. 4:17). Men who in their pride and independence of heart reject the prophetic lamp which God has graciously placed within the reach of all who can appreciate it, must of necessity grope in darkness. Light from God, which cheers the spirit and guides the steps, is not far away; but they desire it not. Never was the word of prophecy more necessary for the people of God than in this twentieth century of the Christian era, with its manifold complications and perplexities (2 Pet. 1:19).

## Three Wrecked Lives

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The reply of the men of Bethel to Josiah's inquiry concerning a particular sepulcher which caught his eye carries us back to one of the most serious chapters in Holy Writ—1 Kings 13. Three men are set before us therein, and the governmental dealings of God with them. Although three thousand years have passed away since the incidents that are there recorded, the lessons of the chapter are as important as ever for all who have to do with God, and especially for any who stand forth in public testimony for Him.

Three wrecked lives! In no other way can we justly speak of Jeroboam, king of Northern Israel, the man of God out of Judah, and the old prophet of Bethel.

In Jeroboam we see the worthlessness and hopelessness of flesh, however divinely favored. Lifted out of obscurity by the God of Israel, and granted dominion over ten of the tribes, Jeroboam commenced his reign with every advantage. Jehovah promised to be with him, and build him a sure house if he would pay heed to His commandments, and walk in His ways. Solomon had grievously failed in this, and was (with his heirs) chastened by God in its righteous government. Jeroboam should have profited by Jehovah's stern dealings with the king that He loved so well, and upon whom He heaped wisdom, riches, glory, and blessing. But when did flesh ever profit under the hand of God? It is irremediably evil, and the word of God to every man is, "Ye must be born anew" (John 3:7). When Jeroboam became established in his kingdom (for Jehovah forbade Rehoboam to attack him) in his desire to make his throne secure, he devised a new religion for his people. The will of God was nothing to him. Because he feared that if the people continued to go up to Jerusalem to worship Jehovah they would ultimately return to their allegiance to the house of David, he appointed new religious centers for them. Yet the word of Jehovah through Ahijah the prophet should have made it clear to him that he had nothing to fear if he kept the commandments of God (1 Kings 11:35-38). Hence his sin was great in setting up golden calves in Bethel and in Dan for the people to worship. Repeatedly we hear the dismal refrain concerning his corrupt successors that they "walked in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin" (2 Kings 13:2-11). The malign influence of this man reached to the Captivity.

On a day that will never be forgotten a man of God out of Judah appeared in Bethel while Jeroboam was burning incense upon his idolatrous altar. Not only had he diverted the people, from Jehovah's chosen center, he had also set aside the Aaronic priesthood and had appointed priests of his own choosing, even acting as a priest himself, (1 Kings 13:33)! Christendom has been guilty of all this. Religious centers have been set up in abundance and God's holy priesthood, consisting of all believers in the Lord Jesus (1 Peter 2:5), has been rejected in order to make room for a host of men who know nothing of the grace of God, and who are guilty of the sin of Korah in their pretentious ministrations (Num. 16:4-7; Jude 11).

The man of God was sent to Bethel to denounce Jeroboam's doings, His message was addressed to the altar rather than to the king himself. "O altar, altar, thus saith Jehovah, 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." Now this is prophecy. Why make a difficulty about it? If God be God, if He be indeed the "I am," it is easy for Him to speak about men and their doings centuries in advance if He chooses to do so. We, creatures of a day, can only speak of things which are transpiring before our eyes. Tomorrow is quite unknown. This prophecy is very precise in that the man who would destroy Jeroboam's altar is named. In like manner Jehovah named Cyrus hundreds of years before his birth (Isa. 45:1). And pray why not? We ask again, where is the difficulty? Away with the stupid unbelief that would deprive us of the inestimable benefit of the vast range of prophetic truth that is enshrined in Holy Scripture.

The prediction that judgment would reach Bethel by a prince of David's line must not pass unnoticed. Jehovah was very displeased with that Royal house, yet he had not abandoned His purposes in connection with it. Josiah, in his work of destruction, is typical of Christ (all Scripture points to Him). Who at His appearing will judge and clear away all evil from Israel, and from the earth generally. Cyrus also typifies Christ, but in a different character. Josiah pulled down, but Cyrus built up. It was he who published the famous decree which encouraged the Jewish people to return to the land of their fathers, and to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1). Thus in Josiah, Christ is suggested as the judge and destroyer of all that is evil, and in Cyrus as the restorer of the people so long strangers from the land of promise.

The man of God gave Jeroboam a sign that the word of Jehovah through him would come to pass. The altar should be rent, and its ashes scattered; and so it happened, to Jeroboam's dismay. "Lay hold on him," cried the angry king; but the hand which he extended withered up by the judgment of God, "Pray for me" (1 Kings 13:4), said Jeroboam in alarm. Alas, the unhappy man had never learned to pray for himself. In this he reminds us of Pharaoh in Exodus 8:8, and Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8:24. The exercise of the power of God that he had experienced should have led Jeroboam to repentance, but flesh learns nothing. He felt the consequences of his sin, but not the evil of it. "After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way" (1 Kings 13:33).

The central figure of 1 Kings 13 is "the man of God out of Judah"; and the words upon which all the instruction of the chapter turns are "the word of Jehovah," ten times repeated. To Jeroboam the word of Jehovah meant nothing, self-will was his rule of life; to the old prophet who lived in Bethel, the word of Jehovah meant something, but it had lost its power over his soul; to the man of God the word of Jehovah meant everything until the fatal moment when he allowed himself to be seduced from it.

Let it be emphasized that the messenger who finished his course so tragically was a man of God. This title is used very rarely in Scripture, and it is only accorded to divinely selected persons. Yet the man of 1 Kings 13 is thus described fifteen times, not merely by the scribe who wrote the chapter, but also by the Holy Spirit who guided his pen! On the same principle Barnabas, after his false steps, is divinely described in Acts 11:24 as "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." A man does not lose his whole character in the eyes of God because of one or more failures. In this our God is more merciful (and more righteous) than His people, who, in forgetfulness of their own frailty, are sometimes merciless towards those whom Satan has tripped up. Sin should never be regarded lightly, and God will certainly deal with it in those who are near to Him; but critics should remember the warning, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor.

10:12).

God has not been pleased to tell us the name of the witness who failed so seriously at Bethel, nor has He told us the name of the man who led him astray. We shall meet them both in the glory of God ere long, and they will join with us in proclaiming the worthiness of the Lamb that was slain. None of us dare boast of anything in ourselves; "He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:31).

We again draw attention to the fact that the man who failed at Bethel is described fifteen times in 1 Kings 13 as "a man of God." He was all that the title implies, or the Spirit of God would not thus designate him. His holy soul revolted against the wickedness which covered the land of Israel; he desired to stand in complete separation from it; and he denounced it with all the fervor at his command. The word of Jehovah was precious to him, whatever it might be to others. Why then did he fail? Because, dear Christian reader, he was no more perfect than you and me. In the books of Scripture the faults of even the truest of God's servants are not overlooked. Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and others all broke down at times in the presence of the enemy. In these solemn records, God would teach us that the only perfect Servant and Witness is the Son of His love. As for ourselves, we only walk steadily when the eye of our faith is upon Him, and when the Word of God is supreme in our souls by the power of the Holy Spirit. May God in His infinite mercy keep us steady in a world that is rushing to its doom, and in a Church which has but little respect for His holy will!

Jeroboam was so relieved by the restoration of his hand that he invited the man of God to his home for refreshment and reward. But the "man of God said unto the king. If thou wilt give me half thine house I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: for so was it charged me by the word of Jehovah, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou earnest" (1 Kings 13:8-9). All this is excellent. There was firmness in the tone of Jehovah's messenger. He clearly understood the nature of his commission, and he was determined to be obedient in every detail. Royal patronage should not deflect him from the Word of God. Eating and drinking is expressive of fellowship; so we are taught in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22; and there could be no fellowship between the people of Bethel and the man who respected Jehovah and His truth. Let us not miss the lesson of this. The need for bold testimony against religious evil becomes increasingly urgent as the apostasy draws near; but the testimony of our lips will lose all its value if we tolerate for a single moment that which we know to be contrary to God. "Surely I may attend my own daughter's wedding in the Cathedral?" What sort of instruction have you given to your daughter that she should wish to be married in a Cathedral? If you have taught her correctly, and she persists in setting at naught your counsel, would you not do well to spend the wedding hour quietly at home in prayer for your wayward child? Why descend to her level by giving sanction to that which Cathedrals and clergy represent? Our Lord's brethren after the flesh marveled that He was not making preparation to attend "the Jews feast of tabernacles" in Jerusalem. But His heart was not there. It would be simply a great worldly religious gathering, so different from what "the feasts of Jehovah" were intended to be (Lev. 23). "The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil" (John 7:7). Let us range ourselves alongside the blessed Son of God, even though faithful separation from all that is contrary to God may cause us to be hated even as He was hated.

So the man of God “went another way, and returned not by the way that he came to Bethel.” But the eye of Satan was upon the man. When face to face with an angry King, he stood calmly in faith; when the seductive voice of a religious, “friend” reached his ears, he failed dismally. Had he gone straight home, all might have been well, but his seducer found him “sitting under an oak.” The Christian life is a race. While our souls are in motion we are secure; but even a brief relaxation may be our undoing. In Philippians 3 we find Paul straining every nerve (spiritually speaking) to reach the goal which God had set before him—conformity to Christ in glory. “I press, toward the mark for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14). Amongst his last words we read, “I have finished the course” (2 Tim. 4:7). We are exhorted to “lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and to run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the beginner and finisher of faith” (Heb. 12:1-2). Satan’s most successful weapon is deception. Note the words, “deceive” and “deceived” in Revelation 20. “We are not ignorant of his devices,” says the Apostle in 2 Corinthians 2:11. This states the Christian position ideally, but it may not be true at every moment of every individual believer. Constant watchfulness is necessary.

The seducer of the man of God out of Judah was himself a prophet of Jehovah. The Holy Spirit calls him “an old prophet” (1 Kings 13:11). The adjective arrests our attention. In 1 John 2 the family of God is divided into three grades; “babes,” “young men,” and “fathers.” “Fathers” are saints in the highest condition of spiritual development; old men (in the spiritual sense) suggest decay. It is written of Ephraim in Hosea 7:9 “Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not; yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, and he knoweth it not.” It is deplorable when this has to be said of a believer in the Lord Jesus, but it appears to have been really true of the old prophet. Like Lot before him, he lived in bad surroundings and “evil communications corrupt good manners”(1 Cor. 15:33). Large numbers of pious people had forsaken their all in the Northern Kingdom in order to get away from Jeroboam’s idolatries. They went south into Judah and Jerusalem where there was still some regard for the law of Jehovah (2 Chron. 11:13-17). But the old prophet remained in Bethel! As Hosea 7:9 expresses it, strangers had devoured his strength, and gray hairs were upon him. He was not the type of man whom God could use to publicly denounce the devilries of Jeroboam and his followers; hence the special mission of the man of God out of Judah, whose work the backsliding old prophet cruelly marred.

When the prophet’s sons came home from the town and told their father of all that had happened his spirit was stirred, as it might well be. Having ascertained which way the man of God had gone, he went after him, desiring to bring him back into his house for a season. Let us be reasonable in our criticism of the old prophet at this point. He probably knew nothing of the strict divine command that Jehovah’s witness must neither eat nor drink in Bethel. What is probable is that he longed for some intercourse with a man who feared God. What the Holy Spirit so graciously says of unfaithful Lot would be equally true of the unfaithful old prophet, “that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds” (2 Pet. 2:8). Not for many a day had a “brother” sat at the old prophet’s table; what pleasure it would be to receive one now! It is possible also that he sought some recognition from the man who had acted so wonderfully in the presence of the King and his people. But why had he not long before turned his back on Bethel? Separation from evil is vital for the development of the spiritual life. Only in healthy surroundings can any of us increase in the knowledge of God.

When the man of God told the old prophet what his orders were (“by the word of Jehovah”) the most critical moment in the life’s history of both men was reached, little as either realized it. Oh, the importance of watching every word, and every step! First the old prophet failed, for he lied; then the man of God failed, for he was not sufficiently alert to discern the seductive voice of Satan. Do we wonder that the prophet lied? His environment is sufficient explanation. No one could live in Bethel without his whole spiritual tone becoming lowered. Thus he said: “I am a prophet also, as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the Word of Jehovah, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread, and drink water” (1 Kings 13:18). Paul the Apostle would quickly have disposed of such an utterance. Mark his vehement language in Galatians 1:8, “though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.” If an angel at any moment dared to contradict, or even modify, any explicit word from God, it would be a sin of the first magnitude. We commend to our readers a few words from a wise counselor long gone to his rest, but who “being dead, yet speaketh”: “Whenever God has made His will known to us we are not to allow any after-influence whatever to call it in question, even although the latter may take the form of the Word of God. If we were morally nearer to the Lord, we should feel that the only true and right position is to follow that which He told us at first” (J. N. Darby, Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, Vol. 1:506).

Sorrowful spectacle! Two disobedient servants of the living God turning back to Satan’s chief stronghold in the land to eat and drink! Surely each had a bad conscience; with each one the word of the Lord had no power, at least for the present. The government of God, which cannot tolerate sin in those who are near to Him, moved quickly. In His divine sovereignty God put the sentence of death against the deceived one in the mouth of the deceiver himself! “He cried unto the man of God that came from Judah (note the word “cried”), saying “Thus saith Jehovah, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of Jehovah, and hast not kept the commandment which Jehovah thy God commanded thee, but camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place of the which He did say to thee, Eat no bread and drink no water; thy carcass shall not come unto the sepulcher of thy fathers” (1 Kings 13:20-22). There was no such severity towards either Jeroboam or the old prophet. It is a blessed thing to be in intimate relationship with God by grace; but it is a solemn thing if we dishonor His holy name. In the city of Corinth in Paul’s day there were probably persons far more wicked than any in the Assembly, yet certain in the Assembly were divinely laid low in sickness, and some were put to sleep. Strange as it may seem, they were fit for heaven but they were not fit for Corinth!

The parting at the door of the prophet was solemn. Each knew that they would not meet again in this world; but both men, with ourselves, will “be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:10). The man of God had not gone far when a lion met him, and slew him. The Holy Spirit notes the facts that the lion did not harm the ass, nor did he devour the carcass; moreover, he allowed passers-by to observe what he had done without molesting them. What a lesson is here! The animal obeyed the divine commission, and did not exceed it in any detail. It is humiliating to reflect that the humblest of God’s creatures can be more obedient to their Creator than man made in His image! In Isaiah 1:3 the ox and the ass are cited as rebuking the people of Jehovah, and in Jeremiah 8:7, four birds are mentioned from whom disobedient men and women might learn something. The ravens were faithful in their service when they carried bread and flesh twice daily to Elijah at Cherith (that is, they did not eat the food); the fish that swallowed Jonah obeyed his

Creator in putting out the prophet when his lesson was learned; and the colt submissively carried the Lord Jesus through shouting crowds into Jerusalem. When the old prophet heard of the disaster to the man of God, he saddled his ass and rode quickly to the spot. What a sight he beheld! The lion and the ass standing guard, as it were, over the dead body! Surely a parable is here! The dead messenger of Jehovah was a strange blend of the lion and the ass; with the king so bold, but with the old prophet so foolish! Similarly, Peter was bold in the presence of armed men, but terrified when amongst servant-maids! All the circumstances proved that the roadside tragedy was the hand of God. Jeroboam was spared the consequences of his sin in answer to prayer (1 Kings 13:6), but the fault of the man of God was outside the range of prayer, it was "sin unto death" (1 John 5:16). It was left to the old prophet to carry back the body to Bethel, and bury it in his own tomb, with the lamentation, "Alas, my brother!" But he was led to confirm all that the dead man had said concerning Jeroboam's iniquities, "The saying which he cried by the word of Jehovah against the altar in Bethel, and against all the high places which are in the cities of Samaria, shall surely come to pass" (1 Kings 13:32).

This was the tomb concerning which Josiah inquired when he visited the spot three and a half centuries later. The dead man had mentioned his name thus long before his birth as the destined executor of God's judgments, and he had fulfilled the word of God. With the tenderness of heart that was characteristic of him, Josiah should have profited by the story; but alas! few years hence his own life (so valuable to the nation) ended in shame, because, like the man of God, he got out of the path of entire subjection to the Word of Jehovah.

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Let us not hasten away from the tomb in Bethel. A few moments of further meditation upon its solemn lessons will be wholesome for us all. It is possible for an aged brother to become a spent force; shall we not guard against this? Advanced years do not necessarily imply increased spirituality. A long course of useful service for God may easily breed in us a spirit of self-satisfaction, than which nothing is more dangerous both for ourselves and for all who come under our influence. In that case, our words of counsel may have weight and value with younger brethren which they do not deserve. Humility and self-judgment become us until our latest breath. We shall not be free from danger until we find ourselves in the safe shelter of the Lord's presence. The old prophet—a man whom apparently God could no longer employ—ensnared a younger man to his ruin. The younger men of our time must not overlook this danger. Respect for age and experience is good; but our only authority for action in any sphere of life is the Word of God. "A brother advised me," or "an angel spake to me," will not sound well at the judgment seat of Christ. Both old and young must maintain themselves in direct touch with God and His truth!

It is but a little while until the great gathering of saints to the Lord in the air. The man of God out of Judah will be in that brilliant throng; likewise the old prophet of Bethel, and King Josiah; also all the readers of these pages who believe in the Lord Jesus. We shall glory forever in the grace which has saved us; but our service we must leave the Lord to appraise when we stand before Him. All that is faulty He will graciously put out of remembrance; but all that is good (wrought in us by the Holy Spirit) He will commend and reward. Meantime, each one of us must humbly say:

"That Thou should'st have delight in me,

And be the God Thou art,  
Is darkness to my intellect  
But sunshine in my heart.”

F. W. Faber

## The Great Passover

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It is refreshing to turn away from the contemplation of three wrecked lives and to meditate upon the notable Passover which Josiah held in Jerusalem. The sands of time were running out for guilty Israel, and soon their "place and nation" would be extinguished by the righteous judgment of God, not to be restored until the appearing of Christ; yet, before the stroke fell, the remnant left in the land experienced one of the brightest moments that Israel had ever known. This was due instrumentally to the faith of the King, whose mind and heart had been reached by the Word of God, and who desired that both himself and his people might be wholly obedient thereto. All this is encouraging to us today. We are living in the late evening of the Church dispensation; but God is as willing as ever to grant blessing and joy to those whose hearts are true to Him. The gloom which surrounds us has arisen from the mists of our own disobedience and folly; but God is today towards His people as ever in grace and love.

In both records the Holy Spirit stresses the fact that Josiah's Passover was unprecedented in character, in 2 Kings 23:22 we read, "Surely there was not holden such a Passover from the days of the Judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the Kings of Israel, nor in the days of the Kings of Judah?" In 2 Chronicles 35:18 (written after the return from the Captivity) we are told, "There was no Passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the Kings of Israel keep such a Passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem." The date of this precious memory has been carefully preserved; in both "Kings" and "Chronicles" we are told that it was "in the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah."

That which made this Passover different from all that had gone before it was the scrupulous observance of the Word of Jehovah by both King and people. God had spoken through Moses, David and Solomon concerning the ordinances of divine worship, and Josiah was determined that it should all be carried out. The failures and shortcomings of earlier days were not allowed to influence things now. Hezekiah kept the Passover in the second month; but Josiah kept it in the first. In Hezekiah's day the purification of the people and the sanctuary was but partial; Josiah saw to it that the purification was thorough and complete. Jehovah graciously pardoned the irregularities in the reign of Hezekiah; but since then the book of the law had come into renewed prominence, and Josiah desired that its every enactment should be carefully observed. Listen to his exhortation to the Levites, "Kill the passover, and sanctify yourselves, and prepare your brethren, that they may do according to the Word of Jehovah by the hand of Moses" (2 Chron. 35:6).

With such a spirit working we are prepared for the words "Josiah kept a Passover unto Jehovah in Jerusalem" (2 Chron. 35:1; 2 Kings 23:21). It was not an occasion for mere priestly pomp and display. Poor flesh loves such things! Magnificent buildings, costly vestments, entrancing music and the odor of incense attract multitudes in our own time. But it is all deeply offensive to Him with whom we have to do. "God is a spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in

truth” (John 4:24). Jehovah was in the mind of Josiah. His whole soul was going out to Him; and his one desire was to please Him in all things. Passing to the Gospel of John, what strange language we find there! “The Passover, a feast of the Jews was nigh” (John 6:4); “the Jews feast of Tabernacles was at hand” (John 7:2). The language of the Apostle is cold. Both Passover and Tabernacles were “feasts of the Jews”; not, as in Leviticus 23, the “feasts of Jehovah.” The ritual of those great days was duly carried out, but Jesus was in the land, and unwanted. Fearful hypocrisy! The God of Israel walking up and down amongst the people, a near neighbor in His condescending grace, yet unwanted! “He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not” (John 1:10-11). When the great festivals of His own appointing were in progress, Annas and Caiaphas were welcome; one or both would attend in state; but Jesus was outside it all.

Some of the simple folk might inquire whether He would be present, and might argue with others concerning Him; but there was no move to exalt Him of whom every detail in the feasts of Jehovah spoke eloquently to all who had ears to hear, and hearts to understand (John 7:11-12).

Are our hearts going out towards God and Christ as fervently as the heart of Josiah went out to Jehovah long ago? Concerning the place of separation which many profess to have taken, have we really gone forth “unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach” (Heb. 13:13)? When we set out for a meeting on any given occasion, is the thought uppermost in our mind that we are going to meet the Lord, or are we merely attending a religious service? We may be truly scriptural in what we do, as the priests and Pharisees were in our Lord’s day, and yet give no pleasure to the heart of God.

A very important step had to be taken before the Passover could be rightly held in Jerusalem—the ark of Jehovah had to be restored to its place. Josiah “said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, which were holy unto Jehovah, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David, King of Israel did build; it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders: serve now Jehovah your God, and His people Israel” (2 Chron. 35:3). This command is startling to read! There has been no previous mention of the ark being displaced. Who did it? What king was evil enough to remove the sacred vessel from the Holy of Holies? How low had the people of God fallen that such profanity could be tolerated? And where was the ark during the years of its dishonor? It is true that the ark was but a chest made of shittim wood, overlaid with gold, with a cover upon which the atoning blood was intended to be sprinkled. But the ark spoke to God of Christ, and Josiah very properly spoke of it as “the holy ark.” It was the most expressive of all the types of the Levitical economy our Lord’s incorruptible humanity is set forth in the shittim wood; His deity in the gold which covered it, and His accomplished sacrifice is suggested in the blood on the Mercy Seat (or, propitiatory) upon which the golden cherubim looked down. Typically, it was Christ in His person and work which had been utterly rejected in Israel until Josiah was divinely raised up to put everything in its true place. Christ is God’s true center, and this must be made clear (at least in type) before the Passover could be acceptable Jehovah.

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Early in the nineteenth century there was a movement of the Spirit of God in Christendom which went far beyond the great work of the Protestant Reformation. In the sixteenth century the important truth of justification by faith was recovered, and multitudes rejoiced in it. But not much

more was recovered at that time. But in the “twenties” of the last century there were quiet, stirrings in many hearts concerning the Assembly — its true relationships to God and to Christ, and the walk that is proper for those who, by grace, have part therein. Pride in denominational prosperity, and boasting in religious leaders was abundant; but for all practical purposes Christ was displaced. He is everything to God, and He should be everything to us. He sits on high as Head of His body the Church; what other head dare we acknowledge? He is the only true gathering center for His saints on earth, according to His own words in Matthew 18:20 “Where two or three are gathered together unto My Name, there am I in the midst of them.” When these precious realities are made good to the soul by the Holy Spirit, emancipation from human traditions results. Beloved Christian reader, is Christ all this to you—the Head with whom you are in conscious union, and the Center to whom you delight to gather with others who love His peerless name?

What a week of joy and blessing Josiah and his people experienced in Jerusalem! It was a revival indeed. We have already seen that in both “Kings” and “Chronicles” we are told that there had been nothing like it for several centuries. But why did Josiah convene a Paschal week rather than a week for the feast of Tabernacles? Because the Passover was Jehovah’s great foundation institution for His people, and His people must begin where He begins. It was the memorial of His marvelous deliverance of Israel in the days of Moses. It was intended to have a three-fold appeal—(1) to the individual; (2) to the family; and (3) to the nation corporately. Every firstborn in Josiah’s time would recall how the firstborn was spared in Egypt, and he would thus learn something of the value of the sprinkled blood. So with the individual now. It is good to sing with the assembly:

“Worthy the Lamb that’s gone on high  
To be exalted thus;  
Worthy the Lamb that died, we cry,  
For He was slain for us.”

Dr. Watts.

But each individual also delights to say, “The Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). Personal pronouns are very acceptable upon our lips when we sing to God individually; but personal pronouns are out of place in the assembly.

“My Redeemer! Oh how sweet to call Thee mine!” is more suitable for the home than for the assembly.

Every family in Israel would feed together upon the roast lamb. Are we careful to have family worship? Do we so train our children that with one accord in the home we speak and sing in terms of appreciation of the Lamb that was slain! But beyond the appreciation of the individual and of the family, there is also the gathering up of the congregation to bless God and the Lamb—in Israel’s case, the whole nation; and in this era the whole Assembly of saints.

The Pascal gathering in Jerusalem in Josiah’s day was a small affair compared with the gathering in the days of Solomon to keep the feast of Tabernacles. “At that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt

before Jehovah our God” (1 Kings 8:65). But Solomon’s day was the time of Israel’s glory; the nation was undivided; and it was suitable that the feast of Tabernacles should have prominence, for it speaks typically of millennial glory and blessing. In Josiah’s day the nation was broken; and large numbers of the people had been removed from the land by Gentile Powers. Only a remnant was left, but it was very precious to Jehovah to see them coming together at that late moment in the history of the nation to place themselves once more in their danger and need under the shelter of the blood of the lamb. Precious lesson for us in this day!

We must remind ourselves that the Passover proper was a one-day feast, but inseparably connected with it was the feast of unleavened bread for seven days more. The whole was concluded with a holy convocation. “On the seventh day ye shall have a holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work therein” (Num. 28:25). Nothing of this was overlooked by Josiah. How anxious he was to be obedient to the Word in every detail! “The children of Israel that were present kept the Passover at that time, and the feast of unleavened bread seven days” (2 Chron. 35:17). In Jehovah’s original instructions concerning the Paschal week leaven was absolutely forbidden. He who dared to eat leavened bread during that season was to be cut off from Israel (Ex. 12:14-20). No work and no leaven were the divine rules for the Paschal week (Lev. 23:6-8). No work, for the great Calvary work of Christ was in view (typically), and no human efforts must be placed alongside it, Christ is not a mere helper of sinners, making up for their deficiencies; He is Savior, doing all that is necessary to save us from eternal ruin. Every day during the feast of unleavened bread burnt-offerings were to be offered to Jehovah, for they spake to Him of the perfections of Christ in life and in death, in virtue of which we are accepted and blessed. The contrast between what man is and can do, and what Christ is and has done was thus strongly presented typically.

No work and no leaven. No leaven, for it is suggestive of evil throughout the Scriptures. The application of these instructions to Christians is shown in 1 Corinthians 5. The Corinthian saints (resident in a particularly vile city, and not long converted had low thoughts of what is suitable to God. The Old Testament types of the Passover and unleavened bread were therefore brought to bear upon them by the Apostle. “Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leavening of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:7-8). The Lord’s Supper is not in view in this passage. The Lord’s Supper is dealt with in 1 Corinthians 11, and the fellowship connected therewith in 1 Corinthians 10. The teaching of 1 Corinthians 5, goes far beyond the Supper, which indeed is never Called a “feast” in the New Testament. The Apostle had in mind the whole life of believers in Jesus. Israel’s seven days of unleavened bread are typical of the whole period of our “sojourning here” (1 Pet. 1:17). We are to keep ourselves free from everything that suggests, not only on the first day of the week, but also every day in every week in every year. All that is hateful to God, which cost His beloved Son His precious life must be absolutely excluded from our lives.

Returning to 1 Corinthians 5 the Holy Spirit uses homely figures, which are nevertheless very instructive. “Ye are unleavened,” says the Apostle to the Corinthian Assembly. Grace thus, likened them to a lump of pure dough—a character which they were responsible to maintain, especially in view of the impurity all around them. But their state did not correspond to their standing. “Old leaven”—bad Corinthian habits—had crept in amongst them, to the Lord’s dishonor and to their own hurt. They must “purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.” Moral evil was active in their midst. Elsewhere we are warned against doctrinal evil (Gal. 5:9; Matt.

16:12), The latter is the product of minds insubject to God, and it may work more disastrously than open immorality. Leaven in its every form must not be tolerated by those who profess to appreciate the grace of God and the blood of the Lamb.

Israel's next Passover will be held in the millennial kingdom. Instructions concerning it will be found in Ezekiel 14:21-24. Restored to their own land, not by the political schemes of Gentile Powers, but by the infinite grace of God, the people will once more place themselves gratefully under the shelter of the blood of the lamb. The animals that will be sacrificed then will speak to them of Christ. The veil having been removed from their hearts, they will see and understand all that has been so long obscure to their fathers (2 Cor. 3:15-16).

During Josiah's Paschal week, the rich helped the poor to provide all that was necessary for the great feast; the singers led the praises of the congregation; and the porters guarded the door against all intruders (2 Chron. 35:7-8, 15). When the hearts of the people are right with God they are generous, praiseful and watchful. May the Holy Spirit make all these things true of us at this time also.

## Sad Megiddo!

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Thirteen years of silence on the part of the Holy Spirit! Nothing is recorded of Josiah from the eighteenth year of his reign until his thirty-first and last year! Men's biographical works are not written thus, but it is the usual way of the Holy Spirit. He brings before us many interesting characters, but in no single case have we a full life-story. The story of the blessed Son of God and of His sojourn amongst us is noteworthy in this respect. Although four men were divinely employed to write of Him. His wonderful ways and words are only recorded in modest measure, (John 21:25).

It is not a little remarkable that the next thing we are told after the keeping of the Passover is Josiah and his people confronting the power of Egypt. This is reminiscent of the first Passover; but how different the circumstances now! At the beginning, Jehovah was delivering His people from bondage, and all the might of Pharaoh was unavailing against those who had placed themselves in faith under the shelter of the blood of the lamb. In Exodus 12-14 we have a very complete picture of God's salvation as we now realize it. Spared from divine judgment, conducted safely through the Red Sea, with Pharaoh's hosts overthrown, Israel presents a picture of our own wonderful position and blessing through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. In Moses' day Israel did not seek conflict with Pharaoh—nay, they dreaded it!—but in Josiah's day conflict was deliberately entered into. How true are the wise man's, words in Proverbs 26:17, "He that.... meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears."

"After all this," says the inspired historian, with a tinge of sorrow in his tone (2 Chron. 35:20). After years of walking with God, after years of strict obedience to His word, King Josiah, so excellent until now, plunged heedlessly into war. Brethren—old and young—let us heed the warning! After years of good service for God, and blameless conduct, it is possible for us to make fools of ourselves and blast our lives. Every step needs to be watched in dependence upon God if we are to finish well. Josiah had now reached the age of Hezekiah (thirty-nine) when Jehovah sent him the message by Isaiah "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live" (Isa. 38:1). But Jehovah did not thus bid Josiah prepare for death; but, alas! he rushed blindly into it. How can we account for his folly? Had he become puffed-up by the success of his undertakings hitherto? This is always a possibility for the servants of God—even for you and me. Amaziah erred in this way, and brought disaster upon himself and upon his people (2 Chron. 25:17-24).

There is no mention of prayer on Josiah's part before he led his army out to war, and there was no divine command so to do. This man, so devoted until now, appears to have got completely out of the path of dependence and obedience. The position was admittedly a difficult one. Egypt and Assyria were at war, each desiring world-supremacy. Pharaoh's best route against his enemy was through Palestine, as Germany in our day judged that the best way to reach France was to march through Belgium. It may be urged that it was natural for Judah to resist this. Agreed; but that which is natural to flesh is not always right for men in relationship with God. Why did not Josiah spread the matter out before God, and seek His guidance and protection? He had in this the good

example of Hezekiah, who, when his little kingdom was in danger from a mighty foe, placed the whole matter in the hands of Israel's faithful God (Isa. 37) It has been said that Judah was under treaty obligation to help Assyria in case of war. Even if this be true, Josiah was not justified in moving out without a word from Jehovah. Israel was never to be reckoned as one of the nations (Num. 23:9). Israel stood in special relationship with Jehovah, and only at His word should any step be taken at any time. In this they were meant to be a testimony to all who observed their ways.

Judah was no match for Egypt. Both Egypt and Assyria a few years later were humbled and broken by Nebuchadnezzar; but that hour had not yet come. Assyria was declining, the tall cedar of Ezekiel 31:3, was tottering; Egypt, the great eagle of Ezekiel 17:7, was soon to have its wings clipped; but in Josiah's day, Egypt was far too strong for Judah. Pharaoh's hosts might possibly have passed through the land as peacefully as Israel's hosts proposed to pass through Edom several centuries earlier (Num. 20:14-20). But Josiah's kingly pride could not tolerate this. Had Jehovah commanded him to withstand the Egyptian armies, the superior numbers of the latter would have mattered nothing. Jonathan once said, "There is no restraint to Jehovah to save by many or by few" (1 Sam. 14:6). When God is working, victory lies with the few rather than with the many. Gideon's three hundred men accomplished great things for God (Judges 7:7); but the three thousand poltroons of Judah's royal tribe who sought to hand Samson over to his enemies for the sake of a false peace were worse than worthless (Judg. 15:11).

Had Josiah weighed up the situation quietly in the presence of God, and gone forth at His bidding he might have used David's words in Psalm 27, "Jehovah is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? ...Jehovah is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident." When our blessed Lord went into danger to the dismay of His disciples, He was calmly confident. He had the Father's word for what He was doing, and He was thus walking in the light (John 11:7-10). But Josiah had got out of touch with God, and was making the greatest mistake of his life, for which the whole nation suffered as well as himself.

Josiah had a remarkable warning addressed to him—by the King of Egypt himself! Pharaoh Necho "sent ambassadors to him, saying, What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? I come not against thee this day, but against the house wherewith I have war: for God commandeth me to make haste: forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that He destroy thee not" (2 Chron. 35:21). Amazing words!

Does it strike Christian readers as strange that God should speak through a heathen King to one of His own choicest servants? The Holy Spirit adds His own comment to Pharaoh's message, "Josiah... hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God." We have here a remarkable example of the sovereignty of God, who works and speaks through whomsoever He pleases. Did not the Holy Spirit come upon wicked Balaam and constrain him to say most blessed things concerning His people (Num. 24:2)? Had not Josiah himself experienced the sovereignty of God when He sent him an important message by a woman prophetess (2 Kings 22:14)? When Rabshakeh was sent against Jerusalem by his master the King of Assyria, he said, "Am I come up without Jehovah against this land to destroy it? Jehovah said unto me, Go up against this land, and destroy it" (Isa. 36:10). Awful words as proceeding from such lips! it was falsehood and

blasphemy, which Jehovah resented and speedily judged.

Josiah a few years earlier had a sensitive conscience concerning the will of God. When the book of the law was read before him he quietly recognized the divine voice, and obeyed it. Why did he not recognize the same voice speaking to him through Pharaoh Necho? How easy it is, beloved brethren, for any of us to fall into a condition of spiritual dullness, so that the voice of God, although clearly sounding forth through some chosen instrument, or text of scripture, fails to move us! It is true that there are siren voices around us. Even in the religious circle men speak, "lies in hypocrisy" (1 Tim. 4:2); "many false prophets are gone out into the world," animated by evil spirits (1 John 4:1). All this calls for spiritual alertness that we be not led astray. But the soul that walks humbly with God, with a heart subject to His Word, will readily distinguish between His voice and the voice of the deceiver.

Josiah had enjoyed thirty-nine warless years, during which he had been able to do much good to the sheep committed to his care; now he rushes into a needless conflict! The fact that he disguised himself proves that he had not a good conscience about the matter. We are not surprised that Ahab wore disguise on the battlefield (while basely urging his friend Jehoshaphat to expose himself in his royal robes), for he was aware that God's sentence of judgment hung over his head (1 Kings 22:30), and he would evade it if he could; but Josiah should have known better. The God who has revealed Himself so fully to us in the person of His Son is not served by methods of subterfuge at any time. Let us never forget this. In all our ways, whether in the world or in, the assembly, let everything bear the full light of day. "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11).

Josiah's life was of immense value to Israel. He was fully aware that the sins of his predecessors, and of Manasseh in particular, called aloud for judgment (2 Kings 23:26), and that his life alone stood between the nation and the outpouring of the wrath of Jehovah. Huldah's communication should have made him act with less precipitation, and with a more exercised heart than he manifested when he went up against the king of Egypt. The knowledge that their well-deserved judgment was soon to overwhelm Israel, and that there was no remedy for their sins....ought to have prevented him going up against Pharaoh, when the latter did not attack him, and even warned him to forbear; but he would not hearken, and was lost through a hardihood which was not of God" (J. N. Darby). A chance arrow (guided doubtless by the God of Judgment) smote Ahab in spite of his disguise; something similar happened to Josiah. "The archer shot at King Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Have me away; for I am sore wounded" (2 Chron. 35:23). His servants lifted him out of his fighting chariot, and put him into another; but alas, he was soon dead! Megiddo was the scene of a great victory when Barak and Deborah moved in faith against the Canaanites, for God was with them (Judges 5:19); Megiddo was now the scene of a disastrous defeat, for God was not with Josiah in his foolish enterprise.

"All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah: and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day" (2 Chron. 35:24-25). They might well mourn, for the disaster in the valley of Megiddo was the end of the Kingdom of Judah. The crash must needs come, for Jehovah had spoken of it years before; but it is sorrowful that the folly of one of the brightest saints that ever lived should have hastened it! This reflection should serve to take out of us all every vestige of self-confidence. We are sorry stewards

of God at the best! Only His grace can keep us right for a single hour. The uniqueness of Josiah is set forth in 2 Kings 23:25, "Like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to Jehovah with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him." Yet such a fine servant of God ended badly!

At the judgment seat of Christ everything will come out in the light of God. "The rest of the acts of Josiah and his goodness .... and his deeds first and last, behold they are written." Thus our goodness is divinely recorded as well as our badness and our first deeds, when love was fresh and warm, will not be obliterated by any unfortunate last deeds. Everything will be remembered and divinely estimated, "Jehovah is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed" (1 Sam. 2:3). Not "counted" as if quantity is everything with God, but "weighed"; quality is the chief thing with Him. "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but Jehovah pondereth the hearts" (Prov. 21:2).

Poor Josiah! He finished badly, but in spite of his sorry blunder, he is "absent from the body and be present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). We shall meet him in the presence of the Lord Jesus at His coming. No blunders there; each saved one will bear the image of the Firstborn Son forever. It is all of grace. To Him be all the glory!

## The Wreck of the Kingdom

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Josiah's reign was a happy experience for the remnant of the people still in the land. The faith of the King caused the lamp of David to shine brightly for a season (1 Kings 11:36); but it will not shine again until the appearing in glory of "great David's greater Son," Twenty five centuries have passed away, but the promised One has not yet come, and Israel's sorrows continue and deepen. A few years of chaos followed the death of Josiah, and then the remnant of the people were swept out of the land by Nebuchadnezzar. Josiah was the last king worthy of the title. Three sons and a grandson succeeded him—mere puppets of their Gentile masters. Later, the Herods masqueraded as kings in Jerusalem, and in a day that is still to come the Anti-Christ will take his seat there (Dan. 11:36); but the accomplishment of God's purposes of love await the coming of Christ. "Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion" (Psa. 2:6). Every attempt to reestablish the fallen nation prior to His return can only end in disaster, and intensify the sufferings of the people.

After his victory at Megiddo, Pharaoh-Necho took possession of the country. When he arrived in Jerusalem he found that the people had anointed Jehoahaz (otherwise, Shallum), Josiah's second son to be their king. Necho deposed him, and carried him prisoner in chains to Egypt. Necho then installed Eliakim whose name he changed to Jehoiakim (2 Chron. 36:1-4). Eliakim means "God will raise up"; Jehoiakim means "Jehovah will raise up." The reason for this change of name is not apparent, but it was at any rate an exercise of authority. The giving of names is a mark of lordship. Thus Nebuchadnezzar gave new names to Daniel and his three friends when he took them into his service (Dan. 1:7); and he also changed Mattaniah into Zedekiah when he set him upon Judah's tottering throne. What humiliating details! How low the chosen people had now fallen as the fruit of centuries of persistent transgression against Jehovah! The land which was intended to be the center of God's ways in government was now at the mercy of rival gentile powers, and the heirs of David's royal throne, who should have been the leaders of the nation in righteousness and blessing, were now objects of universal contempt. How degrading is sin! Pharaoh-Necho held the Holy land for a short time; then Nebuchadnezzar dispossessed him. Necho was not to be the head of the Gentiles, however ardently he may have desired it. He who sits upon the throne above does as He pleases in the affairs of men; happy would it be if all competitors for power would learn this lesson. Since the sorrowful days which followed the death of Josiah the land has been held by Persians, Greeks, Romans, Saracens, Turks, and now the British, and the despised seed of Abraham have sighed for it in vain. Oh that they would humble themselves before God, and own their many sins—their violation of the law, their murder of the prophets, their rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah, and their persistent opposition to the testimony of the Holy Spirit! When this comes about, every blessing will be theirs, and peace and prosperity in the land of their desire.

Josiah's sons were all wicked men, and we wonder why. His family was not large—only three names come before us in Scripture. Amongst earlier rulers in Israel we read that Gideon had seventy sons (Judges 8:30); Jair had thirty (Judges 10:4); Abdon had forty (Judges 12:14); and Rehoboam had twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters (2 Chron. 11:21). Such numbers are considerable; how could fatherly care be bestowed upon them all? But Josiah had but three sons

and all wicked! Yet the father was a particularly godly man, and had deep reverence for the Word of God! Is it possible that Josiah's public work, involving journeys into every corner of the land for the extirpation of evil led to neglect of the family? This is a question which should be carefully considered by all who feel called to a traveling ministry in this day. At the moment of writing I hear of a servant of Christ sailing for Africa and leaving a wife and six young children in Scotland. No servant of Christ has right to judge another; but such facts do raise questions in our minds. Children are a great responsibility entrusted to us by God. It was never His original intention that our children should be brought up by others.

We learn more about the evil ways of the sons of Josiah from the prophetic books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel than from the historical books of the Kings and the Chronicles. Concerning Shallum we read in Jeremiah 22:10-12, "Weep ye not for the dead (that is, Josiah), neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away (that is, Shallum), for he shall return no more, nor see his native country." This suggests that something worse than mere deportation was in store for Josiah's worthless successor. Jehoiachim, a few years later, went into easy captivity, but no such portion awaited Shallum. Possibly Necho inflicted upon him what he would have liked to inflict upon the man who opposed his march to Carchemish. Shallum's short reign was cruel according to Ezekiel 19:1-4.

Concerning Jehoiakim a great deal is recorded in the prophetic books. Three sins in particular are laid to his charge. (1) Oppression of the people. Pharaoh Necho laid upon Judah a heavy war indemnity, which Jehoiakim was obliged to raise. "Jehoiakim gave the silver and the gold to Pharaoh; but he taxed the land to give the money according to the commandment of Pharaoh: he exacted the silver and the gold of the people of the land, of every one according to his taxation, to give it into Pharaoh Necho" (2 Kings 23:35). As if this was not enough for the suffering people to bear, Jehoiakim compelled them to build palaces for himself without wages. Evil as the people were, Jehovah resented this tyrannical cruelty. "Woe unto him," said He in His indignation. Jehovah loves to see a shepherd leading the flock, but Jehoiakim was a wolf, ravaging the sheep. The contrast between this monster and his father is divinely noted in Jeremiah 22:13-17, "He judged the cause of the poor and needy: then it was well with him: was not this to know Me? saith Jehovah? The remnant of Israel might well mourn the loss of Josiah when his callous son thus held them in bondage. The moral grandeur of Israel and of David's royal house had departed; but Jehoiakim would still affect material splendor. Let God's saints today beware of attempting to keep up outward appearances when spiritual power has gone. God wants reality at all times.

(2) Jehoiakim not only oppressed the people, but he persecuted to the death those who witnessed against his deeds. He chased the faithful prophet Urijah into Egypt, fetched him back with an armed force, and put him to death (Jer. 26:20-23). He would have treated Jeremiah in the same way had not the princes resisted him. "When He maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them: He forgetteth not the cry of the humble" (Psa. 9:12). (3) in addition to all the foregoing, Jehoiakim wickedly threw into the fire Jeremiah's manuscript containing the words of God. Even his unholy companions were shocked but their pleading was in vain (Jer. 36). When we recall Josiah's great reverence for the Word of God the behavior of his son appears the more terrible. The whole nation mourned when Josiah died; but Jehovah decreed that there should be no mourning for Jehoiakim. When Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem, he bound Jehoiakim "in fetters, to carry him to Babylon" (2 Chron. 36:6). But he never went to Babylon, for Jehovah had

said some time before “concerning the son of Josiah King of Judah; They shall not lament for him, saying Ah, my brother! or Ah, sister! they shall not lament for him, saying, Ah, lord! or his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates, of Jerusalem” (Jer. 22:18-19). Thus did the indignant God of Israel express His abhorrence of this infamous son of a godly father.

Concerning Zedekiah, the last of the lion’s whelps (Ezek. 19:5-9), the youngest of Josiah’s sons. He succeeded his nephew Jehoiachin, who, after an evil reign of one hundred days, was carried into captivity in Babylon (2 Chron. 36:9-10). His short reign was so bad that Jehovah said that no man of his seed should ever sit upon the throne of David (Jer. 22:24-30). When speaking of these vile occupants of Israel’s throne the Holy Spirit said, “Oh earth, earth, earth, hear the Word of Jehovah.” He would have the rulers of every nation and in every age understand how hateful to God are the unrighteous ways of those, who, as His responsible stewards rule over the children of men. Zedekiah profited nothing by the calamities which befell his predecessors. He was Israel’s last hope. He was “a spreading vine of low stature” (Ezek. 17:6). A very humiliating figure of speech indeed! But there might still have been crumbs of blessing for the unhappy people had he walked humbly with God. After his overthrow Jeremiah said of him “The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of Jehovah, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among: the nations” (Lam. 4:20). Poor creature though he was, he counted for something with the people that were still in the land. With Zedekiah’s downfall Israel’s hopes were extinguished until the coming in power of the Lord Jesus. Zedekiah was a weak character, easily influenced by his courtiers and even by women. His outstanding sin was his violation of his oath of fealty to his overlord Nebuchadnezzar. The Chaldean “made him swear by God, but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the Lord God of Israel” (2 Chron. 36:13). Nebuchadnezzar thought to secure him by making him swear by the sacred name; but the sequel proved that Jehovah’s name was less to the Jew than to the Gentile! “Thou shalt not take the name of Jehovah thy God in vain; for Jehovah will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain” (Ex. 20:7). Had he been true to his covenant, Zedekiah’s kingdom, poor and despicable though it was, might have stood (Ezek. 17:14); but now, “As I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die.” Again, “Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, as I live, surely Mine oath that he hath despised, and My covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head” (Ezek. 17:16-19).

When Nebuchadnezzar discovered that his pledged vassal was negotiating with Egypt with reference to a revolt (Ezek. 17:15), he turned all his forces against him, and so completed the ruin of Judah and Jerusalem. If Zedekiah really felt that he should be free from the domination of Babylon, he should have sought help from God; instead, he treacherously turned to Egypt. Egypt, typically, represents the world as that from which God has delivered His people in grace, to seek its help in anything is a grievous offense in His sight. Let us remember this. Judgment fell first upon Judah; then, a few years later, upon Egypt also. Jehovah considered that wages were due to Nebuchadnezzar for his service in destroying Tiro. That opulent commercial city did not yield rich spoil to its captors, much treasure having been carried away to the west in Tyrian ships. The wealth of Egypt, including the silver and gold carried thither by Necho from Jerusalem, was Jehovah’s recompense to the instrument of His righteous judgments (Ezek. 29:18).

It is interesting to note that both Assyria and Egypt, Israel's two vain hopes at various times, fell under the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar; but Israel, Assyria, and Egypt are all to be blessed together at the last, so gracious is our God (Isa. 19:18-25). Meanwhile, it is sheer wickedness for the Jews to clamor for possession of Palestine. They have no claim whatever to the land. The God against whom they have sinned has definitely given the vineyard unto others (Mark 12:9). This will be reversed when the people bow humbly at the feet of their long-rejected Messiah. Pardon and blessing, with full possession of the land from the Nile to the Euphrates will then become their portion forever (Gen. 15:18).

The following reprint of an article of mine which appeared in "The Witness," June 1942, may interest our present readers:

## The Coveted, But Missing Diadem

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The downfall of the petty Jewish State two thousand five hundred years ago, was doubtless a small matter in the eyes of the politicians of that day. It would scarcely have made front-page news in the press of any country. For many years Judah had been tributary to Assyria, Egypt and Babylon, and the last occupant of the throne was a very despicable character. Yet the downfall of Judah was an event of the greatest possible importance in the history of the Earth. It meant the suspension for ages of the Creator's gracious purpose for all nations.

Jerusalem and its people had a place in the mind of God never accorded to others. David's throne was "the throne of Jehovah" (1 Chron. 29-23). It was meant to be the divine seat of government and blessing for the whole earth. The years of David's rule, followed by Solomon's forty years of peace and glory furnish a picture of what Jehovah desired. But the evil of the royal house, and the idolatries of the people made it impossible for God to go through with His gracious purpose.

While David's throne stood, however feeble and contemptible might be its occupants, it was still "the throne of Jehovah." The last king, Zedekiah, brought on the ruin by his perfidy.

Nebuchadnezzar "made him swear by God" (2 Chron. 36:13), but he despised the oath by "breaking the covenant" (Ezek. 17:17-18). Nothing was sacred in his eyes. Now note these words of Jehovah to him "And thou profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, at the time of the iniquity of the end. Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: his shall not be the same (or, what is, shall be no more). Exalt that which is low, and abase that which is high, I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until He come whose right it is, and I will give it Him" (Ezek. 21:25-27). Ever since that day David's throne has lain in the dust, and the diadem of rulership over the nations has been removed (Psa. 79:27-32).

No one has held the world-scepter since the overthrow of the throne of Jehovah in Jerusalem, and the removal of the diadem from the head of David's unworthy heir. A limited measure of supremacy was granted to Nebuchadnezzar, and that only for a time. Babylon's evil led to the subjugation of that Empire to another. "After thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee." Others followed as allowed by God. But of no man yet has it been true, "He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth... Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him all nations shall serve Him" (Psa. 72:8-11).

Aspirants for world-dominion have never been lacking, and some have achieved for a time a measure of success. But against all such persons there stands the solemn sentence of Ezekiel 21 "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it." He who sets his mind upon universal sway courts ruin for himself, and for all who are associated with him.

At the present fearful juncture in the world's history many are peering into the future anxiously. The word of God to Zedekiah answers all questions. God has One in His mind, once born in grace of David's royal line, for whom worldwide rule is purposed. Convulsion must follow convulsion until He appears. Mark the words, "until He come whose right it is." How often, when partaking of the

Lord's Supper, have the words, "till He come" delighted our hearts! In Ezekiel 21 we have another "till He come." In 1 Corinthians 11:26, our removal to the Father's house on high is in view; in Ezekiel 21 the adjustment of all earth's disorders, and the firm establishment of blessing from pole to pole. David's Heir—He who suffered for our salvation—will yet take up the diadem which many here coveted, but could not obtain; and from Jehovah's long-loved center in Zion He will ride for His glory, and for the good of all creation.

"Amen, Come, Lord Jesus."

## Appendix: Jehovah's Passover

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The Passover was Israel's fundamental institution. It marked the commencement of their history as a nation, and as a people in special relationship with Jehovah. That night in Egypt was never to be forgotten by them. Its terrible doings were to be rehearsed in the ears of their children from generation to generation.

What a night! The angel of Jehovah sweeping through Pharaoh's empire from end to end with his destroying sword! Every house, save those which were marked with blood, was bereaved of its firstborn. Every stable too was robbed of its choicest and best. One deep united wall ascended to heaven as Jehovah thus vindicated His offended majesty, and manifested His superiority over all the gods of the heathen, and over all the might and glory of men.

The awful story has a living voice for men today. God was acting in His judicial character as the avenger of sin. Pharaoh and his people had openly defied His commandments. Spite of plague after plague they still refused to let Israel go. Even divine long-suffering has its limits. Accordingly we have Jehovah in Exodus 12 carrying into effect His original threat as given in Exodus 4:22-23, "Thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, thus saith Jehovah, Israel is even My firstborn; and I say unto thee, Let My son go, that he may serve Me; and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn." Are men more subject to the voice of God in our day than, in Pharaoh's time? Is it, not a fact that His every commandment is outraged amongst us, and His authority everywhere challenged? As surely then as He desolated Egypt in ages past, so will He desolate the whole earth shortly. None will escape His avenging hand but those who are sheltered beneath the Savior's blood.

The Passover chapter opens very suggestively. "And Jehovah spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year unto you" (Ex. 12:1-2). The month in question was Abib, otherwise Nisan (Ex. 13:4), and corresponded to our March-April. It had hitherto been the seventh in order of reckoning; from the time of Israel's deliverance from Egypt it was to be accounted the first. Redemption thus gave the people a new start with God. Even so is it now. When a man acknowledges himself a sinner in the divine sight, exposed to eternal wrath, and in simple faith takes refuge under the blood of the Lamb, he begins life anew. His past of sin and guilt is divinely expunged. His whole previous course, "alienated from the life of God" (Eph. 4:18), is accounted as so much waste, and so utterly worthless that it is mercy on the part of God to wipe it out of all remembrance.

We are aware that this is not men's usual way of looking at things. When it becomes whispered around that such and such a one has become "converted," it is too commonly supposed that the individual referred to has said "good-bye" to "life once for all." What men call "life" and what God so describes are two wholly different things. Men's idea of "life" is the gratification of their, own lusts and pleasures at the utmost possible distance from their Creator. Bitterness and disappointment result, as the Lord so graphically showed in the parable of the lost son in Luke 15, and as the wise man so painfully records (writing down his own experience) in the book of Ecclesiastes. It is

feeding upon ashes and striving after the wind. Life according to God is participation in divine joys. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36). The happy man of whom this is true finds himself in heart and mind in touch with pleasures outside this world. The life he has thus received, as the fruit of sovereign grace, is of a heavenly order, and carries with it capabilities of entering into divine thoughts, divine affections, and divine counsels. This is life indeed. He who is in it looks back with shame and self-judgment upon all the years spent in ignorance of God and His Son. The knowledge of redemption involves a tremendous revolution; it is "the beginning of months"—a new point of departure, a new mode of being altogether.

## Every Man a Lamb

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Ten plagues in all fell upon rebellious Egypt. From nine of them the captive Israelites were markedly exempt. When their oppressors were enveloped in darkness that could be felt, the Israelites had light in their dwellings; when the deadly murrain destroyed the cattle of the Egyptians, the cattle of the Israelites escaped unharmed; when the hail wrought havoc with the crops of the one people, the crops of the other were absolutely untouched; and so on. The captives were spared all the providential inflictions from which their tormentors suffered. Thus did Jehovah openly signify the difference between those who were His and those who were not His. But when the moment came that the angel of death must be sent through the land, invading with his sword the homes of all who transgressed the divine will, Israel could be exempted no longer. However favored these people might be, in the sovereignty of God's grace, they were sinners like all others (Ezek. 20:5-9); if therefore they were to be spared the last dread stroke some righteous ground for this must be discovered. This is why the lamb was prescribed.

The instructions concerning the lamb were very comprehensive. "Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers a lamb for an house" (Ex. 12:3). There is no mistaking the plain force of such words as these. "All the congregation of Israel" were addressed, and "every man" was to take a lamb. There were at that time about six hundred thousand men amongst them capable of bearing arms; reckoning upon this basis there were probably some three millions of Israelites in Egypt that night. Amongst so large a number of people there were doubtless great differences in character and ways. The religious and the irreligious, the amiable and the cantankerous, the honorable and the dishonorable, the generous and the mean, not to mention the universal distinction between high and low, and rich and poor. But every man must take to himself a lamb. Neither character nor station counted for anything in the presence of the judgment of God.

In thus insisting upon a lamb, Jehovah was thinking of Christ. 1 Corinthians 5:7 puts this beyond all dispute, "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us." Accordingly this ancient story of Israel in Egypt has its voice for our consciences at this hour. Nothing counts with God but Christ. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The most outrageous sinner who shelters himself in faith in Christ and His blood is secure from all alarms; the most estimable character that ever lived who has not humbly availed himself thus of God's merciful provision is speeding to eternal ruin. No proposition could be more simple, and yet nothing seems so difficult for the human mind to grasp. We all love to think that there is something in us that should commend us to God; like the Pharisee of Luke 18:11 we are more or less disposed to say, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are." In such an assertion, however badly expressed, there may be a measure of truth, yet it still remains true that with God nothing counts but Christ. The Lamb, and the Lamb only, is our sole hope and plea.

## The Tenth Day

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The fact is remarkable that while the Passover month was to be henceforward the first in the year to the people of Israel, the lamb was not appointed to be slain on the first day of that month. One might almost have supposed that Jehovah would have commenced the new reckoning with the great fact of redemption. Yet this is what we read in Exodus 12:3, "Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb." Ten days were thus to run their course ere the victim was drawn from the flock for death.

Numbers are used in Holy Scripture with divine significance. The frequent occurrence of "seven" and "twelve" in the book of God is sufficient to suggest this to every observant reader. This is scarcely the place in which to show the meaning of all the numerals divinely employed; for our present purpose it is enough to say that "ten" represents the full measure of human responsibility. Thus we have ten commandments in Exodus 20, ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13, and ten pounds in Luke 19:13. The ten days of Exodus 12:3 speak to us therefore of the ages of responsibility (or probation) which ran their course ere God sent forth His beloved Son to be the Lamb of God, the taker away of the sin of the world.

The preceding ages of responsibility were divinely designed to teach men their deep need of a Savior, that thus they might be disposed to welcome Him with adoring appreciation at His appearing. Taking Archbishop Usher's chronology (which cannot, however, be insisted upon) men were being thus disciplined during forty centuries. During that long period God's ways with His fallen creatures varied considerably. Until Noah's day men had the testimony of creation and the voice of conscience. No Scriptures existed, and there was neither sovereign nor magistrate to call evil-doers to account. The end was the Deluge, the earth having become full of corruption and violence. When Noah and his sons were re-established in the cleansed earth, God set up the principle of human government (Gen. 9:6)-a merciful provision intended as a curb upon wickedness. This quickly failed; Noah's drunkenness, Nimrod's tyranny, the building of the tower of Babel, and the idolatry which soon covered the earth proving only too sadly that magistracy (however excellent as an institution) is inefficient as applied to so rebellious a being as man.

Later there was the giving of the law, with its solemn "Thou shalt not's," and its accompanying threats and curses for all who were disobedient thereto. The law was given to Israel only (Ex. 20:2; Psa. 147:19—20); for God would demonstrate in that nation the moral condition of flesh everywhere. The commandments had scarcely gone forth from Jehovah's lips before the first was violated by the setting up of the golden calf and this was but the commencement of a long history of transgression culminating at last in the murder of the Son of Man, who was constrained by lawless men to tread the same path of blood as all others who had ever sought to bring God before their consciences. The parable of the husbandmen in Matthew 21:33-46 declares the wretched story vividly.

Thus men proved, during forty centuries, that under every variety of circumstances and conditions there was nothing but evil in their hearts. This terrible fact having been fully demonstrated, God

sent forth His Son. “When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6). God’s “due time” is set forth typically in “the tenth day” of Exodus 12:3. Oh, that men everywhere understood the lesson of it, for then would they renounce all pretension to goodness and strength in themselves, and glory in Christ alone!

## The Fourteenth Day

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The lamb was thus to be taken out from the sheep or from the goats on the tenth day of the month; nevertheless it was not to be slain on that day. "Ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening" (Ex. 12:6). Under this arrangement the victim was for three or four days under the immediate observation of those for whom its blood was to be shed. This finds its answer in the years of the public ministry of the Lord Jesus. During the first thirty years of His earthly pathway He lived in the retirement of Nazareth. His perfections during those years are known to God alone. It was when He emerged into public view that John the Baptist gave utterance to that marvelous word: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). There before John's eyes was He to whom the Paschal lamb and every other sacrifice pointed. He had come from heaven to fulfill all the types and shadows of the law. But He did not go to Calvary at that moment. He was indeed on His way thither when John beheld Him, but three and a half years of ministry—matchless ministry—ran their course ere "His life is taken from the earth" (Acts 8:33). He was thus, as it were, "taken out" on the tenth day, and "kept up" until the fourteenth. The typical picture is the more complete when we remember that His death actually coincided with the Passover feast of that year. His priestly murderers would fain have had it otherwise, fearing a tumult amongst the people (Matt. 26:5); but God's hour had struck, and the deed must be done at that time, and at no other.

During His three and a half years of ministry the Savior lived in the fierce glare of hostile criticism. No ascetic was He, as John; not in the desert was His home; He moved freely in and out amongst the people. All the facts of His life were therefore fully known. If His foes could have discovered a single flaw in Him, how it would have delighted their evil hearts! But He was God's holy One. The Paschal lamb was to be "without blemish"; only thus could it set forth Him who was at once holy in nature, and stainless in all His ways. At the end His judge had to say, "I find no fault in Him" (John 19:6) and His enemies could only find the semblance of a charge against Him by bribing men to commit perjury in their court (Mark 14:55-60).

His spotless life proclaimed His fitness to die in atonement for the sins of others. Could it be proved that He was ever guilty of the smallest transgression, then salvation is impossible for any of us; for in that case He would have needed a Savior for Himself. His years of public life demonstrated that death had no possible claim upon Him. He was thus divinely competent to take up the sin question and settle it to the eternal satisfaction of the claims of the throne of God. "Hallelujah what a Savior!"

## Kill It

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Death is everywhere stamped upon our chapter (Ex. 12). Let us at this moment lay all possible emphasis upon the solemn words of verse 6, “The whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.” Nothing short of this could satisfy the claims of God, and avert the destruction that was approaching. The lamb must die; the blood of the innocent must be shed if the guilty were to be spared.

Death lies upon men everywhere as the fruit of sin; it is sin’s wages, as Romans 6:23 tells us. Had sin not intruded itself into God’s fair creation, not a grave would ever have been dug, not a tear of bereavement would ever have been shed. Let us have no misunderstanding as to this. Those who speak of their impending dissolution as “the debt of nature” are simply hiding from themselves the real truth, of their position in relation to God and His throne. No folly could be greater. The presence of death in the world admits of but one explanation—man is a fallen creature, a rebel against his Maker. For those who fail to seek divine grace and pardon the death of the body is but the prelude to “the second death,” the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14). The righteousness of God demands that if any are to be spared the last dread sentence then death must fall upon another instead.

This is what is set forth with all plainness in the ordinance of the Paschal lamb. The angel of death was to pass through the land of Egypt at midnight to destroy the firstborn in every house. No way of escape was possible from so fearful a visitation but the death of the lamb. In every home in which death had done its work upon the sacrifice, death passed the firstborn by. Wherever the people failed to put the death of the lamb between themselves and God, there the stroke fell. Even so is it now. The death of Christ, humbly accepted and appropriated in faith, is our only possible door of escape from the eternal judgment of God. A living lamb would not suffice in Israel; a living Christ could not suffice for us. His personal presence on earth was, an inestimable privilege and blessing for men, but atonement was not effected thereby. He must die ere He could be available, as Savior for the lost. His own words in John 6:51 show this conclusively, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” To this may be added His memorable utterance to Nicodemus, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:14-15). Happy is the man who can say, “The Savior died for me.” Upon such a one the stroke of divine judgment can never fall.

“The whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.” Not “them,” but “it.” Thousands of lambs were slain that night, and yet in the mind of God there was but One. Christ is God’s first great thought, and to Him every sacrifice pointed. There is no salvation in any other.

## Take of the Blood

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In Exodus 12:7, for the first time in Holy Scripture, we have blood mentioned in connection with man's deliverance and blessing. In various passages in the book of Genesis, blood is spoken of as evidence of human guilt (notably in the story of Cain and Abel), and in the early chapters of Exodus blood is twice introduced as one of God's judgments upon rebellious Egypt (Ex. 4:9; Ex. 7:17); now, in the ordinance of the Paschal lamb, it comes before us as the means whereby God's believing people were sheltered from destruction. From this point onward to the close of the book of God the doctrine of atoning blood stands out in unmistakable characters. By blood, and by blood alone, can men be saved.

These were the instructions given to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, "They shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side-posts and on the upper door-post of the houses wherein they shall eat it" (Ex. 12:7). Further on in the chapter we hear Moses addressing the elders of Israel thus, "Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the passover. And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two side-posts with the blood that is in the basin; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning" (Ex. 12:21-21). The various steps were thus made perfectly clear for God's people. The dullest amongst them could not well misunderstand what was so essential to his salvation. First the lamb was to be selected for sacrifice; then it was to be brought into the house; four days later it was to be killed; and finally the blood was to be sprinkled upon the lintel and side-posts of the house of every man of Israel. It was not enough to kill the lamb, nor even to preserve the blood in a basin; it must be sprinkled in obedience to the word of Jehovah.

The meaning for us in this day is plain enough. Christ, the Lamb of God, has been slain; His precious blood has been shed; all that God requires from the sinner who would escape the wrath to come is to accept these mighty facts in simple-hearted faith. But just as in Egypt that night no man could help his neighbor, each being compelled to sprinkle the blood for himself, so now no man can shelter himself under the cloak of another's faith; each must appropriate for himself Christ's precious blood as the only safeguard of his soul. To those who have done this Peter writes thus, "Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold.... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot; who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by Him do believe in God, that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God" (1 Pet. 1:18-21). The sentiments expressed in this passage manifestly go far beyond anything that was experienced in Egypt in Moses' day. Then it was simply a matter of keeping God as Judge out of the house; now, on the righteous basis of the blood of Christ, every believer is brought to God, accepted and taken into favor in the risen One, and withal entitled to know it in the power of the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven.

## When I See the Blood

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If the instructions to Israel were very explicit, so that no one could well misunderstand them, they were also severely inflexible. No room whatever was left for human opinion as to what was right and proper that night, and no deviation was permitted from the strict letter of the divine word. The blood of the lamb was the divine requirement. and nothing else could be accepted in its stead. Here is Jehovah's message to the people "I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am Jehovah. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt" (Ex. 12:12-13).

Suppose some in Israel had pleaded that their lives were so much better than their neighbors', that therefore there was not the same urgent necessity for putting the blood upon the door-post, what would have happened? The angel of death would have swept through that dwelling, even though the people therein were in very deed the most upright and the most religious in the land. Jehovah did not say, "When I see your excellent lives," but, "When I see the blood."

Again, suppose some had objected to slaying the lamb, their minds revolting from the gruesomeness of shedding blood, and had instead tied the living animal to the door-posts of their houses, would this have been accepted? By no means. Jehovah did not say, "When I see the lamb," but "When I see the blood."

The blood was the confession on the part of those who sprinkled it that they were personally only worthy of death, and that they sheltered themselves under the death of another. To God the blood witnessed that death had already entered the houses upon which it rested; and this justified Him in bidding His ministers of judgment pass such houses by.

How simple are these lessons, and yet how difficult it is to get men to take them in, albeit they concern their eternal peace! How many plead their moral and religious lives as if excellent living should exempt them from the holy judgment of a sin-avenging God. Again, how many profess for the living Christ, admiring His perfect ways, and acclaiming Him as the great Preacher to whom all men would do well to hearken. "Back to Christ," they say. "Let us live according to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, and all will be well." Vain delusion! False hope! Men's great need is not a holy example, nor a teacher of good, but a sin-atoning sacrifice. This is found alone in the precious blood of Christ. He has made peace through the blood of His cross (Col. 1:20), and in no other way could peace ever have been made between men and God. Apart from "shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). A millennium of holy living and divine teaching on the part of the Son of God would have left the sin question just where it was before He came to earth. Sin could only be expiated by blood.

God be praised for the atoning death of Christ. It has made it righteously possible for Him not only to exempt from judgment the sinner who believes, but also to take such a one into His, heart of

love forever and ever. No wonder the redeemed on high ascribe all worthiness and glory to the Lamb who was slain.

## I Will Pass Over You

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The significance of Jehovah's pledge to Israel — "I will pass over you" — is frequently misunderstood. By many it is taken to mean mere exemption from destruction; whereas, in reality, a great deal more than this is involved in the words. We will quote Exodus 12:23 at length in order that we may have the whole pledge before us, "Jehovah will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He seeth the blood upon the lintel, and upon the two side-posts, Jehovah will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come unto your houses to smite you."

Jehovah "passing through" is thus one thing; but Jehovah "passing over" is quite another. Our inquiry just now is to the latter. What does it mean? Isaiah 31:5 (RV) will help us here. "As the birds flying, so will the Lord of Hosts, protect Jerusalem; He will protect and deliver it, He will pass, over and preserve it." The language of Isaiah 31 is thus very similar to that of Exodus 12, and its meaning is transparent. It gives the idea of a mother-bird hovering over her nest, anxiously watching it, and mounting guard over her young. This is what Jehovah promised to do in Egypt for all who, in obedience to His word, sprinkled the blood upon their houses. He would Himself be the protector of such people. He would Himself stand between them and all harm. I "will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you" (Ex. 12:23).

This presents to us a truly delightful view of the God with whom we have to do. He positively ranges Himself upon the side of those who, in faith, have sought the shelter of the blood of Jesus. The fact that He has raised His Son from amongst the dead is the public proof that every requirement of His throne has been fully met. In perfect consistency therefore with His own character of righteousness, He against whom all our sins have been committed is now able to constitute Himself the guardian of His believing people. Faithful to His word and to the precious blood of Jesus, He will never, while eternal ages roll, permit judgment to touch His own. This being most certainly true, let us get rid of all servile fear. There is no room for dread in our relationships with such a God.

The men of Israel might well sit down in quiet confidence that night. Even if others' wail of distress reached their ears, they had no occasion for alarm. They had put the blood of the lamb between themselves and the destroyer, and they had Jehovah Himself standing sentinel, as it were, outside their sprinkled doors. Had anxious thoughts been entertained by them, they would have cast dishonor upon God—His faithfulness and truth. In like manner the unbelieving apprehensions of many in our day who truly love the Savior's name are a deep affront to the God of our salvation. As Toplady's lines put it:

From whence this fear and unbelief,

If God, my Father, put to grief

His spotless Son for me?

Can He, the righteous Judge of men,

Condemn me for that debt of sin,  
Which, Lord, was charged on Thee?  
Impossible!

## Eat the Flesh

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The blood of the lamb having been sprinkled according to the ordinance of Jehovah, the flesh of the animal was to be cooked and eaten. Here also for every detail there was divine legislation; nothing whatever was left to the decision of the people. So we read, "They shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof " (Ex. 12:8-9). Eating has in Scripture the double force of appropriation and identification. In John 6:51-57 the Savior insists upon the necessity of eating His flesh and drinking His blood in order to have and enjoy eternal life. It is folly to drag the Lord's Supper into John 6, for it had not been instituted at the time our Lord thus spoke. The meaning is that not only must He be slain in order to meet the need of sinful men, but men must distinctly appropriate Him in faith in that character. Hence the language of the new song in heaven, "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood" (Rev. 5:9). They who surround the throne adoringly acknowledge that their every blessing is due to the Savior's death. Israel's feeding upon the lamb in Egypt is thus typical of our appropriation today of the once-slain Christ.

But there is more than this. It was distinctly forbidden to boil the flesh, as also to eat of it raw. It must be "roast with fire." Fire is the emblem in Scripture of the holiness of God in judgment. It is not enough for me to know that Christ died; it is essential that I should believe that He died atoningly, having first exhausted all the judgment of God that my sins deserved. "His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24). Feeding, as it were, upon the roast lamb, I enter in some measure into the awful judgment which fell upon Christ as my sin-bearer, and I realize that but for His self-sacrificing love I must myself have remained under the wrath of God forever (John 3:36). A sense of this doubtless weighed heavily upon the soul of Saul of Tarsus in Damascus when for three days he could neither eat nor drink (Acts 9:9).

The "bitter herbs" which accompanied the roast lamb are suggestive of the same principle. The realization that sin—my sin—is of such exceeding gravity in the sight of God that nothing could expiate it, and thus save me from eternal ruin, but the death of Christ, and that in the midst of circumstances of unparalleled grief and shame, is bitter indeed; though the knowledge of redemption yields ultimately and forever exceeding joy.

Anything that remained of the Paschal lamb was to be destroyed in the morning. The sacrifice in all its ceremonial was to be completed within a single night. "Ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire" (Ex. 12:10). The rising sun was thus to see no trace of the slain lamb. In like manner the atoning work of Christ is not a progressive, but a completed thing. It is not in process of being accomplished; it has been accomplished definitely and eternally. As a fragrant and hallowed memory Calvary's costly sacrifice abides with God and the redeemed forever, but the sacrifice itself is past and completed. So divinely efficacious is it that nothing further could ever be required or accepted. For God's suffering Lamb the dark night of judgment is no more, and He lives on high in the eternal sunshine

of divine favor and love.

## The Stroke

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Men's threats are sometimes mere idle words or empty bombast; not so the predicted judgments of God. At no stage in the world's history has the Creator threatened judgments which He had no intention of executing. There have been occasions when His hand has been averted by the repentance of the people. The sparing of Nineveh in the time of Jonah is an example of this. It is part of the declared ways of God to withdraw sentence when men humble themselves before Him. Jeremiah 18:7-8 shows this plainly. It is also true that He is "slow to anger," leaving until the last an open door for repentance, but even the long-suffering of God has its limits. This was solemnly proved by the defiant Egyptians in the days of Moses. At the commencement of Moses' mission Jehovah said to Pharaoh, "Israel is My son, even My firstborn; and I say unto thee, Let My son go, that he may serve Me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn" (Ex. 4:22-23). The patience of God being now exhausted after various appeals and preliminary judgments, this dread sentence took effect on the night of Israel's Passover. "It came to pass, that at midnight Jehovah smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead" (Ex. 12:29-30). There was thus no respect of persons. The royal palace, in every country shielded to the utmost from the calamities which befall the lowly, was no more immune that night than the prison cell or the stable. The king's heart was torn with anguish as well as that of the meanest of his subjects. Truly, it is a terrible thing to defy the God of judgment!

Yet while desolation thus spread itself throughout the land of Egypt, the houses of the Israelites were absolutely unharmed. This was due solely to the fact that they obeyed Jehovah in faith, and sprinkled the blood of the slain lamb outside their dwellings. Neither good conduct nor religious orthodoxy saved them that night, but the blood of the lamb alone. Under the shelter of this they could eat and drink in peace, with girded loins and staff in hand, prepared to march out of a scene which was in no sense their home.

We are ourselves living in a solemn moment in the world's history. The Gospel day is ending, with all its opportunities of eternal blessing. The hour for God's judgments to begin will shortly strike. Then the once-crucified Lord will arise from the throne on which He is seated, and will come forth in His might as the divinely-appointed Judge of quick and dead. First He will deal with the quick (i.e., the living), destroying His enemies before Him like the driven snow; later, when His Millennial reign is ended, He will summon the dead from their tombs to stand before the great white throne. These are tremendous considerations, which it is folly and madness for any to ignore. Happy is the man who, as a confessedly guilty sinner, worthy only of eternal wrath, has fled to the Savior for refuge, trusting wholly and solely in His precious atoning blood. Such a one is eternally secure—as secure as a righteous God can make him.

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