

BIBLE HISTORY
OLD TESTAMENT VOL. 7
FROM THE DECLINE OF THE TWO KINGDOMS
TO THE ASSYRIAN & BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY
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THE BIBLE HISTORY

VOLUME 7

THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH

**FROM THE DECLINE OF THE TWO KINGDOMS
TO THE ASSYRIAN AND BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY**

PREFACE

THE volume herewith introduced to the reader brings, according to the original plan of the series, this *Bible History* to a close. This circumstance naturally suggests a retrospect, however brief. In the Prefaces to preceding volumes, the chief characteristics of each period were successively sketched, and the questions indicated to which they gave rise, as well as the special points in respect of which the treatment of one part of this History differed from another. The period over which the present volume extends — that from the decline to the fall of the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel — can scarcely be said to have any distinguishing features of its own. It is the natural outcome and the logical conclusion of the history which had preceded. It means that this History, as presented in Holy Scripture, is one and consistent in all its parts; or, to put it otherwise, that what God had from the first said and done with reference to Israel was true. Thus, as always, even the judgments of God point to His larger mercies.

In two respects, however, this period differs from the others, and its history required a somewhat different treatment. It was the period during which most of the great prophets, whose utterances are preserved in the books that bear their names, lived and wrought, and over which they exercised a commanding influence. And never more clearly than in this period does it appear how the prophet, as the messenger of God, combined the twofold function of preaching to his own and, in a sense, to every future generation, and of intimating the wider purposes of God in the future. There is not in the prophetic utterances recorded any one series of admonitions, warnings, or even denunciations which does not lead up to an announcement of the happy prophetic future promised. In this respect prophecy has the same fundamental characteristic as the Book of Psalms, in which, whatever the groundnote, every hymn passes into the melody of thanksgiving and praise. This similarity is due to the fact that, in their Scriptural aspect, the progress of outward teaching and the experience of the inner life are ever in accordance. On the other hand, there is not in the prophetic writings any utterance in regard to the future which has not its root, and, in a sense, its starting point in the history of the time. The prophet, so to speak, translates the vernacular of the present into the Divine language of the future, and he interprets the Divine sayings

concerning the future by the well-known language of the present. As between his teaching and his prediction, so between the history of the present and that of the future there is not a gap: they are one, because through both runs one unswerving purpose which gradually unfolds what from the first had been enfolded. And so history and prophecy also are one, because God is one. And so also, if we would rightly understand them, must we study not so much prophecies as isolated utterances, but as prophecy in its grand harmonious historical unity.

But apart from the considerations now offered, it must be evident to the most superficial observer how much and varied light the utterances of the contemporary prophets cast on the condition, the circumstances, and the history of the time in which they lived. Indeed, from their writings we obtain the most vivid account, not only of the moral and religious state of the people, and even of their manners, but of the moving springs and the real history of events. On the other hand, it must be equally evident how the history of the time illustrates not only the occasion but often the meaning of the prophetic utterances. And so the one helps the understanding of the other. But this circumstance has also naturally imposed on us the duty of studying the history of this period in connection with the various prophecies referring to it, to which, accordingly, constant reference will be found in the present Volume.

Another peculiarity of this period is that its history will be found inseparable from that of the great empires of the world — especially Assyria and Babylonia. Those who have followed the progress of Assyriological studies know how often and unexpectedly light has been cast on the history of the Old Testament by the information derived from the Assyrian monuments. But they equally know that this science is as yet almost in its infancy; that on some points connected with the Old Testament, the opinions of Assyriologists differ, or else have undergone change, while on others the information we possess may receive further confirmation, modification, or important addition. It will be understood that in these circumstances the preparation of the present volume has required special labor and care. I can only hope that it may serve to make clear the history of a period which without illustration both from the prophetic writings and the Assyrian records would be not a little difficult and complicated. Lastly, the twofold Index to the whole series, contributed by the industry of my daughter, will, it is believed, be helpful to the student.

Thus far as regards the present volume. And now it is with more than the common feelings of natural regret on bringing to a close a work which has engaged a writer more or less for a number of years, and on parting from a circle of readers, whom in the course of time he has come to regard as friends, that the concluding paragraphs of this Preface are written. The object in beginning this series was to make a fresh study of Old Testament history from the original text, with such help as was to be derived from the best criticism and from cognate sciences. And not only was it to follow the course of the outward history, describing it as accurately and fully as might be, but to reach beyond this to its spiritual and universal meaning to mark the unity, application, and unfolding of its underlying idea; and to point to its realization and completion in the kingdom of God. Briefly, the underlying idea of the Old Testament, in its subjective aspect, is that of “the Servant of the LORD.” The history of the Old Testament in its progress to the New is that of the widening of the idea of the servant of the LORD into that of the kingdom of God. Lastly, its realization and completion is in the Christ and the Church of God. Unless, indeed, the Old Testament had this higher meaning and unity, it could not possess any permanent or universal interest, except from a historical point of view. It would not permanently concern mankind — no, nor even Israel, at least, in its present relation to the world. On the other hand, without it the New Testament would want its historical basis, and the historical Christ offer what would seem an absolutely unintelligible problem.

Such, then, has been the plan and conception of this *Bible History*. The readers in view were teachers, students, and generally the wider, educated and thoughtful public. Throughout, the desire has been not to ignore nor pass by difficulties or questions that might arise in the course of this History, but without always specially naming, rather to anticipate and remove or answer them by what seemed the correct interpretation of the narrative. How far this aim has been attained must be left to the judgment of others. This only may be truthfully said, that as difficulties have not in any case been consciously ignored, so their solution has not been sought by inventing an interpretation simply for the purpose of removing an objection. If it may seem that sometimes suggestions have been offered rather than positive statements made, it was because caution was felt to be not only in place but even part of necessary reverence.

But beyond all this there are wider questions connected with the Old Testament, which have, particularly of late, been prominently brought

forward. In a work like the present it seemed specially desirable to avoid controversial matters, which, in any case, could not here be satisfactorily dealt with. And yet all reference to them could not be omitted. But on the most fundamental of them — that of the origin and date of the Pentateuch it may be well here to mark what appears an essential distinction. There is the widest difference between the question whether the Pentateuch — legislation is of Mosaic origin, and this other of the precise time when it, or any special part of it, may have been reduced to writing or redacted. The former is a question of principle, the latter one chiefly of literary criticism, and as such can have no absolute interest for general readers of the Bible. On the first of these questions the present writer has not seen any reason for departing from the old lines of the Church's faith, but rather everything to confirm our adherence to them. Thus literary criticism may, and ought, in this, as in other matters, to continue its independent course of investigation without causing any misgivings to those who, on good and valid grounds, hold fast to the old truth concerning' Moses and the prophets' and the assured fact of their testimony to Christ. And the final result of all investigations can only be the confirmation and vindication of the faith of the Church.

In conclusion I have to thank the readers of this *Bible History* for their kindness, and the indulgence extended to me in completing this series. Any delay in it has been caused by literary engagements. To me, at least, it has afforded the refreshment of periodically returning to a loved work, while the marked advance in cognate studies tending to the illustration of this History has been of the greatest advantage during the progress of the Series. It only remains, with all humility, to offer the results of these labors to those who love the Old Testament, in the earnest hope that He in Whose service they were undertaken may graciously accept, and by His blessing further them, not only to the fuller knowledge, but to the spiritual understanding of His own Word.

ALFRED EDERSHEIM
6, CRICK ROAD, OXFORD,
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THE HISTORY OF JUDAH AND ISRAEL TO THEIR CAPTIVITY

CHAPTER 1

ATHALIA, (SEVENTH) QUEEN, AND JEHOASH, (EIGHTH) KING OF JUDAH

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WITH the accession of Jehu and the destruction of the house of Ahab, and with the ill-fated alliance between the doomed race of Ahab and the descendants of David, the last period in the history of Israel and Judah's national decline had begun. The measure was not only full, but the Hand hitherto lifted in threatening was no longer stayed. We have reached a period of judgments, when each follows the other with only brief intermission. Of the events in Israel connected with the rebellion of Jehu, of the character of the religious changes introduced by him, and of the troubles and difficulties of the military monarchy which he founded, a detailed account has already been given.¹ But the full sweep and import of these events will only be perceived as we mark their direct and indirect influence on the history of Judah.

The union between Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, and Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, had introduced apostasy, and brought calamity to the house of David. If the marriage had been planned from political motives, perhaps in the hope of an ultimate reunion of the two

kingdoms, or at least with the expectation of a firm and close alliance between them, the result speedily showed the folly of attempting to achieve imaginary successes by subordinating principle to so-called policy. Indeed, this is one of the lessons which throughout make the history of Israel typical of that of the Church, and in a sense of all history, and which constitute its claim to the designation of “prophetic.” In its events move, so to speak, in step with the utterances of the God of Israel. No direct or sudden interference seems necessary; but in the regular succession of events, each deviation from Divine order and rule, each attempt to compass results by departure from God’s law and word, brings with it, not success, but failure and ruin. From her entrance into her new home in Judah, to her seizure of its throne, Athaliah brought it only evil. Her very name, “Athaliah” (“Jehovah oppresseth”), seems significant. She possessed all the evil qualities of her mother Jezebel, without her queenly bearing and courage; all the cunning of her father, without any of his impulses towards good. Holy Writ marks that she was her son’s “counselor to do wickedly” (2 Chronicles 22:3), and her influence for evil must have commenced in the previous reign of her husband, Jehoram. To the influence of “the house of Ahab” are expressly traced, both in the reign of Jehoram and in that of Ahaziah, the revival of idolatry (2 Kings 8:18, 27; 11:15; 2 Chronicles 22:3, 4); the desecration of the Temple of Jehovah (2 Chronicles 24:7), and those evil counselings (2 Chronicles 22:4) which brought such Divine judgments (2 Chronicles 21:13, 14, 16, 17; 22:7). To her, we cannot doubt, was due not only the slaughter of his “brethren,” with which Jehoram stained the beginning of his reign (2 Chronicles 21:4), but the destruction by Jehu of so large a number of the remaining royal princes of Judah (2 Kings 10:13, 14; 2 Chronicles 22:7, 8). And if her murderous purpose on seizing the government had been wholly successful, the political union between the house of Ahab and that of Jehoshaphat would have ended in the extermination of the whole house of David.

There is not a scene in Jewish history more vividly depicted than that of Athaliah’s seizure of the Jewish crown, and of her miserable end. It seems more than likely that on his ill-fated expedition to the court of Israel, Jehoram had entrusted the government of the kingdom to his mother, who had all along exercised such determining influence upon him.² We need not wonder, although we take notice of it, that the position of woman in Israel

should have been so different from that generally assigned to her in the East. A nation which counted among its historical personages a Miriam, a Deborah, and an Abigail — not to speak of other well-known figures — must have recognized the dignity of woman. Nor can we here forget the influence respectively exercised by the mother of King Asa (1 Kings 15:13), by Jezebel, and by other queen-consorts or mothers.³

When tidings successively reached Athaliah, first of the death of Ahaziah, and then of the murder of presumably the great majority of the royal princes, the thought would naturally suggest itself to such an ambitious and unscrupulous woman permanently to seize the reins of the government. Other motives may also have contributed to this resolve. She must have known that, despite all that had been done in the two previous reigns to denationalize Judah, her party formed only a small and unreliable minority even in the capital. Both in Jerusalem and throughout the country the great majority were, as events afterwards proved, opposed to the queen-mother, or at least attached to the old order in State and Church. The acknowledged and natural head of this party was the active and energetic high-priest,⁴ Jehoiada, the husband of Jehosheba or Jehoshabeath,⁵ the half-sister of the late King Ahaziah.⁶ And Athaliah must have felt that if, after the slaughter of the other princes by Jehu, a minor were proclaimed king, his guardianship and the government would naturally pass into other hands than hers.

In view of such possible dangers to herself, but especially for the realization of her own ambitious designs, the queen-mother resolved, in true Oriental fashion, on the slaughter of all that remained of the house of David. On its extinction there could no longer be any possible rival, nor yet any center around which an opposition could gather. It casts manifold light on the institution and the position of the priesthood, with its central national sanctuary in the capital, that at such a period the safety of the people ultimately rested with it. Evidently it must have been an institution of the highest antiquity; evidently, it must have formed part of the central life of Israel; evidently, it was from the first invested with all the dignity and influence which we associate with it in the Mosaic legislation; evidently, it was intended as, and did constitute, the religiously preservative and conservative element in the commonwealth, the guardian of Israel's religion, the rallying-point of civil rights and of true national life.

Even the fact that in such a time the high-priest was wedded to the king's sister is significant.

From the general massacre of the royal house by Athaliah, Jehosheba had succeeded in rescuing an infant son of Ahaziah, Joash by name. Together with his nurse, he was for a short time concealed in "the chamber of beds," apparently that where the mattresses and coverlets of the palace were stored, and which would offer a very convenient hiding-place. Thence his aunt removed him to a still more safe retreat in the Temple, either one of the numerous chambers attached to the sanctuary, or, as seems most likely,⁷ to the apartments occupied by her husband and his family within the sacred enclosure, or closely joined to it.⁸ So matters continued for six years, Joash probably passing for one of the children of the high-priest. During that time the plunder of the house of Jehovah and the transference of its dedicated things to the service of Baalim, which had been begun by the sons of Athaliah (2 Chronicles 24:7), must have been carried to its utmost extent. Naturally it would arouse a strong reaction on the part not only of those who held the foreign rites in abhorrence, but also of those who were opposed to the rule of the foreign queen who had murdered all that had remained of the family of David. In the seventh year of this misrule, Jehoiada "took courage,"⁹ and organized a counter-revolution, in which all ranks in the State were equally represented. If ever a movement of this kind was constitutional, it was that against the murderous usurper of the throne of David. The Book of Chronicles, while always relating events pre-eminently from the priestly and Levitical viewpoint, here furnishes some welcome details, apparently derived from the same original sources as the account in the Book of Kings, although omitted in the latter. From the two accounts we infer that Jehoiada in the first place addressed himself to the five "captains of hundreds," or centurions, whose names are mentioned in 2 Chronicles 23:1. Apparently they commanded the five divisions of the royal bodyguard, which combined the designation *Kari* (equivalent to *Kerethi*) given in Davidic time to the corps, then consisting chiefly, if not entirely, of foreign (Philistian) auxiliaries, with the older (So in 1 Samuel 22:17) and more permanent¹⁰ name of "runners" (*ratsim*). The account in the Book of Chronicles adds what in itself would seem most likely, that the military leaders distributed themselves through the country to secure the adhesion and co-operation of the heads of families and clans,

and of the Levites. Manifestly it would be necessary to enlist the latter, since the central scene of the rising was to be the Temple. There the confederates met, probably at one of the great festivals, when the youthful prince was presented to them. As, no doubt, in the first instance the military leaders, so now the whole assembly bound themselves by a solemn oath to the undertaking, which primarily had only the proclamation of the new king for its object (comp. 2 Chronicles 23:3).

The differences, and even more the similarity, in the narratives of the event in the Books of Kings and Chronicles have suggested what to some appear discrepancies of detail. It is well to know that, even if these were established, they would not in any way invalidate the narrative itself, since in any case they only concern some of its minor details, not its substance. The most notable difference is that in the Book of Kings the plot and its execution seem entirely in the hands of the military; in Chronicles, exclusively in those of the priests and Levites. But in Chronicles also — and, indeed, there alone — the five military leaders are named; while, on the other hand, the narrative in the Book of Kings throughout admits the leadership of the priest Jehoiada. And even a superficial consideration must convince that both the priests and the military must have been engaged in the undertaking, and that neither party could have dispensed with the other. A revolution inaugurated by the high-priest in favor of his nephew, who for six years had been concealed in the Temple, and which was to be carried out within the precincts of the Sanctuary itself, could no more have taken place without the co-operation of the priesthood than a change in the occupancy of the throne could have been brought about without the support of the military power. And this leaves untouched the substance of the narrative in the two accounts, even if what we are about to suggest in the sequel should not seem to some a sufficient explanation of the part assigned respectively to the priesthood and the military in the two narratives.

Of this, at least, there cannot be any doubt, that the account in the Book of Kings deals with the operations assigned to the military. Briefly, they may be sketched as follows. As each of the “courses” into which the priesthood was divided relieved the other at the beginning of every Sabbath, so apparently also the royal bodyguard. The plan now agreed upon was, that the guard which was relieved should, instead of returning to their homes or

barracks, march into the Temple, where the high-priest would furnish them with weapons from those that had formerly belonged to David, and which, no doubt, according to sacred custom, had been deposited in the sanctuary. The sole object of that guard (2 Kings 11:7, 11) was in two divisions to surround the new king on either side, with orders to cut down any one who should try to penetrate their ranks, and to close around the person of the king in all his movements. Thus far for the guard that had been relieved. On the other hand, the relieving guard was to be arranged in three divisions. One of these was to form, as usually, the guard of the royal palace, so that the suspicions of Athaliah should not be aroused. The second division was to occupy the gate Sur,¹¹ also called the “gate of the foundation” (2 Chronicles 23:5); while the third division was to be massed in “the gate behind the guard,” the same as “the gate of the guard” (2 Kings 11:19), and which probably formed the principal access from the palace into the Temple. The object of all this was to guard the palace — not only to disarm suspicion, but for defense (2 Kings 11:5), and to ward off or bar¹² any attempt on the part of adherents of Athaliah to possess themselves of the royal residence. The importance of this will be understood, not only in case of a counter-revolution, but in view of the ancient custom of solemnly placing the king on the royal throne as the symbol of his accession to the government (1 Kings 1:35, 46), which it was intended to observe also on this occasion (2 Kings 11:19).

It must have been noticed that, minute and complete as these arrangements were, so far as regarded the defense of the new king and the guard of the royal palace against a sudden attack by the adherents of Athaliah, they left all the main gates of access to the Temple undefended against any eventuality. And yet it must have been quite as important to protect the Sanctuary from a hostile rush upon it, and to avert its profanation by a fight within its sacred precincts. It is on this ground that we deem it antecedently probable that provision should have been made for guarding the Temple itself, similar to that in regard to the king and the royal palace. But this would naturally devolve upon the Levites, as the regular custodians of the Temple, just as the military guard would as naturally have the immediate custody of the person of the king. And such participation on the part of the Levites seems otherwise necessarily implied in the circumstance that the rising was planned by the priesthood,

and organized by them as well as by the military leaders. In all these circumstances it seems almost impossible to believe that an active part of some kind should not have been assigned to the Levites; that access to the Temple should either have been left unprotected; or that the guard of the Temple should have been entrusted to others than those who were its regular custodians.

These considerations leave no room to doubt the accuracy of the account given in the Book of Chronicles. Only as that in the Book of Kings details the arrangements for the safety of the king and the palace, so that in Chronicles records those made for the security of the Temple, which were entrusted to the Levites. Some other confirmatory particulars deserve attention. Thus we notice that although the account in Chronicles seems to imply that all the arrangements were in the hands of the Levites, yet when Athaliah was to be led to her doom, the order was given, not to the Levites, but to the military leaders, who were to bring her forth “within the ranks” (*Sederoth*). The verse is almost literally the same as in 2 Kings 11:15. The term which we have rendered “ranks” indicates an orderly arrangement, as of soldiers. It is used in 2 Kings 11:8 in reference to the military guard which was to surround the king, but not in designation of the wider compass of Levites, which, according to 2 Chronicles 23:7, was to be about the king. We therefore conclude that this division of Levites was to form an outer circle not only around the king, but also around his military guard. This also explains the difference in the directions given in 2 Kings 11:8 to the military guards to kill those who penetrated their “ranks,” and in 2 Chronicles 23:7 to the Levites, to kill those who penetrated into the Temple. In other words, the Levites were to stand beyond the guards, and to prevent a hostile entrance into the Temple buildings; and if any gained their way through them to the ranks of the military, they were to be cut down by the guards. Thus the king was really surrounded by a double cordon — the military occupying the inner court around his person, while the Levites held the outer court and the gates.

The explanations just offered will, it is hoped, show that there is not any discrepancy between the accounts of this event in the Books of Kings and Chronicles. We can understand how in the latter the functions and localities are assigned to the Levites, which in the Book of Kings seem assigned to the military. Both had similar or kindred functions, and in close

proximity to each other. Thus the two accounts are entirely compatible. In point of fact, they supplement each other, the writer of Chronicles, as usually, telling the part which the priesthood sustained in the national rising, while the writer of the Book of Kings simply relates the part taken by the secular power. Thus the one narrates what was specially done by the Levites, the other what by the military; yet each, as we have seen, also giving indications of the cooperation of the other actors. The whole question, however, is not of any real importance, although it may be well to state that the explanations which have been offered are substantially confirmed by the account given of the event by Josephus (Ant. ix. 7, 2).¹³

The plan of Jehoiada and the leaders of the rising — or, as we may say, of the national party — was carried out in every particular. It is indicative of the general opposition to the new *regime*, as well as of the unpopularity of the queen, that the secret of the confederacy, although shared by so many, remained unknown to Athaliah. At the same time we must remember that they had bound themselves by an oath, on the keeping of which success depended that the priesthood was entirely under the control of its official chief; and that probably only a short time intervened between the league in the Temple (2 Kings 11:4; 2 Chronicles 23:3) and the execution of the plan agreed upon.

On the day appointed, both the military and the Levites were at their posts. The youthful king, who had been presented to the leaders at their first meeting in the Temple (2 Kings 11:4), was now formally introduced. Then the crown and the “testimony” were put upon him — the latter ceremony probably consisting in placing in his hands, rather than (as some have suggested) on his head, a copy of the Law, whether that referring to the duties of the king (Deuteronomy 17:18-20), or, more probably, the Law in a wider sense. Lastly, since the regular succession had been broken by the intrusion of Athaliah,¹⁴ the new monarch was anointed by Jehoiada and his sons, when, as was the custom, the people broke into demonstrations of joy, clapping their hands, and shouting, “Long live the king!”

However closely the secret had hitherto been kept, the acclamations of the guards and the people were heard in the palace, and the queen rushed into the Temple. Her access to it was not hindered by the military stationed in

the palace, although (according to Josephus) her immediate bodyguard were prevented by the priests from following her into the Sanctuary. The sight which now met her eyes must at once have revealed to her the state of matters. On the elevated stand “at the entering in,” probably to the court of the priests,¹⁵ usually occupied, at least on solemn occasions, by the king (2 Kings 23:3; 2 Chronicles 34:31), she saw the youthful prince, and beside him “the captains” and the Levites blowing their silver trumpets,¹⁶ while “the people of the land” greeted their new monarch. According to the Biblical account, Athaliah rent her clothes and cried, “Conspiracy, conspiracy!” while Josephus adds that she called on those present to kill the young king. The appearance and attempted interference of the queen was the signal for her destruction. By direction of Jehoiada, she was led forth beyond the Temple between “the ranks” formed to prevent her escape or communication with possible adherents. Any who might attempt to follow her were to be immediately cut down, while Athaliah herself was to be killed beyond the bounds of the Sanctuary. It must have been close to it, where the stables communicated with the palace, that she met her fate.

While this was passing outside the Temple, Jehoiada completed the second part of the royal installation by a twofold solemn act, of which the first consisted in a covenant by which the new king and the people bound themselves to renewed allegiance to Jehovah; while by the second the king similarly bound himself to the people, no doubt to rule in accordance with the law as laid down in the Book of Deuteronomy (2 Kings 11:17). The ancient God-appointed constitution in Church and State having thus been re-established, the new king was conducted in state to the palace by the principal entrance, and formally enthroned. It was probably only after this that the people proceeded to the house of Baal, wholly destroying it and its altars and images, and slaying Mattan, the priest of Baal. The religious reformation thus inaugurated was completed by the appointment of the officials required to superintend and carry on the orderly worship of the Temple — as we infer from 2 Chronicles 23:18, 19, in accordance with the arrangements originally made by David, but which had since fallen into desuetude. And the whole account of this religious revolution concludes with this significant record: “And all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was in quiet.”

CHAPTER 2

JEHOASH, OR JOASH, (EIGHTH) KING OF JUDAH. JEHU, (ELEVENTH) KING OF ISRAEL

Character of Athaliah, of Jehoiada, and of Joash — Lessons of this History — Early Reign of Joash — Repair of the Temple — Death of Jehoiada — Counter-reformation — Murder of Zechariah — Invasion by the Syrians — Conspiracy against Joash — Murder of the King.

(2 KINGS 12; 2 CHRONICLES 24.)

As we look back on the events described in the preceding chapter, their deep meaning in this sacred history becomes increasingly apparent. The movement in the northern kingdom, which issued in the destruction of the house of Ahab and the elevation of Jehu, had been inaugurated by the prophets. It was speedily followed by another in Judah, under the leadership of the priesthood, which resulted in the dethronement of Athaliah and the accession of Joash. From the popular point of view, each of these movements represented a reaction against what was foreign and non-Israelitish in politics and in religion, and in favor of the ancient institutions in Church and State. And, surely, we cannot fail to perceive, from the higher point of view, the fitness that in the northern kingdom, where since the time of Jeroboam there was not any authorized priesthood (2 Chronicles 11:14), the prophets should, in a sense,¹ have taken the lead in such a movement, nor that in Judah the Divinely-instituted priesthood should have sustained a similar part. In truth, this was one of the higher purposes of the priestly office (Leviticus 10:10; Deuteronomy 33:10; Malachi 2:7). But what we are careful to mark is the light which this throws upon the Divinely-appointed institutions in Israel, especially in reference to the mutual relations of Church and State, and the influence for good of religion upon national life and civil liberty.

There is yet another aspect of these movements, alike as regards their short-lived success and their ultimate failure. They were a last Divine interposition in that downward course which led to the final judgments

upon Israel and Judah. The people had fallen away from the Divine purpose of their national calling, and become untrue to the meaning of their national history. From this point of view the temporary success of these movements may be regarded as a Divine protest against the past. But they ultimately failed because all deeper spiritual elements had passed away from rulers and people. Nor is it otherwise than as those who, as it were, uttered this Divine protest that the prophets in the north and the priests in the south took so prominent a part in these movements. But with the vital aspect which would have given permanency to these movements, neither the military party in the north nor the majority in the south were in any real sympathy.

And still deeper lessons come to us. There is not a more common, nor can there be a more fatal mistake in religion or in religious movements than to put confidence in mere negations, or to expect from them lasting results for good. A negation without a corresponding affirmation — indeed, if it is not the outcome of it — is of no avail for spiritual purposes. We must speak, because we believe; we deny that which is false only because we affirm and cherish the opposite truth. Otherwise we may resist, and enlist unspiritual men, but we shall not work any deliverance in the land. “Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel” (2 Kings 10:28), but “he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin.”

“And Joash did that which was right in the sight of Jehovah
all the days of Jehoiada the priest” (2 Chronicles 24:2).

But “after the death of Jehoiada,” “he and his people left the house of Jehovah, God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass” (vers. 17, 18). And as if to mark this lesson the more clearly, the judgments alike upon Israel and upon Judah came to them through one and the same instrumentality — that of Hazael, king of Syria (2 Kings 10:32; 12:17, 18).

As regards the movement in the southern kingdom of Judah, Old Testament history does not present a nobler figure than that of Jehoiada, whether viewed as priest or patriot. Faithful to his religion, despite his connection with the house of Jehoram and the temptations which it would involve, he dared to rescue the infant prince and to conceal him for six years at the risk of his life. At that time he must have been upwards of a

hundred years of age.² Even after six years of misrule, Jehoiada still seems most reluctantly to have taken the initiative against Athaliah, although from his custody of the infant-prince, no less than from his age and dignity, it naturally devolved upon him. In the language of the Book of Chronicles, he had to “take courage” for it. And when at last he acted, it was, to use a modern expression, in the most “constitutional” manner, as well as in the most earnest religious spirit. There cannot be doubt that the occupancy of the throne by Athaliah was not only an usurpation and a crime, but contrary to the law and constitution of the land. Yet in bringing about a change which was strictly legal, Jehoiada acted in the most careful manner, having first consulted with, and secured the co-operation of, all the estates of the realm. Similarly, the execution of the plan was entrusted to those to whom action in the matter naturally belonged; and if the high-priest marked the accession of the new king by a covenant between him and the people and Jehovah, he was at least equally careful to secure the constitutional rights and liberties of the people by another covenant between them and their sovereign. Lastly, in the period that followed, Jehoiada used his position and influence only in favor of what was best, and not at any time for lower or selfish purposes. To this record of his life we have to add his activity in connection with the restoration of the Temple. We do not wonder that when he died at a patriarchal age,³ the unparalleled honor was accorded him of a burial not only in Jerusalem itself, where, according to tradition, there were no burying-places, but “in the city of David” and “among the kings,” “because he had done good in Israel, and toward God and His house” (2 Chronicles 24:16).

But perhaps the most striking part in this history is the almost miraculous preservation of the infant prince Joash. This fulfillment of the Divine promise concerning the permanence of the house of David (2 Samuel 7:12-16) must have impressed all those who believed in “the sure mercies of David.” This the more, that during the six years of Joash’s concealment, and when an Athaliah occupied the throne, it must have seemed to have entirely failed. The proclamation of the youthful scion of David in the Temple, the solemn religious covenant by which it was accompanied, and the happy reformation which followed, must have vividly recalled the ancient Divine promise, and directed the minds of all true-hearted Israelites to the great goal in that Son of David in Whom all the promises were to be

finally fulfilled. And for a time all seemed in accordance with the beginning of Joash's reign. It is only reasonable to suppose that during his minority, which would not have been so long as in the West, Jehoiada virtually, if not formally, acted as regent. In fact, the religious influence of the priest over the king continued "all his days, because [or since⁴] Jehoiada the priest instructed him." If any doubt could attach to the meaning of this expression, it would be removed by the parallel notice⁵ that

"Joash did that which was right in the sight of Jehovah
all the days of Jehoiada the priest" (2 Chronicles 24:2).

His change after that is only too clearly evidenced by the murder of Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, an event which has not been seriously called in question even by negative critics.

On the whole, it cannot be doubted that the great defect of the character and reign of Joash was a fatal weakness, such as that of his ancestor Ahab, probably due to want of stable, personal religious convictions. Under the guiding influence of Jehoiada, he "did that which was right;" yet even so he tolerated the worship of the people at the "high places." In view of his character, we must regard it as a specially wise act on the part of the high-priest to concern himself about the alliances⁶ of the young king, a circumstance which is specially noted in the Book of Chronicles (2 Chronicles 24:3). Of his two wives, one (Jehoaddan) is mentioned as a native of Jerusalem; and from the age of her son, Amaziah, at his succession, we infer that he must have been born when his father, Joash, was twenty-two years of age⁷ (2 Chronicles 25:1).

But the most notable act of the reign of Joash was the restoration of the Temple. The need for it arose not so much from the age of the building, which had only been completed about a hundred and thirty years before, as from the damage done to it by the family of Athaliah, and the forcible appropriation for the service of Baalim of all that had been dedicated to the house of Jehovah (2 Chronicles 24:7). The initiative in the proposed restoration was taken by the king himself, although it is impossible to determine in what year of his reign. According to the original plan, the sum required for the work was to have been derived from "all the money of the consecrated;" that is, all the sacred offerings "brought into the house of Jehovah; the expression, "current money,"⁸ meaning not coined money,

which was not in use before the Exile, but silver weighed in certain proportions, for current payment to the workmen. The sacred text further explains that this consecrated money was to be derived from two sources. from “the money of souls, after his estimation “ — that is, the redemption money in case of vows, to be fixed according to the provisions of Leviticus 27:2, etc. — and from voluntary offerings. These sources of revenue the priests were to “take to themselves, every man of his acquaintance” (2 Kings 12:5), and with them to “repair the breaches of the house.” The Book of Chronicles explains that this money was to be gathered by personal collection in all the cities of Judah. Considering that these contributions were mainly of the nature of voluntary offerings, like those once gathered for the Tabernacle (Exodus 35:21), such a mode of collection would appear the most suitable, especially in a time of religious revival following after a widespread religious decay.

The king had bidden the priests and Levites “hasten the matter” (2 Chronicles 24:5). But when, even in the twenty-third year of his reign, no satisfactory progress had been made with the needful repairs of the Temple, the king, with the consent of the priesthood, proceeded to make such alterations in the mode of collecting the money as virtually to place it in his own hands and those of the high-priest. It is not necessary to suppose that there had been defalcations on the part of the priesthood; indeed, the later arrangements are inconsistent with this idea. But we can quite understand that, besides the natural reluctance to collect from friends, the priests might find such calls interfering with the collection of their own revenues in the various districts; while the people would feel little confidence or enthusiasm in what was at best an irregular and disorderly mode of securing a great religious and national object. It was otherwise when the king and high-priest took the matter in hand. A chest for receiving voluntary contributions was placed at the entrance into the court of the priests, at the right side of the altar. A proclamation throughout the whole country, announcing a mode of collection identical with that when Moses had reared the Tabernacle in the wilderness, caused universal joy, and brought thousands of willing contributors. All the other arrangements were equally successful. When the chest was full, it was carried into the royal office, and opened in presence of the king’s scribe and the high-priest or his representative, when the money was bound into bags and weighed to

ascertain the exact amount. “And they gave the money that had been weighed into the hands of them that did the work [that is, them] that were appointed for the house of Jehovah,” viz., to superintend the building operations. According to 2 Chronicles 24:12, these were Levites, and men of such trusted character that it was deemed unnecessary to require an account of their disbursements to the workmen whom they employed. The money was in the first place exclusively devoted to the repair of the Temple (2 Kings 12:13). But when this was completed, the rest was used for the purchase of sacred vessels for the service of the Sanctuary (2 Chronicles 24:14). And it is specially indicated, partly to show the liberality of the people, and partly the extent of the religious revival, that all these contributions in no way diminished the regular revenues of the priesthood⁹ (2 Kings 12:16).

We mark that the twenty-third year of Joash, when the king took in hand the hitherto neglected restoration of the Temple, was that in which, after Jehu’s death, such great calamities befell the kingdom of Israel (see the next Chapter). In general, the accession of Jehu’s son, his partial return to the service of the LORD), and afterwards the advance of Hazael into Israelitish territory, must all have had their influence on the state of matters in Judah. Shortly after the restoration of the Temple, Jehoiada died. The opportunity was seized by “the princes” to bring about a partial counter-reformation. It is only natural that the corruption of the last reigns should have had a demoralizing influence upon them. The moral rigor of the service of Jehovah would stand in marked contrast with the lascivious services of Asherah (Astarte — “groves” in the A.V.) and of idols, probably the sacred trees of Astarte, and the service of Baal connected therewith¹⁰ For the restoration of the latter, the “princes” humbly and earnestly petitioned the king. Joash yielded; and, although he is not charged in Holy Scripture with any act of personal idolatry, the sin which this involved brought its speedy judgment, and reacted on the whole later bearing of Joash.

It has sometimes been objected that so vital a change as this near the close of his reign seems difficult to understand. But the character of Joash, the removal of the paramount influence of Jehoiada, the growing power of the “princes” in the threatening hostilities from the north, and the circumstance that the king in the first place only permitted the proceedings

of the corrupt aristocracy, sufficiently account for all that is recorded in the sacred narrative. On the other hand, there cannot be more instructive reading than to compare this later part of the history of Joash with that of Asa (1 Kings 15:9-24, and especially 2 Chronicles 14), which, although by way of contrast, seems almost a parallel to it.

The sanction given by the king to the introduction of idolatry in Judah soon brought, in the Divine order of things, its national punishment. But here also Divine mercy first interposed by admonitions and warnings sent through His prophets (2 Chronicles 24:19). Among these we have probably to include Joel, whose prophecies were probably uttered in the period of hopeful revival which characterized the first part of the reign of Joash. But now the warnings of the prophets were not only left unheeded: they called forth violent opposition. Still, prophets might be borne with because of their extraordinary mission and message. It was otherwise when the high-priest Zechariah, the son — or, rather, grandson¹¹ — of Jehoiada, standing in his official capacity in the court of the priests, addressed the people gathered beneath in the lower court speaking in similar language, under the overpowering influence of the Spirit of God. The princes and people conspired; and at the command of the king, unmindful not only of his duty to God, but even of the gratitude he owed to his former preserver and counselor, the grandson of Jehoiada was stoned to death “between the temple and the altar.”

All things combined to mark this as a crime of no ordinary guilt, specially typical of what befell the last and greatest Prophet of Israel, the Christ of God. The death inflicted on Zechariah was that which the law had appointed for idolatry and blasphemy (Leviticus 20:2; 24:23). Thus the murderers of the high-priest, as those of Christ, unrighteously inflicted the punishment which was due to themselves. Again, in the one case as in the other, the crime was provoked by faithful admonitions and warnings sent directly of God. In both instances the crime was national, the rulers and people having equal part in it; in both, also, it was connected with the Temple, and yet the outcome of national apostasy. Lastly, in both instances the punishment was likewise national. Yet there is marked difference also. For, as Zechariah died, “he said, Jehovah, look upon it, and require it,” while our Lord, when referring to this event as parallel to what was about to befall Him, implied no personal resentment when He uttered

this prediction: “Behold your house is left unto you desolate.” And yet further, unlike the words of Zechariah, those of Christ ended not with judgment, but with the promise of His return in mercy and the prospect of Israel’s repentance (Matthew 23:39). Jewish tradition has preserved, although with many legendary additions,¹² the remembrance of this national crime, fabling that the blood of the high-priest spilt on the Temple pavement could neither be wiped away nor be at rest, but was still bubbling up when more than two and a half centuries later Nebuzar-adan entered the Temple, till God in His mercy at last put it to rest after the slaughter of many priests.

The judgment predicted upon Judah was not long delayed. Joining together the notices in the Books of Chronicles and of Kings, we learn that exactly a year after the murder of Zechariah, Hazael, the king of Syria, made a victorious raid into Judah. We cannot be mistaken in connecting this with the expedition of the king of Damascus into the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 13:3, 7, 22). Having conquered the territory east, and subjected that west of the Jordan, when Gilead specially suffered (Amos 1:3), Hazael seems next to have marched into Philistine territory, either for personal conquest or perhaps even at the request of the people. The latter seems suggested, as we shall see, alike by the siege and capture of Gath, and by the conjunction of the Philistine cities with Hazael in the prophecies of Amos (1:6-10; comp. also 6:2). These imply that the Philistine cities had been conspicuous by their traffic in the captives whom Hazael had taken in Judea.

The varying history of Gath deserves special notice. In the reign of Solomon it seems to have had a king of its own, although apparently under the suzerainty of Judea (1 Kings 2:39). During the reign of Rehoboam, the son and successor of Solomon, Gath is mentioned as one of the cities fortified for the defense of Judah (2 Chronicles 11:8). The suzerainty of Judah over Philistia seems to have continued up to the time of Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 17:11). We have no means of judging how the Egyptian expedition in the time of Asa affected the later condition of Philistia; but we know that in this, as in other hostile attacks upon Judah, the Philistines took an active part (2 Chronicles 21:16, 17). On all these grounds it seems likely that the native population of Gath, apparently the only city held by Judah, had called in the aid of the Syrians on their

occupation of the kingdom of Israel, and that this had been the occasion for the siege of Gath by Hazael. From Gath to Jerusalem the distance is only about thirty miles, and the defeat of the Judean garrison in the Philistine fortress was naturally followed by an incursion of Judea proper. Although the Syrian force was numerically much inferior to that of Judah, the army of Joash was defeated with heavy losses. These notably included the destruction of those “princes” who had been leaders in the movement that ended in the murder of Zechariah. The Book of Chronicles (24:24) is careful to mark the hand of God in a defeat which formed so striking a contrast to the victory which the LORD had given to Asa with an army greatly inferior to his enemies (2 Chronicles 14:9, etc.) And yet this was only the beginning of judgment upon Joash. According to the account in the Book of Kings (2 Kings 12:18), Joash bought off the capture of his capital by handing to the conqueror all the hallowed things of the Temple¹³ and the treasures of the palace.

The withdrawal of the Syrian army, under conditions so disastrous and humiliating to Judah, was the signal for internal troubles. Joash lay sick and suffering, perhaps in consequence of wounds, in the castellated palace Millo¹⁴ (1 Kings 9:15), when he fell a victim to a palace conspiracy. Two of his servants¹⁵ murdered him as he lay in his bed. The Book of Chronicles traces his fate to the murder of “the son [grandson]¹⁶ of Jehoiada” — not, indeed, in the sense of this having been the motive of the conspirators, but as marking the real cause of his tragic end. No doubt the conspiracy itself was due to the unpopularity which the king had incurred in consequence of the successive national disasters which marked the close of his reign. And even those who had most wished to see the sternness of Jehovah-worship relaxed in favor of the service of Baal must have felt that all the national calamities had been connected with the murder of Zechariah in the Temple, which they would impute to the king. Thus, not only religion, but superstition also, would be arrayed against Joash. Even his murder produced no revulsion in popular feeling. Joash was indeed buried “in the city of David,” but “not in the sepulchers of the kings.”¹⁷

CHAPTER 3

JOASH, (EIGHTH) KING OF JUDAH. JEHOASH, (TWELFTH AND THIRTEENTH) KINGS OF ISRAEL

Accession of Jehoahaz — Chronology of the Period — Character of his Reign — Wars with Syria — The Assyrian Monuments — The Prayer of Jehoahaz and its Answer — Re-arrangement of the Text — Spiritual Lessons of this History — Accession of Jehoash — The Dynasty of Jehu and Reversal of the Policy of Ahab — The new Relation to the Prophets — Explanation of it — The Three Fundamental Principles in the bearing of the Prophets — Last Interview between Jehoash and Elisha — its Lessons — The Miracle after Elisha's Death — Victories over Syria.

(2 KINGS 13.)

THE reign of Joash, king of Judah, extended over the unusually long period of forty years.¹ Acceding to the throne in the seventh year of Jehu, king of Israel, he survived not only that monarch and his son and successor, Jehoahaz, but also witnessed the accession of Jehoash. According to the Biblical text, Jehu was followed on the throne of Israel by Jehoahaz, his son, in the twenty-third, or more strictly speaking, in the twenty-first year of Joash, king of Judah.² His reign, which lasted seventeen years, was a period of incessant warfare with Syria, and of constant and increasing humiliation to Israel. The history is very briefly indicated in the Book of Kings, which is chiefly concerned in marking the deeper spiritual reasons for the disasters of Israel in the increasing apostasy of king and people. But welcome light is thrown on the brief details of political history furnished in the Biblical account by what we read on the Assyrian monuments. It will be remembered that the Syrian conquest of Israelitish territory had begun during the reign of Jehu.³ The Biblical notice of these successive conquests by Hazael (2 Kings 10:32, 33) is probably somewhat general, and not confined only to the time of Jehu. But the records on the Assyrian monuments show that Hazael was at war with the powerful empire of Assyria, defeated, and obliged to entreat peace under humiliating

conditions. They also record that Jehu had paid tribute to the powerful king of Assyria — more strictly, that he had entered into a tributary alliance with that empire.⁴ When peace was concluded between Assyria and Hazael, the latter seems to have turned his whole force against the kingdom of Israel as allied to Assyria. By a series of victories, Hazael gradually possessed himself of the whole country east of the Jordan. Thence, during the reign of Jehoahaz, he extended his conquests over the Israelitish territory west of the Jordan, till, in the judgment of God,⁵ the army of the king of Israel, gathered together in Samaria as the last stronghold, came to be reduced to, fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen.”⁶ The rest — in the expressive language of Scripture — “the king of Syria had destroyed,” “and made them as dust to trample upon” (lit. “to tread down”) (2 Kings 13:7).⁷ And we again mark, as indicated in the previous Chapter, that it was two years after the accession of Jehoahaz, viz., in “the three and twentieth year of King Jehoash” (2 Kings 12:6), during the full progress of the Syrian conquest of Israel, when the restoration of the Temple was begun. We can scarcely be mistaken in connecting this with a national reaction against what had taken place in the north, and with fear of judgments such as had overtaken Israel. Lastly, we should notice, in final explanation of the expedition of Hazael against Gath (2 Kings 12:17), which ultimately eventuated in a march upon Jerusalem, that the Assyrian monuments everywhere indicate a tributary dependence upon Assyria of the Philistine cities along the seacoast.

From this glimpse into the political history we turn to what throughout is the main object of the sacred writer, the indication of the religious causes which led up to these events. The Biblical text seems here somewhat involved, in part from the mixture of remarks by the writer with the historical notices extracted from existing documents. The following appears its real order. The usual notice (2 Kings 13:1) of the accession of Jehoahaz, and of the duration of his reign is followed by a general description of the character of that monarch (in ver. 2): as doing that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, and continuing the wrongful religious institutions of Jeroboam. Then we have in ver. 3 a notice of the Divine punishment of these sins in the surrender of Israel to Hazael, king of Syria, and to Ben-Hadad, his son and successor. The following verse (ver. 4) marks the repentance and prayer of Jehoahaz, occasioned by these

calamities, and God's gracious answer, although not in the immediate present (see vers. 22-25). Verses 5 and 6 form a parenthesis. Possibly it may begin with ver. 4. The reference to the wars of Ben-Hadad in ver. 3, which can only apply to the time of Jehoahaz,⁸ may be rather of a general character (see vers. 22 and 25). In any case the continuous historical notices, or extracts, recommence with ver. 7, which describes the depressed condition of the kingdom under Jehoahaz, while vets. 8 and 9 record, in the usual form, the death of Jehoahaz and the accession of his son, Jehoash (or Joash). Thus, as already stated, vets. 5 and 6, if not also yet. 4, form an intercalated notice, telling on the one hand how God had heard the prayer of Jehoahaz by raising up "a savior" to Israel (ver. 5), and, on the other hand, how this gracious interposition did not really affect the spiritual state of Israel (ver. 6). They not only continued in the sins of Jeroboam, but "there stood the Asherah⁹ also in Samaria." This parenthetical notice must be considered as of a general character: "the savior" raised up being in the first place Jehoash (ver. 25), and finally and fully Jeroboam II. (2 Kings 14:25-27).¹⁰ Similarly the account of Israel's degenerate religious condition in 2 Kings 13:6 must be regarded as a general description, and not confined to either the reign of Jehoahaz, that of Jehoash, or that of Jeroboam II.¹¹ Lastly, the graphic expression, "the children of Israel dwelt in tents as beforetimes" (lit. "as yesterday and the third day") (the day before), is intended to recall the primitive happy days, the idea being that so thorough was the deliverance from the Syrians that Israel once more dwelt in perfect security as in olden times.

But the parenthesis in verses 5 and 6 is not the only one in this chapter. The brief notice in vers. 10-13 of the accession of Jehoash, the character of his reign, his death, and his succession by Jeroboam II., seems derived from the same historical record from which the equally brief previous account of Jehoahaz had been taken. It is followed in vers. 14-21 by a parenthetical account of what occurred in connection with the death of Elisha the prophet, derived, we would venture to suggest, from another source; perhaps a narrative of the lives and activity of Elijah and Elisha.¹² With this the writer connects (in verses 22-25) what really resumes and fully carries out the more summary remarks in vets. 4-6. Lastly, in chapter 14, the history of Jehoash — which had only been outlined in 13:9-13 — is taken up in detail and continued, and this in connection with the history

of Judah, being perhaps derived from the annals of Judah, as the previous brief record may have been extracted from those of Israel.

Viewing this history from another and higher standpoint, we mark the readiness of the Lord in His mercy to listen to the entreaty of Jehoahaz, welcoming, as it were, every sign of repentance, and by His deliverance in response to it, encouraging a full return to Him, showing also that prosperity or disaster depended on the relation of the people towards Him. And assuredly no better evidence could be afforded us that even in our farthest decline we may still turn to God, nor yet that prayer — even by Jehoahaz, and in that state of Israel — shall not remain unanswered. Yet, though the prayer was immediately heard, as in the judgment pronounced upon Ahab (1 Kings 21:27-29), its immediate manifestation was delayed. These are precious practical lessons to all time, and the more valuable that they are in such entire accordance with God's dealings as declared in other parts of Revelation, exhibiting the harmony and inward unity of Holy Scripture. And even as regards the outward structure of this narrative, its very want of artistic connection only inspires us with greater confidence in its trustworthiness, as not concocted but apparently strung together from extracts of existing historical documents.

Jehoahaz was succeeded on the throne of Israel by his son Jehoash (or Joash), whose reign extended over sixteen years (2 Kings 13:10, 11). Religiously it was, like that of his father, marked by continuance in "the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat." Indeed, as previously stated, this return to the religious policy of the founder of the northern kingdom, supplies the explanation of the administration of Jehu, and of the popular reaction against the house of Ahab which he represented and headed. Of this uniform policy we find an indication even in the name Jeroboam, which the son and successor of Jehoash bore. There was this other continuity also, that the monarchy founded by Jehu, originating in a military revolution, continued a military rule under his successors. This appears from the alliances with Assyria, from the continuous and finally successful wars with Syria during the whole of this dynasty, and lastly from the war with Amaziah, king of Judah (2 Kings 13:12). In this, as in the abolition of Ahab's religious institutions, we observe a reversal of the policy of the dethroned house. Nor can we be mistaken in ascribing to the latter cause the new friendly relations with the servants of Jehovah, and

especially His prophets, which the new dynasty sought to inaugurate. Almost the first act of Jehu had been to invite Jehonadab, the son of Rechab, to make public entry with him into Samaria, and to witness his zeal for Jehovah (2 Kings 10:16). Almost his first public measure had been the destruction of the temple of Baal, with its priests and worshippers (2 Kings 10:18-28). Even the slaughter of the descendants of Ahab and of the princes of Judah (2 Kings 13:4) might be imputed to the same motives — at least by a people in the religious condition of Israel. The same feelings may be traced in the repentant prayer of Jehoahaz (2 Kings 13:4), and lastly in the visit of Jehoash to the deathbed of Elisha (2 Kings 13:14).

It is another and a more serious question how the relation of these servants of Jehovah and especially of Elisha towards a dynasty stained by so many crime, and so unfaithful to the true service of the Lord, is to be explained. It certainly cannot be understood without taking several considerations into account. The situation was not simple, but complicated, and accordingly the motives influencing the conduct of the prophets were varied, and, if one-sidedly viewed, may for that very reason appear conflicting. These three considerations may, however, help us to understand their general bearing. First, the prophets were always only the executors of God's behests; they stood not in any independent personal relation to events or individuals. Secondly, the behests of God, and consequently the prophetic commission, whether as regarded judgment or deliverance, applied to acts and individual events, not to persons or lives. Thirdly, the final object of all was, on the one hand, the vindication of Jehovah's dealings, and, on the other, the arresting of Israel's spiritual, and with it of their national decline. It was needful that signal judgments should sweep away Ahab and all connected with his ways, and Jehu was, in the circumstances of the time and in the state of the people, the most suitable instrument for it. Thus far, and thus far only, had his counter-revolution the countenance of the prophets. Again, it was in accordance with the Divine purpose of mercy that the first indication of any spiritual comprehension of God's judgments should be welcomed and encouraged. Hence the prayer of Jehoahaz was heard; hence, also, and in further pursuance of the promise of deliverance, the interview between the king and the dying prophet, as well as the prediction of Jonah, the son of Amittai (2 Kings 14:25). Nor must we overlook in all this the human

aspect of the question. The prophets were indeed first and foremost God's messengers; but they were also true patriots, and intensely national, and this not despite, but rather because of their office. Any national reaction, any possible prospect of national return to God, must have had their warmest sympathy and received their most hearty encouragement. In short, whenever they could, they would most readily range themselves on the side of their people and its rulers. They would co-operate whenever and in whatsoever they might; and only protest, warn, and denounce when they must. And a consideration alike of the bearing of Jehonadab (comp. Vol. VI., p. 210), and again of Elisha, must convince that as their co-operation was never withheld when it might be given, so it was never extended to that which was either wrong in itself or inconsistent with their spiritual mission.¹³

If evidence were required of what has just been stated, it would be found in the last interview between Jehoash, the king of Israel, and Elisha. Forty-five years had elapsed since the anointing of Jehu, and as Elisha was grown up even during the reign of Ahab (1 Kings 19:19), he must have attained a very advanced age. Strange as it may seem, we have not any record of his public activity during the forty-five years that had passed since Jehu's accession. It is impossible to determine whether or not some of his recorded mighty deeds had been done during this lengthened period, although inserted in this history without regard to chronological order, having been extracted from a separate biographical rather than historical work. Or his activity may not have been of so public a character; or it may not have required record in the general history of Israel; or through him may have come the message to Jehu (2 Kings 10:30), and afterwards the impulse which led to the prayer of Jehoahaz.

Residing in Samaria, Elisha could not, even as regards his prophetic office, have fallen out of public view, since, on tidings of his last fatal illness, Jehoash at once hastened to his side.¹⁴ Nor, on the other hand, could we imagine this history to have omitted all reference to the death of Elisha; nor yet that the prophet should have departed without some public admonition for good or pledge of Jehovah's near deliverance of Israel. Indeed, had it been otherwise, the victory over Syria, coming so long after the prayer of Jehoahaz, might have been imputed to the prowess of Jehoash, and not to the answer of God.

It would be difficult to imagine a more striking contrast than between the bearing of the youthful king of Israel and that of the aged dying prophet. Elisha is full of confidence and courage, while Jehoash is overwhelmed rather with concern than with grief at the impending death of the prophet, weeps “over his face,” and addresses him: “My father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!” The language is the same as that of Elisha himself on the removal of Elijah (2 Kings 2:12), but uttered in a spirit very different from his.¹⁵ The king’s was language of respectful affection, indeed, but also of unbelief, as if with the removal of Elisha’s presence from amongst them the defense and might of Israel had ceased. Very different also from the bearing of Elisha when his master had been taken from him was that of Jehoash. Then the first act of Elisha had been one of faith that dared the utmost, when with the mantle fallen from his master’s shoulders he smote the waters of Jordan, and they parted hither and thither. On the other hand, almost the first act of Jehoash in view of the departure of his master was one of unbelief, that in cowardice shrunk back, even within sound of the prophet’s express directions and of the accompanying assurance of promised Divine help. So the same words have a very different meaning in the mouths of different persons, nor is there safety in any mere formula, however sacred or sanctioned. In this also the letter killeth, but the Spirit maketh alive.

Alike intrinsically, and in view of the condition of the king, as also for a lasting record to Israel, it was needful that the prophet should before his departure once more give emphatic testimony to Jehovah, emphatic confirmation also of His promise, and encouragement to Israel. So would his dying words become a permanent message to the people, and not only sum up and seal, but, so to speak, perpetuate his whole mission. It was in accordance with almost uniform prophetic custom (comp. 1 Kings 11:29-32; Isaiah 20:2; Jeremiah 13:1; Ezekiel 4:1, and others), and also best suited to the condition of the king and the circumstances of the case, that this message should be joined to a symbolic act as its sign. It would be impossible to misunderstand it, when Elisha bade Jehoash take bow and arrows and put his hand upon the bow, while the prophet himself laid his hands upon that of the king. And when this had been done, the window towards the east was opened, or rather, its lattice removed, and the king at Elisha’s command shot the arrow. Towards the east was Syria; in shooting

the arrow thither, the king of Israel was acting at the direction, and with the symbolically assured helping Presence of the LORD. And so it meant: “An arrow of salvation [deliverance] of Jehovah [the deliverance being His] and an arrow of salvation from [against, over] Syria;” to which the prophetic promise was immediately added’ “For thou shalt smite Syria in Aphek to destruction [complete annihilation].” The latter statement, it need scarcely be said, referred only to the Syrian host at Aphek, since this first was followed by other victories. But Aphek was a significant name, marking the locality where by Divine prediction and Divine help Israel had once before defeated the overwhelming might of Syria (1 Kings 20:26-30).

But the interposition of God, although direct, is not of the nature of magic. If any success granted by Him is to be complete, it implies moral conditions on our part. To put it otherwise: the full reception of God’s benefits has for its condition full receptivity on the part of man. This was the meaning of Elisha’s further behest to the king; this also the explanation of Jehoash’s failure. The prophet bade him seize “the arrows” which he had already taken from the quiver,¹⁶ and “strike (that is, shoot, hit) towards the earth.” Instead of obeying fully and literally, or at least shooting five or six times, the king struck only thrice. It was a symbol he could not fully understand, and which therefore had not any real meaning for him. Of simple, unquestioning, and persevering obedience of faith he had not any conception. So far as his capacity reached he did obey. He may have dimly perceived that it meant the shooting at the enemy prostrate on the ground. But then “three times” indicated in ordinary Jewish parlance that a thing was completely and fully done (as in Exodus 23:17; Numbers 22:28, 32, 33; 24:10; 2 Kings 1:9-14), and three times he had “smitten.” This also was symbolic of the king’s moral incapacity for full deliverance. That at such a moment he should have failed in the test of faith and obedience, perhaps grown weary of what seemed meaningless in its continuation, and that this failure should have involved the delay of Israel’s full deliverance, filled the prophet and patriot with holy indignation.¹⁷ It should be to him as he had done — only thrice, according to his obedience, but not to complete and final victory would Jehoash smite the Syrians.

We cannot help connecting the brief notice of the miracle after Elisha’s death and burial with this interview between the king and the prophet. It

was not as the king in his faint-heartedness had cried, or as Israel might have feared, that with the disappearance of the living prophet from among them “the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof” were gone. It was the God of the prophet, and not the prophet’s god, that was Israel’s defense and might. It needed not a living prophet — the same power which stood behind him in life could work deliverance through him after he was dead. The main point was not the man, but his mission, and to it — that he was a prophet this miracle after his death gave the most emphatic attestation; such also as would both in itself and from its surrounding circumstances specially appeal to that time and generation. This, without overlooking its other possible symbolic application,¹⁸ seems to us its chief meaning. It appears that “at the coming in of the year” — probably in the spring — after Elisha’s burial, they were carrying a man to his burying, as was the wont, on an open bier. But lo, as the procession reached the last place of rest, one of those predatory Moabite bands, which, like the Bedawin of modern times, desolated the land, was seen swooping round to where the mourners were gathered. Only a hasty flight could save them from death or bondage. There was not time for hesitation. Rolling away the stone which barred the entrance, and opening the door of his sepulcher, they laid the dead man upon the bones of the prophet, and then hastily fled. But lo, life came again to the dead man by touch of the dead prophet — and “he stood on his feet,” the only bring man in the silent home of the dead; safe in the sepulcher of Elisha from either flight or the Moabites. But whatever its immediate meaning, who can in this prophetic history refrain from thinking here of the life that comes from touch of the crucified Christ; of the raising of the young man carried at Nain on his bier to the burying; or even of the dim dawning of thoughts of a resurrection, the full blaze of whose light comes to us from the empty tomb on the Easter morning?

At its close the narrative again returns to what is its keynote (in vers. 4, 5). Again comes the record of the LORD’S compassion, of His faithful remembrance of the covenant with the Fathers, and of His merciful delay of that final punishment of Israel’s sin which would sweep them far from their land. It was as God had promised. Hazael was dead. Once and again, nay three times, did Jehoash defeat Ben-hadad (III.), the son and successor of Hazael, and take from him those cities which had been captured in the reign of Jehoahaz.

But as from the rock-hewn sepulcher of Elisha came attestation of his Divine mission, so comes there to us from the monuments of Assyria confirmation of this defeat of Ben-hadad in fulfillment of Divine promise. For whereas his father is repeatedly referred to as a bold warrior even against the overwhelming might of Assyria, Ben-hadad (III.) is not even mentioned.¹⁹ This is most significant; evidently, his reign was smitten with weakness, and his power had been wholly broken.

CHAPTER 4

AMAZIAH, (NINTH) KING OF JUDAH. JEHOASH, (THIRTEENTH) KING OF ISRAEL

Accession of Amaziah — Character of his Reign — Military Preparations — The Hiring of Israelitish Mercenaries, Warning of the Prophet, and Dismissal of the Auxiliaries — "The Valley of Salt" — Defeat of the Edomites — March upon Petra — Description of Petra — Slaughter of the Captives — Introduction of Edomite Idolatry — The Challenge of Amaziah to Jehoash, and his Reply — Defeat of Judah — Capture and Plunder of Jerusalem — Conspiracy against Amaziah — Flight to Lachish — Murder of the King.

(2 KINGS 14:1-20; 2 CHRONICLES 25.)

IT has been well remarked that Jehoahaz of Israel had on his death left to his son and successor Jehoash, amidst the sore troubles of his country, this priceless inheritance the promised answer to his prayer. How largely his promise had already been fulfilled appears from a comparison of the condition to which Hazael had reduced the army of Israel in the time of Jehoahaz (2 Kings 13:7), with the three brilliant victories which Jehoash gained over Ben-hadad III. Nor were the military successes of Israel confined to foreign enemies. Jehoash proved as victorious against Judah as against Syria.

In the second year of the reign of Jehoash over Israel, Joash, king of Judah, was succeeded by his son Amaziah. The reign of that monarch, who ascended the throne at the age of twenty-five, extended over twenty-nine years. Its beginning was marked by a continuance of what on the whole might, as in the case of his father Joash, be characterized as doing that which was "right in the sight of Jehovah:"¹ To this the Book of Kings adds, however, the qualification, "Yet not as David his father," which the Book of Chronicles explains by the expression, "not with a perfect heart." In truth his religious bearing during that period was (as both the historical records note) like that of his father Joash, and included the toleration of

worship and services in “the high places.” But even this qualified adherence to the religion of his fathers did not continue during the latter part of his reign.

Ascending the throne after a palace-revolution to which his father had fallen victim (2 Kings 12:20, 21), it must have been some time before “the kingship [royal rule] was confirmed in his hand.”² So soon as this first necessity was secured, he punished the authors of the late revolt by executing the murderers of his father. The sacred text especially notes that in so doing he spared their children, in conformity with the Mosaic law (Deuteronomy 24:16), which in this, as in so many other respects, differed from the common practice of ancient times.³ But the promise of this good beginning failed only too soon. As one has aptly remarked, “with a perfect heart” Amaziah was only a soldier, and even this rather in the sense of a cruel and boastful Eastern monarch than of a wise or brave general. It seems not improbable that the successes of the king of Israel against Syria had awakened in Amaziah lust for military glory. For the attainment of this object he made preparations of the most extensive character. His first aim was again to reduce Edom to the vassalage which it had cast off during the reign of Jehoram (2 Kings 8:20-22).⁴ In prospect of this expedition, he reorganized the forces of Judah, that had been shattered by the Syrians in the time of his father Joash (2 Chronicles 24:23, 24). From the account in 2 Chronicles 25:5, 6, he seems to have made a levy *en masse*, calling to arms the whole population capable of military service.⁵ The national character of this measure appears even from the circumstance that the officers of the new army were first appointed according to the old arrangement of tribe, clans, and families (2 Chronicles 25:5), and that these chiefs then conducted the levy of the people. The grand total so called to arms appears large; but it is considerably smaller than that in the time of Abijah (2 Chronicles 13:3), in that of Asa (2 Chronicles 14:8), or in that of Jehoshaphat⁶ (2 Chronicles 17:14-8).

Besides raising a native Judaeen army, Amaziah had recourse to the novel device of hiring 100,000 Israelitish mercenaries, at the enormous cost of 100 talents — presumably silver talents,⁷ amounting to about. 37,500 pounds of our money. Such aid could only lead to defeat, since Jehovah was not with Israel. Of this even their hiring themselves out for a foreign warfare in which they were not in any wise concerned affords fresh

evidence. Had Amaziah possessed spiritual insight, he would not have sought such help. As it was, “a prophet” was commissioned to warn him that if he went to battle relying on such aid he should surely succumb.⁸ God would show that He had power not only to help, but also to cast down. The answer of the king was characteristic. It indicated that while he rightly appraised the character of these mercenaries,⁹ he was chiefly concerned about the money which had been spent upon them. The dignified reply of the man of God, pointing him upwards to Him who could give far more than this, at least silenced the king, and he dismissed his auxiliaries. But the matter ended not there. Disappointed, no doubt, of their hope of plunder and ravage, the Ephraimires returned to their homes “in burning anger” (2 Chronicles 25:10). Josephus, although telling the story with his usual embellishments, adds what seems a historical notice to the effect that these Israelites laid waste the land as far as Beth-horon, taking much cattle, and slaying 3,000 men (*Ant.* ix. 9, I). If this account be trustworthy, we can scarcely be mistaken in tracing to this the later war between Judah and Israel, with its disastrous consequences to Amaziah.

If Amaziah had hitherto proved himself anything but what his name implied, “the strong one of Jehovah” [or perhaps, “Jehovah strengthens”], his true character was soon to appear, alike in his success and in his defeat. The dismissal of the Israelitish auxiliaries did not delay the preparations for the war. The south-eastern limit of “the land” may be roughly marked by the lower end of the Dead Sea., Here, east of the mountain of rock-salt (the *Khashm Usdum*), stretches southward that continuation of the Jordan-gorge (the *Ghor*) known as “the Valley of Salt” (the *Sabkah*). The valley, which extends about eight miles (about three hours), trends southwards to the white chalk cliffs,¹⁰ which rise 50 to 150 feet. They are formed from the debris washed down from the higher soil of the *Arabah* — here especially that part of “the plain” which stretches from Jericho downwards on both sides of the Jordan as far as the Elanitic Gulf of the Red Sea.¹¹ The “salt valley” itself formed the southern boundary of Judaea towards Edom. In its western and central parts it is wholly desolate, the clay soil being often flooded by the Dead Sea, and even the watercourses which traverse it being impregnated with the salt which encrusts the district. It is otherwise as regards the southern part of the valley, and especially the eastern, which is covered with vegetation, and where we still

trace the sites of ancient towns.¹² Here indeed we have an oasis that formed the ancient boundary between Edom and Moab.

In this “salt valley” had Joab, or rather Abishai, his brother, defeated Edom in the time of David (2 Samuel 8:13; 1 Chronicles 18:12, etc.), and here again did the Edomite army encounter the host of Amaziah. Although we know not the precise spot where the battle was fought, we may well suppose that it was in the southern part of the valley. The Edomites were within their own territory; their retreat would not be difficult, and, owing to the surrounding heights, comparatively safe. On the other hand, if the Judæan army had been beaten, it is not easy to imagine how any considerable remnant could have escaped, either by crossing the treacherous “valley,” or by skirting it. Nevertheless the Edomite army was defeated, with a slaughter of 10,000 men, and the capture of other ten thousand.¹³ The account in the Book of Kings (2 Kings 14:7) adds that the victorious Jewish army marched on to Sela, or Petra, where, according to 2 Chronicles 25:12, the wretched prisoners were “cast down from the height of Sela.” Needless objection has been taken to the transport of prisoners over what is sometimes described as so long and difficult a journey. Chiefly for this reason,¹⁴ the localization of the “Valley of Salt” has also been called in question. But if we suppose the battlefield to have been the southern part of the valley, these objections are removed.¹⁵ And obviously it would be the policy of the victorious army to penetrate into the heart of the conquered country, take its capital,¹⁶ and by an act of terrible vengeance to strike terror into the people.

It must have been a marvelous sight which met the Jewish host as they descended from the east into that surpassingly grand defile which opens into the so-called Wady Musa — the “Valley of Moses”¹⁷ — the site of the ancient, *Sela*, “rock” — better known by its later name of Petra. The “cleft,” or *Sik*, which formed the only access to it, passes between perpendicular rocks of red sandstone, rising to a height of from 100 to 300 feet. It follows the winding course of a torrent which rises in the mountains half an hour thence, at a spot said to be that where the rod of Moses had brought the water from the smitten rock. For an hour and a half we pass through this gorge, between rocky walls that “overlap and crumble and crack,” their intervening heights “throughout almost as narrow as the narrowest part of the defile of Pfeffers.” At the entrance we pass

under an arch that spans the chasm. Our progress is along what had once been a paved way, where the torrent had been “diverted,” “along troughs in the rocks, into a water-conduit for the city.” Festoons of the caper-plant and wild ivy and oleanders fringe the road, which winds like a river, affording at every turn the surprise of new views. The cliffs are red — in the sunshine, scarlet; in the shadow, black. Then through a narrow opening, where the rocks here overarch, we find ourselves suddenly at a turn of the road in face of a temple, with its pale pink pillars, all hewn into the rock. For all here is rock — rock graves, streets of rock, rock dwellings, rock temples, rock monuments; gorgeous rocks, dull crimson streaked with purple, over which seem to flow ribbons of yellow and blue. Again the road narrows through the streets of tombs, till it passes into the bottom of the rock-enclosed hollow or valley, with its branching valleys of rocks. This is the site of Petra now a desolation, but once a city of splendor and wealth, the central station for the commerce from India.

For further description this is not the place.¹⁸ It was into the midst of all this wondrous glory of nature and wealth of man that the Jewish army marched with its ten thousand captives. There cannot be doubt that the victorious host plundered and laid waste Sela. This explains how Amos does not mention it, but only Bozrah¹⁹ (Amos 1:12), which seems to have become the capital of Edom. Similarly, it is not named by the later prophets, except in Isaiah 16:1 and 42:11; and it only again emerges into importance in the fourth century before our era. But the most terrible scene yet remained to be enacted in the conquered city. We can scarcely be mistaken in supposing that the victors marched or drove their captives through its streets across to the western bank of the rivulet. There up the western cliffs mounts “a staircase” of broad steps “hewn out of the rocks.” “High up in these cliffs, between two gigantic walls of cliff, stands a temple.” It must be here, or on the cliffs above and around — or perhaps on the Acropolis somewhat to the south of it that we have to look for “the height of Sela” (2 Chronicles 25:12²⁰ — lit., “the top,” or “head”), whence the ten thousand Edomite captives were hurled, their shattered limbs dashing from cliff and rock, and their mangled remains strewing the heights and covering the ground beneath. But as they that long afterwards laid waste Jerusalem changed its name to *Aelia Capitolina*, so did King Amaziah change that of Sela into *Joktheel*, “the subdued of God” (2 Kings

14:7). Yet neither the one nor the other name, given by man in his pride, did long continue.²¹

It is a horrible, heart-sickening scene of history, so utterly un-Jewish in character that we can only account for its enactment by the state of moral degradation which the contemporary prophets Hosea and Amos describe in such vivid language. Yet another terrible inheritance, besides the guilt of this deed, did Judah bring back from the campaign against Edom. We can readily imagine how deeply the rock-city had impressed the mind of the king. But one of its chief features, which still first attracts the traveler, is the startling appearance and weird location of its temples. An Eastern mind, not religious, but superstitious, would readily come under the spell of these divinities whose temples were so weird and grand, so thoroughly in accord with nature around.²² Be this as it may, on his return from Edom King Amaziah brought with him its idols, and did worship to them, although the notice of it in 2 Chronicles (25:14) seems to imply personal rather than national or public idolatry. None the less was Divine anger kindled against such a Jewish and Davidic king. In vain was Divine warning sent to him by “a prophet.” The king replied by coarse sneers and threats, which, needless to say, so far from silencing the Divine messenger, only led to the announcement of near judgment.²³ And the sacred narrative expressly marks the connection between this and the later conspiracy which cost the king his life (2 Chronicles 25:27).

Two characteristics which have so often impressed us in the course of this Divine history appear in this narrative also. For, first, the Divine decree, in this instance of judgment, was not immediately carried out, and to some it might seem to tarry. And, further, the execution of this decreed destruction came not in sudden or miraculous manner, but in what might be regarded as the natural course of events, through popular dissatisfaction at gratuitously provoked national disaster. Thus, however real the connection between the Divine agency and Amaziah’s destruction, it would, on both the grounds above mentioned, require the eye of faith to perceive it. And this also is of permanent meaning: that the teaching of God is only to those who are capable of learning it.

It might almost seem as if the victory over Edom had infatuated the king and his council, filling them with unbounded self-confidence and

overweening self-esteem. For, since they discarded God, was it not the prowess and might of Judah which had wrought the victory over Edom? Very significantly, the account of Judah's defeat by Israel in the Book of Chronicles is introduced by the notice, "And the king took counsel." He had taunted the prophet as not being a counselor to the king, and the prophet had announced to him the counsel of God to his destruction.²⁴ It would now appear how the king's own chosen counselors would themselves bring about this "counsel" of God.

As we have suggested, it is not unlikely that the war between Judah and Israel really grew out of the dismissal of the Israelitish auxiliaries from the host of Judah. This would be the more probable if the account of Josephus is trustworthy, that Amaziah had hired these soldiers directly from the king of Israel, and that on their return to their homes they had laid waste Judaeen territory. And this would also better account for the challenge to fight²⁵ which Amaziah, with advice of his council, addressed to Jehoash, king of Israel, than to view it as a demand for submission and return to obedience to the Davidic rule, which, according to Josephus, formed the burden of this message. If the challenge of Amaziah was peculiarly Oriental and boastful in its tone, the reply of Jehoash equaled and even surpassed it in these respects. The allegory²⁶ which he used about the "thorn" in Lebanon that had sought a family alliance with the cedar, meant that it was absolute folly on the part of Amaziah to regard himself as the equal of Jehoash. Yet this was implied in his purpose of measuring himself with him. A contest between them! Why, a beast of the field in Lebanon passing over the thorn would crush it down.²⁷ Then followed the mocking application of the simile:

"Thou hast indeed smitten Edom make thyself glorious [enjoy thy glory], and abide at home' why shouldest thou meddle²⁸ with evil, that thou fall, thou and Judah with thee?" (2 Kings 14:10.)

The advice was sound, though extremely provocative to one in the mood of Amaziah. But Jehoash did not await his attack. Marching southwards, he met the Judaeen army at Beth Shemesh, the south-eastern point in the ancient possession of Dan, close to the border of Philistia,²⁹ situated in a beautiful valley only eight or nine hours west of Jerusalem. The battle was most disastrous for Judah. The army fled; Amaziah was taken prisoner;

and the Israelitish host advanced unopposed to Jerusalem. Here they made a breach in the wall 400 cubits (or about 600 feet³⁰) wide, from the northern gate of Ephraim (or Benjamin, the present Damascus gate) to that in the north-west corner of the wall, where it runs southward. Thus the city would be laid open towards the north, or the land of Israel. Josephus (*Ant.* ix. 9, 3) has it that Jehoash through this breach made triumphal entry into Jerusalem, carrying his royal prisoner with him.³¹ The victor plundered the Temple of what treasures it still contained in charge of one Obed-Edom.³² He also stripped the royal palace of its valuables, and taking with him “hostages” — probably from the chief nobles — returned to Samaria.³³

The war between Judah and Israel probably occurred quite near the close of the reign of Jehoash, king of Israel. As Amaziah of Judah reigned altogether twenty-nine years (2 Kings 14:2), and survived Jehoash for fifteen years (verse 17), we conclude that the Judaeo-Israelitish war had occurred in the fourteenth, and the Edomite war probably in the thirteenth, year of the reign of Amaziah. The fifteen years which followed after the death of Jehoash were full of trouble to the king of Judah. At last the general dissatisfaction, caused by the disasters of the war and the attempted introduction of foreign rites, culminated in a revolution at Jerusalem. Amaziah escaped to Lachish, in the low country of Judah (Joshua 15:33, 39), on the road from Hebron to Gaza.

Lachish has sometimes been erroneously identified with the present Tel-el-Hasi. Its more correct location³⁴ seems to be, passing from Eleutheropolis [the Biblical Libnah] westwards to Ajlan, the ancient Eglon, whence at a distance of about forty-five minutes the ruins of Umm Lakis — the ancient Lachish are — reached. As usually, the ancient city lay on the top of a hill. Among its ruins many cisterns are found. The country around is undulating, and two great wadys open on either side. Lachish was, as we know, strongly fortified (2 Chronicles 11:9); it was besieged by Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:14, 17; Isaiah 36:2); and could offer a stout resistance to Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 34:7). In short, it was one of the strong fortresses towards Egypt, although, from the friable nature of the building materials, its ruins, as those of other similarly-constructed places, are not considerable. In the time of Solomon, Lachish had been one of the “chariot-cities,” for which alike its situation near the Egyptian emporium

of horses (1 Kings 9:19; 10:26-29), and the plentiful pasturage around, would specially fit it. From the prophecies of Micah (1:13), it appears to have been the first Judaeen city to adopt the idolatrous worship of the northern kingdom, which thence passed into Jerusalem.

But the strong walls of Lachish could not afford security to Amaziah. The conspirators from Jerusalem followed the king, and his dead body was brought back to Jerusalem — perhaps in the very chariot in which he had made his escape.³⁵ Yet even this circumstance, as well as his honorable burial with his royal ancestors, and the elevation to the throne of his son, “by all the people of Judah,” indicate that although the discontent was not confined to the capital, yet the people generally were wholly averse to any change of dynasty, such as had characterized every revolution in Israel.³⁶

CHAPTER 5

AZARIAH, OR UZZIAH, (TENTH) KING OF JUDAH. JEREBOAM II., (FOURTEENTH) KING OF ISRAEL

Accession of Azariah or Uzziah — Reign of Jeroboam II. — Restoration of Israelitish Territory — Political Causes and Divine Agency in these Successes — Corruption of the People — Scattered Historical Notices — New Phase in Prophecy — Its Characteristic — The two Prophets on the Boundary-line — Prophets of that Period: Joel, Amos, Hosea, Jonah.

(2 KINGS 14:21-29.)

It would seem that a peculiar meaning attaches to the notice that all the people of Judah took Azariah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father, Amaziah” (2 Kings 14:21). With the exception of the name, this statement is literally repeated in 2 Chronicles 26:1, indicating that the writers of the two books had copied it from the same historical record. But considering the youth of the new king on the death of his father, Amaziah, at the age of fifty-four (2 Kings 14:2), he could scarcely have been his eldest son. Probably there was, therefore, a special reason for his selection by the people. Possibly there may be some connection between it and the twofold name which he bears in Holy Scripture. In 2 Chronicles — written, as we may say, from the priestly point of view — the new king is always called Uzziah,¹ while in the Book of Kings he is designated during the first part of his reign as Azariah, while in the notices of the latter part of that period he appears as Uzziah (2 Kings 15:13, 30, 32, 34). The usual explanations either of a clerical error through the confusion of similar letters,² or that he bore two names,³ seem equally unsatisfactory. Nor is the meaning of the two names precisely the same — Azariah being “Jehovah helps;” Uzziah, “My strength is Jehovah.” May it not be that Azariah was his real name,⁴ and that when after his daring intrusion into the sanctuary (2 Chronicles 26:16-20), he was smitten with lifelong leprosy, his name was significantly altered into the cognate Uzziah — “My strength is Jehovah” — in order to mark that

the “help” which he had received had been dependent on his relation to the LORD. This would accord with the persistent use of the latter name in 2 Chronicles — considering the view-point of the writer and with its occurrence in the prophetic writings (Hosea 1:1; Amos 1:1; Isaiah 1:1; 6:1; 7:1). And the explanation just suggested seems confirmed by the circumstance that although this king is always called Uzziah in 2 Chronicles, yet the Hebrew word for “help,” which forms the first part of the name Azariah, recurs with marked emphasis in the account of the Divine help accorded in his expeditions (2 Chronicles 26:7, 13, 15).

At the accession of Uzziah (as we shall prefer to call him) the throne of Israel had been already occupied for fourteen years by Jeroboam II., the son and successor of that Jehoash who had inflicted such defeat on Amaziah of Judah (2 Kings 14:23). His exceptionally long reign extended over fifty-one years,⁵ being the longest of that of any Israelitish king.”⁶ Holy Scripture gives only the briefest sketch of outward events during that half-century in Israel. Religiously, it was marked by a continuance of the wrongful institutions of the founder of the Israelitish monarchy (Jeroboam I.). Politically, it was distinguished by the complete defeat of Syria, and the recovery of all the territory which had, in the most flourishing times of united Judah,⁷ been conquered by David or occupied by Solomon’ in the language of the sacred text, “from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain” (2 Kings 14:25). Indeed, the conquests of Jeroboam seem to have extended even beyond this, and to the boundary of Moab (see Amos 6:14, where for “river of the wilderness,” read “of the Arabah “). The Dead Sea unquestionably marked on that side the southern boundary originally of united Palestine, and afterwards of the trans-Jordanic kingdom of Israel, while the “entering in of Hamath” equally indicates the northern limits of the realm (Numbers 13:21; 34:8; Joshua 13:5; 1 Kings 8:65; 2 Chronicles 7:8; Amos 6:14). The precise locality designated as the “entering of Hamath,” has not yet been accurately ascertained. But it must be sought in that broad rich plain, flanked towards the west by the Lebanon, and watered by the Orontes, which ascends for a distance of about eight hours from Homs to Hamah, the ancient Hamath the Great (Amos 6:2).⁸ In all likelihood it is in this general sense that we are to understand what seems the parallel notice of these conquests (2 Kings 14:28):” Damascus and Hamath.” The expression seems to refer to the

whole of the broad plain just described the words bearing the same general meaning as when David is stated to have put garrisons in Syria of Damascus (2 Samuel 8:5, 6), and Solomon to have occupied Hamath (2 Chronicles 8:3, 4)⁹ Here again welcome light comes to us from the monuments of Assyria. Thence we learn, on the one hand, that the kingdom of Israel was tributary to the king of Assyria, and, on the other, that that monarch conquered Damascus, took prisoner its king, who, having embraced his knees in submission, had to pay a ransom of 2,300 talents of silver, 20 of gold, 3,000 of copper, 5,000 of iron, together with garments of wool and linen, a couch and an umbrella of ivory, and other spoil numberless.¹⁰ The disastrous war of Syria with Assyria, and the tributary alliance of Israel with the latter, would sufficiently account for the conquests of Jeroboam II.

And yet here also there is a higher meaning. If, on the suggestion just made, the instrumentality used to bring about the victories of Jeroboam II. was not the direct help of Jehovah, but the prowess of Assyria, we ought to bear in mind that direct interposition on the part of the LORD in behalf of such a king could not have been expected. And yet, as noted in the sacred text (2 Kings 14:25), the promise of the LORD given through the prophet Jonah, the son of Amittai, was literally fulfilled — only in the natural course of political events. And the more clearly to mark the agency of God in what might seem the natural course of events, the connection between these successes and the original promise in 2 Kings 13:4, 5, is indicated in 2 Kings 14:26, as well as the higher meaning of all (in ver. 27).

It still remains to point out the strict accuracy of the Biblical account, alike as regards the prosperous internal condition of the land at that period (2 Kings 13:5), and the moral and religious decay of the people (2 Kings 13:6). If the victories of Jeroboam had, as on grounds of contemporary history seems likely, been gained in the early part of his reign, the rest of that long period was one of almost unprecedented wealth and prosperity, but also of deepest moral corruption. To both facts the contemporary prophets, Amos and Hosea, bear frequent witness — to the prosperity in such passages as Hosea 2:8; 12:9 [A.V. ver. 8]; Amos 3:15; 6:4-6; to the corruption, in many passages and in varied particulars.¹¹ A more terrible picture of religious degeneracy and public and private wickedness could scarcely be imagined than that painted by the prophets in this the most

prosperous period of Israelitish history. Thus the goodness of God, misunderstood by an apostate people, which attributed all to its own prowess (see Amos 6:13), was only abused to further sin (Hosea 13:6). A people which could not be humbled by judgments, and to which every mercy became only the occasion for deeper guilt, was ripe for that final doom which the prophets predicted.

On some other points of interest scattered notices may here be put together. Firstly, Jeroboam II. was certainly the most warlike king and the most successful administrator of all who occupied the throne of Israel. Of this even the new registration in the re-conquered trans-Jordanic provinces affords evidence (1 Chronicles 5:11-17). Secondly, this history is another proof of how little real success could attend such a re-action against the foreign rites of the house of Ahab as that which had been initiated by Jehu. The worship of the golden calves speedily led to that on high places, and even to the restoration of the service of Baal (Hosea 2:13, 17; Amos 2:8; 4:4; 5:5; 8:14). Nay, Jeroboam and his priest at Bethel proceeded to actual persecution of the prophets of the Lord (Amos 7:10-17). Lastly, we may derive from a study of the prophetic writings much insight into the political relations of Israel and Judah at the time, more especially as regards Syria and Assyria.¹²

But there is one subject which claims special attention. Even a superficial study must convince that from a religious point of view, and particularly as regards Israel's future and the great hope of the world entrusted to their keeping, we have now reached a new period. We are not now thinking of the general religious and moral decay, nor of the national judgment which was so soon to follow, but the other and wider aspect of it all. God's great judgments, when viewed from another point, are always seen to be attended with wider manifestations of mercy. It is never judgment only, but judgment and mercy — and every movement is a movement forward, even though in making it there should be a crushing down and a breaking down. Even here, so early in the history of the kingdom of God, the casting away of Israel was to be the life of the world. For with this period a new stage in prophecy begins. Hitherto the prophets had been chiefly God-sent teachers and messengers to their contemporaries — reproving, warning, guiding, encouraging. Henceforth the prophetic horizon enlarges. Beyond their contemporaries who were hardened beyond hope of

recovery, their outlook is henceforth on the great hope of the Messianic kingdom. They have despaired of the present: but their thought is of the future. They have despaired of the kingdom of Israel and of Judah; but the Divine thought of preparation that underlay it comes increasingly into prominence and clearer vision. The promises of old acquire a new and deeper meaning; they assume shape and outlines which become ever more definite as the daylight grows. It is the future, with Israel's Messiah-King to rule a people restored and converted, and an endless, boundless kingdom of righteousness and peace which in its wide embrace includes, reconciles, and unites a ransomed world, obedient to the LORD, which is now the great burden of their message, and the joyous assured hope of their thoughts. For doomed apostate Israel after the flesh, we have Israel after the spirit, and on the ruins of the old rises the new: a Jerusalem, a temple, a kingdom, and a King fulfilling the ideal of which the earthly had been the type.

It is not meant that these prophets had not their message for the present also: to Israel and Judah, and to their kings, as well as regarding events either contemporary or in the near future. Had it been otherwise, they would not have been prophets to, nor yet understood by, their fellow-countrymen. Besides, God's dealings and discipline with Israel still continued, and would of necessity continue — primarily to the coming of the Christ, and then beyond it to the final fulfillment of His purposes of mercy. Hence their ministry was also of the present, though chiefly in warning and announcement of judgment. But by the side of this despair of the present, and because of it, the ideal destiny of Israel came into clearer minds, the meaning of the Davidic kingdom, and its final spiritual realization in a happy future; and along with denunciations of impending judgment came the comfort of prophetic promises of the future.¹³

Two points here specially present themselves to our minds. The first is, that with this period commences the era of written prophecy. Before this time the prophets had spoken; now they wrote, or — to speak more precisely — gathered their prophetic utterances and visions into permanent records. And, as connected with this new phase of prophetism, we mark that it is rather by vision and prediction than by signs and miracles that the prophets now manifested their activity. But the importance of written records of prophecy is self-evident. Without them, alike the manifestation and establishment of the Messianic kingdom in

Israel and its spread into the Gentile world would, humanly speaking, have been impossible. Christianity could not have appealed to Messianic prediction as its spring, nor yet could the prophetic word of God have traveled to the Gentiles. With this yet a second fact of utmost interest seems intimately connected. On the boundary-line of the two stages of prophetism stand two figures in Jewish history: one looking backwards, Elijah; the other looking forwards, Jonah, the son of Amittai (2 Kings 14:25). Both are distinguished by their ministry to the Gentiles. Elijah, by his stay and ministry at Sarepta, to which might, perhaps, be added the ministry of Elisha to Naaman; Jonah, by that call to repentance in Nineveh¹⁴ which forms the burden of the prophetic book connected with his name while, on the other hand, his contemporary message to Jeroboam is apparently not recorded.¹⁵ Thus the great unfolding of prophecy in its outlook on the inbringing of the Gentiles was marked by symbolic events.

Without attempting any detailed account, the prophets of that period, and the contents of their writings, may here be briefly referred to. The earliest¹⁶ of them was probably *Joel*, “Jehovah is God” — a Judaeen whose sphere of labor was also in his native country. His “prophecy” consists of two utterances (1:2-2; 18; 2:19-3:21), couched in language as pure and beautiful as the sentiments are elevated. From the allusions to contemporary events (3:4-8, 19), as well as from the absence of any mention of Assyria, we infer that his ministry was in the time of Joash, king of Judah, and of the high-priest Jehoiada, — with which agree his temple-references, which indicate a time of religious revival. But here also we mark the wider Messianic references in chapters 2 and 3. The prophecies of Joel seem already referred to by *Amos*, “the burden-bearer” (comp. Amos 1:2; 9:13 with Joel 3:16, 18, 20). Amos himself was also a Judaeen, originally a “herdsman of Tekoa” (Amos 1:1; 7:14). But his ministry was in Israel, and during the latter part of Jeroboam’s reign, after the accession of Uzziah (Amos 1:1). There in Bethel, where the false worship of Israel was combined with the greatest luxury and dissipation, the prophet was confronted by Amaziah, its chief priest. Although apparently unsuccessful in his accusations of political conspiracy against the prophet, Amos was obliged to withdraw into Judah (Amos 7:10-13). Here he wrote down his prophetic utterances, prefacing them by an announcement of coming judgment (Amos 1:2.) through a nation, evidently

that very Assyria on which the confidence of Jeroboam had rested (comp. Amos 5:27; 6:14). Yet, amidst all his denunciations, Amos also looked forward to, and prophesied of the glorious Messianic kingdom (Amos 9:11-15). A third prophet of that period was *Hosea*, “help” — the Jeremiah of the northern kingdom, as he has been aptly designated. From certain allusions in his book we infer that he had been a native of the northern kingdom (Hosea 1:3; 6:10; comp. 7:8). His ministry was probably towards the end of the reign of Jeroboam, and extended to the rising of Shallum and of Menahem (comp. Hosea 6:8; 7:7). His prophecies give special insight into the political relations and dangers of the northern kingdom, and into the utter corruption of all classes. Frequent, too, are his references to Judah. Yet here also we mark the persistence of the outlook on the better Davidic kingdom (Hosea 3), with much concerning it scattered throughout his prophecies. Lastly, as yet another prophet of that period, we have again to refer to *Jonah*, the son of Amittai,¹⁷ a native of Gath-hepher, in the tribal possession of Zebulun,¹⁸ and therefore in the northern part of Israel. Without entering on the critical questions connected with the story which forms the burden of the Book of Jonah, or discussing the precise date of its publication in its present form,¹⁹ a deep significance surely attaches to its association with the prophet contemporary of Jeroboam II. It is not only that it points to a preaching of repentance to the Gentiles also, and to their ingathering with believing Israel into the family of God, but the circumstances of the time give it a special meaning. From apostate, morally sunken Israel, such as we have learned to know it from the descriptions of the prophets, Jonah, the very messenger who had announced coming deliverance to Jeroboam, turns by Divine commission to the Gentiles: to that great world-empire which was representative of them. And from this comes to us a fresh and deeper meaning in regard to the application of this history by our Lord (Matthew 12:39-41; 16:4; Luke 11:29-32). It had been “a wicked and adulterous generation” of old that had heard the prophecy of Jonah, and understood not the sign; nor was other sign to be given to it. So would it be to those who heard and saw the Christ, yet craved after other “sign” suited to their unbelief/ None other than the sign of Jonah would be theirs — yet even this, “a sign” sufficient in itself (Matthew 12:40), a sign also not only of judgment, but of wider mercy (Matthew 12:41).

CHAPTER 6

AZARIAH, OR UZZIAH, (TENTH) KING OF JUDAH

State of Judah at the Accession of Uzziah — Account of his Reign in the Book of Kings — Re-occupation of Elath — Religious Condition of Judah — Expedition against the Philistines and neighboring Tribes — Occupation of Trans-Jordanic Territory — Restoration and Extension of the Fortifications of Jerusalem — Re-organization — Prosperity of the Country — Growing Pride and Corruption — The Sacrilege of Uzziah — His Leprosy and Death — Jewish Legends.

(2 KINGS 15:1-7; 2 CHRONICLES 26)

WHATEVER motives had determined the selection of Uzziah by all the people of Judah as successor to his murdered father (2 Kings 14:21), the choice proved singularly happy. To adapt the language of the prophet Amos (9:11), which, as mostly all prophetic announcements of the Messianic future, takes for its starting and connecting point reference to the present, easily understood, and hence full of meaning to contemporaries — Uzziah found, on his accession, “the tabernacle of David,” if not “fallen” and in “ruins,” yet with threatening “breaches” in it. Never had the power of Judah sunk lower than when, after the disastrous war with Israel, the heir of David was tributary to Jehoash, and the broken walls of Jerusalem laid the city open and defenseless at the feet of the conqueror. This state of things was absolutely reversed during the reign of Uzziah; and at its close Judah not only held the same place as Israel under the former reign, but surpassed it in might and glory.

There can be little doubt that Jeroboam II. retained the hold over Judah which his father Jehoash had gained; and this, not only during the fifteen years after his accession, in which Amaziah of Judah still occupied the throne, but even in the beginning of the reign of Uzziah. For “breaches” such as those that had been made are not speedily repaired, and Uzziah was, at his accession, a youth of only sixteen years (2 Kings 15:2). We therefore incline to the view that the otherwise unintelligible notice (2

Kings 15:1), that Uzziah acceded “in the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam” bears reference to the time when he had shaken off the suzerainty of Jeroboam, and “began to reign” in the real sense of the term. This would make the period of Judah’s liberation the twenty-seventh after Jeroboam’s accession, and the twelfth after the elevation of Uzziah to the throne, when that monarch was twenty-eight years of age.¹ Important though the reign of Uzziah was — chiefly from a political, but also from a religious point of view — the writer of the Book of Kings gives only a few and these the briefest notices of it. In fact, he may be said only to single out the leading characteristics of that period. As regards political events, he marks the beginning of the recovery of Judah’s power in the occupation of the important harbor of Elath, and the rebuilding of that town (2 Kings 14:22). This, as we shall show reason for believing, probably in the early years of the accession of Uzziah.² As always, he records the age of the new king and the duration of his reign, as well as the name of his mother (2 Kings 15:2). If the suggestion previously made is correct, he also notices the exact time of the recovery of Judaeian independence from Israel (2 Kings 15:1). Again, the religious character of this reign is described; while, lastly, the unhappy fate and end of the king are recorded, although without mention of what led to it. Manifestly the point of view in the Book of Kings is simply “prophetic” — not, as in Chronicles, priestly — and the writer hurries over events alike of a political and a personal character, to indicate what seems to him of main importance’ the theocratic relation of the people to Jehovah.³

The brief outline in the Book of Kings is amply filled up in that of Chronicles (2 Chronicles 26.). Here, also, the first event recorded is the taking of Elath. This important harbor, from which, as from the neighboring Ezion-Geber, Solomon had sent his fleet of traders to Ophir (1 Kings 9:26-28; 2 Chronicles 8:17, 18), lay on the north-eastern end of the Gulf of Akabah, and at present bears the same name. Of its ancient greatness only a tower remains for protection of the pilgrims to Mecca.⁴ Around it are ruins and wretched hovels; but abundance of date-palms still betokens the former fertility. For half-an-hour beyond the town stretch, along the blue gulf, sands covered with beautiful shells; the view being finally shut off by granite and sandstone mountains. Such is the present aspect of “Elath” (or Elath) “the strong trees.” There can be little doubt

that when in the days of Joram of Judah “Edom revolted” (2 Kings 8:20-22), Elath recovered its independence. The conquest of Edom by Amaziah had apparently only extended as far as Petra, about half, way between the Dead Sea and Elath. In occupying it again and rebuilding it, Uzziah therefore completed the subjection of the country by his father. Such an expedition could not, in the state of Edom, have offered any real difficulty, however much its success must, after the late disasters, have raised the courage of Judah and inspired the people with confidence. These circumstances, as well as the place which the narrative occupies in the sacred text, lead us to infer that this was the first military undertaking of Uzziah. And, in view of his ultimate purpose as regarded Israel, the king would naturally begin with what was not only certain of success, but would also secure his rear in any future expedition. Nor was this all. A wide-reaching plan of national restoration would embrace the revival of commerce. And what prominence the new Tarshish mercantile marine held in public thought, and how it affected life in Judah in the days of Jotham, the successor of Uzziah, appears from the allusion in Isaiah 2:16.

As regards the religious condition of the country it is significant that, as the reign of former kings, so the present was characterized by a combination of doing “the right in the sight of Jehovah,” with a continuance of “the high places,” and their sacrifices and worship. It seems to indicate that this strange mixture in religion marked the highest point attained by the people. But even this qualified adherence to the worship of the Lord was only temporary, as the text explains: “in the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God”⁵ (2 Chronicles 26:5). This prepares us alike for the later history of the king, and for what we shall learn of the condition of the people.

But the first or religious period of the reign of Uzziah was one of continuous and progressive prosperity. Although it is not possible to determine the precise chronological succession of events, it seems likely that the expedition against the Philistines soon followed that to the Red Sea. The object of it was finally to break up the great anti-Judaeen confederacy which, in the days of King Jehoram, had wrought such havoc in Judah, after the successful revolt of Edom (2 Chronicles 21:8-10).⁶ The defeat of Edom must have rendered this expedition also one of comparative ease. One by one the great Philistine cities fell; Gath, which, in the reign of

Joash, had been wrested by Hazael of Syria, and made the starting-point of his incursion into Judah (2 Kings 12:17); Jabneh (Joshua 15:11), afterwards Jamnia, and about nine miles to the northeast of it, and three miles from the sea, Ashdod. It was probably owing to the importance of this strong town, which commanded the road from Egypt, that the sacred text specially mentions this district as one in which the king “built cities” (2 Chronicles 26:6). The general policy seems wisely to have been not to destroy nor depopulate the Philistine cities, but to render them harmless by breaking down their fortifications, and founding by their side throughout the Philistine territory, cities, inhabited no doubt by Judaean colonists. And from Philistia the expedition naturally extended to, and reduced to submission, the Arab tribe to the south “in Gur-baal” and “the Meunim” (or Meunites).⁷

We have now probably reached the period when either luxury and corruption had so demoralized Israel as to render it incapable of resisting the extending power of Judah, or else the government of Jeroboam II. had become paralyzed. For although the subduing of the Philistines and the other tribes to the south and south-east explains the statement that “the name” — here, presumably, the authority — of Uzziah “went to the going down into Egypt,” more is implied in the notice that “the Ammonites gave gifts.” This tribute imposed on Ammon evidently presupposes the occupation by Uzziah of the intervening trans-Jordanic territory belonging to Israel.⁸ And its possession seems implied in the further notice (2 Chronicles 26:10), that the herds of Uzziah pastured “in the low country,” that is, on the rich Philistine downs by the Mediterranean (1 Chronicles 27:28), and “in the plain,” that is, on the wide grazing lands east of Jordan, in the ancient possession of Reuben (Deuteronomy 3:10; 4:43; and Joshua 13.).

But by far the most important undertaking of the reign of Uzziah was the restoration and the fortification of the northern wall of Jerusalem, which had been broken down in the time of Amaziah (2 Chronicles 25:23). Drawing an almost straight line along the north of the ancient city, Uzziah built three towers: “at the lower gate,” in the north-western corner of the city, whence the wall slopes slightly southwards, and towards the west; at “the valley-gate,” the present Jaffa gate; and lastly, at the opposite extremity of the northern wall (and again slightly south), to protect the so-

called “horse gate” (Nehemiah 3:28; Jeremiah 31:40), where the northern wall forms to the east “a turning” or angle, whence it runs southwards (comp. Nehemiah 3:19, 20, 24, 25). Thus, as the “upper city” had, besides that just mentioned, not any other gate towards the west, nor yet any to the south, the entrance into the city was defended on the north, west, south, and at its north-eastern angle. Moreover, these forts were armed with new and powerful engines for projecting arrows and great stones upon any besieging host (2 Chronicles 26:15). Lastly, in accordance with all this, we read of a re-organization of the army, “according to the number of their enrollment (mustering) by the hand of Jeiel, the scribe, and Maaseiah, the officer (superintendent?), under the hand (direction) of Hananiah *one* of the king’s captains” (2 Chronicles 26:11). The levy was again made in accordance with earliest national custom — although in even more systematic manner than before. Under two thousand six hundred “heads” or “chiefs of houses,” “mighty men of valor,” an army of not less than 307,500 men was gathered, and completely equipped by the king — the heavy infantry being furnished with shields, cuirasses, and helmets, the light infantry with bows and “stones for slings.”⁹ This specially indicates the completeness of the armament, which, this time, was not only furnished by the central authority, but with such care that even the slings and the stones generally picked up by the men were served out to the troops.¹⁰

In these circumstances we do not wonder that the warlike fame of the king “went forth unto far,” although we specially note how carefully the sacred text throughout emphasizes the Divine help extended to Uzziah in each part of his undertakings. Nor was the internal prosperity of the realm less marked. We have already seen how the reoccupation of Elath led to a revival of shipping and commerce which must have brought wealth to the country. Similarly, the king took a deep interest in agriculture. In the mountains of Judah the ancient terraces were repaired for the culture of the vine; in the more flat portions, as in the district of Carmel (1 Samuel 15:12; 25:2, 5), agriculture was carried on; whilst, alike in “the wilderness” of Judah, in “the low country” of the Philistine downs, and in the rich “plain” across the Jordan, numerous flocks and herds browsed — provision and security for the operations of “husbandry” being afforded by hewing out many cisterns and building watch-towers (2 Chronicles 26:10).

It has previously been stated that this was the flourishing period of prophetism in Israel. This perhaps the more, because now the last warning voices were raised among a people sunk in idolatry and corruption, and nigh to judgment. From the prophetic allusions the state of matters in Judah seems, at least during the first period of this reign, to have been somewhat better. But here also, alike owing to increasing prosperity and to success, “pride” and its resultant vices, soon became apparent (Amos 2:4; Hosea 5:5, 14; comp. also Isaiah 2:5, etc.; 3:12, 15; 7:10-13; 28:7-10).¹¹ This chiefly on the part of the king himself. In the expressive language of Holy Scripture, “when he was strong his heart was lifted up unto destruction” — that is, until he did that which was wrongful and destructive. Intolerant of any power in the land but his own, he sought to combine the chief functions of the priesthood with those of royalty.¹² The holiest service of the Temple was when the incense was offered on the golden altar within the Holy Place. It symbolized the offering of Israel’s worship by the great High Priest. Regardless of the express Divine ordinance (Exodus 30:7, 27; Numbers 18:1-7), Uzziah penetrated into the Holy Place to arrogate to himself this holy function. In vain Azariah, “the chief priest” (2 Chronicles 26:17, 18), and with him eighty other brave men, no doubt priests of “the course” then on service, sought to arrest the king. Their remonstrance, really their warning, that the issue would be other than his pride had anticipated, only served to incite the wrath of the king. Such utter misunderstanding and perversion alike of the priestly functions in their deepest meaning, and of the royal office in its higher object — and that from motives of pride — must bring instant and signal judgment. While yet the censer with its burning coals was in his hand, and looks and words of wrath on his face and on his lips, in sight of the priesthood, he was smitten with what was regarded as pre-eminently and directly the stroke of God’s own Hand (comp. Numbers 12:9, 10; 2 Kings 5:27). There, “beside the altar of incense,” the plague-spot of leprosy appeared on his forehead. Hastily the assembled priests thrust him, whom God had so visibly smitten, from the Holy Place, lest the presence of the leper should defile the sanctuary. Nay himself, terror-stricken, hastened thence. So the king, whose heart had been lifted up to the utter forgetfulness of the help hitherto given him by Jehovah until he dared the uttermost sacrilege, descended living into the grave in the very moment of his greatest pride. Till death released him he was a leper, dwelling outside the city, separated

— “in a house of sickness “ — or, as others have rendered the expression, with perhaps greater probability, in “a house of separation” (comp. Leviticus 13:46; Numbers 5:2; 2 Kings 7:3) Cut off from access to the house of the Lord, where he had impiously sought to command, and debarred from all intercourse with men, the kingdom was administered by Jotham, his son — for how long a period before the death of Uzziah it is impossible to determine. His punishment followed him even into the grave. For, although he was “buried with his fathers,” it was “in the field of the burial which belonged to the kings,” probably the burying ground of the members of the royal family; he was not laid in the sepulcher where the kings of Judah rested; “for they said, He is a leper.”¹³

Of the record of his deeds by Isaiah, to which the sacred text refers (2 Chronicles 26:2), no portion has been preserved. Although the activity of the prophet began during the reign of Uzziah (Isaiah 1:1; 6:1), yet, considering that it extended into that of Hezekiah, Isaiah must have been still young,¹⁴ when the leprous king died. Jewish legend has fabled much about the stroke that descended on the sacrilegious king. In his clumsy manner of attempting to account for the directly Divine by natural causes, Josephus¹⁵ connects the sudden leprosy of the king with that earthquake (Amos 1:1) of which the terrible memory so lingered in the popular memory as almost to form an era in their history (Zechariah 14:4, 5). In that earthquake, which Josephus describes, he tells us: “a rent was made in the Temple, and the bright rays of the sun shone through it, and fell upon the king’s face, insomuch that the leprosy seized upon him immediately.” Other Jewish writers strangely identify the death of Uzziah referred to in Isaiah 6:1, with the living death of his leprosy, and the earthquake with the solemn scene there pictured. Yet this application of theirs is certainly true when they rank Uzziah with those “who attained not what they sought, and from whom was taken that which they had” (Ber. R. 20).

CHAPTER 7

UZZIAH (TENTH), JOTHAM (ELEVENTH), AND AHAS, (TWELFTH) KING OF JUDAH. ZACHARIAH (FIFTEENTH), SHALLUM (SIXTEENTH), MENAHEM (SEVENTEENTH), PEKAHIAH (EIGHTEENTH), PEKAH (NINETEENTH) KING OF ISRAEL

Accession and Murder of Zachariah — Accession and Death of Shallum — Accession of Menahem — Taking and Back of Tiphshah — Accession and Victories of Pul or Tiglath-pileser II. of Assyria — Tribute to Assyria — Accession and Murder of Pekahiah — Military Revolution and Accession of Pekah — Accession and Reign of Jotham in Judah — Syro-Israelitish League against Judah — Accession of Ahaz in Judah — Character of his Reign — The new Idolatry — Changes in the Temple and its Worship.

(2 KINGS 15:8-16:18; 2 CHRONICLES 27, 28)

WHILE the kingdom of Judah was enjoying a brief period of prosperity, that of Israel was rapidly nearing its final overthrow. The deep-seated and wide corruption in the land afforded facilities for a succession of revolutions, in which one or another political or military adventurer occupied the throne for a brief period. In the thirteen or fourteen years between the death of Jeroboam II. and that of Uzziah, the northern kingdom saw no less than four kings (2 Kings 15:8-27), of whom each was removed by violence. In the thirty-eighth year of Uzziah,¹ Jeroboam II. was succeeded by his son Zachariah, the fourth and last monarch of the line of Jehu. Holy Scripture here specially marks the fulfillment of Divine prediction (2 Kings 10:30), in the continuance of this dynasty “unto the fourth generation.” Of his brief reign, which lasted only six months, we read that it was characterized by continuance in the sins of Jeroboam. A conspiracy by one Shallum,² not otherwise known, issued, not in the private assassination, but in the public³ murder of the king. So terribly had all bonds of society been loosened. The regicide occupied the throne for only one month. Menahem, whom Josephus⁴ describes as the general of

Zachariah, advanced⁵ against Shallum from Tirzah,⁶ the ancient royal residence, and slew the usurper. The assumption of the crown by Menahem seems to have met some resistance. At any rate, we read of an expedition of Menahem against a place called Tiphseh (“a ford”⁷), which had refused to open its gates to him. The town and its surrounding district were taken, and Menahem took horrible vengeance on the population.⁸ The reign of Menahem, which, as regards religion, resembled that of his predecessors, lasted ten years. But it may truly be characterized as the beginning of the end. For with it commenced the acknowledged dependence of the northern kingdom upon Assyria, of which the ultimate outcome was the fall of Samaria and the deportation of Israel into the land of the conqueror.

Leaving aside, for reasons already indicated, questions of chronology, the Assyrian monuments enable us more clearly to understand the Biblical account of the relations between Menahem and his eastern suzerain (2 Kings 15:19, 20). Thus we learn that after a period of decadence which may account for the independent progress of Jeroboam II., perhaps even for the occupation of Tiphseh by Menahem, a military adventurer of the name of Pul, apparently sprung from the lower orders, seized the crown of Assyria, and assumed the title of Tiglath-pileser II.⁹ The first monarch of that name, five centuries earlier, had founded the power of Assyria, which was now to be re-established. In the very year of his accession he vanquished and impaled the king of Babylon, and henceforth himself assumed that title. Two years later he turned his armies to the west, and after a siege of three years took the Syrian city Arpad, in the neighborhood of Hamath, and not far from Damascus¹⁰ (comp. Isaiah 10:9, 36:19; 2 Kings 18:34; Jeremiah 49:23). Without following his further military expeditions it may suffice to state that three years later (in the eighth year of his reign), he is described on the monuments as receiving the tribute of Menahem of Israel, among those of other vassal kings. The shattering of the power of the Syrian confederacy and the occupation of Hamath fully explain the Biblical notice of the advance of Pul or Tiglath-pileser II. into the northern kingdom. His progress was for the time arrested by the submission of Menahem, and his payment of an annual tribute of 1,000 talents of silver, or about 375,000 pounds, which the king of Israel levied by a tax of 50 shekels, or about. 6 pounds 5 shillings. on all the wealthier

inhabitants of his realm. This would imply that there were 60,000 contributors to this tax, a large figure, indicating at the same time the wide prosperity of the country, and the extent of the burden which the tribute must have laid on the people. On these hard conditions Menahem was “confirmed” in “the kingdom” by the Assyrian conqueror¹¹

Menahem was succeeded in the kingdom by his son Pekahiah, whose reign, of a character similar to that of his father,¹² lasted only two years. He fell the victim of another military conspiracy headed by Pekah, the son of Remaliah,¹³ probably one of the captains of the king’s bodyguard. As we interpret the narrative (2 Kings 15:25), the king of Israel had surrounded himself with a bodyguard, such as that which of old had been formed by King David. The name of Pekahiah’s father: “Menahem, the son of Gadi” (2 Kings 15:17), seems to indicate that he was descended from the tribe of Gad. It is therefore the more likely that this bodyguard had been raised from among his countrymen the Gileadites — those brave highlanders on the other side of Jordan who were famed as warriors (comp. Judges 11:1; 1 Chronicles 26:31). Thus the LXX. — perhaps after an old tradition — render, instead of “the Gileadites” of the Hebrew text, the 400, which reminds us of David’s famous 600 (2 Samuel 15:18). This bodyguard we suppose to have been under the command of three captains, one of whom was Pekah, the leader of the rebellion. The other two: “Argob,” so named from the trans-Jordanic district of Bashan (Deuteronomy 3:4), and “Arieh,” “the lion” (comp. 1 Chronicles 12:8), fell, probably in defending the king. As we read it, Pekah, with fifty of the Gilead guard, pursued the king into the castle, or fortified part of his palace at Samaria, and there slew him and his adherents. The crime vividly illustrates the condition of public feeling and morals as described by the prophet Hosea (4:1, 2). The murderer of his master was not only allowed to seize the crown, but retained it during a period of thirty years.¹⁴

This revolution had taken place in the last (the fifty-second) year of Uzziah. He was succeeded in Judah by his son Jotham, in the second year of Pekah, the son of Remaliah. Jotham was twenty-five years old when he ascended the throne, and his reign is said to have extended over sixteen years. But whether this period is to be reckoned from his co-regency (2 Kings 15:5; 2 Chronicles 26:21), or from his sole rule, it is impossible to

determine. And in this may lie one of the reasons of the difficulties of this chronology.¹⁵

The reign of Jotham was prosperous, and only clouded towards its close. Both religiously and politically it was strictly a continuation of that of Uzziah, whose co-regent, or at least administrator, Jotham had been. According to the fuller account in the Book of Chronicles (2 Chronicles 27.), Jotham maintained in his official capacity the worship of Jehovah in His Temple, wisely abstaining, however, from imitating his father's attempted intrusion into the functions of the priesthood. Among the people the former corrupt forms of religion were still continued, and had to be tolerated. Naturally this corruption would increase in the course of time. Among the undertakings of the former reign, the fortifications of Jerusalem, the inward defense of the country, and its trans-Jordanic enlargement, were carried forward. As regards the first of these, the wall which defended Ophel, the southern declivity of the Temple-mount, was further built.¹⁶ At the same time the sacred house itself was beautified by the rebuilding of the "higher" [or upper] gate on the north side of the Temple, where the terrace runs from which it derived its name. The "higher gate" opened from the "upper" [or inner] court — that of the priests — into the lower, which was that of the people (2 Kings 21:5; 23:12; 2 Chronicles 33:5). Each of these two courts was bounded by a wall. Probably the general ingress into the Temple was by the outer northern gate.¹⁷ Thence the worshippers would pass through the lower, outer, or people's court to the second wall¹⁸ that bounded the inner, upper, or priest's court, which extended around the Temple house. Thus the worshippers, or at least those who brought sacrifices, would have to enter by this northern gate which Jotham rebuilt. As the inner or upper court lay on a higher level, we find that in the Temple of Ezekiel eight steps are said to lead up to it (Ezekiel 40:31, 34, 37), and such was probably also the case in the Temple of Solomon. Close to this "higher gate" — at the right hand, as you entered it — the chest for the collection of money for the Temple repairs had been placed by Jehoiada (2 Kings 12:9). Lastly, from its designation by Ezekiel (8:5), as "the gate of the altar," we infer that it formed the common access for those who offered sacrifices. Its later name of "new gate" was due to its reconstruction by Jotham, while the passages in which it is mentioned indicate that this was

the place where the princes and priests were wont to communicate with the people assembled in the outer court (Jeremiah 26:10; 36:10).

Nor were the operations of Jotham confined to Jerusalem. “And cities he built in Mount Judah [the hill country], and in the forests [or thickets, where towns could not be built], castles [forts], and towns [no doubt for security].” To complete the record of that reign we add that the expedition of the previous reign against Ammon was resumed, and the Ammonites were forced to pay an annual tribute, not only of the produce of their fertile lands (10,000 Kor¹⁹ of wheat and as many of barley), but of a hundred talents of silver, or about. 37,500 pounds.²⁰ But, as the sacred text implies (2 Chronicles 27:5), this tribute was only paid during three years. In the fourth, probably the last year of Jotham’s reign, it ceased, no doubt in consequence of the Syro-Israelitish league against Judah, which was apparently joined by the neighboring tribes who had hitherto been subject to Uzziah and Jotham. Lastly, of the internal condition of the country, of its prosperity, wealth, and commerce, but also of its luxury and its sins, a vivid picture has been left in those prophecies of warning judgment which form the opening chapters of the Book of Isaiah (chap. 1:5-6.).

Jotham himself only witnessed the approach of the calamities which were so soon to befall Judah. In the northern kingdom Pekah must have found himself in the midst of turbulent elements. Even if he had not to defend his crown against another pretender,²¹ the disorganized condition of the country, the necessity of keeping the people engaged in undertakings that would divert them from domestic affairs, as well as the obvious desirableness of forming foreign alliances to support his throne — perhaps even more ambitious plans — must have made the thirty years²² of this military usurper a period of sore trouble in Israel. We catch only glimpses of it at the close of Jotham’s reign. But our scanty information is to some extent supplemented by the Assyrian records. Holy Scripture simply informs us that

“in those days Jehovah began to send against Judah Rezin,
the king of Syria, and Pekah, the son of Remaliah” (2 Kings 15:37).

It is a majestic and truly prophetic mode of viewing events, thus to recognize in such a league as that of Rezin and Pekah the divinely-appointed judgment upon Judah. It is to pass from the secondary and

visible causes of an event straight to Him Who over-rules all, and Who with Divine skill weaves the threads that man has spun into the web and woof of His dealings. In point of fact, the Syro-Israelitish league against Judah ultimately embraced not only the Ammonites, who refused to continue their tribute, but also the Edomites, the Philistines, and all the southern tribes lately reduced to subjection (2 Chronicles 28:17, 18).

As already stated, Jotham only witnessed the commencement of this great struggle, or else he was sufficiently strong still to keep in check what at first were probably only marauding expeditions. It was otherwise when his weak and wicked son Ahaz ascended the throne, in the seventeenth year of Pekah, the son of Remaliah (2 Kings 16:1). He was probably twenty-five years of age²³ when he succeeded his father. The sixteen years of his reign were in every sense most disastrous for Judah. As throughout this history, it is emphatically indicated that just as former successes had come from the help of the Lord, so now the real cause of Judah's reverses lay in their apostasy from God. From the first, and throughout, Ahaz "did not the right in the sight of the Lord." Nor should we omit to mark how the sacred text when describing each successive reign in Judah brings its religious character into comparison with that of David. This, not only because he was the founder of the dynasty, nor even because in him centered the Divine promise to the royal house of Judah, but from the strictly theocratic character of his public administration, which should have been the type for that of all his successors, even as Jeroboam's became that for the kings of Israel.

It is impossible to determine whether the varied idolatry described in 2 Chronicles 28:3, 4, characterized the beginning of Ahaz's reign, or was only gradually introduced during its course. More probably the latter was the case; and as the success of Syria was the avowed motive for introducing its gods into Judah, so that of Israel formed at least the pretext for walking "in the ways of the kings of Israel" (2 Chronicles 28:2). Indeed, there is not a single aspect from which the character of the king could have commanded either respect or sympathy. Unbelieving as regards the Lord and His power (Isaiah 7:11-13), he was nevertheless ready to adopt the most abject superstitions. By making "molten images for Baalim," he not only followed in the ways of the house of Ahab (1 Kings 16:32; 2 Kings 1:2; 3:2), but adopted the rites then practiced in Israel

(Hosea 2:13; 13:1). Connected with these was the service of Moloch [or more correctly, Molech], who was only another form of Baal (comp. Jeremiah 19:3-6; 32:35). Alike, in the service of the one and the other, human sacrifices were offered: for which, indeed, Baal himself was supposed to have given a precedent.²⁴ But this was to revive the old Canaanitish and Phoenician worship, with all its abominations and all its defilements. The valley of Gihon, which bounds Jerusalem on the west, descends at its southern extremity into that of Hinnom, which in turn joins at the ancient royal gardens the valley of Kidron, that runs along the eastern declivity of the Holy City. There, at the junction of the valleys of Hinnom and Kidron, in these gardens, was *Topheth* — ” the spitting out,” or place of abomination — where an Ahaz, a Manasseh, and an Amon, sacrificed their sons and daughters to Baal-Moloch, and burnt incense to foul idols. Truly was Hinnom “moaning,”²⁵ and rightly was its name Gehinnom [valley of Hinnom — Gehenna], adopted as that for the place of final suffering. And it is one of those strange coincidences that the hill which rises on the south side of this spot was that “potter’s field,” the “field of blood,” which Judas bought with the wages of his betrayal, and where with his own hands he executed judgment on himself. History is full of such coincidences, as men call them; nor can we forget in this connection that it was on the boundary-line between the reigns of Jotham and Ahaz that Rome was founded (in 752 B.C.), which was destined to execute final judgment on apostate Israel.

Nor was this all. Not only did Ahaz burn incense in that accursed place where he offered his own son²⁶ as a burnt sacrifice to Baal-Moloch, but a similar idolatrous worship was offered on the high places²⁷, on the hills, and under every green tree (2 Chronicles 28:4; 2 Kings 16:4). Thus, in regard to form — the many sanctuaries in opposition to the one place of worship — as well as to substance and spirit, there was direct contrariety to the institutions of the Old Testament. Indeed, it may not be without use here to mark that in the surroundings of Israel, exclusive unity of worship in one central temple, as against many sanctuaries, was absolutely necessary if a pure monotheism was to be preserved and the introduction of heathen rites to be avoided.

But the idolatry introduced by Ahaz was to be carried to all its sequences. A despotic edict of the king, while at Damascus, in singular contrast to the

weakness displayed towards his foreign enemies, ordered a new altar for the Temple after the pattern sent to Jerusalem of one, no doubt devoted to an Assyrian deity, which he had seen in Damascus and approved. He was obeyed by a servile high-priest. When Ahaz returned to his capital sacrifices were offered by him on the new altar,²⁸ probably thankofferings for his safe arrival. This was only the beginning of other changes. It seems not unlikely that the king introduced in connection with the new altar the worship of the gods of Damascus (2 Chronicles 28:23, in connection with ver. 24). Certain it is that an exclusive place was assigned to it. Apparently Urijah, the priest, had originally set it at the rear of the old altar of burnt-offering, which stood “before the Lord,” that is, “before the house,” in other words, fronting the entrance into the sanctuary. But as this would have indicated the inferiority of the new altar, the king, on his return from Damascus, brought the two altars into juxtaposition.²⁹ In the words of the sacred text (2 Kings 16:14): “And the altar, the brazen [one]³⁰ a which [was] before Jehovah he brought near [placed in juxtaposition], from before the house [the sanctuary], from between the altar [the new Damascus altar] and the house of Jehovah, and he put it at the side of the altar [the new Damascus altar], northwards.” The meaning of this is that the brazen altar, which had hitherto faced the entrance to the sanctuary, eastwards, was now removed to the north side of the new altar, so that the latter became the principal, nay, the sole sacrificial altar. Accordingly, by command of the king, all sacrificial worship³¹ was now celebrated at this new heathen altar, the disposal of the old altar being left for further consideration.³²

The new place of sacrifice rendered other changes in the Temple furniture almost necessary. The old altar of burnt-offering was ten cubits, or about fifteen feet high (2 Chronicles 4:1). Hence there was an ascent to it, and a circuit around, on which the ministering priests stood. As the pieces of the sacrifice laid on the altar had to be washed, the “ten lavers of brass” for this purpose, which surrounded the altar, were placed on high “bases” or rather stands, so that the officiating priests could wash the sacrificial pieces without coming down from the circuit of the altar. The side pieces which formed the body of these stands were of brass, richly ornamented alternately with figures of lions and oxen with wreaths underneath them, and cherubim (comp. 1 Kings 7:27-40). For the new altar such high stands

were no longer required, and accordingly Ahaz “broke away the sidepieces of the stands” [A. V. “cut off the borders of the bases”]. Similarly he lowered “the sea,” by removing it from the pedestal of the “brazen oxen,” and placing it on “a base³³ of stone.” Possibly the king may also have been influenced by a desire to make other use of these valuable pieces of Temple furniture than that for which they had been originally designed. At any rate they remained in the Temple till a later period (comp. Jeremiah 52:17-20).

It is more difficult to understand the import of the changes which King Ahaz made “on account of the king of Assyria” in “the covered Sabbath place,” and “the entrance of the king, the outer one” (2 Kings 16:18). In our ignorance of the precise purpose or locality of these we can only offer such suggestions as seem in accordance with the language of the original. We conjecture that “the covered Sabbath place,” or stand, “which they had built” — viz., since Solomonic times — was probably a place opening into the inner or priest’s court, occupied by the king and his court when attending the services on Sabbaths and feast days. Connected with it would be a private “entrance” to this stand from, or through, the “outer” court (comp. Ezekiel 46:1, 2). We further conjecture that in view of a possible visit of, or in deference to, the king of Assyria, Ahaz now “turned the covered Sabbath place and the entrance of the king, the outer one, to the house of Jehovah,” that is, that he removed both into the sanctuary itself, probably within the porch. We regard it as a further part of these alterations when, in 2 Chronicles 28:24, by the side of the notice, that Ahaz “broke up the vessels of the house of God,” we find it stated that he “shut up the doors of the house of Jehovah.” This implies that the services within the Holy Place were now wholly discontinued. Thus the worship would be confined to the sacrificial services at the new altar; while the transference into the Temple porch of the king’s stand and of the entry to it, would not only bring them close to the new altar, but also assign to them a more prominent and elevated position than that previously occupied. We can readily understand that all such changes in the worship of Judah, and the pre-eminent position in it assigned to the king, would be in accordance with the views, the practice, and the wishes of the king of Assyria, however contrary to the spirit and the institutions of the Mosaic law.

After this we do not wonder to read that Ahaz “made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem,” nor yet that “in every several city of Judah he made high places [*bamoth*] to burn incense unto other gods” (2 Chronicles 28:24, 25). What influence all this must have had on a people already given to idolatry will readily be perceived. Indeed, Holy Scripture only gives us a general indication of the baneful changes made in the public religious institutions of the country. Of the king’s private bearing in this respect, we only catch occasional glimpses, such, for example, as in the significant later reference to “the altars” which he had reared “on the roof” of the Aliyah³⁴ or “upper chamber” in the Temple, no doubt for the Assyrian worship of the stars (Jeremiah 19:13; Zephaniah 1:5).

CHAPTER 8

AHAZ, (TWELFTH) KING OF JUDAH, PEKAH (NINETEENTH), HOSHEA, (TWENTIETH) KING OF ISRAEL

Import of the Changes introduced by Ahaz — Purpose of the Syro-Israelitish League — Taking of Elath, Success of Rezin, and Victory of Pekah — Siege of Jerusalem — Appeal to Assyria — Message of Isaiah — Withdrawal of the Allies — Danger from Assyria — The Prophet Oded and Liberation of the Judaeen Captives — Lessons of it — The Name Shear Yashub — Assyrian March upon Israel — Capture and Annexation of Naphtali — Further Campaign — Taking of Samaria — Revolution, and Murder of Pekah — Succession of Hoshea — Transportation of Israelites — Siege and Capture of Damascus — Death of Rezin — Cessation of the Syrian Power.

(2 KINGS 15:29, 30; 16; 2 CHRONICLES 28)

A RELIGIOUS change so complete as that which has been described might seem incredible if it had been sudden, or we were left in ignorance of its deeper causes. In truth, it was no less than a systematic attempt to substitute a complicated heathenism for the religion of the Old Testament. If its institutions had any deeper spiritual import, everything in them must have been symbolic. Hence, every alteration would necessarily destroy the symmetry, the harmony, and with them the meaning of all. To substitute for the altar of burnt-offering one after the heathen pattern was not only to infringe on the Divinely prescribed order, but to destroy its symbolism. More than this, it was to interfere with, and in a sense to subvert, the institution of sacrifices, which formed the central part in the religion of Israel. Again, to close the doors of the Holy and Most Holy Places¹ was to abolish what set forth Israel's fellowship with their Lord, His gracious acceptance of them, and His communication of pardon, light, and life. The temple of Ahaz was no longer that of Jehovah, and the attempt to attach the old services to the new altar would only aggravate the sin, while it exhibited the folly of the king.

Even more strange seems the mixture of heathen rites which it was sought to introduce by the side of the perverted Temple ritual. It consisted of the worship of the Syrian deities, of Baalim, of Ashtoreth,² of the host of heaven, and of Molech — in short, it combined Syrian, Phoenician, and Assyrian idolatry.³ Yet in all this Ahaz found a servile instrument in the high priest Urijah (2 Kings 16:11-16). Assuredly the prophet's description of Israel's "watchmen" as "ignorant," "dumb dogs — loving to slumber," "greedy dogs," "insatiable shepherds," only bent on gain and steeped in vice, was true to the letter (Isaiah 56:10-12). And with this corresponds the same prophet's account of the moral and religious condition of the people (Isaiah 2:6-9; 5:7-23). In view of this, King Ahaz can only be regarded as the outcome of his time and the representative of his people. Accordingly the judgments announced in these prophecies of Isaiah read only as the logical sequence of the state of matters.

The account of these judgments comes to us equally from the Books of Kings and Chronicles, which here supplement one another, and especially from the prophecies of Isaiah, which in chapter 7 give the most vivid description of the condition of things. The Syro-Israelitish league had been formed at the close of the reign of Jotham (2 Kings 15:37), although its full effects only appeared when Ahaz acceded to the throne. In its development the confederacy embraced also the Edomites and Philistines, although probably at a later period — in all likelihood after the early victories of the Syrian and Israelitish armies (2 Chronicles 28:17, 18). The purpose of the two chief allies is easily understood. No doubt it was the desire of Syria and Israel, which Tiglath-pileser had so deeply humbled, to shake off the yoke of Assyria. And as, after a period of decadence, the Assyrian power had only lately been restored by the usurper Pul, a hope may have been cherished that a powerful league might huff Tiglath-pileser from his throne. But for this object it was necessary first to secure themselves against any danger from the south, especially as there is some indication in the Assyrian inscriptions of a connection existing between Judah and Assyria since the days of Uzziah.

In point of fact, the expedition was rather against Ahaz than against Judah,⁴ and we are distinctly informed that it was the purpose of the allies to depose the house of David, and to place on the throne of Judah a person of low origin, "the son of Tabheer," whose name indicates his Syrian

descent⁵ (Isaiah 7:6). It is only when realizing this purpose of making a full end of the house of David, with all the Messianic promises and hopes bound up with it, that we fully understand how it evoked, in the case of Ahaz, that most full and personal Messianic prediction of “the Virgin’s Son” (Isaiah 7:14). Not only would their plan not “come to pass” (Isaiah 7:7), but looking beyond the unbelief and the provocations of an Ahaz (Isaiah 7:13), the Divine promise would stand fast. “The house of David” could not fail. For beyond the present was the final goal of promised salvation in Immanuel the Virgin-born And this was God’s answer to the challenge of Rezin and of the son of Remaliah — His “sign” as against their plans: a majestic declaration also of His object in maintaining “the house of David,” even when represented by an Ahaz. And when the hour of judgment came, it would be not by placing a Syrian king on the throne of David, but by carrying prince and people into a banishment which would open a new — the last — period of Israel’s God-destined history.

But as tidings of the “confederacy,” with its avowed purpose of taking all the strongholds and cities which commanded the defenses of Judah,⁶ and of setting up another king, reached “the house of David,” in the poetic language of Isaiah, Ahaz’ “heart shook, and the hearts of his people, as the trees of the forest shake before the wind” (Isaiah 7:2). And in truth the success of the allies was such as to account for such feelings — at least on the part of an unbelieving and craven king. Joining together the narratives in the Books of Kings and Chronicles, we have first, in 2 Kings 16:5, a general account of the war — its purpose, beginning, and final failure. To this is added, in the next verse, a notice of the expedition of Rezin, in which he “restored Elath to Edom,”⁷ when “the Edomites came to Elath,” and continued to occupy it to the time of the writer. This brief account is supplemented in 2 Chronicles 28:5. There we read of a twofold success of the allies — that achieved by Rezin, in consequence of which a great multitude of captives were carried to Damascus and a victory gained by Pekah. In all probability Rezin marched from Damascus through the trans-Jordanic territory straight into the south of Judah, extending his march as far as the latest conquest of Judah, Elath. This was now restored to Edom. Syria alone could scarcely have held such an isolated post, nor could it have been left in the rear in the hands of Judaeans. On the other hand, its restoration to Edom explains their active participation in the league (2

Chronicles 28:17). The text leaves it somewhat doubtful whether Rezin actually fought a pitched battle against a Judaeian army, such as was evidently won by Pekah (2 Chronicles 28:6), or else the “smiting” of the Syrians spoken of in ver. 5 only referred in a more general sense to the losses inflicted on Judah by Rezin.⁸ As it is not likely that an army of Judah could have been opposed to Rezin, while another was dispatched against Pekah, we adopt the latter view.

While Rezin thus ravaged the south, Pekah attacked Israel from the north. In a pitched battle, no fewer than 120,000 Judaeians fell in one day.⁹ Among the slain were Maaseiah, a royal prince, Azrikam, “prince of the palace” — probably its chief official, or *major-domo* — and Elkanah, “the second to the king” probably the chief of the royal council (comp. Esther 10:3). It is not easy to arrange the succession of events. But we conjecture that after the losses inflicted by Rezin in the south, and the bloody victory gained by Pekah in the north, the two armies marched upon Jerusalem, (2 Kings 16:5), with the object of deposing Ahaz. But from the strength of its late fortifications the undertaking failed of success. It was when Ahaz was thus pressed to the uttermost, and the Edomites and Philistines had actively joined the hostile alliance (2 Chronicles 28:17, 18), that two events of the gravest political and theocratic importance occurred. The first of these was the resolve of the king to appeal to Assyria for help, with abject submission to its ruler. The second was the appearance, the message, and the warnings of the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 7; 8). As we understand it, their inability to take Jerusalem, and the knowledge that Ahaz had resolved to appeal to Tiglath-pileser, induced the kings of Syria and Israel to return to their capitals. Rezin carried probably at that time his captives to Damascus; while the Israelitish army laid the country waste, and took not only much spoil, but no less than 200,000 captives, mostly women and children (“sons and daughters”) — as the sacred text significantly marks, to show the unprecedented enormity of the crime’ “of their brethren” (2 Chronicles 28:8). Their ultimate fate will be told in the sequel.

We pass now to the second event referred to. While the fate of Judah was trembling in the balance, the prophet Isaiah was commissioned to go with his son, Shear Yashub¹⁰ to meet the king “at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, at the highway of the fuller’s field” (Isaiah 7:3). If this “upper

pool” was (as seems most likely) the present Birket-el-Mamilla, the “dragon well” of Nehemiah 2:13, and “serpent’s pool” of Josephus (*War*; V. 3, 2), it lay in the north-west of the city. The “pool,” which is only a reservoir for rain-water, is partly hewn in the rock and lined with stone. From its eastern side an outlet channel or “conduit” opened, winding somewhat to the south of the Jaffa gate, eastwards into the city, where at present it debauches into “the Pool of the Patriarch” (the *Hammam-el-Batrak*), the Amygdalon [Tower] Pool of Josephus.¹¹ From the manner in which the locality is mentioned, we infer that the king was wont to pass that way, possibly on an inspection of the north-western fortifications.¹² The prophet’s commission to Ahaz was threefold. He was to admonish him to courage (Isaiah 7:4), and to announce that, so far from the purpose of the allies succeeding, Ephraim itself should, within a given time, cease to be “a people.”¹³ Lastly, he was to give “a sign” of what had been said, especially of the continuance of the house of David. This was, in contrast to the king’s unbelief, to point from the present to the future, and to indicate the ultimate object in view — the birth of the Virgin’s Son, Whose name, Immanuel, symbolized all of present promise and future salvation connected with the house of David.¹⁴

The result was what might have been expected from the character of Ahaz. As, with ill-disguised irony, he rejected the “sign,” implying that his trust was in the help of Assyria, not in the promise of God, so he persevered in his course, despite the prophet’s warning. Yet it scarcely required a prophet’s vision to foretell the issue, although only a prophet could so authoritatively, and in such terms, have announced it (Isaiah 7:17-8:22). Every Jewish patriot must have felt the wrong and humiliation, every clear-sighted politician have anticipated the consequences of calling in — and in such manner — the aid of Tiglath-pileser. For the terms on which Ahaz purchased it were the acknowledgment of the suzerainty of Assyria (2 Kings 16:7), and a present of the silver and gold in the Temple, the royal palace, and in the possession of the princes (2 Kings 16:8; 2 Chronicles 28:21.) If it led to the immediate withdrawal of Rezin and Pekah, yet the danger incurred was far greater than that avoided. And in 2 Chronicles 28:20 we read: “And Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, came against him¹⁵ [viz., against Ahaz], and distressed him, but strengthened him not.” Although, even from its position in the text,¹⁶ this seems a

general statement rather than the record of a definite event, yet some historical fact must underlie it. Further reference will be made to it in the sequel. But, while we do not read of an expedition of Tiglath-pileser against Jerusalem, such may have been made, even if under the guise of a friendly visit.¹⁷ And perhaps there may be some connection between this and the reported Temple alterations, “on account of the king of Assyria” (2 Kings 16:18). In any case Tiglath-pileset must have desired to extend his conquests further south than Samaria. He must have coveted the possession of such a city and fortress as Jerusalem; and the suzerainty so abjectly offered by. Ahaz would in his hands become a reality. In fact, the subjugation of Judea must have formed part of his general policy, which had the subjection of Egypt as its scope. And from 2 Kings 18:7, 14, 20, and Isaiah 36:5, we infer that from the time of Ahaz to that of Hezekiah the kingdom of Judah was actually both subject and tributary to Assyria.

An episode in the Syro-Israelitish war, hitherto only alluded to, still remains to be described. It will be remembered that the Israelitish victors had taken 200,000 prisoners. From the expressions used, we infer that these were brought to Samaria, not by the whole army — the majority having, after the Eastern manner, probably dispersed to their homes — but by a division, or armed escort, perhaps by those who formed the standing army. But even in Samaria God had not left Himself without a witness. “A prophet of Jehovah was there, whose name was Oded.” As in the days of Asa, the prophet Azariah had met the victorious army of Judah on its return not with words of flattery, but of earnest admonition (2 Chronicles 15:1-7), so now this otherwise unknown prophet of Samaria. And his very obscurity, and sudden and isolated message, as well as its effect, are instructive of the object and character of propheticism. Only a prophet of the Lord could have dared, in the circumstances, to utter words so humiliating to Israel’s pride, and so exacting in their demand. The defeat and loss of Judah had been in Divine punishment of sin, and would they now add to their own guilt by making slaves of the children of Judah and Jerusalem? Or did they presume to regard themselves as instruments of God’s judgments, forgetful of the guilt which rested upon themselves? Nay, let them know that wrath was already upon them, alike for their sins, for this fratricidal war, and now for their purpose of enslaving their brethren — and let them set their captives free.

There is not the least reason for questioning the accuracy of this narrative,¹⁸ nor yet of that of the effectual intervention on behalf of the captives of four of the heads of houses in Ephraim, whose names have been handed down to honor. The latter is a further confirmation of the historical character of the report. Indeed, even if it had not been recorded, we should have expected some such intervention. The more serious party in Israel, whether friends or foes of Pekah, must have disapproved of such an undertaking as that of their king. There had previously been wars between Israel and Judah; but never one in which Israel had joined a heathen power for the purpose of overthrowing the house of David, and placing on its throne a Syrian adventurer. It must have awakened every religious and national feeling; and the sight of 200,000 Judean women and children driven into Samaria, weary, footsore, hungry, and in rags, to be sold as slaves, would evoke not satisfaction, but abhorrence and indignation. It is to this that we understand the four princes to refer when speaking of the “trespass” already committed by this war, and warning against adding to it by retaining the captives as slaves. As we realize the scene, we do not wonder at the intervention of the princes, nor at the popular reaction when the words of the prophet roused them to full consciousness of their wrong. Nor, taking merely the political view of it, could princes or people have been blind to the folly of weakening Judah and entangling themselves in a war with Tiglath-pileser.

As so often in similar circumstances, the revulsion of popular feeling was immediate and complete. The spoil and the captives were handed over to “the princes;” those who had lately been prisoners were tenderly cared for as brethren and honored guests,¹⁹ and brought back to the Judean border-city Jericho.²⁰ Without presuming to affirm that this episode was in the mind of our Lord when He spoke the parable of “the Good Samaritan,” there is that in the bearing of these men who are expressed by names²¹ which reminds us of the example and the lessons in that teaching of Christ.

Another suggestion we would venture to make. It will be remembered that when Isaiah was directed to meet King Ahaz he was to go not alone, but accompanied by his son, Shear Yashub (Isaiah 7:3). The meaning of this evidently symbolical name is “A remnant shall return.” May that name not have been a symbolic prediction of the episode just related, and intended to show how easily the Lord could give deliverance, without any appeal

for help to Assyria?²² If so, it casts still further light on the place occupied by symbolism, not only in the Old Testament, but in Hebrew, and in measure in all Eastern thinking. Symbolism is, so to speak, its mode of expression — the language of its highest thinking. Hence its moral teaching is in parables and proverbs; its dogmatics in ritual and typical institutions; while in its prophecy the present serves as a mirror in which the future is reflected. To overlook this constant presence of the symbolical and typical in the worship, history, teaching, and prophecy of the Old Testament is to misunderstand not only its meaning, but even the genius of the Hebrew people.

We turn once more to the course of this history to trace the results of Ahaz' appeal to Assyria as against Syria and Israel.²³ Unfortunately, of the two groups into which the Assyrian inscriptions of that reign have been arranged, that which is chronological and also historically the most trustworthy has in important parts been destroyed or rendered illegible by a later monarch of a different dynasty (Esarhaddon).²⁴ Nevertheless we are able to gather a sufficiently connected history at any rate of twelve out of the eighteen years of the reign of Tiglath-pileser. Its beginning, and to the period of the taking of Arpad, has been described in the previous chapter. And thus much may be added generally, that "the picture of Tiglath-pileser derived from the Assyrian inscriptions entirely corresponds with what we know of him from the Bible."²⁵

Further, we learn that in Tiglath-pileser's expedition against the Syro-Israelitish league his first movement was against Israel and the smaller nations around Judah (2 Chronicles 28:17, 18). A brief account of the campaign against Israel is given in 2 Kings 15:29, 30, which we cannot help thinking is there out of its place.²⁶ But it correctly indicates, in accordance with the Assyrian inscriptions, the priority of the march against Israel to that upon Damascus, which is recorded in 2 Kings 16:9, and it seems also alluded to in 2 Chronicles 28:16, comp. ver. 17. From the Assyrian inscriptions we learn that Tiglath-pileser made an expedition against Philistia — that country being presumably named as the utmost western objective of a campaign which was equally directed against Samaria, the Phoenician towns, Edom, Moab, and Ammon, and even affected Judah. To the latter the notice in 2 Chronicles 28:20 may possibly bear reference. Judging from the order of the conquered cities mentioned in the Assyrian

inscriptions, Tiglath-pileser had left Damascus aside, and marched straight on the old Canaanitish towns at the western foot of Lebanon, which commanded the road to Palestine. Two of these are specially mentioned, Arka²⁷ (Genesis 10:17), the modern Irka, about twelve miles north-east from Tripolis, and Zemar (Genesis 10:18), the modern Symra, the ancient Simyros.²⁸ After an unhappy break of two lines in the inscription, we next come upon the names of two of the cities which in 2 Kings 15:29 are described as taken by Tiglath-pileser, Gilead and Abel-beth-Maachah, with express notice of their situation in the land of Beth-Omri (Samaria), and of their having been added to the territory of Assyria. The inscription further states that Tiglath-pileser had set his own officials and governors over these districts. Thence the victorious expedition is traced as far as Gaza, whence no doubt, after having subjugated all the border-tribes to Northern Arabia, it returned to the land of "Beth-Omri." It is added that Tiglath-pileser carried away to Assyria all its inhabitants, with their chattels, and killed Pekah their king, appointing Hoshea in his place (2 Kings 15:30).

We do not fail to perceive in this record boastful exaggerations by the Assyrian monarch, since, although the revolution which cost Pekah his life (2 Kings 15:30) was no doubt occasioned by the victories of Tiglath-pileser, yet the Israelitish king fell by the hand of Hoshea, the leader of the rising. At the same time Hoshea was absolutely dependent on Assyria, to which he became tributary. On the Assyrian inscription the sum exacted from him is said to have amounted to ten talents of gold (67,500 pounds) and 1,000 talents of silver (375,000 pounds).²⁹ The list of the conquered Israelitish cities given in 2 Kings 15:29 enables us to follow the course of the campaign of Tiglath-pileset straight down from north to south, through Upper Galilee. The Assyrians took first Ijon, in the tribe of Naphtali (2 Chronicles 16:4), a place formerly conquered by Ben-hadad (1 Kings 15:20), probably the modern Tell Dibbin, on a hill in a "well watered" district, on the road from Damascus to Sidon. Thence the conquerors passed to Abel-beth-Maachah, "the meadow" of Beth-Maacah (a neighboring small Syrian district), also called *Abel Mayim*, "meadow of waters" (2 Chronicles 16:4), a considerable town, known to us from the clays of David (2 Samuel 20:18) and of Ben-hadad (1 Kings 15:20), situated about one and a half hours west-north-west from Dan. The next town occupied, Janoah (not that of Joshua 16:6), probably the modern

Hunin, lay about midway between Abel-beth-Maachah and Kedesh, the place next captured. It was also in the possession of Naphtali — and indeed, to distinguish it from other places of the same name, was known as Kedesh-Naphtali, or Kedesh in Galilee (Joshua 20:7; 21:32; 1 Chronicles 6:76). This was one of the ancient Levitical cities, and the birthplace of Barak (Judges 4:6, 9). Although belonging to Upper Galilee, it was at the time of Christ held by the Tyrians (Jos. *Wars*, 2. 18, 1), whose territory here bounded with Galilee. It still retains its old name, and lies north-west of the marshes that surrounded Lake Merom. The other three names in 2 Kings 15:29 among the conquests of Tiglath-pileser seem those of districts rather than towns: Gilead, the later Gaulonitis,³⁰ the northern portion of the trans-Jordanic district which Jeroboam II had only lately won back for Israel (2Kings 15:25); Galilee, in the more restricted sense of the term, that is: the northern part of it, or “Galilee of the Gentiles” (Isaiah 9:1; compare 1 Kings 9:11) — in short, “all the land of Naphtali.”

The advance of Tiglath-pileser, marked by the occupation of those towns in a straight line from north to south, concerted Galilee and the adjoining trans-Jordanic district into an Assyrian province, which served as a basis for further operations. These terminated — perhaps after passing near or through Jerusalem — with the occupation of Samaria, where a revolution ensued, in which Pekah fell. He was succeeded by the leader of the rising, Hoshea, who became tributary to Assyria. The easier part of his undertaking accomplished, Tiglath-pileser turned his arms against Damascus. Here he met with a stubborn resistance. Holy Scripture only records (2 Kings 16:9) that Damascus was taken, Rezin killed, and the people carried captive to Kir — a district not yet certainly identified, but apparently belonging to Media (compare Isaiah 21:2; 22:6). It was thence that the Syrians had originally come (Amos 9:7), and thither they were again transported when their work in history was done (Amos 1:5). Unfortunately, the Assyrian tablets which record this campaign are mutilated, that in which the death of Rezin was recorded being lost. But we learn that the siege of Damascus occupied two years; that Rezin was shut up in his capital, into which he had been driven; that not only was every tree in the gardens round Damascus cut down, but, in the language of the tablet, the whole land desolated as by a flood. With the capture of Damascus, the Damasco-Syrian empire, which had hitherto been a scourge

for the punishment of Israel, came to an end. Henceforth it was only a province of Assyria. It is in the light of all these events that we have to read such prophecies as those in Isaiah 7 and the first part of chapter 8. The majestic divine calm of these utterances, their lofty defiance of man's seeming power, their grand certitude, and the withering irony with which what seemed the irresistible might of these two "smoking firebrands" is treated — all find their illustration in the history of this war. Such prophecies warrant us in climbing the heights of faith, from which Isaiah bids us to look, to where, in the dim distance the morning glow of the new Messianic day is seen to fill the sky with glory.

But in Damascus the conquered did Tiglath-pileser gather, as for an Eastern *darbar*, the vanquished and subject provinces. Thither also did King Ahaz go "to meet" the king of Assyria; and thence, as the outcome of what he had learned from prophecy and seen as its fulfillment in history, did this king of Judah send the pattern of the heathen altar to Jerusalem (2 Kings 16:10, 11). On the Assyrian monuments he is called Joachaz (Ja-u-ha-zi). But sacred history would not join the name of the Lord with that of the apostate descendant of David. For all time it points at him the finger, "This is that King Ahaz" (2 Chronicles 28:22); and he sinks into an unhonored grave, "not into the sepulchers of the kings of Israel" (ver. 27).

And yet other and still wider-reaching lessons come to us from this history.

CHAPTER 9

HOSHEA, (TWENTIETH) KING OF ISRAEL.

Summary of this History — Accession of Hoshea — Religious Character of his Reign — Death of Tiglath-pileser and Accession of Shalmaneser IV. — Expedition into Palestine and Submission of Hoshea — Attempted Alliance of Israel with Egypt — Hoshea made a Prisoner — Siege of Samaria — Account of it in the Assyrian Inscriptions — Accession of Sargon — Capture of Samaria — Deportation of Israel — Localities of their Exile — The new Colonists of Samaria and their Religion — Lessons of this History.

(2 KINGS 17)

THERE is a strange Jewish tradition to the effect that from the time when Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh were deported, the observance of Jubilee years ceased¹ (*Arakh. 32 b; Fer. Shebh. 39 c; Fer. Gitt. 45 d*). Whatever of truth there may be in this notice, other peculiarities connected with this period are of such interest and importance in this history, alike retrospectively and prospectively, that we group them together in an orderly form before proceeding with our narrative.²

When we turn to the first and most prominent factor in this history, Israel, we are impressed with this, that now, for the first time since the separation of the brother-nations, the northern kingdom had entered into a formal league against Judah with a heathen nation, and that its hereditary foe, Syria. And the significance of this fact deepens as we remember that the final object was not merely to conquer Judah, but to dethrone the house of David, and substitute for it a Syrian, presumably a heathen ruler. So forgetful had Israel become of its great hope, and of the very meaning of its national existence. For the first time also, at least in the Biblical record, does the Assyrian power now appear on the scene of Palestine, first to be bought off by Menahem (2 Kings 15:19, 20); then to be invoked by Ahaz, with the result of rendering Judah tributary, and finally of overthrowing Israel.

When we pass from Israel to Judah, we find that the country had now attained a state of national prosperity greater even than in the time of Solomon. But in its train had come luxury, vice, idolatry, and heathen thoughts and manners, to the utter corruption of the people. In vain did the prophets call to repentance (Joel 2:12-14; Isaiah 1:2-9, 16-20); in vain did they speak of nearing judgment (Micah 2:3; Isaiah 1:24; 3:1-8; 3:16-4:1:5:5-to end); in vain seek to woo by promises of mercy (Micah 4:1-5; Isaiah 2:2-5). Priests and people boasted in an outward and formal observance of ritual ordinances, as if these were the substance of religion, and in this trust set lightly by the warning of the prophets (Isaiah 1:11-15). In their overweening confidence as to the present, and their worldly policy as regarded the future, they brought on themselves the very evils which had been predicted, but from which they had deemed themselves secure. And so it came that a people who would not turn to their God while they might, had in the end this as their judgment of hardening, that they could no longer turn to Him (Isaiah 6:9-13).

Indeed, Judah had so declined that not only idolatry of every kind, but even the service of Molech — nay, witchcraft and necromancy, expressly denounced in the law (Deuteronomy 18:10-13), were openly practiced in the land (Isaiah 8:19). The Divine punishment of all this has already appeared in the preceding history. For if, at the beginning of the reign of Ahaz, Judah had attained its highest state of prosperity, it had sunk at its close to the lowest level yet reached. In truth all the three nations engaged in the war described in the previous chapter received meet punishment. The continuance of the northern kingdom was now only a question of time, and the exile of Israel had actually begun. Judah had become dependent on Assyria, and henceforth was only able fitfully and for brief periods to shake off its yoke, till it finally shared the fate of its sister-kingdom. Lastly, Syria ceased to exist as an independent power, and became a province of Assyria.

But in the history of the kingdom of God every movement is also a step towards the great goal, and all judgment becomes larger mercy. So was it on this occasion also. Henceforth the whole historical scene was changed. The prophetic horizon had enlarged. The falling away of Israel had become already initially the life of the world. The fullest predictions of the Person and work of the Messiah and of His universal kingdom date from this

period. Even the new relations of Israel formed the basis for wider conceptions and spiritual progression. Those petty wars with Syria, Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Philistia, which had filled the previous history, now ceased to be factors in it, and Israel found itself face to face with the great world-power. This contact gave new form and shape to the idea of a universal kingdom of God, wide as the world, which had hitherto only been presented in dim outline, and of which only the germ had existed in the religious consciousness of the people. Thus in every respect this was the beginning of a new era, an era of judgment indeed, but also of larger mercy; an era of new development in the history of the kingdom of God; a type also of the final hardening of Israel in the rejection of their Messiah, and of the opening of the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

Hoshea, the son of Elah, the last king of Israel, ascended the throne in the twelfth year of Ahaz, king of Judah. His reign extended, at least nominally, over nine years (2 Kings 17:1). Of its religious character we have this brief notice, that “he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him.” In the absence of details, we can only conjecture that this indicates decrease in the former active opposition to the worship of Jehovah. This seems implied in the circumstance that apparently no official hindrance was offered to the later invitation of Hezekiah to attend the Passover in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 30:1-12). The Talmud has it that after the deportation of the golden calves to Assyria (Hosea 10:5, 6), Hoshea had abolished the military posts which since the time of Jeroboam 1. had been set to prevent Israelites from going up to the feasts at Jerusalem (*Gitt.* 88 a; *Babh.* Q. 121 b; comp. *Seder Ol. R.* 22).

Tiglath-pileser died probably five years after Ahaz had “met” him in Damascus. He was followed on the throne by Shalmaneser IV.³ Although special records and inscriptions of his reign do not exist, we learn from fragmentary notices that in the third year of his reign the Assyrian monarch undertook expeditions against the west — presumably Phoenicia and Israel. Further light comes to us from Josephus (*Ant* 9. 14, 2), who reproduces an extract from the historical work of Menander, itself derived from the Tyrian archives. Thence we learn that the Assyrian king invaded Phoenicia, and on the same occasion no doubt also Samaria, which was in league with it. As Shalmaneser was not a successful leader, we can easily understand that the allies may have cherished a hope that the heavy yoke

of Assyria might be shaken off. But on the appearance of Shalmaneser Hoshea had to submit — in the language of Scripture, he “became his servant and rendered him tribute”⁴ (2 Kings 17:3). Similarly, according to the Tyrian annals, most of the Phoenician cities seem to have surrendered or made terms with him, with the exception of Tyre, which held out for five years, and was only taken by Sargon, the successor of Shalmaneser. It is probably to this that the prophecy in Isaiah 23: refers.⁵ The Tyrian annals, and even the Assyrian inscriptions, mutilated as they are, lead us to regard this campaign as consisting of several expeditions into Phoenicia. This renders it difficult to know at what precise period the first submission of Hoshea was made.

It seems likely that the protracted resistance offered by Tyre may have encouraged the hope that Shalmaneser might after all prove unsuccessful against a powerful combination. Accordingly, Hoshea entered into negotiations with Seve,⁶ “the king of Egypt.” The king of Israel had good reason for looking hopefully to an alliance with this monarch. He was the first Pharaoh of the twenty-fifth Ethiopian dynasty. Under him Egypt, which before had been pressed in the north by the Assyrians and in the south by the Ethiopians, and suffered from internal dissensions, became strong, peaceful, and independent. This is not the place for details of a reign which was not only signally beneficial to his country, but elevated in character. Seve was too wise a monarch to be persuaded by the ambassadors, or seduced by the “presents” which Hoshea sent, into an active alliance with Israel against Assyria.⁷ The attempted “conspiracy”⁸ became known to Shalmaneser. He turned against Hoshea, who in the meantime had ceased to pay his tribute, seized and cast him into prison (2 Kings 17:4).

The further progress of this war is only briefly summarized in the Biblical record (2 Kings 17:5, 6), which is chiefly concerned with the issue of the struggle, and its spiritual import and lessons. It only relates that the siege of Samaria lasted three years; that at the end of them — that is, in the ninth (or last) year of Hoshea — the city was taken; and, lastly, that “Israel” was “carried away” to certain places which are mentioned. Happily, the Assyrian inscriptions enable us to fill up this bare outline. From them we learn that after the siege of Samaria had continued about two years, Shalmaneser was succeeded by Sargon, who took the city (after

a siege of altogether three years) in the first year of his reign — that is, in the year 722 B.C.⁹ Strictly speaking, the sacred text does not expressly attribute the capture of Samaria to Shalmaneser himself (comp. 2 Kings 17:6; 18:10, 11)¹⁰, although Sargon is not mentioned. And for this silence, or even the ascription of this campaign wholly to Shalmaneser, there may be reasons, unknown to us, connected with the relation between Sargon and Shalmaneser, and the part which the former may have taken in the military operations or the conduct of the siege. Certain it is that Sargon was not the son of Shalmaneser, although apparently of princely descent — perhaps the scion of a collateral branch of the royal family. Nor do we know the circumstances of his accession — possibly in consequence of a revolution, easily accounted for by dissatisfaction with the king's failure both before Tyre and Samaria. In any case, the inscriptions distinctly inform us that Sargon captured Samaria, led away 27,280 of its inhabitants, took fifty chariots, leaving his subordinates to take the rest of the property found in the city, and appointing a governor, with the same tribute as Hoshea had paid.

Similarly, the Biblical account of the deportation of Israel into exile is supplemented and confirmed by the Assyrian records. The places to which they were carried are not indeed enumerated in the Assyrian inscriptions, but their location can mostly be ascertained. “Halah” (or rather “Chalah”), the first place mentioned in 2 Kings 17:6, was, judging from its conjunction with “*the river Chabor*” and with “Gozan” (comp. 1 Chronicles 5:26), a district contiguous to them, called Chalchitis, where a mound called *Gla* may represent the city.¹¹ There cannot be any doubt in regard to the other localities to which the Israelites were carried. They were “placed” “on the Chabor, the river of Gozan,¹² and in the cities of the Medes.” “Gozan” — Gausanitis — the Assyrian Gu-za-nu, is a district in Mesopotamia traversed by the Chabor (Ass., Ha-bur), the “great” river, with “verdant banks,” which springs near Nisibis, and is navigable long before it drains the waters of Gozan into the Euphrates. The last district mentioned lies east of the others. “Media” is the province stretching east of the Zagros Mountains, and north to the Caspian Sea, or rather to the Elbur mountain-chain, which runs parallel to its southern shore. Its “cities” had only lately been overrun by the Assyrian conqueror. In them the legendary book of Tobit still places these exiles¹³ (Tobit 1:14; 3:7). The

account of the Ten Tribes by Josephus adds little to our knowledge. He describes them as “an immense multitude, not to be estimated by numbers,” and as located “beyond the Euphrates” (*Ant.* 11. 5, 2). Equally, if not even more vague, are the later references to them in 4 Esdras, and in Rabbinic writings.¹⁴ From all this we may infer that there was no longer any reliable historical information on the subject.

On another point, however, we have important information. We know that with these exiles went their priests (2 Kings 17:27), although not of Levitical descent (2 Chronicles 11:14). Thus the strange mixture of the service of the Lord and foreign rites must have continued. In the course of time the heathen elements would naturally multiply and assume greater prominence, unless, indeed, the people learned repentance by national trials, or from higher teaching. Of this there is not any evidence in the case of Israel; and if the footsteps of these wanderers shall ever be clearly tracked, we expect to find them with a religion composed of various rites, but prevailing heathen, yet with memories of their historical past in traditions, observances, and customs, as well as in names, and bearing the marks of it even in their outward appearance.

On yet another point does the testimony of the Assyrian records confirm the Biblical narrative. From the inscriptions we learn that Sargon transported to Samaria, in room of the exiled Israelites, inhabitants of countries conquered by him. And when in 2 Kings 17:24 we read that these new colonists were “brought from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim,” we recognize the names of places which, according to the Assyrian inscriptions, were conquered by Sargon, and whence, as was his wont, he deported the inhabitants.¹⁵ From the inscriptions we further learn that these transportations were successive, and that even the earliest of them did not take place immediately on the removal of the Israelites. Thus we understand how lions, so numerous in Palestine at one time, but gradually diminished with the growth of the population, once more increased among the scanty and scattered settlers. The sacred historian recognizes in this the hand of the LORD.¹⁶ And rightly so, since all who are in sympathy with things Divine must by the spiritual instinct of their new nature rise to the recognition of Him Who ruleth, and of Whose government and purposes all events are the unbidden means, and all men the unconscious, yet free,

agents. But especially do we mark this realization of the eternal Presence of the living God as the distinguishing characteristic of Old Testament teaching, whose first and last utterance it is- “Jehovah reigneth..”

But we have more than merely a general confirmation of the Biblical account. From the Assyrian records we learn that in the first year after his accession Sargon vanquished Merodach-Baladan of Babylon, and deported of the people to “Chatti,” which is the designation for Syro-Palestine, inclusive of Samaria. Again, the Biblical expression “Babylon” includes besides the capital other cities of Babylon, and transportations from some of them to “the land of Beth Omri,” or Samaria, are expressly recorded. According to the inscriptions, these took place not only in the first but in other years, notably in the seventh after the accession of Sargon and the taking of Samaria. Among the cities mentioned as furnishing colonists, “Cuthah,” which has been re-discovered in the modern Tell-Ibrahim, lay about fifteen miles north-east of Babylon. “Ava” has not yet been identified. Sepharvaim, or “the twin Sipar” (Sipphara), so called because the city was built on both banks of the Euphrates, has been recognized in the ruins of Abu-Habba, about twenty miles north of Babylon, where the celebrated Temple of the Sun has been laid bare. Lastly, Hamath is the well-known Syrian city which rebelled against Assyria under a king Jahubi’d, who was vanquished in the battle of Karkar, when Hamath was taken, and its people deported. The other cities mentioned in Scripture were conquered by Sargon at a later period, in his final wars against Merodach-Baladan, in the twelfth and thirteenth years after his accession (710, 709 B.C.).¹⁷ Hence the transportation of their inhabitants to Samaria must have been as many years after the taking of the capital of Israel.

As the sacred text informs us (2 Kings 17:25-33), the new colonists brought with them the worship of their national deities. Among these, “Succoth-benoth”¹⁸ — mentioned as the deity of “the men of Babylon” — is probably a corruption¹⁹ of the name of the well-known Babylonian goddess, *Zir-banit*,²⁰ “She who gives seed [posterity].” As the god of Cuth, “Nergal” is mentioned, and this is confirmed by the Assyrian inscriptions. Nergal seems to have been the lion-god represented by the colossal winged lions at the entrance to the palaces.²¹ Concerning “Ashima,” the deity of Hamath, and Nibhaz and Tartak, the gods of the Avites, we possess not any definite information. On the other hand,

“Adrammelech” [“Adar is king”] and Anammelech [“Anu is king”], the gods of Sepharvaim, represent well-known Assyrian deities. Adar (originally A-tar) means “father of decision.”²² In the inscriptions this god bears among others the designation of “lord of fire,” which accords with the Biblical notice that the worshippers “burnt” to him “their children in fire.” He is represented as a winged bull, with human head and a man’s face. *Anu* was represented as a man clothed in the skin of a fish, culminating in a tiara. After the two supreme gods, Il and Asur, he occupied the first rank in the Triad [Anu, Bel, Nisroch]. He is also described as “the good god,” and as “lord of the night.” His female counterpart bore the name *Anat* or, *Anatuv*.²³

The perils which the new settlers experienced from the increase of wild beasts, which, in true heathen manner, they ascribed to their ignorance of “the manner of the God of the land,” led to an appeal to the king. Entering into their views, Sargon dispatched to Samaria one of the priests who had accompanied Israel into exile. He settled in Bethel, the traditional metropolis of Israelitish worship, such as Jeroboam I. had remodeled it. And it was this corrupt form of Jehovah worship which he taught the new settlers. The result was a mixture of Israelitish truths, traditions, and corruptions, with the pagan rites which they had brought with them. Thus their new religion bore a strange similarity to the mixed new, partly Israelitish, partly foreign, population. And such, according to the writer of the Book of Kings, continued substantially the character of the religion of Samaria to his own days.

Yet another transportation of foreign colonists to Samaria seems to have taken place in the reign of Esar-haddon, or rather of his son — possibly in consequence of an attempted rising on the part of the Israelitish population (comp. Ezra 4:2, 10). But what most deeply impresses us in the Biblical narrative of these events is the spirit and manner in which at the close of Israel’s national history the writer passes in review the leading characteristics. The Divine calling of Israel; their defection, rapidly growing into open idolatry; the warnings of the prophets sent to them, and their neglect; the hardening of heart, leading up to the utmost corruption in religion, morals, and life — such, with a brief reflection on Judah’s kindred guilt and danger, is the summary presented to us of this history in its spiritual aspect. Scarcely on any other occasion does the sacred writer

allow himself reflections of this kind. But they are appropriate, and almost needful, at the close of a history which relates events in their bearing on the kingdom of God, and views Israel as a nation called to be the servants and the messengers of the Lord. They explain the inner meaning of God's dealings in the past, and the deeper causes of a rejection and an exile which cannot end till Israel and Judah, no longer hostile nor separate, shall in one common repentance turn to seek Jehovah their God and the Son of David their King.

CHAPTER 10

HEZEKIAH, (THIRTEENTH) KING OF JUDAH. HOSHEA, (TWENTIETH) KING OF ISRAEL.

Accession of Hezekiah — Political Circumstances of the Times — Religion the only True National Policy — The Position of Assyria in relation to Judah — Religion the Central Principle of Hezekiah's Reign — Idolatry Abolished in Judah — Restoration of the Temple Services — Purification of the Temple — Services of Re. Consecration — Celebration of the Pass-over — Invitation to the Northern Tribes — Subsequent Festival — Re-arrangement of the Temple-Services — Provision for Priests and Levites — General Inferences — Activity of Hezekiah in regard to the Canon of Scripture.

(2 KINGS 18:1-6; 2 CHRONICLES 29-31)

THERE is not a more striking instance of Divine mercy on the one hand, nor yet, on the other, of the personal character of religion even under the Old Testament, than that Ahaz should have been succeeded on the throne of Judah by Hezekiah. His name, ¹ “Strength of Jehovah,” or, perhaps better, “God is might,” was truly indicative of the character of his reign. In every respect — not only as regarded the king personally, but also in the results of his administration, as affecting his country and people — this period was in complete contrast to that which had immediately preceded it.

Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, ascended the throne at the age of twenty-five, towards the close² of the third year of Hoshea's reign in Israel. He was therefore a witness of the events which befell Samaria. From a merely political point of view, the position of a king of Judah must have been one of no small difficulty. In the northern kingdom Pekah had sown the wind, and Hoshea would reap the whirlwind. The one had brought upon himself the might of Assyria; the other would ultimately lose crown and life in his attempts to shake off the yoke of the conqueror. And in his ruin would Israel be involved. Assyria was the paramount power, not only in Samaria,

which was so soon to become a province of that empire, but in Judah also. For Ahaz had made himself tributary to it, and held his crown almost at the mercy of the great world-empire. And, as will appear in the sequel, Hezekiah himself was to feel the power of Assyria even before he came into actual conflict with it.

All this succession of evils, and those which were still to follow, were the consequences of the disbelief and unbelief of Ahaz. As he had discarded the religion of Jehovah, so he despised His Word. In the political circumstances of the country, the only alternative before him was either to trust in the Lord for deliverance, or else to surrender to a foreign power. Against the admonitions and warnings of the great prophet, who had assured him of Divine help, Ahaz had chosen the second alternative. His resolve was not only sin: it was folly. His short-sighted policy brought in another power whose domination could never afterwards be permanently shaken off. Afterwards, when the kingdom of Israel came to an end, the two rival world-empires, Assyria and Egypt, stood face to face, only separated by little Judah — an object of ambition to both, a help to neither, yet whose subjection was absolutely necessary to Assyria, not only in view of its further projects, but even if previous conquests were to be preserved. And for an Assyrian monarch not to be successful was, as this history has shown, to lose crown and life.

So matters stood when Hezekiah ascended the throne. Of all the political combinations possible to him, he chose none. He returned to the point from which Ahaz had departed. His policy was not to have any policy, but to trust in the living God, to obey His Word, and to follow His guidance. His policy was his religion, and his religion was true policy. The only occasion on which he was tempted to deviate from it was at a later time, and it well-nigh proved fatal to him, as in the sequel it certainly did to his successors. Not that Hezekiah neglected to avail himself of political combinations as they arose. Indeed, this became the source of his danger. He may have argued that not to make use of the means placed within his reach was fatalism, not faith. In this he erred. Yet he did not put his trust in such alliances. He treated them rather as means for defensive, than as instruments sought for offensive purposes. The only real help which he sought was that of the living God.

Thus religion was the central principle of his reign and the secret of his success. The first act of his government was to abolish every kind of idolatry, whether of foreign or domestic origin. The “*bamath*,” or “high places,” were abolished; the *matsebhoth*, or stone pillars and statues erected for the worship of Baal, were broken down; and the *Asherah*,³ or wooden symbol of the lascivious worship of Astarte, was cut down. Nay, even the brazen serpent, which had apparently been preserved⁴ since the time of Moses, and had, no doubt in degenerate times, become almost an object of worship, was now destroyed, having received the appellation⁵ which, when made an idol, it deserved — *Nechushtan*, “brazen,” a piece of brass (2 Kings 18:4). In general, the sacred text describes Hezekiah as unequalled in religious earnestness and in conformity to the Divine law by any even of the pious kings that had preceded, or who succeeded him, and it places him on a level with “David his father.” And this is fully vindicated by his abolition of even that form of Jehovah-worship on “heights” which Solomon, as well as Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoash, Amaziah, and Uzziah had tolerated (1 Kings 3:2; 15:12, 14; 22:43; 2 Kings 12:3; 14:4; 15:4, 35).

But the reformation initiated was not only negative, and Hezekiah restored the services of the Temple in their completeness and purity. From the detailed account in the Book of Chronicles, we learn that “the house of the Lord” had actually been closed (2 Chronicles 29:3, 7). By this we understand the closing of the Sanctuary itself, that is, of the holy and most holy places, since Ahaz continued to use the court of the priests, although for sacrifices at the heathen altar which he had reared. But now the doors of the Sanctuary were repaired, and once more thrown open. Then Hezekiah “gathered” the priests and Levites in “the wide place on the east,”⁶ probably some well-known locality in the eastern part of the Temple-buildings⁷ (comp. Ezra 10:9; Nehemiah 8:1, 3, 16). This for the purpose of calling upon them to sanctify themselves, and to remove the heathen abominations which had defiled the Temple. And with this object, the king made in their hearing an earnest review of the sinful past, with its consequent judgments, and a declaration of his purpose “to make a covenant with the Lord.”

The response to his appeal was immediate and hearty. In the account of the work now taken in hand by representatives of the Levites they appear

once more according to their ancient division into the three families of Kohath, Merari, and Gershon, as David had arranged their courses (1 Chronicles 23:6-23, comp. ver. 27). With these were conjoined as a special branch, probably on account of their pre-eminence (Numbers 3:30), the representatives of the house of Elizaphan, a chief of the Kohathites (Exodus 6:18). Next in the enumeration we find the representatives of the three ancient divisions of Levite musicians — the sons of Asaph, of Heman, and Jeduthun (comp. 1 Chronicles 25:1-6; 2 Chronicles 5:12). While these heads of Levite houses gathered their brethren to do the work assigned to them, the priests similarly cleansed the inner part of the house, when the Levites flung the remnants of past heathen defilement into the brook Kidron. It marks the zeal with which the work was carried on that, begun on the first day of the first month of the first year of Hezekiah's reign — reckoning its ecclesiastical commencement from the month Nisan⁸ — it was completed on the sixteenth day. Then the vessels which Ahaz had cast away were restored, viz., the altar of burnt-offering, the stands for the brazen lavers, and that for "the sea" (comp. 2 Kings 16:14, 17).⁹

The Temple having been thus purified, its services were recommenced with a grand function, when seven bullocks, seven rams, and seven lambs were offered for the congregation as burnt-offerings, and seven he-goats as sin-offerings¹⁰ (comp. Leviticus 4:14; Ezra 8:35). In strict accordance with the Mosaic law, all the sacred functions were discharged by the Aaronic priesthood, with sprinkling of blood on the altar, and imposition of hands on the sacrifices, denoting their vicariousness (Leviticus 1:4; 4:4, 15, 24, and Leviticus 4:7, 18, 30; 5:9). But what specially distinguishes these services is that the sin-offerings were brought not only for Judah, but "for all Israel" (2 Chronicles 29:24), indicating alike the solidarity of "all Israel" as the congregation of the Lord, and the representative character of these sacrifices. And in accordance with the institution of David, the sacred strains from Levite instruments, and the inspired hymns of David and of Asaph,¹¹ once more filled the Temple with the voice of melody and of praise,¹² while the king, the princes of Judah, and the people responsively bowed their heads in lowly worship.

The more direct sacrificial offerings for the people were followed, at the king's suggestion, by thankofferings (comp. Leviticus 7:11, 16), also of a public character, to which "as many as were of upright heart" — probably

they who had stood aloof from the idolatry of the previous reign — added burntofferings. As these thankofferings were brought by the congregation as a whole, the victims were not slain and flayed by the offerers, as was the case when brought by private individuals (Leviticus 1:5, 6); but this part of the service devolved on the priesthood, who called in, as in such case they might, the assistance of the Levites. When we remember that, besides the special “burnt-offerings” of individuals (70 bullocks, 100 rams, and 200 lambs), the “thankofferings” of the congregation amounted to no less than 600 oxen and 3,000 sheep (2 Chronicles 29:32, 33), we scarcely wonder that the priests alone should not have sufficed for the service. And as the text significantly marks, recalling the special defection of the priesthood, from the high-priest Urijah downwards (comp. 2 Kings 16:15), the number of priests who had as yet sanctified themselves was proportionally smaller than that of the more faithful Levites. “So the service of the house of Jehovah was established. And Hezekiah rejoiced and all the people, because of that which God had prepared to [for] the people [probably referring to their willing participation and contribution to these services], for the thing had come suddenly” [without long previous preparation] (2 Chronicles 29:35, 36).

What followed shows that, however sudden the impulse in this religious revival, it was neither transient nor superficial. Of all the festivals in Israel, the most solemn was that of the Passover. It commemorated Israel’s national birthday as the redeemed of the Lord, and pointed forward to that better deliverance of which it was the emblem. Ordinarily this feast commenced on the evening of the 14th Nisan (Exodus 12:6, 8, and parallels). But in the present instance this was impossible. Not only had the cleansing of the Temple occupied till the 16th of the month, but a sufficient number of priests for the services had not yet sanctified themselves, while further time was required to make announcement of the Passover throughout all Israel. For, unlike the services at the reconsecration of the Temple, which seem to have been confined to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, this was to be observed as a great national festival. But it was possible to remove the difficulty thus arising. The law, while fixing the ordinary date of the Passover, had also made provision for an after-celebration of the feast on the corresponding day of the second month in cases of unavoidable hindrance (Numbers 9:6-13). This is one of

the most instructive commendations on the character of the Mosaic law. It shows that the outward form was not of its essence, but was flexible and adaptable. Thus the law was not something rigidly outward and absolutely permanent, but gave indication of the possibility of an enlargement by a higher fulfillment of its spirit as distinguished from the mere letter. Hence such a provision seems like an unspoken pledge of a future transformation of the law, in accordance with the higher conditions and the wants of new circumstances. Lastly, it also affords a precedent and a warrant for such a change as that of the transference of the Sabbath from the close of the week to its beginning; from the day of rest to that of the Resurrection of Christ; from the memorial of the completion of the first creation to that of the second in the creation of the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Of this legal provision of an after-Passover, Hezekiah resolved to avail himself. We mark as specially interesting in itself, and as foreshadowing great changes in the future political and ecclesiastical organization of Israel, that Hezekiah acted in this with the advice of “his princes and all the congregation in Jerusalem” (2 Chronicles 30:2). And yet more interesting is it to learn that the invitation to attend the Passover addressed by the king “and his princes” was sent not only to the cities of Judah, but to all Israel, “from Beersheba even to Dan.” To this the text adds the retrospective notice that previous Paschal observances had been partial, not general: “for not in multitude [in large numbers] had they done it, as it is written”¹³ (2 Chronicles 30:5).

This brotherly invitation to the feast of Israel’s birth and the common worship of their God and Redeemer was, so to speak, the answer which repentant Judah now made to that fratricidal war which Israel had so lately waged with the object of exterminating the kingdom of David. And the letters of the king and the princes bore such tender references to past sin and judgment, and to present national calamity,¹⁴ and breathed such a spirit of religious hope for the future, as almost to rise to the level of New Testament sentiment.

In spite of the mockery with which at least at first the invitation was received by the majority in what still remained of the northern kingdom, the final response was truly encouraging (comp. vers. 10, 18). In Judah it

was both hearty and unanimous (2 Chronicles 30:12). From the other parts of the country “a multitude of people, even many,” came from out of five of the tribes that still constituted the kingdom of Israel. For Naphtali had been annexed to Assyria, and Reuben and Gad been deported.¹⁵ The festival in Jerusalem was followed by a spontaneous national movement against idolatry. For while the purification of the Temple had been a public act of reform initiated by the king, it was left to the people gathered in Jerusalem to remove the altars in the capital, whether in private houses or in more public places, which were the remnant of the idolatrous worship introduced by Ahaz (2 Chronicles 28:24).

The only drawback to the right observance of the Passover festivities was that many of the worshippers “were not sanctified.” Accordingly the Levites had to offer for them the Paschal lamb, which, by the law, each offerer should have slain for himself and his house. This applied specially to those who had come from the northern kingdom (ver. 18). If, none the less, they were allowed to partake of the Paschal feast, this was a concession almost necessary in the circumstances, since otherwise theirs would not at all have been a Passover; and for this Hezekiah implored and obtained forgiveness from the Lord.¹⁶

How deeply this revival had struck its roots appears from the voluntary resolve of the people to follow up the seven days of the Passover by other seven days of festivity. For the wants of the people during that time King Hezekiah and the princes made liberal provision (vers. 23, 24). It was at this time also that the removal of all traces of idolatry from the land, briefly noticed in 2 Kings 18:4, took place. This was effected, as the fuller account in the Book of Chronicles explains, by a spontaneous popular movement which extended beyond Judah to “Ephraim also and Manasseh” (2 Chronicles 31:1), although, as we may reasonably conjecture, only in districts from which the chief inhabitants had come to Jerusalem. Closely connected with the restoration of the Temple services were the arrangements now made for their orderly continuance. The “courses” of the priests and Levites were once more settled. The public sacrifices of the congregations — daily, Sabbatic, and festive — were provided by the king as his contribution. the “portion of his substance.” The latter was indeed very large (comp. 2 Chronicles 32:27-29); but the number of sacrificial animals and other requisites furnished by the king according to the

requirements of the law (Numbers 28, 29) was correspondingly great. It has been calculated to have amounted to “nearly 1,100 lambs, 113 bullocks, 37 rams, and 30 goats, besides vast quantities of flour, oil, and wine for the accompanying meat and drink-offerings.”¹⁷

For the personal support of the ministering priests and Levites nothing more was required than the re-enactment of the ancient provision of firstfruits, tithes, and firstlings (Exodus 23:19; Numbers 18:12, 21, etc.; Leviticus 27:30-33). These, together with “the tithes of dedicated things”¹⁸ (Leviticus 27:30; Deuteronomy 14:28), were now offered in such quantity as not only to suffice for the wants of the priesthood, but to leave a large surplusage, to the thankful joy and surprise of Hezekiah and the princes. In answer to the king’s inquiry the high-priest Azariah explained that the large store accumulated was due to the special blessing bestowed by the Lord on a willing and obedient people (2 Chronicles 31:5-10). The collection of this store began in the third month — that of Pentecost — when the wheat harvest was completed, and it ended in the seventh month — that of Tabernacles, which marked the close of the fruit harvest and of the vintage. And these contributions, or dues, came not only from Judah, but also from “the children of Israel” (ver. 6); that is, from those in the northern kingdom who had joined their brethren in returning to the service and the law of their Lord.

For the storage of these provisions, Hezekiah ordered that certain chambers in the Temple should be prepared, and he appointed officials, who are named in the sacred text, alike for the supervision and the administration of these stores (verses 11-19). Again and again it is noted with what “faithfulness” one and the other duty were discharged by each in the special department assigned to him (verses 12, 15, 18).¹⁹ The provision for the priesthood included not only those who were for the time actually on service in the Temple,²⁰ but also the others in the priest cities, together with their wives and children, and lastly to those in the country districts around these cities (vers. 16-19). These and all kindred arrangements were extended throughout all Judah. And the detailed account given of the religious activity of Hezekiah closes with the twofold notice that he “wrought the good, the right, and the truth before Jehovah his God;” and that in all he undertook, whether as matter of public or private

religious arrangement, “he did it with all his heart, and prospered” (2 Chronicles 31:20, 21).

To the description of the reformation inaugurated by the piety of Hezekiah, it seems desirable to add some further particulars, either illustrative of the text or derived from other notices in Holy Scripture. As regards the trustworthiness of the account of the sacrificial worship in the restored Temple — that it was not of later invention, and designed to bear out the priestly institutions first enforced in the time of Ezra — we have to point to the important fact that the number of sacrifices and sin-offerings in the time of Hezekiah notably differs from that at the dedication of the Temple in the time of Ezra (comp. 2 Chronicles 29:21, 32 with Ezra 6:17). This, considering especially the symbolism of numbers, shows that the one account could not have been framed upon the other. It follows that the Mosaic institutions must have existed in and before the time of Hezekiah, and could not, as a certain school of critics contends, have originated with the priesthood at a much later period. Indeed, as we follow the present line of argument, by a comparison of the services in the time of Hezekiah with the Mosaic institutions to which they bear reference, the conviction grows upon us not only of the existence of the latter, but of their general acknowledgment, since, keeping in view the circumstances of the previous reign, it is impossible to suppose that all this could have been “invented” in the first year of Hezekiah’s reign. And as connected with this we mark that not only were the liturgical services conformed to a previous model — the Davidic — but that the hymns chanted were in “the words of David and of Asaph the seer” (2 Chronicles 29:30). This seems not only to imply the existence at the time of Davidic and Asaphite psalms — the absence of any mention of other Psalm-collections here deserving special notice — but even to indicate some orderly collection of these Psalms in books. In short, it casts light on the beginning of the present arrangement of the Psalter in five books. It may well have been that, subject to later revision, the former collection of Psalms consisting, roughly speaking, of the two first books of Psalms (now Psalm 1-41; 42-72), was now enriched by the addition of a further collection — roughly speaking, the present third book of Psalms (Psalm 73-89), which in its present form begins with an Asaphite Psalm (Psalm 73), and has in succession eleven Psalms of the same authorship²¹ (Psalm

73-83). But whatever our view, or more accurately, our conjectures, on this subject, there cannot at least be doubt that Hezekiah actively busied himself, under competent guidance, with the collection and arrangement of the existing sacred literature of Israel. This is expressly mentioned as regards a part of “the Proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, collected”²² (Proverbs 25:1). And to this, as assuredly among the most important parts of Hezekiah’s activity, the closing notice of his religious work done by him may also bear reference:

“And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered” (2 Chronicles 31:21).

CHAPTER 11

HEZEKIAH (THIRTEENTH) KING OF JUDAH

Outward Events of the Reign of Hezekiah — Victory over the Philistines — League against Sargon Assyrian Advance and Submission of Judah — Sennacherib — The Assyrian Inscriptions Their Account of the Assyrian Invasion of Judah — Victories of Sennacherib — Assyrian Misrepresentation of Events — The Biblical Record — Works in Defense of Jerusalem — The Various Scriptural Narratives of these Events — The Assyrian Host before Jerusalem — Its Leaders and the Representatives of Hezekiah — The Conference between them.

(2 KINGS 18:7-19; 2 CHRONICLES 32:1-26; ISAIAH 36:, 37)

ALTHOUGH the beginning of Hezekiah's reign was mainly devoted to the first and most important task of religious reform, other matters of pressing necessity were not overlooked. The same wisdom which marked his restoration of the Temple services also guided his other administration, and the same happy results attended both. In fact, Hezekiah made use of the years of quiet to prepare against the troublous period which he must have felt to be at hand. And in the Book of Kings we have this general notice:

“And Jehovah was with him; in all to which he proceeded he prospered;¹ and he rebelled against the king of Assyria and served him not” (2 Kings 18:7).²

In truth, the relations between Hezekiah and the mighty world-empire of Assyria furnish the explanation of all the outward events of his reign. Of the first of these, the victory over the Philistines “unto Gaza,” and the complete subjugation of their country, “from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city” (2 Kings 18:8), it is impossible to fix the date. To judge from its position in the text, it seems to have taken place during the reign of Shalmaneser, before the accession of Sargon, by whom Samaria was taken. The apparent ill-success of Shalmaneser before Tyre may have rendered possible and encouraged such an undertaking on the part of

Hezekiah. In any case, we have to bear in mind that Philistia, so important to Assyria as being the road to and from Egypt, always formed an objective point in the western expeditions of the “great kings,” and that its cities seem to have been divided, some being disposed to make cause against Assyria, while others — notably Ashdod and Gaza, — together with Moab, Ammon, and Edom, were on the side of the eastern empire.³ Thus the period of Shalmaneser’s weakness was being utilized by Hezekiah, not only for his religious reformation, but for securing his flank in any future contest with Assyria, as well as for works of internal defense, to which reference will be made in the sequel.

The aspect of matters changed with the accession of Sargon. That monarch did not indeed feel himself strong enough immediately, after the taking of Samaria, to advance south against Egypt. Besides troubles nearer home, especially the subdual of Merodach Baladan, engaged his attention. But in the second year after his accession we find him engaged in a western expedition. In this campaign the rebellion of Hamath was crushed, and the great battle of Karkar won. But what most concerns our history is the expedition of Sargon against the hostile league formed by Seve of Egypt and Hanno, king of Gaza — as we conjecture a dependent of Hezekiah, who sympathized with, though he does not seem actually to have taken part in the anti-Assyrian combination. Sargon was completely successful. In the battle of Raphia the allies were defeated; Seve fled, and was allowed to make his peace by paying tribute, while Hanno was taken prisoner. On this occasion Hezekiah appears to have been called to account, and to have been obliged to make submission. An Assyrian inscription speaks of Sargon as “the subduer of Judah,” though without any added mention of battle or triumph. From its date we conclude that it refers to something that had taken place during the expedition of Sargon against Seve and Hanno.⁴

Sargon reigned altogether seventeen years.⁵ In the defective condition of the inscriptions, it is impossible to know for certain whether or not he was killed by an assassin. He was succeeded by his son Sennacherib, who, after a reign of twenty-four years, perished at the hands of his own sons (2 Kings 19:37).⁶ The long period of rest between the second year of Sargon and the accession of Sennacherib had, no doubt, been employed by Hezekiah in further improving the condition of the country, possibly in

strengthening the defenses of Jerusalem, and preparing for future eventualities (comp. 2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:5-30, and other passages). This is not the place to give a detailed account of the events of the reign of Sennacherib, as we learn them from the Assyrian inscriptions, except in so far as they bear on the narrative of Scripture. And even here we have to bear in mind that admittedly the inscriptions designedly give a false impression of what had really occurred in that war, in which Judaea was overrun and Jerusalem first besieged, and then a second time summoned to surrender. It will be more convenient to give the story of this expedition, in the first place, as told in the Assyrian records, before referring to the Biblical account.

We have many inscriptions of the time of Sennacherib, in Assyrian: Sin-ahi-irib, or Sin-ahi-ir-ba ('Sin,' the lunar god, 'gives many brethren') — famed also for strengthening and fortifying his capital, Nineveh ('Ninua'), and building there two magnificent palaces, one on each side of the river. Among the various memorials of his reign four inscriptions are of special importance.⁷ Summarizing their contents, which vary only in details, we infer that, in the fourth year of Sennacherib's reign, another league had been formed of the principal Philistine and Phoenician cities of Judah and of the Egypto-Ethiopian empire, for the purpose of shaking off the domination of Assyria. So far as the first-named cities are concerned it comprised Sidon, Ascalon, and Ekron, the inhabitants of which city, probably at the beginning of the war, if not before it, sent Padi, their king, who was faithful to Assyria, in chains to Hezekiah, who cast him into prison. On the other side, Ammon, Moab, and Edom, together with a number of the coast-cities in "the west country" — notably, Ashdod and Gaza — remained faithful to Assyria. Tidings seem to have reached Sennacherib before the confederates had time to carry their plans into execution. The Assyrian army rapidly advanced. Elulæus, king of Sidon, fled to Cyprus, and Ethobal was appointed in his place, while the cities along the route of the Assyrian conqueror either submitted to him or were taken. Sennacherib next advanced against Ascalon, and took it. Zidka, its king, and the royal family, were transported into Assyria; Sarludari, the son of the previous king, was appointed in his place; the whole country overrun and, like Sidon, made tributary. It was probably on his march from Acco to Ascalon — perhaps from Jaffa — that Sennacherib detached a

corps into Judah, which took all the “fenced cities” thereof (comp. 2 Kings 18:13). The Assyrian inscriptions speak of the capture of forty-six fortified towns and of “innumerable castles and small places,” of the transportation of 200, 150 of their captive inhabitants, men and women; of the taking of immense booty, and the annexation — probably only nominal, and, in any case, temporary — of the conquered districts to the domains of the small potentates on the sea-board, friendly to Assyria. It is to this expedition that Isaiah 10:28-34 refers, as indeed the whole prophecy in the tenth chapter of Isaiah applies to the war of Sennacherib against Judah.⁸

Beyond Ascalon it was scarcely safe for Sennacherib to advance much further. The Egypto-Ethiopian army was expected in front; behind him, yet unconquered, was Ekron, and on his flank the strong fortress of Jerusalem, with the whole flower of the Judæan army and the hired auxiliaries to whom the Assyrian monuments refer. It was therefore a wise strategic movement on the part of Sennacherib to turn aside and lay siege to Lachish, the modern Umm Lakis.⁹ It was still a continuation of his advance in the direction of Egypt, although a departure from the straight road to it, and it would oblige the Egyptian army to make a disadvantageous digression inland, thus removing it from the main basis of its operations. But in Lachish, Sennacherib also held a strong position both against Ekron and Jerusalem, the latter being at the apex of an isosceles triangle, of which Ekron and Lachish form the extremities of the base. Thus he would be able to turn upon either one or the other line converging upon Lachish, or else to move rapidly upon Gaza. On the other hand, Hezekiah, seeing the success of the Assyrian advance, and perhaps despairing of a timely approach of the Egyptian army, sought to make his peace with Sennacherib, and sent to Lachish the embassy and tribute of which we read in 2 Kings 18:14-16. It was, no doubt, on this occasion also that Hezekiah set at liberty the captive king of Ekron, according to the Assyrian records, and sent him to Sennacherib.

After this point the Assyrian inscriptions purposely become confused, and mix up a series of different events, with the evident intention of conveying a false impression and concealing the virtual, if not the actual, defeat of Sennacherib. As we infer from a comparison of the Assyrian account with the Biblical record, Sennacherib, who by that time must have

been aware of the advance of an Egyptian army, detached a large division (“a great host”) against Jerusalem, which, however, held out alike against the power and the threats of the Assyrian leaders (2 Kings 18:17-19:7). Meantime the Egyptian host was approaching, and the Assyrian leaders returned, and found Sennacherib in Libnah, somewhere east of Lachish and north of Eleutheropolis. This probably before the battle which Sennacherib fought with the Egyptians at Altaku, on a parallel line between Jerusalem and Ekron. This indicates a further retreat of Sennacherib with his army. In much vainglorious language the Assyrian monarch claims a victory; but from the wording of the account, it is evident that the victory, if such it was, could only have been nominal, and was a real defeat. Instead, therefore, of turning upon Jerusalem, the Assyrians advanced against Ekron and took it, having already previously failed in their attempt to obtain the surrender of Jerusalem by a second message full of boastful and blasphemous threats (comp. 2 Kings 19:9-34). Then followed the destruction of the Assyrian host (ver. 35), and Sennacherib’s return to Nineveh (ver. 36). On the Assyrian monuments nothing is said of these disastrous events, while Sennacherib boasts that he had shut up Hezekiah in his capital “as a bird in a cage,” and the deputation and the tribute sent to Lachish are represented as if Hezekiah had dispatched them to Nineveh, implying a triumph of Assyrian arms and the final submission of Judah. The real course of events is, however, perfectly clear, and the accuracy of the Biblical account of Sennacherib’s ignominious failure before Jerusalem and of his final retreat has been universally admitted.

With these facts before us, we turn to the “prophetic” narrative of them, in their spiritual import on the theocracy. As regards the history which we have been hitherto reading from the Assyrian monuments,¹⁰ the account in 2 Kings 18:13-19. keeps so parallel with what is written in Isaiah 36, 37, as similarly that in 2 Kings 20, with Isaiah 38 and 39 (with the exception of Hezekiah’s hymn of praise, Isaiah 38:9-20), that a connection between the two is apparent. Whether either of them, and which, was derived from the other,¹¹ are questions which have been differently answered by critics. Probably — for we are dealing in great measure with conjectures — both look back upon a common original, which, in the Book of Kings and in the prophecies of Isaiah, is presented respectively in a manner accordant with the spirit and object of each of those works.¹² It is another question

whether this original account “in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel” was not written by the prophet Isaiah himself, as seems indicated in 2 Chronicles 32:32¹³ In any case, the narrative in the Book of Chronicles, which, in accordance with its general spirit, so largely dwells on the Temple reformation of Hezekiah, seems an abbreviated summary of the two other accounts, although containing some notable peculiarities of its own.¹⁴

The Biblical narrative opens with a brief reference to the first part of the campaign, when Sennacherib detached a corps which laid waste Judah and took the principal towns along the route¹⁵ (2 Kings 18:13; Isaiah 36:1). In 2 Chronicles 32:1-8, the various preparations are also noticed¹⁶ which Hezekiah had made, with advice of “his princes and mighty men,” when he felt certain of the danger threatening Jerusalem. First among them was the cutting off of the water-supply for a besieging army. To the west of Jerusalem runs from north to south the valley of Gihon. The rain-water and that coming from the hills around was stored in two pools, the upper (Isaiah 22:11 — the modern Birket Mamilla), and the lower (Isaiah 22:9 — the modern Pool of the Patriarch¹⁷), which were connected by an open conduit. As the upper pool lay outside the city walls and would supply the wants of a besieging army, Hezekiah covered it in, and by an aqueduct brought its waters into a large reservoir or “lake,” “between the two walls” of the upper and the lower city (Isaiah 22:11; comp. 2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:30). But some writers conjecture¹⁸ that in ancient times (although not at present) there may have been a spring or brook near the upper port, which Hezekiah also covered in, diverting its waters into the city¹⁹ (2 Chronicles 32:30). Further, he repaired all the walls that were broken down, “and raised (heightened) upon it (the) towers,”²⁰ and repaired (built?) “the other wall without” — probably that which inclosed the lower city — as well as “Millo, in the city of David,” probably a strong tower with fortified buildings at the western side of the Tyropoeon, or Valley of Cheesemongers. Similarly, arms of defense were prepared and officers appointed. Best of all, he gathered his men and captains, and encouraged them with the chief of all comforts, the assurance that Another, greater and stronger than all the might of Assyria, was with them, not “an arm of flesh,” but Jehovah their God, to help them and to fight their battles.

When from this account we turn to the prophetic narrative in Isaiah 22, we feel that it had not been always so (ver. 11), but that through the admonitions of the prophet, what had been at first confidence in the strength of their defenses, became transformed into trust in the living God. Indeed, the prophet could not have sympathized with the whole previous policy of Hezekiah, which led up to the humiliating embassy to Lachish. But now he could bring them the assurance of Divine deliverance in that mood of spiritual repentance which was the outcome of his ministrations, and which appeared most fully during the siege of Jerusalem, and at the later summons for its surrender. We shall have to revert to this when telling of Hezekiah's bearing towards the ambassadors of Merodach-Baladan, who visited the Jewish capital before these events, probably some time before the commencement of this campaign.

The second event recorded in Scripture is the embassy of Hezekiah to Lachish, and the tribute there imposed upon him of "three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold" (2 Kings 18:14-16). The impost, although not greatly differing from that which Menahem had to pay to Tiglath-pileser (2 Kings 15:19), was heavy, amounting in gold to 200,000 pounds, and in silver to 110,000 pounds²¹ and it necessitated the surrender of all the treasures in the Temple and the palace. It is remarkable that neither in the prophecy of Isaiah nor in the Book of Chronicles²² do we find any reference to the embassy of Hezekiah nor to the tribute which he sent. Probably both were viewed as the sequence of a course disapproved, which, however, had no real bearing on the events that followed, and which only because of their spiritual import, came within range of the object of the narrative.

The third event recorded in Holy Scripture is the detachment of the "great host" against Jerusalem, with all the events connected with it. Of this we have an account alike in the Book of Kings, in that of Chronicles, and in the prophecies of Isaiah.²³ The lead of the Assyrian expedition and the conduct of negotiations were entrusted to the "Tartan," which was the official title of the Assyrian commander-in-chief (comp. Isaiah 20:1), "the Rabh-Saris" — probably the translation of an Assyrian official title, which in Hebrew means "chief of the eunuchs" — and "the Rebh-Shakeh," apparently a Hebrew adaptation of Rab-sak, the Assyrian title of "chief captain," which repeatedly occurs on the monuments, and probably

represents the second in command, or chief of the staff²⁴ We mark that appropriately the spokesman in summoning the city to surrender was not the general-in-chief, nor the chief eunuch (possibly the political officer), but the Rabh-Shakeh, or second in command.

The wisdom of Hezekiah's preparations, especially in depriving the Assyrians of the water supply, was soon apparent. For it was at that very place — the north-western angle of the city — that the strength of the Assyrian attack was delivered, and it was here, "by the conduit of the upper pool, which is in the highway of the fuller's field," that the three Assyrian leaders met the representatives of King Hezekiah, whom they had summoned to conference. Even had their spiritual preparation been less decisive, all must have felt there was something specially significant in the fact that a speech, such as that which the Rabh-Shakeh made, should have been delivered on the very spot where Isaiah had uttered God's message to Ahaz (Isaiah 7:3). It is impossible to determine at what period of the siege the conference between the two parties took place. But it was probably not long after the arrival of the besieging army. For, although the Rabh-Shakeh refers to the horrors of a protracted siege (2 Kings 18:27), his coarse language sounds rather like a threat of future than an indication of present straits. Besides, Jerusalem may have been shut up for some time before the actual siege, while in any case that free communication with the country must have been interrupted which was necessary for the supply of provisions to the capital. On the other hand, it was of the utmost importance to the Assyrians to gain possession of Jerusalem without delay, and so to set the besieging army free to operate against Egypt. Of two among the three representatives of Hezekiah — no doubt mentioned in the order of their rank (2 Kings 18:18) — we have some characteristic notices in Isaiah 22:15-22. From these we are led to conjecture that Shebna, "the scribe," or secretary — probably the chief private adviser of the king,²⁵ and who may possibly have been of Syrian descent²⁶ — was a man actuated by ambition and selfish motives, to whom the mistaken policy of Hezekiah's anti-Assyrian alliance may have been due. On the other hand, we derive a correspondingly high impression concerning the first and chief representative of the king, Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah. He seems to have succeeded Shebna (comp. Isaiah 22:20, 21) in the office of *major domo*, which may be compared to that of the modern *chef du*

cabinet, and as such probably stood nearest to the king. Possibly this transference of office may have been consequent on a change of political and religious views. Of Joab, the son of Asaph, the recorder or analyst, we know not anything farther, nor does he appear afterwards among them whom Hezekiah sent to the prophet Isaiah (2 Kings 19:1; Isaiah 37:2). His attendance on the present occasion was probably in his capacity of secretary of state.

Such were the representatives on the one side and the other, who on that eventful day met to set it clearly before Israel and before all men with whom was the might: whether with the arm of flesh, or with Jehovah; and whether or not the people had been right in resting themselves upon the words of Hezekiah, king of Judah (2 Chronicles 32:8).

CHAPTER 12

HEZEKIAH, (THIRTEENTH) KING OF JUDAH.

Meaning and Lessons of the Account of the Assyrian Invasion.

(2 KINGS 18:17-19)

RARELY, perhaps, was there an occasion on which faith in the unseen was put to severer test than in the conference between the leaders of the Assyrian army and the representatives of King Hezekiah. What gave special point to the message which the Rabh-Shakeh addressed to the king of Judah was the deep sense of past inconsistency: that, as regarded the matter in hand, it had not always been with Judah as at present, and that in measure their present evil was the outcome of their wrong-doing. But there comes to us also for all time this precious lesson: that even where we have been utterly mistaken, if only we turn in repentance to our God, we may look for His help and deliverance in the new and better course on which we are entering, however we may have to suffer for past sin. For God remaineth faithful, however we may have erred and strayed from His ways.

It was only too true, as the Rabh-Shakeh said,¹ that in rebelling against Assyria Hezekiah's confidence had been in Egypt; (compare chapters 9 and 11.) too true also, as even the experience of the past might have taught him, (compare chapters 9 and 11.) that this was to trust in "the staff of a bruised reed"² (comp. Isaiah 30:1-7). Thus, assuredly, whether as regarded his plans or their proposed execution, it was "only word of the lips: counsel and strength for the war!" But in the second point which the Rabh-Shakeh urged lay the weakness of his cause and the strength of Hezekiah's position. Addressing himself to Hezekiah's adherents,³ he argued from the heathen point of view that since Hezekiah had abolished all the altars on the heights, and confined public religious worship to that in the Temple, he had not only forfeited any claim upon Jehovah, Whom he regarded as the Jewish national deity, but provoked Him to judgment. Accordingly, as on the one hand he had taunted Hezekiah with want of all means for resisting the power of his master,⁴ so on the other hand he now

boldly claimed for the inroad of Assyria and its success, not only the approbation of, but even a mandate from Jehovah.

Alike politically and in its religious misrepresentations, the speech was well calculated to appeal to such a populace as that of Jerusalem. Hence also the representatives of Hezekiah requested the Rabh-Shakeh to communicate with them not in “Jewish”⁵ (that is, in Hebrew), as he had done, but in “Aramean,” which, although the commercial language of Syria and Palestine, would not be understood by the common people. The suggestion was haughtily rejected, and the Assyrian openly avowed that his object was not to negotiate with the king nor his representatives, but to produce a reaction among the besieged, whom he represented as reduced to the utmost straits. To them he now directly appealed. They were not to allow themselves to be deceived. Hezekiah would not be able to deliver them — viz., by the aid of Egypt — nor yet was this other pretension well-founded, that Jehovah would deliver them. Rather was it their wisdom to ignore the king, and make a treaty of submission⁶ to Assyria, in virtue of which, instead of their present misery, they might continue to enjoy undisturbed possession of their land till they could be transported into districts equally fertile with their own.

This bold avowal of the ultimate policy of Assyria must have marred an appeal otherwise cleverly contrived. But its effectiveness would be completely destroyed — at least with the pious in Israel — by the contemptuous reference to Jehovah, as if He were like the false gods of other nations,⁷ who in the past had been unable to deliver the lands of their worshippers from the might of Assyria. It was an argument calculated, indeed, to influence heathens, to whom the question was as to the comparative power of gods, to be decided by outward results. But the very essence of Hebrew conviction lay in this, that there was none other God than Jehovah. It is this which constitutes the victory over that which is seen, but on which the men of the world ever deceive themselves in their ignorance of the power of a faith which is based on personal experience. And thus what in their view would seem the strongest argument in their appeal to “common sense” is in reality its refutation. It was in this spirit that the people on the wall of Jerusalem obeyed the injunction of Hezekiah, and answered not a word to the Assyrian.

It was wise and right in the representatives of Hezekiah to bring their report of this interview with clothes rent (2 Kings 8:37); wise and right also on the part of the king to share in this token alike of mourning and humiliation (compare 1 Kings 20:32; 2 Kings 6:30), as in a great public calamity. It identified Israel with its LORD, and made public recognition that every blasphemy of Him was a public crime and calamity, and hence a call to public mourning.⁸ It was in such garb that the king went into the Temple to make his appeal to Jehovah. In this garb also did he send his former delegates to the Rabh-Shakeh, together with “the elders,” probably the chief officials, of the now reformed priesthood,⁹ to Isaiah to bespeak his prayers.¹⁰ By a proverbial expression he indicated that in the time of Israel’s utmost agony they had not strength for deliverance, and were in danger of perishing. But since the words of the Assyrian were a challenge to God, He might “hear” them, and answer the “reproach” by a “rebuke;” therefore let Isaiah pray for the remnant still left. Strange as it may sound, the strength of this plea lay in the sense of felt weakness, which appeared in that the king called upon the prophet not to interpose, but to pray, and even so felt not secure of an answer even to the prophet’s prayer, but rested his hope on the nature of the case.

There could not have been greater contrast than between the boastful confidence of the Assyrian in his might and the absolute submission of Hezekiah to the LORD; nor yet could prayer have been the outcome of clearer spiritual perception. Such prayer must have had its answer; and it came in the assurance that this very boastfulness of victory should give place to fear upon a rumor, and this confidence be laid low when “the great king” should “fall by the sword,” and that “in his own land.”¹¹

It was as had been said. The Rabh-Shakeh returned from his bootless expedition to his master, leaving, as we suppose, his army before Jerusalem. He found Sennacherib not at Lachish, but at Libnah, to which he had retreated probably on hearing of the advance of Tirhakah,¹² the king of Ethiopia. As we have seen,¹³ Sennacherib gained indeed the victory of Altaku. But it was a virtual defeat, which, with the failure to gain possession of Jerusalem, determined the final retreat of Sennacherib from Palestine. His circumstances must have made him most anxious to obtain the surrender of the Judaeian capital. Accordingly, a second embassy had been dispatched to demand it — probably before the battle of Altaku,

although after the approach of the Ethiopian army. This second summons was addressed to Hezekiah, and was in terms similar to those previously used, although it naturally contained no longer any reference to Egypt, and was also perhaps more directly challenging to the God of Israel (2 Kings 19:9-13).

It argues, in our view, a painful want not only of spiritual insight, but even of deeper sympathy, when certain modern critics depreciate the act of Hezekiah in going to the Temple to spread before Jehovah “the letters” of the Assyrian, either as mechanical or as evidence of a lower standpoint. It was not even symbolical, but, as Delitzsch has rightly designated it, a prayer without words — a sublime expression of faith, in entire accordance with what had preceded, and such as in certain events of our lives we might be disposed to imitate, at least in spirit. Still more strange does it seem to find the authenticity of the prayer with which Hezekiah accompanied this submission to the living God, questioned on the ground that the setting aside of all other gods as powerless,¹⁴ being the work of men’s hands, and the exclusive acknowledgment of Jehovah were beyond the spiritual range of the time. Surely this is not only arbitrarily to displace the Scriptural records, but on the ground of it to construct a history of Israel, and then to judge events by this self-made standard.

It was only as we would have expected when Isaiah, in the name of his God, and as His representative, made response alike to the letter of the Assyrian and to the prayer of Hezekiah. His utterance consists, as has been rightly observed,¹⁵ of three parts. In the first (vers. 21-28), the unconquered virgin daughter of Zion addresses to Sennacherib her Divine comment on his boasting; the second part (vers. 29-31) brings the Divine message to Hezekiah and to Judah; while the third (vers. 32-34) contains the prophetic announcement of the issue of this war. From the very outset we mark the attitude of lofty scorn¹⁶ in the contrast between the two adversaries, Sennacherib and the Holy One of Israel on high (ver. 22). Then, in figurative language, the boast of the Assyrian is presented in vers. 23, 24, in each verse in its twofold aspect: as regarded what he claimed to have already done, and what he declared he would achieve in the future. There had been neither barrier nor resistance to him in the past; there could be no hindrance nor limitation to him in the future. All had been surmounted; all would be at his disposal. But, as against this boast of self-

sufficiency, came the Divine question — here Israel's best answer — whether the great king had never “heard” — that is, whether it had never come to his knowledge,¹⁷ nor yet entered his mind — that all his past success had been of God's appointment, and he only the instrument of God's behest in executing pre-ordained judgments.¹⁸ But since, so far from such acknowledgment of God, Sennacherib had raised himself against the LORD, he would experience alike his own helplessness and the Divine judgment. As a wild beast in the power of its captors, he would, like some of his own captives,¹⁹ be brought back the way which he had come (vers. 28, 29).

In its second part (vers. 30-32) the prophetic utterance turns from Sennacherib to Hezekiah and to Judah. We cannot fail to recognize the internal connection between this and the former utterance in Isaiah 7 in regard to the Syro-Israelitish invasion in the time of Ahaz. Once more we have “a sign” of the certainty of promised deliverance in an event as yet future. The absolute deliverance of Judah from the invasion of Assyria is guaranteed by this sign, that in the present year, when the ordinary operations of sowing had been interrupted, they would have sufficient for their support in that which sprang from the grains that had accidentally fallen out of the corn reaped at the former harvest. Similarly, as regarded the next year's harvest, for which it was impossible to make preparation, partly from the presence of the Assyrian army, and partly from the depopulation of the country, there would be sufficiency from the corn which sprang of itself (either on the old stems or from what dropped from unreaped ears). Lastly, in the third year, the ordinary agricultural operations would be resumed, because the Assyrian host would be gone without retaining occupation of the land, and because such as were left of the population would have returned to their homes from Jerusalem and the other fenced cities where they had sought refuge. Thus “the sign” lay in the promised certainty of their support through the Divine blessing on the land which Assyria boasted to have laid waste²⁰ (vers. 23, 24). Nor is it uncommon in fruitful districts of Palestine for a second harvest to spring from the ears of corn left standing in the fields. Thus the provision for their present wants, and that for the agricultural year on which they had already entered, coming to them through the direct blessing of God on a land over which the Assyrian claimed absolute power, would in those two

years be a constant sign that the relation between Jehovah and Sennacherib was what had been told, and that they had not to fear any return of the enemy. And so would this prophetic “sign” — “natural” by the special blessing of God, but “supernatural” when viewed by itself — be alike for comfort and the strengthening of faith, but also for the constant exercise of it.

From another point of view also this prophetic utterance connects itself with the earlier prediction in Isaiah 7. Like the latter, it affords insight into the general character and structure of prophecy. Taking its departure from the present condition of things, it points to the full meaning of the prophecy, viewing it in its widening bearing, till in the dim distance it describes its fulfillment in what is the final goal of all prophecy — the Messianic kingdom. Thoughts of the growth of the seemingly scanty yet sufficient fruit left on the fields of Judah, but which in due time, when Judah was restored to quiet homes, would be followed by rich harvests, suggest the higher application to the “remnant escaped,” which was yet again to “take root downward, and bear fruit upward.” And with yet wider and final application (2 Kings 19:31) does it point forward to “the remnant” according to the election of grace, the faithful remnant, the true Israel (comp. Isaiah 4:2; 6:13; 10:20-23) in the Messianic day, when “the zeal of Jehovah of hosts” should “perform this” (Isaiah 9:7). Lastly, the third part of Isaiah’s utterance (vers. 32-34) is a direct prediction with reference to the threats of Sennacherib and the issue of this war.

Nor was the Divine judgment on Sennacherib long delayed. “In that night”²¹ “the angel of Jehovah” went forth to smite in the Assyrian host — probably that which still lay before Jerusalem — “all the mighty men of valor, and the leaders and captains” (2 Chronicles 32:21). From 2 Samuel 24:15, 16, we are led to infer that, while the judgment was directly sent of God, the means employed was a pestilence. The number of victims amounted to not less than 185,000, although the text does not indicate, and there is certainly no reason for believing that they all fell in one night.²² But to the sacred historian it seems from his prophetic view-point but as one unbroken scene in the great drama of judgment, and he pictorially describes it as a field of the slain, on which they looked as they “arose early in the morning.” And so the Divine judgment completed what the turn which the campaign had taken had begun. It was only natural that

Sennacherib should depart and return to his own land.²³ But the account in Holy Scripture in this also evidences its historical accuracy, that it describes him as dwelling “at Nineveh.” For Sennacherib not only made this his permanent residence, fortified and converted it into his grand imperial fortress, but adorned it with two magnificent palaces.²⁴

There is one event in the history of Israel which the Divine judgment on Sennacherib and the deliverance of Judah must recall to every mind. It is Israel’s miraculous deliverance at the time of the Exodus and of the destruction of the army of Pharaoh in the waves of the Red Sea (comp. Exodus 14:23-31). Then, as now, was the danger extreme, and it seemed as if Israel were defenseless and powerless before the mighty host of the enemy. Then, as now, was the word of the LORD clear and emphatic; then, as now, it was the night season when the deliverance was wrought; and then, as now, was it Israel’s birth-time as a nation. For now, after the final transportation of Israel, did Judah stand forth as the people of the LORD, the inheritors of the promise, the representatives of the kingdom of God. As then, so now was Judah saved without drawing sword or bow, only by the interposition of the LORD. And so it has to all times remained by the side of the miracles of the Exodus as the outstanding event in the typical history of the people of God, perpetuated not only in the later non-canonical literature of Israel, but possibly forming the historical basis of Psalm 46,²⁵ and more probably that of Psalm 75 and 76²⁶

Yet other thoughts come to us — how the worldly policy of even a Hezekiah in forming alliances against Assyria was rebuked, and he learned in the school of affliction and humiliation to turn from all such help to God, and then obtained mercy; and how from the first Isaiah stood forth faithful in his warnings, and calm and unshaken in his confidence, the true prophet and representative of the LORD. And yet beyond these lessons, which are to all times, comes to the Church and to every member of it the conviction that He who supernaturally, although by what we call natural means, once swept away the host of Egypt and again laid dead the proud warriors of Assyria, also watches with ever mindful care over the meanest of His creatures, so that not a sparrow can fall to the ground without His knowledge, nor yet any harm befall His people, nor earthly might overthrow His cause. For He of old is the living and the true God.

But as regarded Sennacherib himself, the Divine judgment seemed to slumber a long time.²⁷ Yet, after many years' reign, it overtook him. "As he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, . . . [his sons] Adrammelech and Sharezer smote him with the sword, and they escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead."²⁸

CHAPTER 13

HEZEKIAH, (THIRTEENTH) KING OF JUDAH

Date of Hezekiah's Sickness — Announcement of his Death — The Prayer of Hezekiah — The Divine Answer — Meaning and Lessons of it. — The Embassy of Merodach-baladan and its Object — Reception of the Envoys by Hezekiah — The Prophet and the King — Prophecy of Babylon.

(2 KINGS 20; ISAIAH. 38; 39)

THE narrative of Hezekiah's sickness and of the embassy of Merodach-baladan, which in an abbreviated form is also given in the Book of Isaiah¹ (38:1-8, 21, 22; 39) must, on literary grounds² and from its position in this history, be regarded as an appendix similar to that added to the account of David's reign in the closing chapters of the Second Book of Samuel.³ Whether or not it was taken from a special and distinct record, or else inserted in this place in order not to break the continuity of a narrative which had a spiritual meaning and object of its own, it is certain that the events which it records could not have been posterior to the final departure of Sennacherib from the soil of Palestine.⁴ After that there could not have been occasion for such anxiety in reference to the king of Assyria as to be met by the Divine promise in 2 Kings 20:6; nor could Hezekiah have shown such treasures to the ambassadors of Merodach-baladan, since he had previously stripped himself of them to Sennacherib⁵ (2 Kings 18:14-16), nor yet from what we know of the history of Merodach-baladan could he then have sent such an embassy with the manifest purpose of an alliance against Assyria, nor, finally, would Hezekiah then have encouraged such overtures.

In these circumstances it is a question of historical interest, rather than of practical importance,⁶ whether the sickness of Hezekiah or rather the embassy of Merodach-baladan had been during the reign of Sargon or in that of Sennacherib, whether they had preceded the campaign of the former in Palestine, or that of the latter.⁷ The text itself seems to point to the period immediately before the invasion of Sennacherib, since in the time of

Sargon Jerusalem was not in such danger as is indicated in the reassuring promise given concerning it (ver. 6). But this is not all. On any theory, the numeral “fifteen” years in the promised addition to the spared life of Hezekiah (ver. 6), must have crept into the text by some mistake. Admittedly, it would not synchronize with the period of Sennacherib’s campaign; while on the other hand it is certain that Sargon came into hostile contact with Hezekiah in the second year of his reign⁸ (that after the taking of Samaria), that is, in the sixth or seventh, scarcely in the eighth, year of Hezekiah’s reign (2 Kings 18:10). But fifteen years added to this would give at most twenty-two or twenty-three for the reign of Hezekiah, whereas we know that it lasted twenty-nine years (2 Kings 18:2) If, therefore, it is impossible to date the illness of Hezekiah and the embassy in the time of Sargon, we have to assign these events to the period immediately preceding the campaign of Sennacherib in Palestine. It may have been that the number “fifteen,” as that of the years added to the life of Hezekiah, had originally been a marginal remark.⁹ With whomsoever it originated or however it passed into the text, the copyist, annotator, or editor, who regarded the fourteenth year of Hezekiah as that of Sennacherib’s invasion (2 Kings 18:13), would naturally deduct this number from twenty-nine, the total of the years of Hezekiah’s reign, and so arrive at the number fifteen as that of the years added to the king’s life. But, on the other hand, this also implies that in the view of this early copyist, annotator, or editor, the sickness of Hezekiah and the embassy of Merodach-baladan had immediately preceded the campaign of Sennacherib.

The narrative itself offers no special difficulties. As Hezekiah lay sick¹⁰ the prophet Isaiah was directed to go and bid him set his house in order (2 Samuel 17:23), since his illness would terminate fatally. The announcement was received by the king with the utmost alarm and grief. We have here to remember the less clear views entertained under the Old Testament, before the LORD by His coming and Resurrection had “brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.” Indeed, our own experience teaches the gradual unfolding of truth with our growing capacity for its perception. And any anticipation of fullest truth would neither have been in accordance with the character of the preparatory dispensation and the training under it, nor have done honor to the new Revelation which was to follow. Indeed, even now many of us learn slowly the joy of “departing,”

nor yet this without constant reference to that which is joined to it, the presence with the Lord, of which they of old knew not. Thus it was neither fatalism nor resignation to the inevitable, but faith, when they laid them down to sleep content with the assurance that sleeping or waking they were still with the LORD, and that it was well in this also to leave themselves implicitly in the hands of the covenant-keeping God. And so we can from every point of view understand it, that the Psalmist should have prayed, “O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days” (Psalm 102:24), and that Hezekiah “turned his face to the wall¹¹ and prayed. . .and wept with great weeping.”

For, assuredly, this being taken away in the midst of his days and of his work, would seem to him not only a mark of God’s disfavor, but actual punishment. It is from this point of view, rather than as the expression of self-righteousness, that we regard the language of Hezekiah’s plea. And apart from this there was not anything blameworthy either in the wish that his life should be spared, or in the prayer for it, although here also we cannot but mark the lower stand-point of those under the Old Testament.¹² The prayer of Hezekiah, as for the present we simply note, was heard. Before Isaiah had passed “the middle city”¹³ he was Divinely directed to return to the king with the message that his request was granted, and to add to the promise of lengthened days the assurance of the safety of the kingdom of David and of Jerusalem¹⁴ in anticipation of those dangers which must have been foreseen as threatening the near future.

Thus far all had been as might have been looked for in the course of this history. But what followed suggests questions of the deepest importance. Isaiah had not only promised Divine healing, but that within the briefest period¹⁵ Hezekiah should once more go up to the Temple — no doubt to return thanks. Yet he conjoined with this miraculous help the application of a common remedy, when he directed that a lump of figs should be laid on the boil. And as if still further to point the contrast, Hezekiah asked for “a sign” of the promise, and the prophet not only gave it, but allowed him a choice in that which from any point of view implied direct Divine interposition. For evidently Hezekiah asked for such “a sign” as would be a pledge to him of God’s direct intervention on his behalf, while, on the other hand, the alternative proposed to him, that the shadow on the steps of the sun-clock of Ahaz,¹⁶ might either move forwards or backwards,

forbids any natural explanation of it, such as that of a solar eclipse which Isaiah had either naturally or supernaturally foreknown.¹⁷ Hezekiah chose what to him seemed the more difficult, or rather the more inconceivable alternative — that of the shadow receding ten steps. And in answer to Isaiah's prayer, the "sign" desired was actually given.

It is not difficult to perceive the symbolical significance of this sign. As Isaiah had been commissioned to offer to Ahaz "a sign" of the promised deliverance, and to leave him the choice of it, "either in the depth or in the height above" (Isaiah 7:11), so here a similar alternative was presented to Hezekiah. As Ahaz in his trust in natural means and his distrust of Jehovah had refused, so Hezekiah in his distrust of natural means and trust of Jehovah asked for a sign. And lastly, even as Hezekiah had feared that his life-day would have ended in its mid-day hour, so now, when it was to be lengthened, did the falling shadow climb up again the ten steps to its mid-day mark.

But there are also deeper lessons to be learnt from this history. The change in the announcement of what was to befall Hezekiah, in answer to his prayer, is of eternal meaning. It encourages us "always to pray" — not excluding from the range of our petitions what are commonly called "things temporal." And yet the very idea of prayer also excludes any thought of the absolute certainty of such answer as had been primarily contemplated in the prayer. For prayer and its answer are not mechanically, they are morally connected, just as between Isaiah's promised sign and its bestowal, the prayer of the prophet intervened (2 Kings 20:11). As miracle is not magic, so prayer is not necessitarianism; and on looking back upon our lives we have to thank God as often for prayers unanswered as for prayers answered.

Yet another lesson connected with the change in the message which Isaiah was to bring to Hezekiah has been already noted by Jerome. There is widest bearing in this remark of his (on Ezekiel 33), that it does not necessarily follow because a prophet predicts an event that what he had predicted should happen. "For," as he adds, the prophet "did not predict in order that it might happen, but lest it should happen." And the immutability of God's counsels is not that of fatalism, but depends on the continuance of the circumstances which had determined them.

This may help us to understand another and in some respects more difficult question. Evidently alike the announcement of Hezekiah's untimely death and its revocation were determined by his relation towards God. This would in turn have its important bearing upon the conduct of the king in the coming Assyrian war, which concerned not only Hezekiah personally, but the whole Davidic line and the fate of Judah itself. But the lessons taught the king first by his danger and then by his restoration were precisely those which Hezekiah needed to learn if, obedient to the admonitions of Isaiah, and believing the promise of the LORD, he was consistently to carry out the will of Jehovah amidst the temptations and difficulties of the Assyrian invasion. This, not only because he had had experience of the truth of prophetic promise, but because he had learned, as he could not otherwise have been taught, that God answered prayer; that He was merciful and forgiving, and able to turn aside the most threatening danger, even at the extreme moment. In truth, what was afterwards witnessed in the deliverance of Jerusalem was on a large scale the same that Hezekiah himself had experienced in his healing. Thus the lessons of his recovery were intended as spiritual preparation for what was so soon to follow.

It still remains to refer more particularly to "the sign" itself on the sun-clock of Ahaz. From the circumstance that in the original account in the Book of Kings there is no mention of alteration in the relative position of the sun (as in the poetic quotation in Joshua 10:12, 13), but of a possible descent or ascent of the shadow,¹⁸ and that even this was to be only observable on the step-clock of Ahaz, we infer that, in the view of the writer, "the sign" was local, and hence could not have implied an interference with the regular order of Nature. The Scriptural narrative conveys only that in that particular place something had occurred which made the shadow on the dial to retrograde, although at the same time we can have no hesitation in saying that this something was Divinely caused. What this "something" of a purely local character was, we have not the means of ascertaining. Of the various suggestions most probability attaches to that of an extraordinary refraction of the sun-rays, which has been recorded to have produced similar phenomena in other places.¹⁹ If such Divine intervention be called a miracle, we demur not to the idea nor to the designation — though we prefer that of "a sign." But we add that, in

a modified sense, Divine interpositions as signs to us are not so unfrequent as some people imagine.

The fame of Hezekiah's healing spread far and wide, with a rapidity not uncommon in the East. It reached a monarch who, especially at that time, was sorely in need of help, Divine or human. Few chapters in history suggest more interesting episodes than that of Merodach-baladan,²⁰ who contended for the independence and supremacy and for the crown of Babylonia successively with Tiglath-pileser, Sargon, and Sennacherib — and who was by turns successful, vanquished, driven away and restored, and once more a fugitive. This is not the place to give such outline of his history as may be gathered from the notices of Berossus, the Chaldee historian,²¹ from the canon of Ptolemy, the Bible, and Assyrian inscriptions.²² Suffice it here, that the date of his embassy to Hezekiah must have coincided with a brief period when at the beginning of Sennacherib's reign he once more occupied the throne of Babylonia for six months. It was only natural that in prospect of his conflict with Assyria he should have sought alliances in every quarter, and that the fame of Hezekiah's miraculous healing, of his great wealth and power — all no doubt exaggerated in Eastern fashion — should have induced him to send an embassy to Jerusalem. A diversion there, a possible confederacy against Assyria in the far west, such as was afterwards really formed, would have been of the greatest use to his cause. Equally natural was it, alike with reference to Assyria and to Hezekiah, that such an intention should not have been avowed, nor perhaps the possibility of an alliance formally discussed, till the ambassadors had been able to judge for themselves of the exact state of matters in Jerusalem. And so they went ostensibly to bring to Hezekiah congratulatory letters on his recovery, and "a present."²³ But all parties including Sennacherib on the one side, and the prophet Isaiah on the other — understood the real object of the embassy.

All this fully explains the Biblical narrative. It is not necessary to suppose that the question of a treaty against Assyria was actually discussed between Hezekiah and the envoys of Merodach-baladan. Indeed, as this is not stated in Scripture, it seems unlikely that a treaty had been made or even proposed. In any case, it could not have been carried out, since long before it could have been acted upon Merodach-baladan was driven away. On the other hand, it seems equally clear that Hezekiah, however reticent

he may have been, secretly favored the design of the embassy. It was with this view — to give practical evidence of his might — that

“Hezekiah hearkened²⁴ unto them, and shewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious oil, and the house of his armor, and all that was found in his treasures; there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not” (2 Kings 20:13).

It was a disingenuous device when Hezekiah, in answer to the questioning of Isaiah, sought to divert him by a reference to the “far country” whence the ambassadors had come, as if flattering to Jewish national pride, and implying the acknowledged supremacy of Jehovah’s power. Such had not been the object of the prophet in asking about the country of these strangers. By eliciting that they had come from Babylon, he would indicate to Hezekiah that his inmost purpose in showing them all his treasures had been read. But to know it was to pronounce the Divine disapprobation of any such alliance against Assyria. This explains the severity of the punishment afterwards denounced upon Hezekiah for an offense which otherwise might have seemed trivial. But this had clearly appeared, that Hezekiah had not learned the lessons which his late danger and God-granted recovery were intended to teach; nor did he learn them otherwise than in the school of extreme anguish, after all his worldly policy had ended in defeat, his land been desolated, and the victorious host of Assyria laid siege to Jerusalem. And this seems to be the meaning of the reference in 2 Chronicles 32:25, 26, to the ungratefulness and the pride of the king after his miraculous recovery, as well as of this other notice (ver. 31), that in the matter of the ambassadors, God had left Hezekiah to himself, to try him, and “know all that was in his heart.”²⁵

But with God there was not any changeableness. As afterwards Isaiah denounced the alliance with Egypt, so now he spoke the Divine judgment on the hoped-for treaty with Babylon. So far from help being derived from such alliance, Israel’s future doom and misery would come from Babylon, and the folly of Hezekiah would alike appear and be punished in the exile and servitude of his descendants. Thus in the sequence of God this sowing of disobedience should be followed by a harvest of judgment. Yet for the present would there be “peace and continuance” — till the measure of

iniquity was filled. And Hezekiah acquiesced in the sentence, owning its justice and grateful for its delay. Yet here also we perceive shortcoming. Hezekiah did not reach up to the high level of his father David in circumstances somewhat similar (2 Samuel 24:17), nor was his even the humble absolute submission of Eli of old (1 Samuel 3:18).²⁶

But as throughout this history Isaiah appeared as the true prophet of God by the consistency of his utterance of the Divine Will against all heathen alliances, by his resistance to all worldly policy, however specious, and even by his bearing on the twofold occasion which forms the subject of the present narrative, so did he now rise to the full height of his office. Never before had there been so unmistakable a prediction of the future as when Isaiah in the full height of Assyria's power announced that the world-empire of the future would not belong to it, but to vanquished Babylonia, and that Judah's judgment would not come from their present dreaded enemies, but from those who now had sought their alliance.²⁷

CHAPTER 14

MANASSEH (FOURTEENTH), AMON (FIFTEENTH), KINGS OF JUDAH.

Popular Mourning for Hezekiah — Accession of Manasseh — Temptations and Character of the King — Idolatry and Cruelty of his Reign — Moral State of the People — Prophetic Announcement of Judgment — Supplementary Narrative in the Book of Chronicles — Its Reliability Confirmed by the Assyrian Inscriptions — The Captivity of Manasseh in Babylon — His Repentance and Prayer — His Restoration to Jerusalem — Superficial Character of his Reformation — His Death — Reign of Amon.

(2 KINGS 21; 2 CHRONICLES 33)

WITH the death of Hezekiah, another and a strange chapter in Jewish history opens. When they buried him “in the ascent of the sepulchers of the sons of David,”¹ not only the inhabitants of Jerusalem — for the defense, adornment, and convenience of which he had done so much — but all Judah united to do him honor. His reign, despite temporary reverses and calamities, had been prosperous for his country, and he left it in political circumstances far different from those when he had ascended the throne. Above all, his history might have been full of most important theocratic teaching to the people. If it was otherwise, we see in this only fresh evidence of that spiritual decay of which the prophets, in their description of the moral condition of the people, give so realistic a picture.

Manasseh was only twelve years old² when he succeeded his father. According to our Western notions, he would have to be regarded as merely a child. But in the East he would at that age have reached the most dangerous period of wakening manhood, before thought could have tempered willfulness, or experience set bounds to impulse. In such circumstances, to have resisted the constant temptation and incitement to gratify every will and desire, would have required one of strong moral fiber. But Manasseh was selfish and reckless, weak and cruel in his wickedness, and scarcely respectable even in his repentance. When the

infant Jehoash acceded to the throne, he had the benefit of the advice of Jehoiada (2 Kings 12:2), and we know how his later and independent reign disappointed its early promise. But Manasseh had not any such guidance. The moral and religious corruption in his grandfather's reign, must, as we infer from the prophetic writings, be regarded as not only the outcome, but also partly the explanation of the measures of Ahaz. This condition of things could not have been effectually checked during Hezekiah's reign of twenty-nine years, especially amidst the troubles and the disorganization connected with the Assyrian invasion. In fact, we know that even among the intimate counselors of Hezekiah, there were those whom the prophetic word emphatically condemned (comp. Isaiah 22:15-19; 29:14-16; 30:1, 9-14).

In these circumstances the sudden re-action and the "counter-reformation" of Manasseh's reign, in which he, apparently, carried the people with him, cannot appear altogether strange or surprising. Briefly, it was a kind of heathen ideal of religion in which various forms of national idolatry were combined. The corrupt mode of Jehovah-worship on "the heights" was restored. To this were added the Phoenician rites of Baal and Asherah, which Ahab had introduced in Israel, and the Assyro-Chaldean worship of the stars. All this was carried to its utmost sequences. In the Temple, on which Jehovah had put His thrice Holy Name, and which, as a firm and lasting abode in contrast to the Tabernacle, symbolized the permanence of His dwelling in the midst of Israel, and their permanence in the land, Manasseh built altars to the host of heaven, placing them in the outer and inner courts. Nay, in the sacred "house" itself, he set up the vilest of idols: "the graven image of the Asherah," whose worship implied all that was lascivious. Conjoined with this was the institution of a new priesthood,³ composed of them that had familiar spirits, and "wizards," while the king himself practiced divination and enchantment⁴ And as usual, together with all this, (Compare Deuteronomy 18:10, 11.) the service of Moloch, with its terrible rite of passing children through the fire, was not only encouraged by the example of the king (2 Kings 21:6; 2 Chronicles 33:6), but apparently came into general practice (2 Kings 23:10). Alike the extent and the shameless immorality of the idolatry now prevalent, may be inferred from the account of the later reformation by Josiah (2 Kings 23:4-8). For, whatever practices may have been introduced by previous kings,

the location, probably in the outer court of the Temple, of a class of priests, who, in their unnaturalness of vice, combined a species of madness with deepest moral degradation,⁵ and by their side, and in fellowship with them, that of priestesses of Astarte, must have been the work of Manasseh.

We know that some such abominations formed part of the religious rites, not only of the inhabitants of Canaan, but of the Babylonians.⁶ On the other hand, we can scarcely avoid the inference that these forms of idolatry were chiefly encouraged for the sake of the vices connected with them. Thus it involved not only religious, but primarily moral degeneracy. Yet, as might be expected, there was also spiritual protest and a moral reaction against all this. Prophetic voices were heard announcing the near doom of a king and people more wicked than the Canaanites⁷ of old. But it is significant that the names of these Divine messengers are not mentioned here.⁸ In truth, it was a time of martyrdom, rather than of testimony. There may be exaggeration in the account of Josephus, that Manasseh killed all the righteous among the Hebrews, and spared not even the prophets, but every day slew some among them (*Ant.* x. 3, 1); and only a basis of historical truth may underlie the Jewish tradition,⁹ which was adopted by the Fathers,¹⁰ that by command of Manasseh Isaiah was sawn asunder in a cedar-tree, in which he had found refuge. But Holy Scripture itself relates that Manasseh had filled Jerusalem “from end to end” with innocent blood.

As we have already marked, these sins were national, and this in a more special sense than merely the identification of a nation with its rulers and their public acts. As this condition of the people was not exceptional, but the outcome of a long course, so the Divine judgments were to be cumulative, extending back from the first beginning to the present stage of guilt (2 Kings 21:15). And commensurate not only with the sin of Israel, but with their utter unfaithfulness to the meaning and purpose of their calling, would be the coming evil.¹¹ In the figurative language of Scripture, the desolation of Jerusalem would be as complete as that of Samaria and of the house of Ahab — as it were, a razing to the ground, so that the builder might stretch over it the measuring line and apply the plummet, as if not anything had stood there (comp. Isaiah 34:11; Lamentations 2:8; Amos 7:7-9). Nay, Jerusalem would be thoroughly emptied and cleansed, as a

dish that was wiped, and then turned upside down.¹² For Judah — the remnant of what had been the inheritance of God — would be cast off, and surrendered to their enemies for “a prey and a spoil” (2 Kings 21:12-14).

Here the history of Manasseh abruptly breaks off in the Book of Kings, to be resumed and supplemented in that of Chronicles (2 Chronicles 33:11-20). This in itself is noticeable, first, as casting fresh light on the “prophetic” character of the history as presented in the Books of the Kings, and, secondly, as attesting the historical value of those of Chronicles. In the Books of the Kings, the writer, or compiler, gives not the annals of a reign, nor the biographies of kings and heroes; but groups together such events as bear on the Divine issues of this history, in relation to the calling of Israel. This explains not only the brief summary of the longest reign in Judah or Israel — that of Manasseh, which lasted fifty-five years — but specifically the omission of what he had done for the defense of Jerusalem and Judah (2 Chronicles 33:14), as well as of his captivity, his repentance, return to his capital, and reformation. For these defenses of Judah were useless; the captivity of Manasseh was temporary; and his reformation was, as we shall see, only superficial. But rarely has the skepticism of a certain school of critics received more severe rebuke than in regard to the doubts which on internal grounds have been cast — and that not long ago¹³ — on the credibility of the narrative in 2 Chronicles 33:11-20. It was called in question for this reason, that, in view of the silence of the Book of Kings, there was not ground for believing that the Assyrians exercised supremacy in Judah — far less that there had been a hostile expedition against Manasseh; and because, since the residence of the Assyrian kings was in Nineveh, the reported transportation of Manasseh to Babylon (ver. 11) must be unhistorical. To these were added, as secondary objections, that the unlikely account of a king transported in iron bonds and fetters was proved to be untrustworthy by the still more incredible notice that such a captive had been again restored to his kingdom. Eminently specious as these objections may seem, they have been entirely set aside by the evidence from the Assyrian inscriptions, the preservation of whose testimony is here specially providential. Unfortunately, the lessons which might have been learned in regard to skepticism on “internal grounds” have had little influence.

Of the supremacy of Assyria over Judah in the time of Manasseh, there cannot be any doubt, notwithstanding the silence of the Book of Kings. In a list of twenty-two subject kings of “the land Chatti,” in the reign of Esarhaddon, whom that monarch summoned, appears expressly the name of *Minasi sar mat (ir) Jaudi*, Manasseh, king of Judah.¹⁴ But the capture of Manasseh by the Assyrian captains, and his deportation to Babylon, recorded in 2 Chronicles 33:11, seems to have taken place not in the reign of Esarhaddon, but in that of his successor, Asurbanipal (the Sardanapalus of classical writers), when his brother Samas-sum-ukln, the viceroy of Babylon, involved among other countries also Phoenicia and Palestine in his rebellion. And although the ordinary residence of Asurbanipal was in Nineveh, we have not only reason to believe that after his assumption of the dignity of king of Babylon, he temporarily resided in that city, but monumental evidence of it in his reception there of ambassadors with tributary presents. Lastly, we find the exact counterpart alike of this, that Manasseh was carried to Babylon with “hooks,”¹⁵ and “bound in fetters,” and then afterwards restored to his kingdom, in the Assyrian record of precisely the same mode of deportation and of the same restoration by Asurbanipal of Necho of Egypt.¹⁶

Holy Scripture tracing this restoration — not, as in the Assyrian inscription, to its secondary cause “the mercy of the king” — but to its real source, connects it with the repentance and prayer of Manasseh in his distress (2 Chronicles 33:12, 13). That in such circumstances the son of Hezekiah, with the remembrance of the Divine deliverance of his father in his mind, should have recognized the folly and guilt of his conduct, humbled himself, and prayed unto the LORD¹⁷ — seems so natural as scarcely to require confirmation. Yet there is such, at least of his return to Jerusalem, in the historical notice of his additions to the fortifications of Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 33:14). And if his abolition of the former idolatry, and restoration of the service of Jehovah, seem not consistent with the measures that had afterwards to be adopted by his grandson Josiah, we have to remember that between them intervened the wicked reign of Amon; that Manasseh seems rather to have put aside than destroyed idolatry; and that the sacred text itself indicates the superficiality and incompleteness of his reformation (2 Chronicles 33:17).

The events just recorded must have taken place near the close of this reign, which extended over the exceptional period of fifty-five years. As Holy Scripture refers to his sins as extreme and permanent instance of guilt (2 Kings 23:26; 24:3; Jeremiah 15:4), so, on the other hand, Jewish tradition dwells upon the repentance of Manasseh and the acceptance of his prayer, as the fullest manifestation of God's mercy, and the greatest encouragement to repentant sinners.¹⁸ And, in truth, the threatened judgment upon Jerusalem was deferred for more than half a century. So it was in peace that Manasseh laid himself to sleep.¹⁹ He was buried in a garden attached to his palace, which popularly bore the name of "the garden of Uzza."²⁰

That the reformation made by Manasseh could only have been superficial, appears also from the record of the brief reign of his son and successor Amon. Indeed, some writers have seen a picture of that period in certain of the utterances of Zephaniah,²¹ although he prophesied during the reign of Josiah. Amon was twenty-four years old at his accession, and his rule only lasted two years. It was marked by the resumption of the idolatry of Manasseh — apparently in an even aggravated form (2 Chronicles 33:23). A palace-conspiracy put an end to his life. As on a former occasion (2 Kings 14:20, 21), "the people of the land" secured the Davidic succession by proclaiming Josiah, the youthful son of Amen, heir to his throne.

CHAPTER 15

JOSIAH, (SIXTEENTH) KING OF JUDAH.

Accession of Josiah — His Early Life — Arrangement of the Narrative — Collection for Repair of the Temple — The Remnant of Israel — Character of those Employed — The Reformation not the Outcome of a general Religious Revival — Temple Repairs — The Finding of the Book of the Law — The Prophetess Huldah — The Assembly and Covenant in the Temple — Destruction of the Emblems of Idolatry in Jerusalem, Judah, and in the Northern Tribal Possessions — Fulfillment of Ancient Prophecy regarding Bethel — The Great Passover in Jerusalem.

(2 KINGS 22; 23:1-23; 2 CHRONICLES 34; 35:1-19.)

JOSIAH was only eight years old when he succeeded to the royal dignity. As his extreme youth would withdraw him from the influences and temptations to which Manasseh had been exposed at his accession, so it must have necessitated the tutorship, or at least guidance, of men to whom, as generally venerated, a royal child would be entrusted. That such there were, we infer from the revival of prophecy, as represented by a Huldah, a Jeremiah, and a Zephaniah¹; from the notices we have of some whom we afterwards find surrounding the king; and, lastly, from the bearing of the priesthood under their chief Hilkiah. Nor, indeed, could the lessons of the reign of Hezekiah, and even of that of Manasseh, have been wholly effaced during the brief rule of Amon. Such men as they, under whose auspices afterwards the reformation of Josiah was carried out, could have had no difficulty in showing the youthful king how the brightest memories of the royal house of Judah were associated with the names of David, Jehoshaphat, and Joash, Uzziah, and Hezekiah, and that the times of greatest national prosperity had been those of faithful and earnest allegiance to Jehovah and His service.

These are indeed mainly inferences; but they are grounded on the facts of this history, and explain them. Nor can we help thinking that even the early birth of an heir to the crown, implying as it does a royal marriage at

the early age of thirteen,² may here be of significance (comp. 2 Kings 22:1 with 23:36). But the whole history of Josiah's reign is of such importance, and it raises so many questions, that, for clearness' sake, it seems better to discuss separately its religious and its political aspect, so far as this is possible.

First and foremost in this reign stand the measures of religious reformation inaugurated by Josiah. These comprise the preliminary abolition of idolatry; the repair of the Temple; the discovery in it of the Book of the Law; the consequent national reformation by the king; and, lastly, the solemn national observance of the Passover. We have stated the events in the order of their time, and as given in the Book of Kings, from which the arrangement in the Book of Chronicles differs only in appearance. Each of these two accounts relates, with different circumstantiality, one or other of the events mentioned — in each case in accordance with the different viewpoint of the writers, to which reference has frequently been made. Thus the main topic in the Book of Kings is the religious reformation, alike in its positive aspect as regarded the Temple, the Law, and national Religion (2 Kings 22:3; 23:3), and in its negative aspect in the abolition of idolatry (2 Kings 23:4-20). On the other hand, the chronicler records at greatest length, and with fullest detail, the Paschal observance (2 Chronicles 35:1-19), while he passes very briefly over what might appear as of graver importance (2 Chronicles 34:4-7).

This will explain what otherwise might have seemed a difficulty in the arrangement of the narrative. The account both in the Book of Kings and in Chronicles places the Temple restoration "in the eighteenth year of king Josiah." But in the former the record of the religious reformation begins with this event, while the chronicler prefaces it by a very brief summary of what had previously been done for the abolition of idolatry (2 Chronicles 34:3-7). That something of this kind must have preceded the restoration of the Temple seems evident. It cannot be supposed that a monarch like Josiah should for seventeen years have tolerated all that Amon had introduced, and then, in his eighteenth year, suddenly proceeded to the sweeping measures which alike the writers of Kings and of Chronicles narrate. It is, therefore, only reasonable to accept the statement of the latter, that "in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young" [in his sixteenth year — when presumably he commenced personally to

administer the government], king Josiah “began³ to seek after the God of David his father,” and that “in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem” from their idolatry (2 Chronicles 34:3). And then the chronicler, who, as we have stated, makes only briefest reference to the reformation described with such detail in 2 Kings 23:4-20, at once adds to the mention of the initial measures towards the abolition of idolatry a summary of what was finally done in that direction, after the restoration of the Temple and in consequence of the discovery of the Book of the Law (vers. 4-7). That such is really the purport of the narrative appears also from the reference at the close of the account of the Temple restoration in 2 Chronicles 34:33, which synchronizes with 2 Kings 23:4.

It was only natural that such preliminary measures as the chronicler relates should have been followed by, as indeed they must have stood in connection with, the restoration of the Temple and its services. This was done in the eighteenth year of Josiah’s reign. Nearly two and a half centuries had passed since the former restoration by Joash (2 Kings 12:4-16), and the sacred building must have greatly suffered under the idolatrous kings, especially during the late reigns of Manasseh and Amon. As the restoration was naturally on the same lines with the previous one under Joash, the two accounts are necessarily similar. The collections for the Temple repairs, to which reference is made, must have begun some years previously (2 Kings 22:4) — perhaps so early as the eighth year of the king’s reign. But what specially interests us is that contributions came not merely from Judah, but from the Israelitish inhabitants of what had been the kingdom of Israel (2 Chronicles 34:9). This indicates not only a religious movement among them, such as previously in the time of Hezekiah, (Compare 2 Chronicles 30:1, 18.) but that politically also the remnant of Israel in the land was drawn into a hopeful alliance with Judah.

Yet further insight into the character of the reformation now begun comes from the history of some of those whom the king employed, either now or later, in connection with it. Foremost among them is Hilkiyah, the high priest, the father or grandfather of Seraiah⁴ (1 Chronicles 6:13, 14; Nehemiah 11:11) who was high-priest at the time of the captivity (2 Kings 25:18), and an ancestor of Ezra (Ezra. 7:1). Again, chief among those whom Josiah sent to Hilkiyah, was Shaphan the Scribe (2 Kings 22:3), the father of Gemariah,⁵ the protector of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 36:10, 19, 25),

and grandfather of Micaiah (Jeremiah 36:20-13).⁶ Of the personages afterwards mentioned 1 Kings 22:14), we have definite notices about Ahikam (the son of another Shaphan), who protected Jeremiah (Jeremiah 26:24), and was the father of Gedaliah (2 Kings 25:22); and about Achbor, the father of Elnathan, one of those among “the princes of Judah” who vainly endeavored to prevent the burning of the prophetic roll dictated to Baruch by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 36:12). Scanty as these notices are, they leave the impression that Josiah had surrounded himself with men imbued, on the whole, with a true religious spirit.

This inference is the more important in view of the general state of the people. The whole history leads to the conviction that the reformation inaugurated by Josiah, although submitted to, and apparently shared in by the people, was not the outcome of a spiritual revival. It was a movement on the part of the king rather than of the nation. Of this we have only too much confirmation in the account which the prophets give of the moral and religious condition of the people, and of the evidently superficial and chiefly external character of the reformation.⁷ And as we derive our knowledge of it from the pages of Jeremiah, we bear in mind that the beginning of his prophetic activity, in the thirteenth year of Josiah (Jeremiah 1:2), synchronized with the commencement of the reformatory movement. Thus we further understand why the changes inaugurated, however extensive, could not avert, as the prophetess Huldah announced, the Divine judgment from the nation, but only from their king (2 Kings 22:14-20). A reformation such as this could be but transient, and the people hastened only the more rapidly to their final apostasy.

It was during the extensive repairs in the Temple that a discovery was made of the greatest influence on the movement about to begin, and which has, especially of late, been connected with some important critical questions regarding the Pentateuch. As we read in Holy Scripture, the high priest Hilkiah informed “Shaphan the Scribe,” that he had “found the book of the law (in 2 Chronicles 34:14: “the book of the law of the LORD, by the hand of Moses”) in the house of the LORD” (2 Kings 22:8). This book Hilkiah gave to Shaphan. Its perusal led Shaphan not only to inform the king of it, but to read the book to him. On this Josiah “rent his clothes,” in token of mourning for the guilt which Israel had incurred in their long absolute breach of its commandments.

Into the complicated questions, What was the exact compass of this special book (whether it comprised the whole Pentateuch, or what parts of it), and again, What was the date of this copy, and how it came to be found in the Temple — the present is not the place to enter. On some points, however, all sober-minded and reverent inquirers will be at one. Assuredly the finding of the book was not a fraud on the part of Hilkiah,⁸ nor yet the book itself a forgery, either by Hilkiah or any priest or prophet of that or the immediately preceding period. Assuming, as there is every reason to do, that certainly it contained the Book of Deuteronomy, and probably also other portions, if not the whole, of the Law,⁹ we cannot imagine any reasonable motive on the part of the priesthood, and still less of the prophets, for the invention of such a book.¹⁰ And plainly it must have been accepted and its genuineness attested by Jeremiah, who at that time had already been five years in the prophetic office. The further question of the precise contents of the book is both difficult of discussion and not of great practical importance. Irrespective of the time¹¹ which the reading of the whole Pentateuch would have occupied (comp. here 2 Kings 23:2), the wording of Holy Scripture scarcely conveys in the first instance that the Book comprised the strictly historical portions of the Pentateuch (such as Genesis), but, as we expressly read, “the Book of the Covenant,”¹² and “the Book of the Law.” The latter expression leads us in the present case to think, first of all, of that aspect of the law which specially affected the people, and the breach of which entailed the national judgment that Huldah had announced, and the apprehension of which had caused such consternation to the king. If so, we should perhaps not have to think in the first place of those ritual ordinances found in the central portions of the Pentateuch, which are now commonly called the “Priest Code.” These would chiefly affect the priesthood, nor perhaps could the people have followed with complete understanding the mere reading of their complicated ritual details. Besides, the previous history has furnished us with sufficient instances to show that, unlike the Law, the provisions and ordinances of the “Priest Code” must have been well known.¹³ On the other hand, the main contents of the Book of the Law read in hearing of the people must have concerned the whole fundamental relation between Israel and Jehovah. Hence we conclude that it must have contained, besides the Book of Deuteronomy, at any rate those portions of the Pentateuch which related to the same all-important subject. Beyond these suggestions, which

are necessarily in the nature of conjectures, we cannot here discuss this question. But on the main points we cannot have any hesitation. In Deuteronomy 31:25, 26, we find directions for depositing the Book of the Law in the innermost Sanctuary, as indeed might have been expected. That in the various troubles, when during many reigns the Mosaic law and order of worship were so often set aside, “the book” should have been removed and hidden by pious hands, and so for a time have become lost, can as little surprise us as its finding during the thorough repairs of the Temple.¹⁴ And whatever the compass of this special book, the whole context shows, on the one hand, that it implies the embodiment of the Mosaic law in the Pentateuch, and, on the other, that the existence of that law was generally known and universally admitted as primitive, derived from the great Lawgiver himself, valid, and Divine.

We can now understand how, on hearing “the words of the Book of the Law,” the king had “rent his clothes” and “sent to inquire of the LORD” both concerning himself and his people. For such breach of the covenant and the law, as he now knew Israel to have been guilty of, must involve signal judgment. In the execution of the king’s behest, they whom he sent, including the high-priest, addressed themselves to Huldah, “the prophetess,” the wife of Shallum, “the keeper of the wardrobe,”¹⁵ who “dwelt in Jerusalem, in the second town.”¹⁶ This part of the city is also designated¹⁷ “the mortar” (Zephaniah 1:10, 11) — in the first place, probably, from its shape, being in the hollow of the valley, and surrounded by rising ground. It probably formed the first addition to the old city which the increase of the population must have rendered necessary even in the time of Solomon.¹⁸ It occupied the upper part of the Tyropoeon valley west of the Temple area, and north of “the middle city,” and was the great business quarter, containing the markets, the bazaars, and homes of the industrial population. This may imply a comparatively humble outward position of “the prophetess.” Why a Jeremiah or a Zephaniah should not have been sought — whether they were not in Jerusalem or from other reasons it is impossible to conjecture. But that such a deputation should have unhesitatingly addressed itself at such a crisis and in a matter so important to a woman, not only indicates the exceptional position which Huldah occupied in general opinion¹⁹ — by the side of and even above the two other Old Testament prophetesses,²⁰ Miriam (Exodus 15:20) and

Deborah (Judges 4:4) — but also casts light on the spiritual relations under the Old Testament, and on the religious conditions of the time. Above all, it shows with what absolute freeness the Spirit of God selected the instruments which He employed in the execution of the Divine behests (comp. Joel 2:28, 29).

The plain and faithful words in which the prophetess announced the coming judgment (2 Kings 22:14-20) give a new and deeper meaning to the assembly of priests, prophets, and people from Jerusalem and from all parts of the land whom Josiah gathered to hear

“the words of the book of the covenant which was found
in the house of the LORD” (2 Kings 23:2).

Evidently in all that he did, the king was actuated by higher motives than merely the wish to avert punishment. In the Temple a solemn national “covenant” was made — no doubt, by the people expressing their assent to the law as binding upon them. In consequence of this, immediate measures were taken under the supervision of the high-priest and his subordinates²¹ (2 Kings 23:4) for the removal of all the emblems of idolatry which had defiled the Temple. The various “vessels made for Baal and for the Asherah, and for all the host of heaven” were burnt (comp. Deuteronomy 7:25; 12:3), “in the fields of Kidron, north-east of the city²² (comp. Jeremiah 31:40). Next, the *Kemarim*,²³ or non-Levitical priesthood, that officiated whether at the high places, or at the various shrines of idolatry, were “put down.” Thus the vile idol of Asherah was brought out from the sanctuary which it had desecrated, burnt by the brook Kidron, its ashes stamped to powder, and further to mark its profanation scattered over the common burying-place.²⁴ Lastly, the houses erected in close proximity to the Temple itself, for the lowest form of frenzied heathen degradation, were broken down.

But these measures were not limited to the removal of idolatry from the Temple, and of the non-Levitical priesthood from office. Beside the *Kemarim* there were those of Levitical descent — *Kohanim*, or priests — who had celebrated an unlawful worship at the high places throughout Judah.²⁵ These unworthy members of the priesthood were brought to Jerusalem and declared unfit for strictly priestly service in the Temple, although not deprived of what to many must have been the only means of

subsistence.²⁶ At the same time any resumption of the former unlawful services was rendered impossible by the destruction of all the high places. Chief among these, as the common resort of those who passed in or came out of the city, were “the high places of the gates: that at the entrance of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, [as well as] that at the left of a man, in the city-gate.”²⁷ Similarly Topheth was permanently defiled. The sacred horses dedicated by previous kings to the sun, and perhaps used in processional worship, were “put away,” and the sun-chariots burned. The altars, alike those on the roof of the *Aliyah* of Ahaz, and those set up by Manasseh in the two courts of the Temple, were broken down, their debris “made to run down from thence,”²⁸ and the dust of them cast into the Kidron.

Nor was this all. Outside Jerusalem, on the southern point of the Mount of Olives, there appear still to have been remains of even more ancient idolatry, which dated from the time of Solomon. These were now removed, and the places desecrated. And beyond Judah proper the movement extended throughout the ancient kingdom of Israel, even to the remotest northern tribal possession of Naphtali (2 Chronicles 34:6). This again affords indication of an approximation between the Israelitish inhabitants left in what had been the northern kingdom and Judah. And in the increasing weakness of the Assyrian empire, alike Josiah and the Israelitish remnant may have contemplated a reunion and restoration under a king of the house of David. At any rate the rulers of Assyria were not in a condition to interfere in the affairs of Palestine, nor to check the influence which Josiah exercised over the northern tribes. On the other hand, we can understand that the measures against former idolatry should have been all the more rigorously carried out in the ancient Israelitish kingdom, which had so terribly suffered from the consequences of former apostasy (comp. 2 Kings 23:20). In Beth-el itself, the original seat of Jeroboam’s spurious worship, not only was the altar destroyed, but the high place — that is, the sanctuary there — was burned, as also the Asherah, which seems to have taken the place of the golden calf. But as they proceeded further publicly to defile the altar in the usual manner by burning upon it dead men’s bones, Josiah espied among the sepulchers close by — perhaps visible from where he stood²⁹ — the monument³⁰ of the prophet of old sent to announce, in the high-day of the consecration of that altar, the

desolation which should lay it waste (comp. 1 Kings 13:1, 2). But while they rifled the graves of an idolatrous people, they reverently left untouched the sepulcher which held the bones of the man of God from Judah, and by their side those of his host, the prophet of Beth el. And so literally did the judgment announced of old come to pass, that the bodies of the idol-priests were slain upon the altars at which they had ministered. And not only in Beth-el, but in the furthest cities of Samaria — as the chronicler graphically and pathetically puts it (2 Chronicles 34:6), “in their ruins round about”³¹ — was judgment executed, and even more severely than according to the letter of the Deuteronomic law (Deuteronomy 17:2-5); for the representatives of the old idolatry were not only stoned, but slain “upon the altars.”

It is with almost a sense of relief that we turn from scenes like these³² to the celebration of the Passover at Jerusalem by a people now at least outwardly purified and conformed to the Mosaic law. Of this festival, and the special mode of its observance, a full account is given in the Book of Chronicles³³ (2 Chronicles 35:1-19). This only need here be said, that whether as regards the circumstances of king and people, or the manner of the Paschal observance,

“surely there was not kept such a Passover from the days of the Judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah” (2 Kings 23:22).³⁴

CHAPTER 16

JOSIAH (SIXTEENTH), JEHOAHAZ (SEVENTEENTH), JEHOIAKIM (EIGHTEENTH), KINGS OF JUDAH.

Retrospect — Political History — Possible Reunion of Judah and Israel — The Fall of the Assyrian Empire — IncurSION of the Scythians — Revolt and Independence of Babylonia — The Expedition of Pharaoh Necho — Resistance of Josiah to his Progress — Battle of Megiddo — Death and Burial of Josiah — Appointment, Deposition, and Captivity of Jehoahaz — Accession of Jehoiakim — Tribute to Egypt.

(2 KINGS 23:29-36; 2 CHRONICLES 35:20; 36:5.)

THE observant student of this history must have been impressed with the seemingly strange fact that, at the final crisis in the history of Judah, when that kingdom was hastening to its fall, monarchs of such opposite religious tendencies as Ahaz and Hezekiah, Amon and Josiah, should have succeeded one another. And it reflects most unfavorably on the moral and religious condition of the people that each reformation should, within so short a period, have been followed by a counter-reformation. On the other hand, it must be felt how gracious had been the divine dealing when, in succession to monarchs who, as we cannot but think, too truly represented the real state of the nation, pious kings were raised up, as if to give space for tardy repentance and recovery. Even the history of Manasseh would, in that sense, almost seem to have borne a symbolic meaning. But especially does the mind dwell on the administration of Josiah, with its very significant re-discovery and re-publication of the Law of Moses. As neither before nor after him was there any king whose heart was so “tender,” and who so humbled himself before Jehovah (2 Kings 22:19), nor yet any who so

“turned to Jehovah with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses” (2 Kings 23:25)

— so we must surely regard his uprising at that crisis, his bearing, and his rule as of direct Divine grace and interposition.

It is when taking into wider consideration these two facts — regarding the people and the king — that we fully understand the Divine sentence of judgment upon Jerusalem and Judah (2 Kings 23:26, 27), and the personal mercy extended to Josiah (2 Kings 22:20). We have been hitherto occupied with the most important measures of his reign — that public religious reformation which had as its necessary sequence the abolition of private idolatrous practices (2 Kings 23:24). But the political history of the time is also of deepest interest.

Reference has already been made to the approximation between Judah and the remnant of Israel left in the northern kingdom. All indications point to the inference that hopes were entertained, if not plans actually formed, of a possible re-union of the two kingdoms under the sway of Josiah. Thus, just as the independent existence of Judah was about to cease, the national prospects might seem to human view more promising than for centuries past. The disappointment of these hopes must have shown that, even as Israel had at the first held the land, not by the power of man, but by the Divine appointment, so would no combination, however hopeful, succeed in restoring what only the God of Israel could bestow. And this has its lessons for the future, as well as in the past.

It has already been stated that Assyria was no longer able to suppress any attempts at independent action in Palestine. Under the brilliant but cruel reign of Asurbanipal (the son of Ezar-haddon) Assyria had reached the highest point of its might; but with it also commenced the decay of the cumbrous empire. Its beginning may be dated from the rebellion of Sammughes (Saosduchin, *i.e.*, Samul-sum-iskun), the brother of Asurbanipal and viceroy of Babylon. That rebellion was indeed crushed, and its author perished in the flames, the victor himself assuming the crown of Babylon. But already other forces were in the field. Elam-Persia, the latest conquest of Assyria, rose in rebellion. These armies were indeed vanquished in two or rather three wars; but from the east the Medes invaded Assyria. The attack was unsuccessful, and cost the Median king, Phraortes, his life. But over Western Asia and far down to Egypt the power of Assyria was lost. And from the north of the Black Sea, from the

steppes of Russia, the Scythians swept down and overran the country to the shores of the Mediterranean, and down to the borders of Egypt. There Psammetichus succeeded in buying them off, and the majority of the barbarians returned northwards. Some writers have supposed that they came into conflict with Josiah, and that Jeremiah 4:5-6:30, as well as some of the utterances of Zephaniah, refer to this, and that the presence of the invaders was perpetuated in the later name of Scythopolis for Beth-Shean.¹ But this is, to say the least, doubtful.² When, after many years,³ the Medes succeeded in finally repelling the Scythians, Assyria was utterly exhausted, and the fall of Nineveh at hand.

But before that an event had taken place of special importance in the history of Judah. The decline of Assyria had naturally rekindled the hopes of Egypt, its rival for the empire of the ancient world. Hitherto it had always been worsted in the contests with Assyria. But now, Pharaoh-Necho (really Necho II.), the son of Psammetichus (the founder of the twenty-sixth, Saite dynasty), resolved to attack the Assyrian power. To us a special interest attaches to Necho, since he was the first to attempt joining the Red Sea with the Mediterranean, although he had finally to desist from the enterprise.⁴ Circumstances seemed indeed favorable to the expedition of Necho against Assyria. Asurbanipal had on his death (probably in 626 B.C.) bequeathed to his successor or successors⁵ a very troubled heritage. In Babylonia⁶ Nabo-palassar appears (in 626 or 625) as nominally a viceroy, but virtually independent of Assyria. The expedition of Necho, to which reference is made in 2 Kings 23:29, and at greater length in 2 Chronicles 35:20-25, was made in the year 609 B.C., or sixteen years after Nabopalassar had become ruler of Babylonia. In 2 Kings 23:29 the expedition is expressly described as against "the king of Assyria." But here a difficulty arises. According to some authorities⁷ the fall of Nineveh⁸ preceded or coincided with the accession of Nabo-palassar to the Babylonian throne in 626 B.C. In that case the expedition of Necho would have been against the Babylonian monarch, who would have been designated "King of Assyria" as successor to that power. According to other authorities the fall of Nineveh would have to be placed between the years 609 and 606 B.C. As Asurbanipal seems to have still occupied the throne in 626 B.C., and as we read of two sieges of Nineveh, it appears

most likely that this (the first) expedition of Necho was still literally against “the king of Assyria.”

Avoiding a march through the land of Judah, the Egyptian army advanced along the ordinary route followed towards the East. At the slope of the hills which separate the low coast tract south of Carmel from the great plain of Esdraelon, its progress was barred by a Judaeian army under Josiah, holding the strong position of Megiddo, the modern el-Lejjun, which commanded the valley of the Kishon (called in 1 (3) Esd. i. 27 that of Mageddo), and also access to the mountains of Samaria. It is not easy to form a definite opinion as to the motives which induced Josiah to attempt arresting the march of Necho. But probably he may have been influenced by those plans for the re-union of Israel and Judah to which reference has already been made. He may have thought that the danger to the independence of the new kingdom would be much greater if Necho succeeded in the object of his expedition than if matters continued as they were. Of the two powers which threatened Palestine — Egypt and Assyria — the former was, at that time, certainly more to be dreaded. Besides, had Josiah succeeded, he would have secured not only the gratitude of Assyria, but the virtual, if not the nominal independence of his kingdom.

It was in vain that Necho remonstrated with Josiah. In the remarkable message⁹ which his ambassadors were instructed to deliver (2 Chronicles 35:21), he probably did not refer to any special prophecies against Assyria, but rather to what he regarded as the general lesson which Josiah should derive from the history of Hezekiah, viewed in connection with subsequent events, as indicating the will of the God of Israel in regard to the destruction of Assyria. But Josiah gave not heed to the warning. A decisive battle was fought on “the plain of Megiddo” (2 Chronicles 35:22). If the reading is correct that Josiah “disguised himself,”¹⁰ we would almost be reminded of the similar device of Ahab (2 Chronicles 18:29). But the precaution, if adopted, was useless. Mortally wounded by the archers, Josiah was lifted from his chariot, and probably expired on the way to Jerusalem (2 Kings 23:30), whither they carried him. He was buried in “his own sepulcher” — apparently in the new place of sepulcher prepared by Manasseh (2 Chronicles 35:24; comp. 2 Kings 21:18, 26). General and deep was the mourning in Jerusalem and Judah for good King Josiah. The

prophet Jeremiah composed a “lament” for him, which, although now lost, seems to have been inserted in a special book of “Laments” mentioned by the Chronicler (35:25). Nay, his memory and the “lament” for him continued in Israel — and the memorial, if not some of the words, of it are preserved in Jeremiah 22:10, 18, and so late as in Zechariah 12:11.

In truth, the defeat of the Judean army and the death of Josiah, not only put an end to his great reformatory movement, and to the hopes of the possible re-union and recovery of Israel and Judah, but it sounded the knell of Jewish independence. Henceforth Judah was alternately vassal to Egypt or Babylonia. According to 1 Chronicles 3:15, Josiah had four sons,¹¹ of whom the eldest, Johanan, seems to have died, either before his father or perhaps in the battle of Megiddo. The other three, arranging them in the order of age, were Eliakim, afterwards called Jehoiakim; Shallum, afterwards called Jehoahaz; and Zedekiah. On the death of Josiah “the people of the land” made and anointed,¹² as his successor, not the eldest royal prince, but his younger brother Shallum, who, on his accession, assumed the name Jehoahaz, “Jehovah holds up” (comp. 2 Kings 23:30, with Jeremiah 22:11, and 1 Chronicles 3:15). From the fate which so speedily overtook him, we may infer that the popular choice of Jehoahaz was largely influenced by his opposition to Egypt. Of his brief reign of three months and, according to Josephus,¹³ ten days, we only know that “he did the evil in the sight of Jehovah.” If Josephus also characterizes him as “impure in his course of life,” this may refer to the restoration of the lascivious rites of his grandfather’s reign.

Meantime, Necho had, after the battle of Megiddo, continued his march towards Syria. Thither, at Riblah (the modern Ribleh, on the Orontes) “in the land of Hamath,” the victor summoned the new Jewish king.¹⁴ On his arrival, Jehoahaz, who had been crowned without the leave of Necho, was put in bonds. Necho does not seem, on this occasion, to have pursued his expedition against Assyria. The great battle at Carchemish, to which the chronicler refers by anticipation (2 Chronicles 35:20), was fought on a second expedition, three years later, when the Egyptian army under Necho was defeated with great slaughter by Nebuchadnezzar, the son of Nabopalassar. This was after the fall of Nineveh, and when the Babylonian or Chaldean empire had taken the place of the Assyrian. But on the present occasion Necho seems to have returned, before encountering the

Assyrians, into Egypt, whither “he brought”¹⁵ with him Jehoahaz, who died in captivity.

The Pharaoh appointed, in room of Jehoahaz, his brother Eliakim, who ascended the throne at the age of twenty-five, being two years older than Jehoahaz (2 Kings 23:31). After a not uncommon practice (Comp. Genesis 41:45; Ezra 5:14; Daniel 1:7), and to show how entirely the new king was his subject, Necho changed his name, Eliakim, into Jehoiakim — “Jehovah setteth up” — the selection of the name being probably determined by a regard for its effect upon the people. A tribute of 100 talents of silver and one talent of gold was imposed upon the land. This sum, so small as compared with the tribute formerly imposed by Tiglath-pileser on Menahem of Samaria (2 Kings 15:19), and that given to Sennacherib by Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:14), and amounting to only about 37,500 pounds in silver and 6,750 pounds in gold, affords evidence of the impoverishment of the country. After the example of Menahem of Samaria (2 Kings 15:20), Jehoiakim raised the tribute by a general tax upon the land. It was an ominous precedent to follow. But, to use the language of a great writer,¹⁶ the twenty-three years which elapsed between the decease of Josiah and the final deportation to Babylon, were only “the dying time” of the kingdom of Judah.

CHAPTER 17

JEHOIAKIM (EIGHTEENTH), JEHOIACHIN (NINETEENTH), ZEDEKIAH (TWENTIETH), KING OF JUDAH.

Character of Jehoiakim's Reign — Sketch of the History of Media — Sketch of the History of Babylonia — Fall of Nineveh — The new Babylonian Empire — Second Expedition of Necho — Battle of Carchemish — Advance of Nebuchadnezzar — State of Things in Jerusalem — Partial Spoil of the Temple — Return of Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon — Jehoiakim first Prisoner, then Tributary — Rebellion of Jehoiakim — Death of Jehoiakim and Accession of Jehoiachin — Siege of Jerusalem — Surrender of Jehoiachin — His Fate — First Deportation to Babylon — Accession and Reign of Zedekiah — The Rebellion of Zedekiah — Advance of Nebuchadnezzar — Siege of Jerusalem — State of matters in the City — Brief Relief owing to the Advance of an Egyptian Army — Resumption of the Siege — Capture of part of the City — Flight and Capture of Zedekiah — The Sentences at Riblah — Burning of the Temple, Destruction of the City, and Deportation of Captives — The Prophet Jeremiah — Appointment of Gedaliah — The Court at Mizpah — Murder of Gedaliah — Pursuit and Flight of the Murderers — Retreat into Egypt — Last Prophecies of Jeremiah — End of the Earthly Davidic Rule — The Desolate Land keeps her Sabbaths.

**(2 KINGS 24, 25; 2 CHRONICLES. 36:5-END;
WITH CORRESPONDING PASSAGES FROM
THE BOOKS OF JEREMIAH AND OF EZEKIEL.)**

The reign of Jehoiakim, which lasted eleven years, was in every respect most disastrous. In truth, it was the beginning of the end. The reformatory work of Josiah gave place to a restoration of the former idolatry (comp. 2 Chronicles 36:8). As in previous reigns, it was connected with complete demoralization of the people (comp. Jeremiah 7:9-15; 17:2; 19:4-9; Ezekiel 8:9-18). And this not only among the laity, high and low, but equally

among the priests and prophets (comp. Jeremiah 23:9-14). All the louder rose the voices of the prophets' Jeremiah, Urijah, and Habakkuk. But their warnings were either unheeded and scorned, or brought on them persecution and martyrdom (2 Kings 24:4; Jeremiah 26:10, 11; and especially verses 20-23). Otherwise, also, it was a wretched government, characterized by public wrong, violence, oppression, and covetousness. While the land was impoverished, the king indulged in luxury, and built magnificent palaces, or adorned towns, by means of forced labor, which remained unpaid, and at the cost of the lives of a miserable enslaved people (Jeremiah 22:13-18; Habakkuk 2:9-17).

In these circumstances the crisis could not be long delayed. As previously stated, three years after his first expedition, Necho once more advanced against the rival empire in the east. There great changes had taken place. Nineveh had fallen under the combined assault of Nabopalassar, king of Babylonia, and Kyaxares, king of the Medes. Notices, however brief, of these events seem necessary for the more complete understanding of this history.¹

Media, by which name we understand the district in Asia reaching from south of the Caspian Sea, but east of the Zagros mountain, down to Elam (Susiana), seems to have been inhabited by a twofold population: the earlier settlers being of non-Arian, the later of Arian descent. Their history first emerges into clear light during the reign of Tiglath-pileser II., who incorporated into the Assyrian empire districts of Media, these conquests being continued by Sargon and Sennacherib. Media regained its independence during the reign of Asurbanipal (668-626, B.C.) when, as previously noted, Phraortes of Media made an unsuccessful inroad upon Assyria. His successor, Kyaxares (633-593, B.C.), in conjunction with Nabopalassar of Babylonia, put an end to the Assyrian empire and destroyed Nineveh.² But the independence of Media did not long continue. Astyages, the successor of Kyaxares, was dethroned by Cyrus (in 558, B.C.), and his kingdom incorporated with Persia.

The other, and in this history more important factor in the destruction of the Assyrian empire, was Babylonia, which took its place. Babylonia, also known to us as "the land of the Chaldees," was bounded in the north by Armenia and Media as far as Mount Zagros,³ in the west by the Arabian

desert; in the south by the Persian Gulf; and in the east by Elam (Susiana). Its population was of twofold race. The earliest inhabitants were non-Semitic — the Accadians. To them the culture of the people is really due, and they were the inventors of the so-called cuneiform writing. To these inhabitants there joined themselves at any rate so early as in the third millennium before our era, Semitic immigrants, coming from Arabia. They occupied, in the first place, Southern Babylonia, in and around Ur, whence they gradually spread northwards, slowly gaining the mastery over the earlier nationality, but receiving the impress of its culture. These settlers were what we know by the name of the Chaldees. To the earlier history of Babylonia and its relations with Assyria, we have, so far as necessary for our present purpose, already adverted in connection with Merodach-baladan. Without here entering into the troubled period of the contests between Assyria (under Tiglath-pileser, Sargon, and Sennacherib) and Babylonia for its independence, we recall the rebellion of Saos-duchin, the brother of Asurbanipal, whom he had appointed viceroy of Babylon. After the suppression of that rising, and the death of Saosduchin, Asurbanipal himself assumed the crown of Babylon. But, as we have seen, his successors could not maintain the supremacy of Assyria. After the final defeat of the Scythians, the Medes, under Kyaxares, were advancing a second time against Assyria. The last king of that empire was purposing himself to make a stand against them. But Nabopalassar, instead of holding Babylonia for Assyria, had turned against it, and made common cause with the enemy, cementing the new alliance by the marriage of his son, Nebuchadnezzar, with Amytis, the daughter of Kyaxares. The two armies now marched against Nineveh, which made brave resistance. Saracus destroyed himself in the flames of his palace, and Nineveh was utterly laid waste.

With Nabopalassar, who founded the new Babylonian empire, began the period of the Chaldees — as they are chiefly known to us in Scripture. Here we may at once indicate that he was succeeded by his son, Nebuchadnezzar (or Nebuchadnezzar), and he in turn by his son, Evil-merodach, who, after two years' reign, was dethroned by his brother-in-law, Neriglissar. After four years (559-556, B.C.) Neriglissar was succeeded by his youthful son, Laborosoarchod. After his murder, Nabonidos (Nabunit, Nabunaid) acceded to the government, but after seventeen years'

reign (555-539 B.C.) was dethroned by Cyrus. The eldest son of Nabonidos, and heir to the throne, was Belshazzar, whom we know from the Book of Daniel, where, in a not unusual manner, he is designated as the son, that is, the descendant of Nebuchadrezzar (Daniel 5:2, 11, 18). We infer that, while his father, Nabonidos, went to meet Cyrus, to whom he surrendered, thereby preserving his life, Belshazzar had been left as “king” in Babylon,⁴ at the taking of which he perished in the night of his feast, described in Holy Scripture.

From these almost necessary digressions we return to the Biblical history. It was three years after his first expedition that Pharaoh Necho once more turned his arms against the eastern empire. Even the direction of his march, as indicated by the battle fought at Carchemish, shows that the expedition was really intended against Assyria. But Nineveh had fallen, and the Egyptian army was encountered by the youthful heir to the new Babylonian empire, Nebuchadrezzar — in the inscriptions Nabukudurri-usur⁵ — “Nebo, protect the crown.” The Egyptian army was thoroughly defeated and followed by the victorious Nebuchadrezzar, who now recovered the Assyrian possessions in Western Asia, which had been lost in the previous reign. The date of this battle deserves special attention. For the victory of Carchemish (606 or 605 B.C.) was gained by the Babylonian army in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 46:2), and it was in the same fourth year of his reign that Jeremiah made Baruch write in a book his prophetic denunciations of judgment (Jeremiah 36:1). The conjunction of these two events is deeply significant.

What followed can be easily understood. As Nebuchadrezzar advanced towards Palestine (2 Kings 24:1) — in the fifth year of the reign of Jehoiakim — the Jewish king, in abject fear, proclaimed a national fast (Jeremiah 36:9). Whether this was done from superstition, or for the sake of popular effect, or else in hope of conciliating the prophet and his adherents, certain it is that the professed repentance was hypocritical. The book of Jeremiah’s prophecies, which Baruch had publicly read on that occasion, was cut in pieces by the king himself, and thrown on the fire (Jeremiah 36:22, 23). Jeremiah and Baruch only escaped imprisonment, if not death, by timely concealment. Nevertheless, Nebuchadrezzar appeared in Jerusalem. Jehoiakim, who would be regarded as a vassal of Egypt, was bound in fetters, with the intention of being carried to Babylon. This,

however, was not done — perhaps because of the summons which rapidly recalled Nebuchadrezzar to Babylon. But the vessels of the temple⁶ were sent to Babylon, and placed, first in the victor's palace, and then in the temple of his god — probably Bel-Merodach or Belus (comp. 2 Kings 24:13; 2 Chronicles 36:6, 7; Jeremiah 35:11; 36:29-31; Daniel 1:2; and for the date also Jeremiah 25:1).⁷ During the Syrian campaign of Nebuchadrezzar his father, Nabopolassar, had sickened. Tidings of his death now induced the heir to the crown speedily to return to Babylon, committing his Jewish, Phoenician, Syrian, and Egyptian captives, together with the spoil, to his subordinates (Jos. *Ant.* x. II, 1).

Jehoiakim was allowed to remain for three years as a tributary to Babylonia (2 Kings 24:1). At the end of that time he rebelled. Nebuchadrezzar, who was probably detained by domestic affairs, left his punishment, in the first place, in the hands of his Chaldean garrisons, and of the old hereditary enemies who surrounded Judah. In the latter respect it is specially significant that the account in the Book of Kings attributes this to the direct agency of the Lord, in fulfillment of His purpose of judgment (2 Kings 24:2). The king of Egypt, who probably was not without share in the rebellion of Jehoiakim, did not venture to come to the aid of the land which was overrun by the enemy (2 Kings 24:7). In the midst of these troubles Jehoiakim died — perhaps by the hand of his assailants. The king who had wrought so much evil (2 Kings 24:4), and who had brought such misfortunes on his land, descended into the grave unmourned and unhonored (Jeremiah 22:18, 19; 36:30).

Jehoiakim was succeeded by his son, Jehoiachin (“Jehovah confirms”), a youth of eighteen years,⁸ who reigned for only three months and ten days (2 Chronicles 36:9). He occupied the throne when Nebuchadrezzar himself appeared a second time on the soil of Palestine (2 Kings 24:11). It is impossible to determine whether what now happened was in punishment of the previous rebellion, or because the young king was guilty of similar intrigues with Egypt. From the indications in Holy Scripture we are led to suppose that the queen-mother, Nehushta (“the brazen”), the daughter of Elnathan, an influential prince of Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:8; Jeremiah 36:12, 25), had considerable share in the events of this brief reign. We infer this, on the one hand, from the connection of her father with Egypt (Jeremiah

26:22), and on the other from the pointed references to her and her fate (2 Kings 24:12; Jeremiah 13:18; 22:26; 29:2).⁹

At first the siege of Jerusalem was entrusted to subordinate officers. But when the fall of the city seemed near Nebuchadnezzar himself appeared. Jehoiachin, together with the queen-mother, the court, the princes, and the leaders seem to have surrendered to the victor. The punishment inflicted on the city was of signal severity. All the treasures of the temple and the palace were carried away, the heavier furnishings of the sanctuary¹⁰ being cut in pieces. Thus was the word of the Lord, long and often spoken, fulfilled (2 Kings 24:12, 13). The king himself, his mother, his wives, and all the officials, whether of the court, the state, or the army, were carried to Babylon. Nay, to make sure of the permanence of the conquest, “all Jerusalem” — in the sense of what made it the capital — and all who in any sense were “strong and apt for war” — who could either lead, or fight, or prepare the means for it — were carried into captivity. Their number is roughly stated as 11,000 (11,023[?] comp. Jeremiah 52:28),¹¹ comprising 3,000 ranked as “princes” and leading citizens, 7,000 soldiers (10,000, 2 Kings 24:14), and 1,000 craftsmen, especially smiths (2 Kings 24:13-16). Considering that the total population of Jerusalem at that time — including women and children — is only calculated at between 50,000 and 60,000 souls, only a sparse remnant can have been left behind — and that wholly composed of “the poorest sort of the people of the land.” Among the captives was also the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:1, 2; 40:1, comp. Jeremiah 29:1).

We may as well here relate the sequel of Jehoiachin’s history. For thirty-seven years he lingered in a Babylonian prison. At the end of that period Evil-merodach (“the man of Merodach”), the son and successor of Nebuchadnezzar, showed him favor. Selected from out the other captive kings he was restored to rank, admitted to the royal table as one of the vassals at the court of the Babylonian monarch, and had a regular allowance assigned to him suited to the wants of his family and establishment. This continued till his death, the date of which is uncertain (2 Kings 25:27-30; Jeremiah 52:31, 34).¹²

We now rapidly near the close of this history. On his departure from Jerusalem Nebuchadnezzar had, with singular generosity, appointed a king

of the old Davidic lineage. His choice had fallen on Mattaniah (“the gift of Jehovah”), whose name was changed¹³ into Zedekiah (“the righteousness of Jehovah”). The new king was the uncle of Jehoiachin, being the youngest son of Josiah by the same mother as Jehoahaz (comp. 2 Kings 23:31). The eleven years of his reign may be summed up in the brief formula which described that of Jehoiakim, as of so many others: “he did the evil in the sight of Jehovah.” And significantly the sacred text adds:

“For because of the anger of Jehovah did it come to pass in Jerusalem and in Judah, until He cast them out from His presence. And Zedekiah rebelled against the King of Babylon” (2 Kings. 24:20).¹⁴

The “rebellion” of Zedekiah was the more culpable and aggravated that he had taken a solemn oath of fidelity to Nebuchadrezzar (2 Chronicles 36:13; Ezekiel 17:13). The precise circumstances which led up to his attempt at independence cannot be fully ascertained. Still there are sufficient indications to show the progress of what ultimately ended in open revolt.¹⁵ The first care of the new king must have been to gather around him counselors and people. As all the most prominent and able men of Judah were in captivity, the task would in any circumstances have been one of extreme difficulty. In the present instance the measures taken seem to have been disastrous. The capital and the Temple were the scene of every idolatry (Ezekiel 8), while the administration of justice would appear to have been of the worst kind (Jeremiah 21:11, 12). It was not long before political intrigues began. Soon ambassadors from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon, appeared at the court of Zedekiah — no doubt to deliberate about a combined movement against Babylonia (Jeremiah 27).¹⁶ Perhaps the contemplated rising was connected with troubles which Nebuchadrezzar had at that time to encounter in Elam (comp. Jeremiah 49:34-39).¹⁷ But all such hopes were doomed to speedy disappointment. Zedekiah now deemed it prudent to send ambassadors to Babylon to assure his suzerain of his fidelity. The messengers also carried with them letters from Jeremiah to the exiles, who seem to have been in a state of restless expectation, probably due to the plans of Zedekiah (Jeremiah 29:1 and follow.). This was in the fourth year of Zedekiah (Jeremiah 28:1). How such hopes were fostered by false prophets appears from Jeremiah 28, which records the predictions of one Hananiah, and the Divine punishment which overtook him. The embassy to Babylon seems not to

have appeased the suspicions of Nebuchadrezzar, and Zedekiah had to appear personally in Babylon (Jeremiah 51:59). This closes the first scene in the drama.

The next scene opens with fresh intrigues — this time chiefly with Egypt (Ezekiel 17:15-18) — probably through the numerous Judaeans immigrants to that country (Jeremiah 24:8). Neighboring tribes, were, however, also implicated. Whether Zedekiah now deemed himself sufficiently strong with the help of Egypt, or else it was impossible any longer to conceal the plans of the allies, certain it is that he now openly rebelled (2 Kings 24:20). His punishment came quickly. Nebuchadrezzar advanced with his army, and pitched his camp at Riblah — significantly, the same place where Jehoahaz had been cast into bonds by Necho (2 Kings 23:33). Riblah remained the headquarters of the Babylonian army, as being a convenient point whence to operate against Palestine and Tyre on the one side, and on the other against Ammon and Moab (Ezekiel 21:19, 20, 22, 28; 26:1-7). Presently all Judaea was overrun. Indeed, it was entirely defenseless, with the exception of the fortified towns of Lachish, Azekah, and Jerusalem (Jeremiah 34:7). Against Jerusalem itself Nebuchadrezzar and his host now laid siege. This was on the tenth day of the tenth month of the ninth year of Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:1; Jeremiah 39:1).

In the city, the greatness of the danger gave rise to what might have seemed feelings of repentance, alternating, however, with opposite tendencies, as amidst the general stupefaction and helplessness one or the other party had the upper hand. In the midst of it all the king seemed as one utterly lost. At first all was energy. The useless houses which the kings and the nobles had reared, were thrown down, and their place and materials used for the defenses of the city (Jeremiah 33:4). It was a vain measure — and these defenses only became the graves of those who held them. Popular measures also were adopted. The king made a covenant with the people, and a solemn proclamation restored freedom to all of Hebrew nationality — men and women — whom previous exactions, violence, and unrighteousness had reduced to, or kept in, slavery (Jeremiah 34:8, 9). The “princes” sulkily submitted. But during the brief time that the Babylonians withdrew to meet the Egyptian army, they not only ignored what had been done, but once more reduced to bondage those who had so lately been set free (Jeremiah 34:10, 11).

As for Zedekiah himself, his conduct was characterized by that helpless perplexity and vacillation, which were the outcome of weakness and want of religious conviction. Deputations were sent to Jeremiah for inquiry of the LORD, and appeal to Him in name of past deliverances (Jeremiah 21:1, 2; 37:3). And yet, at the same time, the king imprisoned and maltreated the prophets. All this according as his nobles either opposed or protected Jeremiah. Yet when the prophet clearly set before the king the certain alternative of resistance and captivity, or else surrender and safety (Jeremiah 34:2-6, 38:17,18), Zedekiah could form no decision. Most characteristic of the situation is Jeremiah 38. As we read it, the king first yielded to his princes, who even ventured to charge the prophet with treacherous designs (Jeremiah 37:13), and Jeremiah was cast into a loathsome dungeon. Next, Zedekiah listened to intercessions on the other side, and Jeremiah was at least removed from the subterranean prison, where his feet had sunk in mire, and more humanely treated. Then the king actually sent for him and consulted him. Nay, he not only most solemnly swore to protect him, but seemed willing to follow his advice and surrender to the Chaldeans. But once more fear prevented his taking that step, notwithstanding the assurances of Jeremiah. In the end Zedekiah was even in fear that his nobles should hear of his conference with the prophet, and bade him give a different interpretation to their interview.

Meantime the siege was continuing, without hope of relief. Tyre suffered straits similar to those of Jerusalem, while Ammon, Moab, Edom, and the Philistines had not only withdrawn from the alliance, but were waiting to share in the spoil of Judah (Ezekiel 25). At length a gleam of hope appeared. An Egyptian army, under their King Hophra, the grandson of Necho, advanced through Phoenicia, and obliged the Chaldeans to raise the siege of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 37:5-7). The exultation and reaction in Jerusalem may be imagined — and it was probably in consequence of it that Jeremiah, who still predicted calamity, was cast into prison (*ib.* ver. 4). But the relief of Jerusalem was brief. The Egyptian army had to retire, and the siege of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans was resumed, and that under even more disadvantageous circumstances to the besieged. To the other calamities that of famine was now added (2 Kings 25:3). Of the horrors of that time Jeremiah has left a record in the Book of Lamentations (comp. i 19; ii. 11, 12, 20; iv. 3-10). The last resistance was soon overcome. On the

ninth day of the fourth month [Tammuz], in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the enemy gained possession of the northern suburb (2 Kings 25:4; Jeremiah 39:2, 3; 52:6, 7). Before the middle gate the Babylonian captains held a council of war (Jeremiah 39:2, 3). Then the king and all the regular army sought safety in flight during the darkness of the night (Jeremiah 39:4). As the Chaldeans held the northern part of the city, they fled southwards. Between the two walls, through the Tyropoeon, then out of the “fountain-gate,” and through the king’s garden, they made haste to gain the Jordan. But their flight could not remain unobserved. They were pursued and overtaken in the plains of Jericho. The soldiers dispersed in various directions. But the king himself and his household were taken captives, and carried to the headquarters at Riblah, where Nebuchadrezzar himself was at the time. Here Zedekiah was formally arraigned and sentence given against him. His daughters were set free, but his sons were slain before him. It was the last sight the king saw. His eyes were put out;¹⁸ he was bound hands and feet with double fetters of brass, and so carried to Babylon. (Compare 2 Kings 25:4-7; Jeremiah 4-7; 43:6; Ezekiel 12:12, 13.) There he died in ward¹⁹ (Jeremiah 52:11).

The remainder of this mournful tale is soon told. After the flight and capture of the king, the city could not long hold out. A month later,²⁰ and on the seventh day of the fifth month (Ab) Nebuzar-adan [“Nebo gave posterity”] penetrated into the city. The Temple was set on fire, as well as the king’s palace. The whole city was reduced to ruins and ashes, and the walls which had defended it were broken down (2 Kings 25:9, 10). After three days the work of destruction was completed; and ever afterwards was the 10th (9th) of Ab mourned as the fatal day of Jerusalem’s fall²¹ (Jeremiah 52:12; Zechariah 7:3, 5; 8:19). “The rest of the people left in the city,” and those who had previously passed to the enemy, together “with the remnant of the multitude,” were carried away (2 Kings 25:11). We can scarcely be mistaken in regarding these captives as the chief part of the non-combatant population of Jerusalem and Judah.

The capture of Jerusalem found Jeremiah in prison for his faithfulness in announcing the coming ruin, and for warning his people of their impending fate. But the same faith and faithfulness led him there to yet loftier display of the prophetic character than even when bearing steadfast testimony amidst gainsaying, persecution, and suffering. In that prison, and in full

view of the impending desolation, he announced, with the same firm faith as formerly the judgments upon Israel, not only the terrible doom that would overtake Babylon (Jeremiah 51:1), but also the certain restoration of Israel. And in sublime confidence of this event, he bought while in prison — in this also obedient to the Divine direction — fields in Anathoth, as it were in anticipation of the return of his people to their own land (Jeremiah 32:6-23). And beyond this did his rapt vision descry a better and spiritual restoration of Israel (Jeremiah 32:37-44). Assuredly, viewing the Prophet in the surroundings of his time and circumstances, it is not easy to understand how any one can fail to perceive either the sublime dignity of the prophetic office, or the Divine character of prophecy.

But the end has not yet been fully told. All of any value in the Temple that could be removed, either whole or when broken up, was taken to Babylon. As already stated, the general population of Jerusalem and of Judah were carried into captivity. Only the poorest in the land were left to be husbandmen and vine-dressers, so as not to leave the soil uncultivated — probably in expectation of a future colonization from Babylonia. Lastly, signal punishment was dealt out to those who were regarded as ringleaders or as representative persons during the late rebellion. “Seraiah,²² the chief priest” (high priest), “Zephaniah,²³ the second priest” (probably the substitute of the high priest), “and the three keepers of the door” — that is, the chiefs of the Levites who kept watch at the three Temple gates (Jeremiah 38:14), were brought before the court which sat at Riblah, and executed. The same punishment as that of the Temple officials was meted out to the royal officers in the city — the chamberlain who had charge of the troops,²⁴ five of the king’s councilors, and the secretary of the general of the army. With these were executed sixty of the people of the land, either as prominent in the late rebellion, or as representing the people generally.

The civil administration of the country was entrusted by Nebuchadrezzar to Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam. The latter had held a high position in the reign of Josiah (2 Kings 22:12), and was even more distinguished for the piety and courage which saved the life of Jeremiah in the time of Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 26:24). The same adherence to the prophetic Word had induced Gedaliah to support the unpopular advice of submission to Nebuchadrezzar. Information of all that passed in the city would no doubt

reach the camp of the Chaldeans, and it would be in consequence of what he had heard that Nebuchadrezzar appointed Gedaliah to his post. It was also this, as well as respect for the prophet and his office, which must have induced the king to give such charge about Jeremiah to Nebuzar-adan, his chief captain (Jeremiah 39:11-14; 40:1-4). The prophet was apparently set at liberty, but afterwards, by some mistake, carried with the other captives in chains to Ramah. Here the error was discovered, and Nebuzar-adan gave the prophet the choice of either going to Babylon, where all honorable provision should be made for him, or of settling in any part of the country. With true patriotic feeling, as well as in accordance with his prophetic work, Jeremiah chose to remain with the new Jewish governor, in order to support his authority, and to guide by his counsel the remnant of the people. But even this proved a thankless and a hopeless task.

Gedaliah had taken up his residence in the ancient historic Mizpah. Thither all that was left of Judah's representative men gathered, as also the wives, daughters, and children of the slain and the captives. Thither also came the fugitives who had sought safety in neighboring lands, as well as the remnants of the dispersed Jewish army. A court was being formed, and the governor was surrounded by a Chaldean and Jewish guard (Jeremiah 40:6-end; 41:3; 43:6). It even seems as if a kind of sanctuary had been set up (Jeremiah 41:5). For a brief time it appeared as if not only peace but a measure of prosperity were to be vouchsafed to the remnant of Judah. But once more all such hopes were disappointed. The rule of Gedaliah lasted only two months.

Chief among them who had come to him was Ishmael, the son of Nathaniah, himself of the seed royal. Partly in the hope of possessing himself of the government, to which his descent might lead him to aspire, and partly at the instigation of Baalis, the king of the Ammonites — who no doubt had purposes of his own in the matter — Ishmael put himself at the head of a gang of conspirators (comp. 2 Kings 25:25; Jeremiah 40:8-16). In vain the generous Gedaliah was warned of his danger. Incapable of treachery himself, he would not believe in that of others, nor sanction measures of needful self-defense. Accordingly the plan of the conspirators was carried out. Gedaliah and all who were around him were massacred, and their dead bodies cast into the pit which, long before, Asa the king had

made, for fear of Baasha, king of Israel (Jeremiah 41:1-9). Only ten men escaped slaughter by promises of rich supplies to the conspirators.

But even so the measure was not full. After his bloody success at Mizpah, Ishmael had carried away captive not only the women, but all the people, with the intention of passing over to the Ammonites. But when tidings of the crimes perpetrated reached Johanan, the son of Kareah, and the captains of the forces in the fields, who had formerly in vain warned Gedaliah of his danger (Jeremiah 40:13-16), they mustered to avenge the wrong. They pursued and overtook Ishmael at Gibeon. The captive Jews now made common cause with their deliverers, and Ishmael escaped with only eight followers into Ammon. But the faith of Johanan and his companions was not equal to the occasion. Afraid that the Chaldeans would avenge on them the treachery and slaughter at Mizpah, they drew off towards Egypt. With hypocritical pretense of a desire that Jehovah might through His prophet show them whither to go and what to do, they approached the prophet. Jeremiah was to inquire of the LORD — and they gave solemn promise implicitly to obey the voice of Jehovah. Yet all the time they had resolved to retire into Egypt. And so Jeremiah told them when he brought them the twofold message from his God, that they might dismiss all fear of the Chaldeans if they remained in the land; but that if they sought safety in Egypt, the sword of the conqueror, who would smite down their protector, should surely overtake them.

The warning was in vain. The message of Jeremiah was represented as only the outcome of his own and of Baruch's personal resentment; and the leaders of Judah carried the feeble remnant to Tahpanhes in Egypt — there yet again to hear the voice of the aged prophet, announcing the coming judgment on the country, where, in their unbelief and hard-heartedness, they had sought shelter (comp. Jeremiah 42 and 43).

So the last remnant of Judah had gone from the land. The Davidic rule had passed away, so far as merely earthly power was concerned. The Davidic kingdom to come would be wider, higher, deeper. It would embrace the brotherhood of man; it would reach up to heaven; it would root in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

But over all the land would be desolateness and stillness. Yet was it a "stillness unto God." The land was keeping long-neglected silent Sabbath

unto God' ten times, "to fulfill three-score and ten years."²⁵ It was just about seventy years²⁶ after the battle of Carchemish, which really decided the fate of Palestine and its subjection to Babylon, that, like the priests' silver trumpets at morn in the Temple, the voice of Cyrus announced the dawn of morning after the long night of exile, and summoned the wanderers from all lands to the threshold of their sanctuary (2 Chronicles 36:21-23).

Again is the land keeping Sabbath. And again is it "stillness unto God," till His Voice shall waken land and people, Whose are land and people, dominion and peace: till He shall come Who is alike the goal and the fulfillment of all past history and prophecy "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel."

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER 1

- ¹ See Vol. 6, pp. 193-213. Here we recall only these points: 1. The literal fulfillment of the prophetic predictions concerning the house of Ahab (1 Kings 21:21-24; 2 Kings 9:6-10). 2. That the reaction against the foreign idolatry introduced by Ahab and Jezebel consisted in a return not to the pure service of Jehovah, but to that under the form of the golden calves instituted by Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:27-33). In short it was an attempt to reverse the whole previous policy both in Church and State and to reconstitute the kingdom of Israel as Jeroboam had sought to found it on its original separation from Judah. And it may well have been that his slaughter of Ahaziah, and then of the princes royal of Judah (2 Kings 9:27; 10:13, 14), may, from a political point of view, have been determined by the wish to break the bonds that were re-uniting the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Lastly, we have to bear in mind the military character of the monarchy founded by Jehu, which continued under his three successors, although no: with successful results.
- ² She acted probably as *Gebhirah*, like *Maachah*, the mother of King Asa (1 Kings 15:13).
- ³ Even among non-Jewish nations we recall the name of Dido, of the same lineage and in the same century as Jezebel and Athaliah.
- ⁴ From the absence of any designation to that effect, it has been doubted whether Jehoiada was actually the high-priest. But this seems implied throughout the narrative, and also indicated in 2 Kings 12, specially in verse 10.
- ⁵ The two names are identical in meaning, and only differ in form. The signification is almost the same as that of Elisheba or Elisabeth.

- ⁶ Every probability attaches to the statement of Josephus (Ant. 9. 7, 10), that Jehosheba was the daughter of Jehoram {half-sister to Ahaziah} by another mother than Athaliah. Whether or not she was full sister of Joash, whose mother was “Zibiah of Beer-sheba” (2 Chronicles 24:1), must remain undetermined.
- ⁷ Comp. the “her” of 2 Kings 11:3, with the “them” of 2 Chronicles 22:12.
- ⁸ The twofold objection raised that, in accordance with 2 Chronicles 8:11, the wife of the high-priest could not have lived in the Temple, while, according to Nehemiah 3:20, 21, the high-priest had a house outside the Temple, is inapplicable. The former passage applies only to the *Egyptian* {foreign} wife of Solomon, while the latter only informs us of what was the rule in the time of Nehemiah. In any case it seems difficult to understand how an infant with his nurse, or with that nurse and his aunt, could have been concealed for six years in the Temple, unless that aunt resided with her husband within the precincts of the sanctuary. If, as some critic would have us believe, Jehosheba was not married at all to the priest, but only concealed with the child in the Temple, Athaliah would surely have searched out her hiding-place.
- ⁹ This is the real meaning of what is rendered in the A.V., “strengthened himself,” in 2 Chronicles 23:1.
- ¹⁰ Kings 14:27; 2 Kings 11:4; 2 Chronicles 30:6. Considerable doubt, however, prevails as to the literal reading of the “Cherethites and Pelethites.” Some regard them as appellations of Philistian clans; Kimchi even as those of two families in Israel; while most translate “executioners and couriers.” In our view, the “*Kari*,” or “*Kari tribe*,” is an appellation marking the old name of the corps, due partly to its original composition, partly, perhaps, also to the circumstances in which it was formed. The correct rendering of 2 Kings 11:4 would be: “The centurions of the Kari and the Runners.”
- ¹¹ Some have regarded this as a side-entrance. Probably this gate gave easy access to the palace, although it formed not the private royal entrance to it, which was from “the gate of the guard.”

- ¹² The word (*massach*), 2 Kings 11:6, rendered in the A.V. by “that it be not broken down,” has been variously explained; but the above gives, it is believed correctly, the meaning intended to be conveyed. The suggestions of the Rabbis are without value.
- ¹³ Minor difficulties call only for briefest explanation. The gate *Sur*, at which, according to 2 Kings 11:6, one post was placed, is evidently the same as “the gate *Yesod*” (“foundation-gate”) of 2 Chronicles 23:5. The more common explanation, that *Sur* is only a clerical error for *Yesod* (the ך dropped out, and ך for ך), is not satisfactory, and the error may lie in Chronicles rather than Kings. The LXX. does not here help us. The Rabbis hold that it was an *eastern* gate, and bore seven different names, two of them being *Sur* and *Yesod*. The latter may be true, although no serious value attaches to their archaeological notices. From the circumstance that one object of the guard was to watch the approaches from the palace to the Temple, we infer that the gate *Sur*, possibly also called *Yesod* (perhaps it marked the site of the foundation-stone), was, as the word implies, “the gate of declining,” a side-entrance into the palace; while “the gate of,” or “behind,” “the runners,” formed the ordinary and principal entrance from the palace into the Temple.
- ¹⁴ The Talmud (*Horay. 11b.*) assigns this as the reason, since ordinarily the kings in regular descent from David were not anointed. On similar grounds the Talmud accounts for the anointing of Solomon and of Jehoahaz.
- ¹⁵ 2 Chronicles 23:13. But opinions differ as to the exact locality.
- ¹⁶ The word used for “trumpets” is that commonly used of those blown by the Levites. In general, it will be observed that this reference, and that to “the people of the land” — indeed, the whole account — seem not only to confirm, but to imply that in the Book of Chronicles.

CHAPTER 2

- ¹ We have said “in a sense,” for the attentive readers of this history will not fail to distinguish the peculiar part taken by the prophets and that of the secular leaders in the movement.

- ² According to 2 Chronicles 24:15, Jehoiada died at the age of 130. And as, according to 2 Kings 12:6, the restoration of the Temple under Jehoiada took place in the twenty-third year of Joash, the high-priest must have been about 107 years old at the accession of Joash.
- ³ He is described as “satiated of days” (A.v., “full of days”). The expression is only used in regard to these five persons: Abraham, Isaac, David, Job and Jehoiada. Needless doubt has been cast on the age of Jehoiada. The computation of age in the historical books is generally very moderate and this is characterized as an exceptionally long life.
- ⁴ It has been proposed to translate, “all his days” viz., all Joash’s life long — but this is impossible; or else, “all the days that (while).” In any case, the meaning intended to be conveyed is as explained in the text.
- ⁵ The view given above is supported by the ancient versions of 2 Kings 12:2.
- ⁶ Canon Rawlinson calls attention to the desirableness in this case of an early union, since all the seed royal had been destroyed by Athaliah. He also suggests that cc the number two [wives] on which he [Jehoiada] fixed implies a desire to combine regard for the succession with a discouragement of excessive polygamy.”
- ⁷ Joash died at the age of 47.
- ⁸ The interpretation of the expression, as referring to the annual Temple tribute of a half-shekel (Exodus 30:13), is not only exegetically impossible, but there is, to say the least, no evidence that the provision of Exodus 30:12, 13 was either intended, or at the time obtained, as a permanent law. Exactly the same expression for “current money” occurs in Genesis 23:16.
- ⁹ The law did not assign to the priests any money in connection with sin-offerings. But we infer that it was the practice that the priest received some money-gift besides the flesh of the sacrifice (Leviticus 6:25-29).
- ¹⁰ See especially the articles, “Astarte” and “Baal,” in Riehm., *HandWorterb. d. Bibl. Altert.* vol. I.

- ¹¹ In Matthew 23:35 (R.V.) he is called the son of “Barachiah.” From the great age of Jehoiada at the time of his death, there is every internal reason for believing that he was succeeded, not by his son, but by his grandson.
- ¹² The story is told, though with some variations, both in the Babylonian Talmud (Sanh. 96 *b*; Gitt. 57 *b*) and in the Jerusalem Talmud (Jer. Taan. 69 *a, b*), also in the Midrash on Ecclesiastes and on Lamentations. According to Jewish tradition, the sin had been sevenfold: they had murdered one who was priest, prophet, and judge; they shed innocent blood in the court of the Temple, and it was the Sabbath, and also the Day of Atonement. See the Targum on Lamentations 2:20. It deserves special notice that there Zechariah is, exactly as in Matthew 23:35, designated “the son of Iddo” (comp. Ezra 5:1; 6:14), who was really the omitted (as in Genesis 29:5; 2 Kings 9:20), perhaps because Zechariah succeeded Iddo (Nehemiah 12:4, 16).
- ¹³ The question why, if the Temple possessed so many valuables, a collection had to be made for its necessary repairs, is easily answered by the consideration that the sale even for such a purpose of things hallowed would have been looked upon as sacrilege. The things hallowed by previous kings (2 Kings 12:18), and which Athaliah and her sons had removed for the service of Baal, were no doubt restored to the Temple on the accession of Joash.
- ¹⁴ The expression, “as one goeth down to Silla” (2 Kings 12:20), probably marks a locality, but is difficult of explanation.
- ¹⁵ The difference in the names in 2 Kings 12:21 and 2 Chronicles 24:26 is easily explained. The first name in 2 Kings, Jozachar, is in 2 Chronicles Zabad, the initial “Jo” — Jehovah — being (as easily perceived) dropped, and the Zachar (זכר) becoming, by a clerical error, Zabad (זבד). The name of the mother of the second of the murderers is given in Chronicles in the fuller form of *Shimrith*. We owe to the account in Chronicles the notice of the nationality of the two mothers.
- ¹⁶ The plural, “sons of Jehoiada,” in 2 Chronicles 24:25, is evidently a clerical error — בני for בן. So also the LXX. and Vulg.

- ¹⁷ Rabbinic writings note the strict accordance between the fate of Joash and his conduct. He cast off the yoke of the kingdom of God, so did his servants cast off the yoke of his rule; Joash forgot what he owed to Jehoiada, so did his servants what they owed to their lord; Joash killed, and he was killed; Joash heeded not the dignity of his victim, nor did his servants heed that he was a king, the son of a king.

CHAPTER 3

- ¹ The average duration of the reigns in Judah is twenty-two, that in Israel only twelve years.
- ² A comparison of 2 Kings 13:1 (“the twenty-third year”) with ver. 10, (“the thirty-seventh of Joash”) shows that these two numbers are incompatible — since, if Jehoahaz acceded in the twenty-third year of Joash, and “reigned seventeen years,” the accession of his son could not have taken place in “the thirty-seventh,” but in the fortieth or in the thirty-ninth year of the king of Judah, Without here entering into the controversy which of these two dates should be “corrected,” we assume with Josephus (*Ant.* 9. 8, 5) that the accession of Jehoahaz of Israel really took place in “the twenty-first year” of Joash, king of Judah. As, on any theory of the composition of the Books of Kings, the manifest discrepancy between the numerals in vers. 1 and 10 could not have escaped the writer there must be some explanation of it, although in the absence of definite materials, it is impossible to propose any with absolute confidence. Possibly the conciliation may lie, not in an error of transcription (כג for כז) but in the peculiar mode of calculating the years of a reign in Judah (from the month *Nisan*) differing from that obtaining in Israel. In any case, the occurrence of a discrepancy which cannot rationally be attributed to ignorance on the part of the writer, should make us careful in our inferences about other chronological difficulties, for which as yet no adequate solution has been found. It by no means follows that further researches will not bring such to light. This remark applies especially to the relation between the chronology of the Biblical documents and that on the Assyrian monuments, which admittedly is not always absolutely exact (see Herzog’s *Real-Encykl*, new edition, vol. 17., p.

475). Such prospect of future conciliation seems to us the more likely from the circumstance (fully explained in the Chronological Note A, Vol. 6. of this History) that the two chronologies agree as to the date of the fall of Samaria (722 B.C.). On the other hand, we have the curious phenomenon that the differences between them for the period before that event are not uniform and permanent, but vary as to different reigns; while we mark the still more curious fact that in the date of events after the fall of Samaria (as to which both chronologies agree) there is a divergence of thirteen years (see Schrader, *d. Keilinschr. u. d. A. T.*, end edition, p. 466). For, assuredly, when the two agree as to the fall of Samaria, it seems almost impossible that there should not be a reasonable explanation, or conciliation, of dates subsequent to it. The utter groundlessness of the bold, entire rejection by certain writers of the chronological notices in the Biblical books has been abundantly proved by Kamphausen and Riehm (see Herzog's *Real-Enc.*, u.s.p. 469). We express the more confidently our views on this point that personally we attach little intrinsic importance to such points, especially where, as in numerals, errors so easily creep in. Although, as hinted, no solution hitherto proposed has satisfied us, we may call attention to an attempt in that direction in the *Church Quarterly Review* for January, 1886. For the literature of the subject and a full discussion of it, although from the German point of view, we refer to the Art. *Zeitrechnung* (already mentioned) in Vol. 17. of the new edition of Herzog's *Real-Encykl.*

³ Comp. Vol. 6. of this History.

⁴ See the inscriptions recording the Assyrian victories and the tribute of Jehu, in Schrader, u.s., pp. 207-210.

⁵ The subject in 2 Kings 13:7 ("he") is Jehovah, and not Hazael.

⁶ We note these precise details as marking precise and accurate documentary information.

⁷ This is the correct rendering of the words.

⁸ Indeed, many interpreters understand the words "all the days" (A.V. "all their days"), as meaning "all the days of Jehoahaz." But this seems to me not a natural Hebrew construction.

- ⁹ On the lascivious worship and rites of Asherah, or Astarte, see Vol. V. of this History, p. 158, and also chapter 14.; and for a full account of it, Riehm's *Hand-Worterb. d. Bibl. Alt.* I. pp. 111-115.
- ¹⁰ Mark especially the expression, "he saved them," in ver. 27.
- ¹¹ This disposes of the controversy whether the Asherah stood in the time of Jehoahaz, or was only set up in that of Jeroboam II.
- ¹² The existence of such a biographical work was suggested in Vol. 6. pp.
- ¹³ One is tempted to say that the kings of Israel must have found these prophets exceedingly impracticable persons failing them just when in their spiritual dullness they had reckoned upon finding them on their side. In truth, they understood not any of the principles above indicated, and looked for absolute personal support on the ground of their support of certain acts and facts. It required spiritual discernment to understand that the prophets were neither political partisans nor political opponents, but might in turn be either or both. In these circumstances we need not wonder that certain modern critics understand the prophets no better than did the kings of Israel,
- ¹⁴ "Came down unto him." The expression implies, as 2 Kings 6:33, that the house of Elisha in Samaria (2 Kings 5:9; 6:32) was at the bottom of the hill on which the city was built.
- ¹⁵ See Vol. 6. of this History.
- ¹⁶ Mark here the use of the definite article, "the arrows," while in ver. 15 it is only "bow and arrows."
- ¹⁷ The LXX. alters, "the man of God was wroth," into "was grieved." This is characteristic of one class of LXX. alterations,
- ¹⁸ It need scarcely be said how absurd would be any inference from this miracle in regard to the use of "relics," — still more, to their veneration. The two cases have not anything in common; since if anything is clear, it is the unique character of this miracle.
- ¹⁹ Comp. Schrader, u.s., pp. 211, 212.

CHAPTER 4

- ¹ We mark, as regards this and other Judaeon monarchs of this period, that their mothers were “of Jerusalem.”
- ² This explanation is both natural and sufficient. There is not any reason for thinking of a “confirmation” of his accession by the king of Assyria, or that Judah was at that time “a fief” of that empire.
- ³ See for ex. Herodotus iii. 119. Curtius (vi. II) speaks of it as a legal provision that the relatives of regicides were executed along with the actual criminals; comp. Cicero *ad. Brut.* 15. In the same heathen spirit had Jehu acted (2 Chronicles 22:8).
- ⁴ Comp. Vol. 6. of this History.
- ⁵ “From 20 years old and above.”
- ⁶ But see on those numbers the remarks in Vol. 5. of this History.
- ⁷ Gold talents would have been so designated, and they would have amounted to the incredible figure of about 675,000 pounds.
- ⁸ The very difficult verse, 2 Chronicles 25:8, is generally explained by supposing that לֹא “not,” or וְלֹא has dropped out from the second clause, and that the verse should read, “But rather go thou, do — that the LORD may not make thee fall — “ This, however, seems an arbitrary solution, and we would propose to render the verse as it stands, translating כִּי אִם by “or else” (see Ewald, *Lehrb. d. hebr. Spr.* p. 861, first line): “Or else (viz. if thou wilt persist), go thou, do, be strong,” etc.
- ⁹ He styles them (ver. 9) “the band of Israel,” the same expression as in 2 Chronicles 22:1; 2 Kings 13:20; and often in the same sense.
- ¹⁰ It is at least doubtful whether these cliffs are identical with the *Akrabbim*, or “scorpion-stairs,” of Numbers 34:4; Joshua 15:3; Judges 1:36.



- ¹¹ At present the part south of the bounding ridge of chalk-hills bears specially the name, *Arabah*. Our description of the country is based chiefly on Robinson's *Bibl. Res.* ii:pp. 121-173; Badeker-Socin's *Pal.*, p. 181, etc., notices in other works (so far as accessible) being also taken into consideration, Riehm's *Hand-Worterb.* gives, as generally, a very good, albeit brief, summary of information.
- ¹² Comp. here also Tristram, *Land of Moab*, chapters iii. and iv. *passim*.
- ¹³ We regard these as "round numbers."
- ¹⁴ The other objections are weak.
- ¹⁵ According to Badeker, the whole journey from Jebel Usdum to Petra occupies only from 18 to 20 hours; and if from this we subtract about four and a half hours to the chalk cliffs which bound "the valley," we have little more than thirteen hours to travel, of which only two or three could really be called difficult. Besides, the Arabah south of the chalk cliffs bears marks of having been, when Ezion Geber stood, the road of communication from the Gulf of Akabah into Jewish territory.
- ¹⁶ *Sela* was less than forty miles from the Dead Sea.
- ¹⁷ For the origin of the name, and indeed for a detailed account of Petra, we must refer to the special literature on the subject, only specially naming Badeker's *Handbook*, and the late Dean Stanley's *Sinai and Palestine*. Upon the description of the latter (pp. 86-90) our brief account is based. Comp. also Palmer, *Desert of the Exodus*, vol. ii. chap. viii.
- ¹⁸ See it and the plan of Petra in Badeker. We only note that Petra is about halfway between the southern end of the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Akabah.
- ¹⁹ About sixteen miles south-east of the Dead Sea.
- ²⁰ In the A.V. "top of the rock."
- ²¹ Even this circumstance seems to betoken a contemporary notice.

- ²² On the character of Edomite worship, with its human sacrifices, comp. Dollinger, *Heidenth. u. Judenth.* p. 405. On Edom generally, comp. Lengerke, *Kanaan*, i. pp. 296-302. Josephus (*Ant.* 15:7, 9) speaks of a god *Koze*, worshipped by the Idumaeans. This divinity is probably the Qaziu of the Nabathean and Hauranitic inscriptions, and the Kassios of the Phoenicians. Comp. Herzog, *Real-Enc.* 4. p. 41.
- ²³ We mark as significant of the state of Amaziah, that the prophet appeals in his first message not to higher duty, but to the common sense and experience of the king (2 Chronicles 25:15). The first part of the king's reply, "Have we [viz., the king and his advisers] made thee counselor of the king?" is taken up in the reply of the prophet: "I know that God has counseled [so lit., using the same word as the king — the meaning being "determined"], because thou hast done this, and not hearkened unto my counsel" [again the same word]. To the threat of the king, "Forbear — why shouldest be smitten?" the prophet replies by announcing the king's destruction. We note, first, that the prophet does not appear to have had any previous commission to that effect; secondly, that his prediction seems an inferential prophecy, based on his knowledge of the Divine dealings; thirdly, that it was necessary, not only for the vindication of the prophet's mission, but for that of the authority of Jehovah; and, lastly, that the king's destruction was dependent on his disobedience. All these inferences embody permanent principles.
- ²⁴ See the previous note.
- ²⁵ Such is also the view of Kimchi. "Let us look one another in the face" — let us fight: as it were, see who is the better man — a characteristic Oriental phrase.
- ²⁶ This, rather than a parable.
- ²⁷ A "thornbush," not, "a thistle," as in the A.V.
- ²⁸ In the Hithpael, when the word is used in connection with war.
- ²⁹ Here the Philistines first deposited the Ark (1 Samuel 6:12-14).
- ³⁰ The ancient Jewish cubit was two spans, each of three hand-breadths, the handbreadth being four fingers wide, *i.e.*, a cubit = 6 handbreadths, = 24 fingerbreadths.

- ³¹ Less credit attaches to his notice that Jehoash had threatened to kill Amaziah unless he persuaded the inhabitants of Jerusalem to open the city to him. Evidently there could not have been any idea of holding out but Josephus may have felt it desirable thus to account for an easy capture of the city which offered such stubborn resistance to the Romans.
- ³² 2 Chronicles 25:24. But probably the booty from the Temple was inconsiderable. Comp. 2 Kings 12:18. Perhaps the name Obed-Edom, as treasurer of the Temple at that time, may in itself be significant. In any case, the special mention of the name marks this as a contemporary notice.
- ³³ That Jehoash left Amaziah on the throne indicates how completely the power of the latter must have been broken.
- ³⁴ Comp. Guerin, *La Judée* i. pp. 299, etc.; Badeker, p. 203.
- ³⁵ 2 Kings 14:20: "And they carried [*lit.* brought] him upon the horses," with the definite article, probably to mark the chariot as that in which he had gone.
- ³⁶ Similarly, the murder of Joash, the father of Amaziah, had not been followed, as in Israel, by the enthronement of one of the conspirators.

CHAPTER 5

- ¹ With the exception of 1 Chronicles 3:12, which forms part of a bare genealogical list.
- ² The **𐤒** is supposed to be confused with **𐤓**; but we can scarcely imagine a confusion so often repeated.
- ³ Of this there is not another instance in the Old Testament as regards kings.
- ⁴ This is the name always given on the Assyrian monuments, *Azrijahu*.

- ⁵ In 2 Kings 14:23, the number is 41 —  — which must be a clerical error for 51, . For a comparison of the date in 2 Kings 14:23 with that in 15:8, gives $15 + 38 = 53$ years, or deducting one at each end (the years not being full), fifty-one years. Commonly the numerals are conciliated by assuming an interregnum of ten or eleven years after the death of Jeroboam II. (2 Kings 15:8). But of this there is not the least indication in 2 Kings 14:29 — rather the contrary. Again, according to Hosea 1:1, that prophet's activity extended from the reign of Jeroboam II, to that of Hezekiah of Judah — a period almost impossible if Jeroboam II. had only reigned forty-one years. For other attempts to conciliate the numbers here and in 2 Kings 15:1, see the Art. *Zeitrechnung* (Herzog. *Real-Enc.* u.s., pp. 471, 472). We have followed Bahr in his Comment. on the passage in Lange's *Bibel-Werk*, Part vii.
- ⁶ This even if we make his reign one of forty-one years.
- ⁷ The expression in 2 Kings 14:28: “*which belonged to Judah,*” need not be struck out, as proposed by some. It indicates that it was part of the ancient territory of Judah, before the two kingdoms were divided, although it was now recovered for Israel (the northern kingdom), within whose territorial limits it was.
- ⁸ See, besides the geographical authorities previously mentioned, Robinson, *Res.*; Conder, *Heth and Moab*, pp. 7, 8; and for a different location, Porter, *Damascus*, II. pp. 355-359. On the map it must be looked for north and a little east from Baalhec.
- ⁹ Hamath itself may have been occupied by the Jews, at the time of Solomon, and in that of Jeroboam II.; but it is scarcely credible that they ever held Damascus. Hamath lies in a narrow valley between high cliffs, open only to the east and west, where the stream passes through them. The territory, as we shall see, soon passed out of the possession of Israel.
- ¹⁰ Schrader, u.s. pp. 212-217.
- ¹¹ An analysis would occupy too much space; but we may select from the opening chapter the following charges: *Idolatry*: Hosea 2:8, 13, 17; 3:1, 4; 4:12, 13, 17; Amos 4:4, 5; *Lasciviousness*: Hosea 2:4; 4:10, 11, 18; *Wickedness* and *violence* of every kind: Hosea 4:1, 2, 14; 6:8-10; Amos 2:6-8; 3:10; 4:1; 5:7, 11.

- ¹² This must be left to the study of the reader, since our limited space renders it impossible to analyze the contents of these prophetic books. They will be found to cast considerable light on the political history of the time as described in the strictly historical books, with which alone we are concerned in this Volume.
- ¹³ Comp. Hasse, *Gesch. des a. Bundes*, apud Bahr, u.s. p. 370. Generally we refer here also to the remarks of Bahr on the whole subject under consideration.
- ¹⁴ This, whatever view may be taken of his mission, or of the time when the prophetic book of Jonah was published (see note at the end of this chapter). If the Book of Jonah be regarded as a grand allegory of the message of God's grace to the Gentiles, reluctantly borne to them by Israel: this will only increase the significance of the fact referred to in the text.
- ¹⁵ There seems no reason to suppose that this prophecy is preserved in Isaiah 15, 16.
- ¹⁶ Unless we are to regard Joel 2:32 as pointing to a still earlier prophet.
- ¹⁷ Of the prophet Isaiah we purposely write not in this place.
- ¹⁸ It lay on the eastern boundary of Zebulun {Joshua 19:13}, and is probably represented by a modern village (El Meshed) about an hour north of Nazareth. (A strange historical coincidence this.)

¹⁹ This is not the place for critical discussions. But in the political relations between the northern kingdom and Assyria, such a mission as that of Jonah to Nineveh seems certainly both possible and credible. Again, modern researches have confirmed the account of the size of Nineveh in Jonah 3:3. Objection has been taken on the ground that the Hebrew of the book contains words of later formation (Aramaisms). But competent authorities have contended that these words and forms are purely north-Israelitic, and hence not indicative of a later period. In any case such objections could only apply in regard to the precise date when the book in its present form was published — not to its connection with the prophet Jonah, the son of Amittai, as its author. And, as Bleek has pointed out, the book does not anywhere mention Jonah himself as the actual writer of it, at least, in its present form. On the question of the historical character of its details, or else of its being only a great prophetic allegory, founded, however, on a substratum of historical fact, we do not feel called upon here to enter. In either case the point would not affect its Divine authority, its reality, or its lessons.

CHAPTER 6

¹ This is the view of Kleinert in Riehm's *Hand-Worterb* ii. p. 1704a.

Others have regarded the numeral 27 (כַּבֵּי) as a clerical error for 15 (טוּ). In any case Uzziah could not have acceded in the 27th year of Jeroboam, as appears from a comparison with 2 Kings 14:2, 17, 23.

² This seems even implied by the otherwise strange addition in 2 Kings 14:22: "after the king fell asleep." Comp. the same in 2 Chronicles 26:2.

³ Bahr, u.s., p. 376.

⁴ It is the tenth station on the road from Cairo to Mecca.

- ⁵ For the present Masoretic text: **הַמְבִין בְּרֵאוֹת** (in the A.V. “understanding in the visions”) we have evidently to read (the second word) **בְּיִרְאָה**, “in the fear” — as many *Codd.*, the LXX., Syr. Targ., the Jewish, and mostly all Christian interpreters. The first word should then be rendered either “understanding” in the fear of God (so the LXX.) or “instructing” in it. We prefer the latter interpretation (with the Syr. Targ., Rabbis, and many interpreters). The expression occurs in the same sense in Nehemiah 8:9. This Zechariah is not otherwise known. Needless to say that he was not the “prophet” of that name; nor even he that is mentioned in Isaiah 8:2, who lived a generation later.
- ⁶ See Vol. 6.
- ⁷ On this tribe and the confederacy generally, compare Vol. 6. It seems to me likely, that even if Gur-Baal is not identical with Gerar, about three hours to the south-west of Gaza (see the Targ.), it must be sought in that neighborhood. From Philistia in the S.W. evidently a line of defense is drawn to the extreme S.E. — the territory of Ammon. Near Gerar — the localization of which is not, however, absolutely certain, opens the wady which, starting from Hebron, stretches down to Beersheba.
- ⁸ Possibly Hosea 5:10 may contain an allusion to this, although perhaps more likely to events in the reign of Jotham (comp. 2 Chronicles 27:5).
- ⁹ So, and not as in the A.V. “slings to cast stones.” The armament was that common to the nations of antiquity.
- ¹⁰ We purposely omit reference to the Assyrian inscription, which records an attempted alliance between Hamath and nineteen cities of the district, and Azriyahu — Azariah or Uzziah (Schrader, V. 5, pp. 217-227). It is quite possible that in their revolt from Assyria these cities may have sought an alliance with Uzziah, into which, however, that monarch did not enter. But the reference to Uzziah in the boastful record by Tiglath-pileser of this Syrian coalition is too shadowy to admit, in our view, any certain inference (comp. Nowack, *Assyr. Bab. Inschr.* p. 27, Note 8). Are we to regard the introduction of the name of Azriyahu as meaning literally that monarch, or only in a general sense as referring to him in his successors — just as Omri is introduced in the inscriptions? Again, are we to regard the reference as indicating a

strictly historical event? This seems scarcely possible. Or is it a general reference to, or inference from, a later policy — or does it express a suspicion, or is it only a boast? On the Assyrian chronology, in its bearing on that of Scripture, we purposely forbear entering for reasons previously indicated. An attempt at conciliation of the two chronologies (by Oppert), see at the close of Hommel, *Abriss d. Bab. Ass. u. Isr. Gesch.* Comp. also H. Brandes, *Abh. zur Gesch. d. Orients im Alterth.*

¹¹ Comp. also the notice in Jos. *Ant.* 9. 10, 4.

¹² Some critics have endeavored to maintain that, in this, Uzziah only aimed to act as David and Solomon had done, and to reassert the ancient royal right of chief conduct of the religious services. But there is absolutely not a tittle of evidence that either David or Solomon ever arrogated to themselves any strictly priestly functions, least of all that about to be mentioned.

¹³ The view here taken is that of Rashi and other Rabbinical commentators.

¹⁴ Some critics have suggested that he was then only about twenty years of age.

¹⁵ *Ant.* 9. 10, 4.

CHAPTER 7

¹ We are writing on the supposition of the correctness of the numbers in the Biblical text.

² Josephus (*Ant.* 9. 11, 1) describes him as “a friend” of the king.

³ קַבֵּל-עַם “before the (?) people” — in public view. The LXX., apparently unable to understand the Hebrew words, have left them untranslated, and made *Keblaam* the name either of the place where Zachariah was killed, or else, according to Ewald, of his murderer.

⁴ *Ant.* u.s.

⁵ According to Josephus, with his army, and gave battle to Shallum.

⁶ For a description of Tirzah see Vol. V. of this History, p. 152.

- ⁷ It seems doubtful whether this was the Tiphseh of Solomon (1 Kings 4:24), which lay on the banks of the Euphrates. The name, which means “a ford,” is so general that it may have attached to other places. At the same time it should be remembered that about that period Assyria had fallen into a state of great weakness.
- ⁸ Such horrors were not unheard of on the part of Israel though only too common in heathen warfare (2 Kings 8:12; Hosea 13:16; Amos 1:13).
- ⁹ The identity of the Biblical Pul with Tiglath-pileser II. has, we believe, been lately proved beyond the possibility of doubt. On the subject generally, comp. Sayce, *Fresh Light from the Ancient Monuments*, pp. 125-131; Schrader, *u.s.*, and the article by the same writer in Riehm’s *Hand-W.* p. 1664, etc.
- ¹⁰ About three hours north of Aleppo. Its possession did not, however, become permanent till the time of Sennacherib.
- ¹¹ The account which we have given is confirmed by the reference to, “the burden” or tribute of “the king of princes” the king of Assyria, Hosea 8:10. Some writers have regarded this event as forming the subject of the prophecy in Amos 7:1-3.
- ¹² According to Josephus he “followed the barbarity of his father” (*Ant.* ix. 11, 1).
- ¹³ Some critics have supposed that his low birth is indicated by his designation as simply “the son of Remaliah” in Isaiah 7:4, 5, 9; 8:6.
- ¹⁴ The Biblical text has 20, כ, which seems to be a transcriber’s error for ל, 30. The latter number seems required by a comparison of 2 Kings 15 32 + 33 + xvii. 1. The only alternative seems to interpose an interregnum of ten years between Pekah and Hoshea, of which, however, the Biblical text does not give any indication.
- ¹⁵ Riehm, in the elaborate Art. *Zeitrechnung* (in his *Hand-W.*) maintains that the sixteen years of Jotham’s reign consisted of twelve years of co-regency with Uzziah, and only four years of sole rule. If there had been four years of sole rule a confusion of this number with the sixteen years of his reign may have led a transcriber to the erroneous notice about the “twentieth year of Jotham” (2 Kings 15:30).

- ¹⁶ Comp. 2 Chronicles 33:14; Nehemiah 3:26, 27; Jos. *Jew. War.* 6, 1, 3. From Ophel the “water-gate” opened into Gihon and the Valley of the Kidron. Comp. here the prophecy Isaiah 32:14, where for “the forts” (in the A.V.) translate “Ophel.”
- ¹⁷ There were four gates opening from the outer, or bounding, wall of the Temple: north, south, east, and west, {comp. the watchposts of the Levites, 1 Chronicles 26:14-18. But Bishop Haneberg (*Relig., Alterth.* p. 226, 4) infers that there were six gates — that is, two (not one) respectively in the south and west. In the Temple of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 40:6-16, 20-22, 24-27) only three gates are mentioned: North, East, and South.
- ¹⁸ For this wall see 1 Kings 6:36; 7:12. Comp. Josephus, *Ant.* 8. 3, 9.
- ¹⁹ The *Kor* (more anciently designated *Homer* or rather *Chomer*)= ten *Ephah* — thirty *Seah*=100 *Omer* or *Issaron* (“tenth,” viz. of an Ephah)= 180 *Qabh* (קֶבֶץ). According to the Rabbis the Qabh held = twenty-four egg shells. Roughly speaking, the *Kor* would be less than “a quarter.”
- ²⁰ I am following the calculations of Schrader (*Keilinschr. u. d. A. Test.* pp. 142-144, and in the Article in Riehm’s *Hand-W.* According to Herzfeld (*Handelsgesch.* p. 172), the sum would amount to 18,800 pounds, but his computation is based on a misconception.
- ²¹ Some writers have supposed that there was such during the first period after the revolution headed by Pekah.
- ²² One year contemporarily with Uzziah; sixteen years contemporarily with Jotham; twelve years contemporarily with Ahaz = twenty-nine, or, allowing for the mode of reckoning years: thirty years.
- ²³ So, in 2 Chronicles 28:1, according to the reading of some *Codd.*, supported by the LXX. and the Syr. The correctness of this reading appears from a comparison with 2 Chronicles 29:1. For if Ahaz had, after sixteen years’ reign, died at the age of thirty-six, and his son succeeded him at the age of twenty-five, Ahaz must have been wedded when only ten years old. Similarly, we have to correct in 2 Kings 16:2 the numeral 20 into 25.
- ²⁴ Comp. Euseb. *Praepar. Evang.* 1. 10, 44.

- ²⁵ This is the probable meaning of “Hinnom,” although the name seems originally to have been that of a person.
- ²⁶ In 2 Kings 16:3 only one son is mentioned as passed through the fire. This seems the more likely (comp. 2 Kings 3:27; 21:6), and the plural in Chronicles is probably only a generalization. When in 2 Kings we read that he “made his son pass through the fire,” this may be either a technical expression, or it may refer to one of the original ideas or purposes of these sacrifices: that of lustration by fire. And possibly the practice may not always have been the same, and hence the original expression retained. But from the parallel passage in Chronicles there cannot be a doubt that, in this instance, as in those afterwards recorded, the unhappy victim was literally burnt. That those “passed through the fire” were really burnt, appears from a comparison of Jeremiah 32:35 with 7:31, and of Ezekiel 16:21 with 23:37. On the question whether the children were only passed through the fire or burnt in it the Rabbis have expressed different opinions. In *Yalkut on Jeremiah 7:31*, (ii. p. 61. col. *d.*) we have a realistic description of the brass figure of Moloch, hollow and filled with fire, with an ox’s head and human arms into which the children were laid. This seems to agree with the account of the Carthaginian rite (Diodor. Sic. 20. 14). Into the large literature on the subject this is not the place to enter. To the present writer it has often seemed more learned than clear. For our purpose it is more important to notice that, according to Psalm 106:37, Ezekiel 16:20, the victims seem to have been first slain and then burnt. It would thus be a terrible counterpart of the Old Test. burnt sacrifices. Josephus (*Ant.* ix. 12, 1) also states that Ahaz had actually burnt his son.
- ²⁷ The “high places” were those on which there was a sanctuary or chapel (בֵּית הַבְּמֶה) — “the hills,” those on which only an altar was reared
- ²⁸ It does not, however, necessarily follow that Ahaz himself offered the sacrifices in the sense of discharging priestly functions although 2 Kings 16:13 seems rather to lead up to this.
- ²⁹ וַיִּקְרַב: “he brought near” (2 Kings 16:14, A.V. ‘he brought’), *i.e.* he brought the one near to the other.

- ³⁰ The old altar of burnt offering, so called in contradistinction to the “golden altar” of incense in the Holy Place.
- ³¹ In the mention of the daily morning-sacrifice, the meat-offering is omitted; in that of the evening sacrifice, the burnt offering. But in both cases special mention was not required, since every burnt sacrifice had its meat-offering (Numbers 7:87; 15:2-12); while the evening sacrifice smoked all night on the altar (Leviticus 6:12, 13), so that its consummation could not be witnessed by the worshippers.
- ³² The best rendering of the difficult expression in 2 Kings 16:15: “the brazen altar shall be for me to inquire by” (A.V. and R.V.) לְבִקְרָהּ יִהְיֶה-לִּי is: “shall before me to consider.” Comp. Proverbs 20:25 and Nowack *ad loc.*
- ³³ So, as the LXX. rightly render it, and not “pavement” as in the A.V. and R.V.
- ³⁴ It has been surmised that this *Aliyah* had been constructed by Ahaz on one of the buildings in the Temple court (for the latter comp. Jeremiah 35:4). But may it not have been on the Aliyah over the Holy and Most Holy Places (1 Kings 6:17-20), and may there not be some connection between this also and the change in the king’s Sabbath-stand, and in his entry to it?

CHAPTER 8

- ¹ That such was literally the case is confirmed by the notice of the re-opening of the doors of the Sanctuary in 2 Chronicles 29:3; comp. verses 7, 17.
- ² This is implied in the reference to the worship “under every green tree” in 2 Chronicles 28:4.
- ³ It is only right to say that in Assyrian worship there is not a trace of human sacrifices.
- ⁴ The personal character of the war appears not only in such expressions as 2 Kings 16:5: “They besieged Ahaz,” but to an attentive reader throughout the whole account of it, both in Kings and Chronicles.

- ⁵ We gather that he was of low origin, from the contemptuous designation, “the son of Tabheel” — like “the son of Remaliah.” Probably he was a Syrian captain. Tabheel (*in pausa*, Tabheal) = “good is God” in Aram, a name kindred to Tabrimmon. But it is a mistake to suppose that it occurs in another form (Itibil or Tibil) on an Assyrian tablet. It is also the name of a Persian official in Ezra 4:7.
- ⁶ Isaiah 7:6 — נִבְקַעְנָה אֲלֵינוּ “let us break through for ourselves;” the same word being “used with reference to the fortified towns or passes commanding the entrance into a country” (Cheyne, *The prophecies of Isaiah, ad loc.*).
- ⁷ For לְאֲרָם “to Syria,” we read with most commentators, לְאֲדָם “to Edom,” while the other correction, וְאֲדוֹמִים “and the Edomites” (instead of “the Syrians”), is attested by the *Qeri*, the LXX., and several *Codd*,
- ⁸ For a similar use of the expression comp. 1 Samuel 6:19; 2 Samuel 24:17; and other passages.
- ⁹ Although this number seems somewhat large, and, indeed, like that of the 200,000 captives taken to Samaria (2 Chronicles 28:8), is evidently “a round number,” yet we must bear in mind the size of the Judaeen army (300,000 under Amaziah, 2 Chronicles 25:5; 307,500 under Uzziah, 26:13); further. the bitter feeling prevailing in Israel (2 Chronicles 28:9); and lastly, that, as Canon Rawlinson reminds us (*Speaker’s Comment, ad. loc.*), as large, and even larger, losses are recorded in profane history (thus the Armenians lost at Tigranocerta 150,000 out of 260,000).
- ¹⁰ The symbolic import of the name is explained in the sequel.
- ¹¹ It is also called the Pool of Hezekiah, as supposed to have been made by that king. Professor Socin (Badeker, *Palaest.* p. 121) throws some doubt on the identification of the upper pool with El-Mamilla; but it is unhesitatingly adopted by *Muhlan*, in his excellent article on Jerusalem (Rheim, *Hand-W.* i. p. 691*a*).
- ¹² It could scarcely have been to stop the waters of the fountains without the city, since there are not any fountains there, and “the pool” was one for rain-water.

- ¹³ In our view the fulfillment of this prophecy was in the transplanting to Samaria of a foreign population in the days of Esar-haddon (Ezra 4:2); and not, as has lately been suggested, in the appointment of an Assyrian prefect of Samaria, which would scarcely fulfill: “Ephraim shall be broken, that it be not a people” (Isaiah 7:8).
- ¹⁴ This is not the place to attempt a detailed explanation — or rather vindication of the Messianic prophecy, Isaiah 7:14. We will only say that the intermingling of elements of the present in the verses following the prophecy is, in our view, characteristic of all such prophecy. See remarks in the sequel.
- ¹⁵ This is the correct rendering of the text.
- ¹⁶ Compare specially the previous verses.
- ¹⁷ It is possible that Tiglath-pileser, after his conquering progress through Galilee, Philistia, and to Gaza and Northern Arabia, may, on his way back to occupy Samaria, have passed close by, or even through Jerusalem. An account of this expedition will be given in the sequel.
- ¹⁸ This has been done by certain critics. Unwilling as we are to use hard language, not only in this, but in most of the difficulties raised by that school of critics, it seems not easy to determine whether their ingenuity is greater in raising objections that are ungrounded, or in constructing a history of their own.
- ¹⁹ They were, “anointed,” and the weak among them carried back on asses.
- ²⁰ Looking back upon this episode, it has been supposed by some critics that the narratives in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles relate to two different campaigns — a theory in itself utterly improbable. Without entering on a formal discussion of critical questions, it is hoped that the account given in the text either anticipates or removes the objections advanced. An excellent monograph on the subject is that of Caspari: *Ueber den Syrischephraemit. Krieg* (Christiania, 1849, 101 pages). That scholar places the events recorded in 2 Chronicles 28:5, etc., between the first and the second half of 2 Kings 16:5 (Caspari, *u.s.*, p. 101). But readers of Caspari’s monograph will perceive that in some important particulars our view of the course of events differs from that of Dr. Caspari.

- ²¹ That is, their names were recorded *in perpetuam rei memoriam*. A noble fact this; nor was, in all likelihood, participation in this good deed limited to the four princes.
- ²² We mark that throughout the names are here symbolical (comp. Isaiah 8:18). That *Shear Yashub* recurs in Isaiah 10:21 (comp. ver. 20) is only in accordance with the reflection of the future upon the present, which is a characteristic of prophecy — nor can we fail to remark concerning this *Shear Yashub* that it is “a remnant of Jacob” and its return is “to El-Gibbor” [God the Mighty], comp. Isaiah 9:6.
- ²³ We are here following the arrangement of Schrader, both in his work, *Die Keilinschriften u. d. A. Test.* and in the articles contributed by the same scholar to Riehm’s *Hand-Wörterb.*
- ²⁴ Schrader, *Die Keilinschr.* pp. 242, 243. That scholar complains of the misarrangement of the texts. One of the plates, seen by Sir Henry Rawlinson, which records the killing of Rezin, had been left in Asia, and has since hopelessly disappeared.
- ²⁵ Schrader u.s. p. 247.
- ²⁶ This may in part account for the confusion in the notice about “the 20th year of Jotham.”
- ²⁷ The ᾿Αρκη of Josephus (*Ant.* 1. 6, 2), the *Caesarea Libani* of the Roman Emperors.
- ²⁸ Near the Nahr-el-Kebir, “the great river,” the ancient Eleutheros (1 Maccabees 12:30), which partly formed the northern boundary of the Lebanon district.
- ²⁹ These sums seem enormous. According to Professor Sayce (*Fresh Light from the Ancient Monuments*, p. 123), the Babylonian talent was considerably smaller than the Judaeian. The proportion of silver to gold was according to *Herzfeld*, as 1:13; according to Schrader, as 1:13&1\2.

³⁰ The LXX. Renders it *Galaan*. A city of Gilead (no doubt in that district) is mentioned in Hosea 6:8; 12:11 (?). The context would certainly lead us to apply to a city rather than to the district the term in 2 Kings 15:29. But the localization hitherto proposed for this Gilead does not meet the exigencies of the narrative, being too far south. A very important question here arises in connection with 1 Chronicles 5:26. As Pul and Tiglath-pileser are one in the same person, and the transportation alluded to was the second — that under Shalmaneser, or rather than Sargon (compare 2 Kings 17:6) — we can only suggest that by some confusion caused by the two names Pul and Tiglath-pileser, the later has by a clerical error, crept into the text, instead of Shalmaneser or else Sargon.

CHAPTER 9

- ¹ That is, as of Biblical institution; not, as afterwards, of Rabbinic ordinance.
- ² In the following summary we are largely following Caspari, *Uber d. Syr. Ephraem. Krieg*, pp. 1-27.
- ³ On the Assyrian inscriptions: “Salmanu-ussir” (Salman [a god] be merciful!); Hoshea on the Assyrian inscriptions: A-u-si’.
- ⁴ Literally, a “present,” מנחה here, as in other places, a euphemistic mode of expression for “tribute.”
- ⁵ Some critics have referred it to the later conquest by Nebuchadnezzar. On the supposed incompatibility of our view with Isaiah 23:13, see Cheyne, *Prophecies of Isaiah*, vol. 1, pp. 132,
- ⁶ The Massoretic pointing *So* seems incorrect; the proper reading would be *Seve* or *Sava*. By the Greeks he is called *Sabakon* (Sevechus); on the monuments *Shabaka*, the last syllable being perhaps an Ethiopic end-syllable. On the cuneiform inscriptions he is called *Shabi-i*. Comp. *Ebers* in Riehm’s *Hand-Worterb.* 2. p. 1505, b.

- ⁷ Unfortunately for Egypt, it did, at a later period, enter into an alliance against Assyria. The defeat and humiliation of Egypt are referred to in Isaiah 20:1. Probably the prophecy in Isaiah 19 refers to the same subject. For the history of the Assyrian victories see Schrader (*u.s.*, pp. 392), who also gives (pp. 402-405) an abstract of the events of 15 out of the 17 years of the reign of Sargon. We only add, that on the Assyrian monument Seve is designated as “Sultan,” or prince, not as “Pharaoh,” king of Egypt (Schrader *u.s.*; p. 270).
- ⁸ Some critics, however, propose to read for קשר, “conspiracy,” שקר, “falsehood.”
- ⁹ Alike Biblical and Assyrian chronology lead up to the year 722 or 721 B.C. as that of the taking of Samaria.
- ¹⁰ It must, however, be admitted that the argument for the reading וַיִּלְכְּדוּ “and he took it,” (2 Kings 18:10) for וַיִּלְכְּדוּ “they took it,” has great weight.
- ¹¹ Comp. Canon Rawlinson, in the *Speaker’s Comment. ad loc.*
- ¹² Some writers, however, have regarded this “Chabor” as representing not the well-known river, but a smaller affluent of the Tigris, north of Nineveh. Similarly, it has been maintained that the right rendering would be “the river Gozan,” a river flowing into the Caspian Sea. Thus, while all writers are approximately at one as to the general direction of the place of exile, there are sufficient divergences to make the precise district and localities matter of controversy.
- ¹³ But the supposition that the birthplace of the prophet Nahum was the Elkosh not far from Nineveh, and on the left bank of the Tigris, is at least unproved.
- ¹⁴ See the quotations as to the fate of the Ten Tribes in *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, i. pp. 14-16.
- ¹⁵ It has, we think, been fully established that the deportation mentioned in 2 Kings 17:24 was that made by Sargon, and not the later one by Esarhaddon (Ezra 4:2).

- ¹⁶ At the same time, the rendering of 2 Kings 17:25, 26, in the A.V. is not correct. Instead of “therefore the Lord sent lions among them,” it should simply be, “and the Lord sent lions amongst them.” Nor should the attribution of things to God be always pressed in its strictly literal sense. Sometimes it is even an Oriental mode of expression. Comp. 2 Chronicles 35:21.
- ¹⁷ Sargon dates his first year as “king of Babylon in 709.”
- ¹⁸ In the LXX. **Σωκχῶθ Βενίθ.**
- ¹⁹ Or perhaps a paraphrastic interpretation, with intention of similarity of sound in the words used. Thus the Hebrew name means “tents of daughters;” the Assyrian *Zir-banit*, “the giver of seed.”
- ²⁰ The wife of the god Merodach, and with him, next to Bel and Beltis, a favorite object of worship.
- ²¹ Comp. Schrader, *u.s.*, p. 283.
- ²² This god is also named *Kevan*, “the firm one,” identified with *Satura*, hence Saturn — Kronos — Hercules.
- ²³ The name of Anat or Anath seems to appear as a compound in some names of places mentioned in the Old Testament (although certainly not in Anathoth nor Anathothyah).

CHAPTER 10

- ¹ In Hebrew *Chizkiyyah*. But this seems an abbreviation of *Yechizkiyyahu*, “Jehovah strengtheneth him,” which is the form generally adopted in Chronicles (also 2 Kings 20:10; Isaiah 1:1; Jeremiah 15:4); in Hosea 1:1 and Micah 1:1 it is *Yechizkiyyah*; in Isaiah (36-39) the name is also *Chizkiyyahu* (so also often in Kings); in the Assyrian inscriptions, *Cha-za-ki-ya-u*.
- ² A comparison with the dates in 2 Kings 18:1, 9 has led some writers to substitute “the fourth” for “the third” year of Hoshea (so already Josephus, *Ant.* ix.13, 1). But there seems no necessity for this.

- ³ The word is here used collectively. Astarte, whose very name seems to suggest defilement, was the same as Aphrodite, and Venus. Her worship was conjoined with that of Baal; her emblem was a tree, with its branches, but without roots, planted upright in the ground. Once we read of an image of Asherah (2 Kings 21:7). Comp. the elaborate Art. *Astarte*, by Professor Schlottmann in Riehm's *Hand-Worterb.*
- ⁴ This does not necessarily imply that it was kept either in the Temple or the Tabernacle. To this there is no allusion in the Old Testament. Some critics have regarded it as a later imitation of the brazen serpent of Moses; but this seems contrary to the plain meaning of the text.
- ⁵ It is doubtful whether the expression "called it" (2 Kings 18:4) refers to Hezekiah or to Israel. But the result would be the same whether we supply one or the other subject.
- ⁶ So in 2 Chronicles 29:4, rendered literally.
- ⁷ This, rather than the Court of the Priests.
- ⁸ The text does not, however, inform us how long — *i.e.* how many months — previously Hezekiah had acceded to the throne. Some critics suppose it to have been in the month *Tishri* preceding.
- ⁹ It will be remarked that this notice in 2 Chronicles 29:19 confirms the previous account in 2 Kings, and that in a manner instructive as regards the harmony of the two narratives, even where the one records what the other omits.
- ¹⁰ That only the he-goats were brought as sin-offerings appears, first, from 2 Chronicles 29:23, and, secondly, from the circumstance that the burnt offerings are afterwards specially enumerated in ver. 27.
- ¹¹ This reference to the two great Psalmists not only indicates the existence of their Psalms at that time, but seems to imply such an activity on the part of Hezekiah in regard to the canon of Holy Scripture then existing as is expressly mentioned in connection with the Book of Proverbs.
- ¹² For the musical part of the Temple services, its time and manner, see *The Temple and its Services.*

- ¹³ Any previous celebration had not been attended by the people generally, according to the Law, but had been partial and local. The rendering of לרב by “in multitude,” and not, as in A.V., by “for a long time,” seems established by the use of the same expression in regard to the priests in ver. 24. It is also confirmed by such passages as Genesis 20:30; 48:16; Deuteronomy i:10. The rendering is very important, as showing, first, the continued observance of the Passover; secondly, its admittedly sparse attendance, which rendered it more local than national. This also accounts for its rare mention in the historical books.
- ¹⁴ It must be remembered that this Paschal celebration was in the first year of Hezekiah, and therefore in the third or fourth of Hoshea — or several years before the final overthrow of Samaria. On the annexation of Naphtali to the Assyrian empire, and the partial deportation of Israel referred to in 2 Chronicles 30:6, 7, 9, see ch. 8: On the later national calamities in the time of Hoshea, see ch. 9.
- ¹⁵ These tribes were Asher, Manasseh, Zebulun (2 Chronicles 30:11), Ephraim, and Issachar (ver. 18).
- ¹⁶ The expression in ver. 20, “The Lord...healed the people,” refers to moral healing, that from guilt. Comp. Psalm 41:4; 147:3; Jeremiah i3:22; Hosea 14:4. We add that ver. 22 should be rendered, “All the Levites that understood good understanding about *the service* of the Lord,” *i.e.*, who were well skilled in the various services of the sanctuary devolving on them.
- ¹⁷ Canon Rawlinson in the *Speaker's Comment. ad loc.*
- ¹⁸ The so-called *Terumoth*, here called “a tithe,” because they stood in the same relation to “things dedicated” as the ordinary tithe to the ordinary produce of the soil.
- ¹⁹ In vers. 15 and 18 translate instead of “in their set office” (A. and R.V.), “with faithfulness,” and “in their faithfulness,” בְּאֵמוּנָה.

²⁰ The text is somewhat involved. In ver. 16 translate, “besides their registration [the names registered] of the males from three years upwards, of all them that came to the house of Jehovah, according to the requirements of every day,” etc., *i.e.*, as they were needed for duty each day. Verse 17 is an intercalated sentence, “but the registration of the priests, *it was* according to the houses of their fathers,” etc. (“in their charges,” *i.e.*, in their offices). Verse 18 again connects itself with the close of ver. 15 (verses 16 and 17 being a double parenthesis): “and [viz., to give] to the registration [the names registered] of all their little ones...for in their faithfulness they showed [proved] themselves holy (comp. Ezekiel 38:23, and see Ewald, *Lehrb. d. hebr. Spr.*, p. 329) *concerning the* consecrated [holy].” In the R.V. the rendering “in their set office” is utterly unwarrantable — “trust” is not much better. Otherwise, their rendering seems to apply to the recipients, not to the distributors. This is possible, but our rendering is in accordance with the context.

²¹ The only other Asaphite Psalm is in Book II, Psalm. 1. Alike the Korahite and the Asaphite Psalms are exclusively in Books II. and III — the 12 Asaphite Psalms, with exception of Psalm 1., in Book III.; the 12 Korahite Psalms, with the exception of four (Psalm. 84, 85, 87,88), in Book II.

²² העתיקו “removed,” “transferred,” “collected.”

CHAPTER 11

¹ This, the rendering of the Vulgate, seems better than that of the A. and R.V. — “Whithersoever he went forth,” which would scarcely seem historically quite accurate.

² In 2 Kings 18:9-12 the Assyrian conquest of Samaria and the deportation of Israel are again related — either because in chap. 17 they were related out of their chronological order, or else because they followed immediately on the Philistine expedition, recorded in 2 Kings 18:8.

³ Possibly the Assyrian proclivities of the southern Philistine cities may be explained by their proximity to Egypt, and their fear of absorption in that empire.

- ⁴ To complete this history we may mention that, in the eleventh year of his reign, Sargon undertook another expedition to quell the rebellion of Ashdod, which had been instigated by Egypt, or rather Ethiopia. Sargon was again victorious. Ashdod was taken; the Egyptian army did not venture to make its appearance, and its king surrendered to Sargon the leader of the Ashdod rebellion, who had fled to him. It is to these events that the prophecy in Isaiah 20 refers, where mark especially verse 5. "The Tartan" was the official designation of the Assyrian commander-in-chief. On this occasion Judah does not seem to have been touched.
- ⁵ In view of these dates the notice in 2 Kings 18:13, about "the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah," must be regarded as a spurious gloss, which a copyist may possibly have transferred from a marginal note into the text.
- ⁶ To avoid the multiplication of references, we may state that, as regards the facts of Assyrian history, we have mainly followed the work of Schrader, previously mentioned.
- ⁷ We are here again following Professor Schrader (See *Keilinschr. u. d. A. Test.* pp. 285-338, and the Art. *Sennacherib* in Riehm's *Hand-Worterb.*
- ⁸ English critics generally — comp. Professor Cheyne's *Commentary on Isaiah*, p. 66 (1st Ed.) — have applied this chapter to the expedition of Sargon on account of the reference in Isaiah 10:9 to Hamath, Arpad, Samaria, and Damascus, which were taken, not by Sennacherib, but by Sargon. But the mention of these places occurs similarly in 2 Kings 18:34. For an explanation of it we refer to our subsequent remarks on that passage.
- ⁹ We remember it as the place to which Amaziah fled, and where he was murdered (2 Chronicles 25:27).
- ¹⁰ We again repeat that we are leaving aside the difficult question of the relation between Biblical and Assyrian chronology, for which — at least, in the judgment of the present writer — we have not yet sufficient data. According to the Assyrian monuments, this expedition was the "third campaign" of Sennacherib.

- ¹¹ The critics who suppose a mutual dependence of the two narratives are somewhat evenly divided as to the priority of the one or the other. It will be understood that all here rests chiefly on conjectural grounds.
- ¹² This view, which seems to us most accordant with facts, and simplest, has been adopted by many of the ablest writers of both schools of criticism.
- ¹³ Presumably these “prophetic annals” were the same as those referred to in 2 Kings 20:20.
- ¹⁴ With these it is obviously impossible to deal in a book like the present. The reader must be asked to believe that what is passed over does not involve any critical difficulty requiring special discussion.
- ¹⁵ The expression, 2 Chronicles 32:1, “And purposed [*lit.*, ‘spake’] to win [or ‘break up’] them for himself,” may refer to the detaching of the conquered towns from Judah, and their annexation to his Phoenician and Philistine vassals, of which the Assyrian monuments make mention.
- ¹⁶ Not necessarily all at one time, but all before the Assyrian advance from Lachish.
- ¹⁷ But, according to some, the modern Birket-es-Sultan.
- ¹⁸ For a quite different location of Hezekiah’s work at Siloah, comp. Herzog’s *Real-Encykl*, vol. vi., p. 567.
- ¹⁹ The LXX. had evidently read, instead of “through the midst of the land,” “in the midst of the city.”
- ²⁰ So in all probability the text should be emendated (see the Vulgate).
- ²¹ On the Assyrian inscriptions Sennacherib describes the tribute as thirty talents of gold and eight hundred talents of silver, the latter, no doubt, of “light weight” (for there were two kinds of talent in Assyrian reckoning), which would be equal to three hundred Jewish talents.
- ²² But in 2 Chronicles 32:9 we have the notice that Sennacherib was laying siege to Lachish.
- ²³ But we note that in the two latter such historical details as the designations of all the leaders of the Assyrian expedition, given in 2 Kings 18:17, are wanting.

- ²⁴ Comp. Schrader, *u.s.* pp. 319, 320. The Hebrew form, “Rabh-Shakeh,” means “chief butler;” but there is no record on the monuments of such a high state official.
- ²⁵ The absence of any mention of his father seems to point to a low origin. On the office comp. 1 Kings 4:5. He seems to have combined it with that of *major domo*, or steward of the palace (Isaiah 22:15, with which comp. 2 Chronicles 26:21; Isaiah 36:3; 37:2).
- ²⁶ Comp. Cheyne, *u.s.* 1., p. 130.

CHAPTER 12

- ¹ The opening words of the Rabh-Shakeh’s speech, “The great king, the king of Assyria,” give one of the very titles by which the Assyrian monarchs designate themselves on the monuments.
- ² I prefer this to the rendering “cracked,” by Professor Cheyne. It certainly does not mean “broken,” the distinction between the two words being clearly marked in Isaiah 42:3. The figure of “a reed” as applied to Egypt is peculiarly happy, from its reference to the Nile banks (comp. Isaiah 19:6, and generally Ezekiel 29:6, which evidently refers to 2 Kings 18:21, or else to Isaiah 36:6). “A reed” is itself an insufficient support; but this reed is besides “bruised.” When leaning on it, it will break, and the hand that rests all its weight thereon will fall upon it and be pierced.
- ³ In Isaiah 36:7 it is put in the singular, “if thou sayest,” probably addressed to the chief Jewish spokesman.
- ⁴ The expression 2 Kings 18:23, rendered in the A.V. “give pledges,” in the margin of the R.V. “make a wager,” neither of which gives a good sense — we would translate “And now enter into competition with my master.” In ver. 24 the word פִּתְּחָהּ which is true Semitic (comp. Schrader, *u.s.* pp. 186, 187), signifies a satrap, or governor, but at the same time also a military chief. “The least of the servants,” *i.e.*, both numerically and as regards valor and discipline.
- ⁵ The term “Jewish” for Hebrew occurs only here and in the parallel passages (2 Chronicles 32:18 and Isaiah 36:11), and in Nehemiah 13:24.

- ⁶ Lit., “make a blessing,” probably not referring so much to religious ceremonies connected with such treaties, as to the offering of gifts on such occasions, — the term, “a blessing,” being frequently used for “a present.”
- ⁷ In reference to the nations mentioned in 2 Kings 18:34, *Arpad*, mentioned in the Bible (comp. also Isaiah 10:9; Jeremiah 49:23) and in the Assyrian monuments in connection with Hamath, was a considerable and powerful Syrian town with adjacent territory, probably the modern *Tell Erfad*, about three hours north of Aleppo. *Hamath* and *Sepharvaim* — the twain Sipar — have been previously referred to. From its conjunction with the latter place, we infer that *Hena* was a city in Babylonia, probably the modern *Anat*, four days’ journey from Bagdad, on both banks of the Euphrates. The locality of *Ivvah*, or *Avvah* (2 Kings 17:24, 31), has not been ascertained; but it was probably also a city of Babylonia. All these places were conquered by Sargon; but there is nothing inconsistent with this in the reference to them by the Rabh-Shakeh as affording evidence of the supreme power of Assyria.
- ⁸ The Talmud appeals to this passage as proof that every one who hears a blasphemy or who hears it reported, is bound to rend his garment (Moed. Q. 26a). The general direction is given in Sanh vii. 5; in the Gemara on this Mishnah (Sanh. 60a), it is inferred from 2 Kings 2:12, where the same expression is used, but with the addition “in two pieces,” that every such rent is to be permanent. In regard to the rent for blasphemy, it is ruled that the name Jehovah must have been expressly used, whether by Jew or Gentile, but that this had no longer application after the dispersion of Israel, as otherwise a person might have his clothes full of rents.
- ⁹ This, as has been remarked, is instructive as showing the relation between the priesthood and the prophets.
- ¹⁰ By way of contrast, comp. Jeremiah 21:1, etc.

- ¹¹ In 2 Kings 19:7 translate (as in the R.V.), “I will put a spirit in him,” *i.e.*, by the direct agency of Jehovah, a spirit of fear would take the place of that of boastful confidence. The “tidings” (this, rather than “rumor”) refer on the one hand to the advance of the Egyptian army, which led to the retrograde movement of Sennacherib, and on the other hand to the Divine visitation which determined his return to “his own land.” In ver. 6 we mark that the expression “servants,” used for the Assyrian ambassadors, is one of contempt, like the German *Burschen* (lads), or *Buben*, and that their words are taken up as a blasphemous challenge to the LORD.
- ¹² Tirhakah — on the Egyptian monuments, Tahark and Taharka; on the the Assyrian, Tar-ku-u, the third and last king of the twenty-fifth “Ethiopian” dynasty, although apparently not himself of Ethiopian but of Egyptian descent. In accordance with the Bible, the monuments describe him as king of Ethiopia, and as making an incursion into Palestine against Sennacherib. For an abstract of his history see Ebers, in Riehm’s *Worterb.* ii., pp. 1671, 1672.
- ¹³ The mention of the places enumerated in 2 Kings 19:12, confirms the view expressed in a previous note, that the boasted conquests were not those of the present reign, but looked back upon the past. Thus *Gozan* was a district in Mesopotamia on the river Chabor, whence Sargon had transported colonists to Samaria. Not far from Gozan was the town of *Haran*, the Roman and Greek Carrhae, one of the earliest Assyrian possessions, mentioned even in the 12th cent. B.C. (comp. Genesis 11:31, etc.). *Rezeph* was another Mesopotamian town, frequently mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions as *Rasaappa*, or *Rasappa*. *Thelasar* (in Ass. *Til-Assuri*, either “the Assyrian hill,” or, “the hill of Asur”) seems to have been one of the cities of “the *Sons of Eden*,” a tribe inhabiting a district on both banks of the middle Euphrates. It is probable that either Shalmaneser or Sargon had changed the original name of the city to *Telassar* (comp. the *Eden* of Ezekiel 27:23; perhaps also the *Beth-Eden* of Amos i. 5).
- ¹⁴ As Thenius reminds us, there is monumental evidence of the cutting in pieces of the image of a god after the taking and sacking of a city.
- ¹⁵ See Bahr ad loc.

- ¹⁶ Comp. the expression “Shaken her head,” in ver. 21, with Job 16:4; Psalm 22:7; 109:25; Jeremiah 18:16.
- ¹⁷ The expression does not contain any allusion to a knowledge of prophetic utterances on the part of Sennacherib, nor is it ironical.
- ¹⁸ Mark the gradation in ver. 26, and note similar figures in Psalm 37:2; 129:6; Isaiah 40:6-8.
- ¹⁹ From the Mesopotamian sculptures, it appears that in the case of distinguished prisoners, literally a ring was passed, in Assyria, through the lower lip, and in Babylonia through the nose, to which a thong or rope was attached, by which the prisoner was led (comp. Rawlinson *ad loc.* in the *Speaker’s Commentary*).
- ²⁰ Generally “the sign” is sought in the prediction of what would happen in those years, of which various — more or less unsatisfactory — explanations are given. We would lay the emphasis on the verb “ye shall eat,” as a promise of sufficient support.
- ²¹ The text seems to imply that it was the night after Isaiah’s prediction; but this is by no means clear. Josephus (*Ant.* x. 1, 5) and the Rabbis suppose the judgment to have overtaken the army that lay before Jerusalem. This is also the view of Friedrich Delitzsch in Herzog’s *Real Ency.* vol. xiii., p. 386. In 2 Chronicles 32:21, and in Isaiah 37:36, the words, “in that night,” are omitted. This seems of itself to indicate that all the 185,000 had not died in that one night.
- ²² See the previous note. Much larger numbers than these are recorded to have perished by pestilence in one place.
- ²³ That some extraordinary event had determined the retreat of Sennacherib appears also from the Egyptian legendary account preserved by Herodotus (II. 141). It describes how, on his advance into Egypt — perhaps mixing up the campaign of Sargon with that of Sennacherib (Schrader in Riehm’s *Worterb.*, II., p. 1366a) — Sennacherib had been forced to fly through a disablement of his army, field-mice having in one night gnawed through the quivers, bowstrings, and shield-straps of his soldiers.
- ²⁴ For further details, we refer to the articles, “Ninive” and “Sanherib,” in Riehm’s *Handworterb. d. Bibl. Altherth.*

- ²⁵ But Delitzsch refers this Psalm to the deliverance of Judah in the time of Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20).
- ²⁶ Comp. Delitzsch on these Psalms. In the LXX. Psalm 76 (Sept., lxxv.), and also originally Psalm 75 also bore the inscription, *πρὸς τὸν Ἀσούριον*. In the Apocr. the references are in Ecclus. 48:18-22; 1 Macc. 7:41; 2 Macc. 8:19.
- ²⁷ 2 Kings 19:37 must not be understood as chronologically following immediately upon ver. 36. It is merely the Scriptural conclusion of this whole narrative. In truth, ver. 37 (see next note) contains a brief summary of events, separated by some period of time. But it is the sublime characteristic of the prophetic view-point of sacred history to pass over intervening events as of no importance, and to connect the fulfillment with the prediction as in unbroken succession.
- ²⁸ “Nisroch” — evidently an Assyrian god — has not yet been identified. Probably it depends upon some corruption of the name, which is differently written in the LXX. and by Josephus. On *Adrammelech* (here the name of a person), see our remarks on 2 Kings 17:31. *Sharezer* is apparently a defective form, the full name having been Nirgal-sar-usur — “Nergal protect the king.” Strangely, *Abydenus* (Euseb. *Armen. Chron.*, ed. Mai, p. 25) has preserved to us the first part of the name, Nergilus, and the Bible its second part. According to the account just referred to, Sennacherib was killed by his son *Adramelus*, and succeeded for a short time by *Nergilus* (comp. Schrader, *u.s.*, p. 330, and note), who was overcome and slain by *Esarhaddon*, who ascended the throne. The latter is confirmed by the Assyrian inscriptions. Professor Sayce (*Fresh Light from the A. Mon.*, p. 127) attributes the murder of Sennacherib to jealousy of Esarhaddon on the part of the two elder brothers, for which he finds a motive in the will of Sennacherib, which bestowed great treasures on Esarhaddon. “The land of Ararat” was south of the mountains of that name, and forms part of Armenia. There was at that time war between Assyria and Armenia.

CHAPTER 13

- ¹ The abbreviation is in the narrative of Hezekiah's sickness and healing. On the other hand, the hymn of praise, Isaiah 38:9-20, is not inserted in 2 Kings, where, indeed, such a hymn would seem out of place.
- ² This appears from the whole cast of the narrative — even from the general and indeterminate note of time in the opening words: "In those days."
- ³ Comp. Vol. 5 of this Bible-History.
- ⁴ It is true that Josephus places it after that event (*Ant.* 10. 2, 1), but his testimony is here manifestly not of any authority.
- ⁵ This, however, does not seem a very strong argument in view of the recuperative power apparent on previous occasions.
- ⁶ Viewed from the prophetic stand-point. For this is not an ordinary history, and the connection which determines the form of the narrative is not that of succession in the order of time, but of spiritual cause and effect — the inward, not the outward, *nexus* of events.
- ⁷ English critics (Rawlinson, Sayce, Cheyne) place it in the time of Sargon; the most competent German authorities (Schrader, Friedrich Delitzsch) in that of Sennacherib.
- ⁸ See the Article *Sargon* in Riehm II. p. 1374.
- ⁹ The critical questions connected with Isaiah 38:5, 6 cannot here be entertained.
- ¹⁰ The disease was probably a carbuncle — certainly, not pestilence.
- ¹¹ In token of sadness, as if to look away from everything else, and to concentrate all thought on one's grief. So also Ahab (1 Kings 21:4), although in a very different spirit.

- ¹² The suggestion of Josephus and of some of the fathers: that the grief of Hezekiah was caused or increased by the circumstance that, at the time, he had not a son to succeed him, is not only wholly improbable but unsupported. The Rabbis however put it still more realistically, and explain: “thou shalt die” — in this world, “and not live” — in the world to come, because Hezekiah had neglected the command in not having children.
- ¹³ So the Massoretic text. The *Qeri* has: “court” for “city” — which looks like an emendation to heighten the miraculous.
- ¹⁴ This addition, so far from interrupting the message of Isaiah, forms, on the view of the matter which we are about to present, an important integral part of it.
- ¹⁵ Whether or not, the expression: “on the third day” be taken literally, manifestly it was intended to convey, not only the briefest period, but one within which such a result could not have been reached had the healing been in the ordinary course.
- ¹⁶ It is interesting to learn that Ahaz had — probably on his visit to Damascus (2 Kings 16:10) — seen and brought to Jerusalem some of the scientific appliances of the great empire of the East. It is impossible to determine whether this mode of measuring the progress of time (not strictly hours) was by a sun-dial, the invention of which Herodotus ascribes to the Babylonians (2. 109). According to Ideler (*Handb. d. Chronol.* 1. p. 485) it was a *gnomon*, or index, surrounded by concentric circles, by which the time of the day was marked by the lengthening shadow. But the term “steps” seems rather to indicate an obelisk surrounded by steps, the shadow on which marked the hours, so that the shadow falling in the morning westwards first on the lowest step, gradually ascended to the plane on the top, and after midday again descended the steps eastwards. As the text seems to imply that there were twenty such “steps,” they must have marked the quarters of an hour, and in that case the event have happened about half-past two o’clock p.m. (comp. Kamphausen in Riehm’s *Worterb.*).

- ¹⁷ The suggestion of a solar eclipse (made by Mr. Bosanquet in the *Journal of the As. Soc.* Vol. 15.), which seems adopted by Canon Rawlinson (*Speaker's Comment.*), who ascribes to Isaiah a "supernatural fore-knowledge" of the event, is untenable, even on the ground that it would imply a supernatural influence on Hezekiah in his choice of the retrogression of the shadow.
- ¹⁸ As already stated, the account of the event in the Book of Isaiah (38:8) is evidently not the original one, but possibly abbreviated from that in the Book of Kings. Whether, in its present form ver. 6 is really due to a later editor, or the reference in it to the sun, not the shadow, be only a popular mode of description, is not of any practical importance for our present purpose.
- ¹⁹ Thus the Prior Romnald, in Metz, notes on the 27th March, 1703, a similar retrogression on the sun-dial of about an hour and a half (= six steps on the clock of Ahaz), due to a refraction of the sun's rays by a vapor. cloud.
- ²⁰ The writing "Berodach" in 2 Kings is evidently a clerical error. In the Assyrian inscriptions *Marduk-habal-iddina*, "Merodach gave a son," is described as "the son of Yakin;" but this designating, not his father, but the dynasty to which he belonged, which ruled over "Blt-Yakin." (Comp. Schrader, *u.s.*, p. 342).
- ²¹ In the extracts from Alexander Polyhistor, preserved by Eusebius.
- ²² For the history of Merodach-baladan I must refer to Schrader.
- ²³ In 2 Chronicles 32:31 the ostensible object is stated to have been "to inquire about the wonder that was done in the land." Such an inquiry as to the real power of the God of Judah would, from the heathen standpoint, not be inconsistent with the real aim of the mission.
- ²⁴ In Isaiah 39:2 we read, "Hezekiah rejoiced." Perhaps this is the better reading.
- ²⁵ Josephus also takes the same view of the object of the Babylonian mission (*Ant.* x. 2, 2).
- ²⁶ Comp. Cheyne, *u.s.* I., p. 231.

- ²⁷ We mark that Isaiah 39 is followed by 40-47. The significance of the conjunction of these prophecies requires not to be pointed out. The one is the Divine counterpart of the other.

CHAPTER 14

- ¹ This, or perhaps “the height,” is the correct rendering. Probably all the space in “the sepulchers” was filled up.
- ² Possibly older sons of Hezekiah may have died, or there may not have been any by Queen Consorts, who would have been qualified for succession to the throne.
- ³ The expression עשה “he made” in 2 Kings 21:6 (see margin of R.V.) implies their formal appointment.
- ⁴ Soothsaying, or divination. I have preferred rendering it thus generally. In Rabbinic usage it is understood chiefly of divination by observing the clouds (from ענן); the expression for “enchantment” is chiefly referred to the whispering of formulas of incantation, and to observing an omen: the having “familiar spirits” refers to necromancy — either by conjuring up the dead or consulting them; “the wizards” [lit., those who have knowledge] ידענים are curiously explained in the Talmud (*Sanh.* 65^b) as magicians, who place in their mouths the bone of an animal called *Yaddua* ידוע when the bone speaks of itself. Comp. generally Leviticus 19:26.
- ⁵ On the nameless abominations of this mania of vice, this is not the place to speak. The classical scholar knows what the Galli were. It is not possible to determine what these priestesses wove, whether “tents,” or hangings — perhaps carpets, or it may have been raiments for the rites of Astarte: but certainly something for the vile worship with which they were connected (2 Kings 23:6). Perhaps the text is here (purposely?) corrupted. In regard to such abominations, comp. Deuteronomy 23:17, 18. See also 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12:22:46; Job 36:14.
- ⁶ Herod. 1. 199. Comp. *Bar.* vi. 43.

- ⁷ The “Amorites” are named as the representatives of the Canaanites generally, being the most powerful of the eleven Canaanitish tribes (Genesis 10:15-18). Comp. Genesis 15:16; 48:22; Joshua 7:7; 13:4; 24:15; Ezekiel 16:3; Amos 2:9, and other passages.
- ⁸ Micah 6 and 7 are supposed to date from this period.
- ⁹ Jewish tradition has it (*Yebam* 49*b*.) that Manasseh charged Isaiah with having taught what was in opposition to the law of Moses (thus Isaiah 6:1, comp. Exodus 33:20; Isaiah 55:6, comp. Deuteronomy 4:7; 2 Kings 20:6, comp. Exodus 23:26). To this Isaiah replied, that he had indeed a good answer to these charges, but would not give it, in order not to aggravate the guilt of Manasseh. Then the prophet spoke the Ineffable Name, on which a cedar tree opened to receive him. The cedar was now sawn through. When it reached the mouth of Isaiah, he gave up the soul. This, because Isaiah had charged his people with being of “unclean lips.” The legend has, with variations, passed into the pseudepigraphic “Martyrdom of Isaiah” (in its original form, probably a Jewish, in its present form a Christian book), which forms the first part (ch. i.-v.) of the Pseudepigraph, “the Ascension of Isaiah” (ed. Dillmann, Leips. 1877). Other versions of the legend, from a Targum, in Assemani, *Catal. Bibl. Vat.* I. p. 452, and in a marginal note on Isaiah 66:1 in the *Cod. Reuchl.*
- ¹⁰ Justin, Tertullian, Origen, Jerome, and Epiphanius. Comp. Schurer, *Gesch. d. Jud. Volks*, II., p. 283, note 112, and pp. 685, 686.
- ¹¹ Kings 21:12. The same expression for terrifying news occurs in 1 Samuel 3:11; Jeremiah 19:3.
- ¹² Other explanations of the figure — of which several have been offered — seem artificial.
- ¹³ But it is only fair to add, that the doubts about Manasseh’s deportation have not been shared by the more cautious critics of that school, although they deny the second part of the narrative — although with no better reason.
- ¹⁴ We also recall here that Esarhaddon transported a fresh colony to Samaria (Ezra 4:2, 10).
- ¹⁵ This is the correct rendering.

- ¹⁶ Comp. Schrader, u.s., pp. 366-372.
- ¹⁷ “The Prayer of Manasseh” in the Apocr., is certainly of late date, and not even received as canonical by the Romish Church. The curious reader is referred to Fritzsche, *Handb. zu d. Apokr.*, I., pp. 157-164, to the literature there mentioned, and to Fabricius, *Cod. Pseudepigr*, I., 1100-1102.
- ¹⁸ The Talmud (*Sanh. 103a*) says that to deny that Manasseh had share in the world to come, would be to weaken the hands of penitents. As justice demanded that heaven should be closed against him, the Almighty opened for him a hole in the firmament. In the Midrash (*Deba. R. 2*) a legendary account is realistically given, first of the idol he set up; then how, when he was being burned by the Assyrians, and found all his gods failed him, he cried to the LORD; lastly, how the ministering angels had shut up all the windows of heaven against his prayer, but God had bored for it a hole under the throne of His glory for the encouragement of penitents to all time.
- ¹⁹ The reference in 2 Chronicles 33:19 to “the history of Hozai,” may be to a prophetic book, now lost, or else a clerical error for **הַחֲזִיִּים**, “the seers.” The latter seems to have been the view of the LXX.
- ²⁰ The locality is unknown. It has lately been identified with the burying-place of Alexander the Maccabee, on the eastern side of the Haram.
- ²¹ For ex. 1. 4-6, 12, 13; 3. 1-4, 11. But most critics refer all such utterances of the prophet to the insufficiency of the reformation in Josiah’s time.

CHAPTER 15

- ¹ Comp. also 2 Kings 23:2: “the prophets.”
- ² Amon became the father of Josiah at the age of 16 (comp. 2 Kings 21:19).
- ³ That is, in his public and official capacity.
- ⁴ But he could not have been identical with the father of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:1), since the priests at Anathoth were from the line of Ithamar (1 Kings 2:26), while the high-priest Hilkiyah belonged to that of Eleazar.

- ⁵ He must not be confounded with the father of Ahikam. Comp. 2 Chronicles 34:14.
- ⁶ The other members of the deputation to Hilkiah and to Huldah, mentioned in 2 Chronicles 34:8, 14, are not otherwise known.
- ⁷ Comp. here such passages as Jeremiah 3:6, etc.; 8:5, etc.; 15:6; 16:10, etc.; and other passages. Comp. also Zephaniah iii. 1.
- ⁸ Comp. here even the emphatic language of Ewald (*Gesch. d. V. Isr.* III, p. 754). See also Kautzsch in Herzog's *Real Encykl.* VII., p. 119. We refer the more readily to these critics that their views in regard to this "book of the Law" widely differ from those expressed in this *History*.
- ⁹ Most German writers regard it as comprising Deuteronomy, or the parts of the Pentateuch which they designate as the work of the Deuteronomist. But this is not the place for critical discussions, and we have only generally indicated in the text the differing views propounded.
- ¹⁰ See Kautzsch, u.s.
- ¹¹ Kautzsch (u.s., p. 118) calculates it as occupying at least ten hours.
- ¹² But in 2 Kings 23:25 we read of "all the law of Moses." And in regard to the "Book of the Covenant," we have to recall the expression in Deuteronomy 29:1, with which we have further to connect Deuteronomy 31:24-26. Bahr (in Lange's *Bibelwerk*, VII., pp. 455, 456, 464, 465) ably contends that the "book" comprised the whole Pentateuch. Kleinert holds that it embraced "certain parts" of the books of Moses, but including ritual laws. The very interesting Art., "Gesetzbuch," by Riehm (*Worterb. I.*, pp. 501-507) represents another aspect.
- ¹³ See also p. 189, note 3*b*. Many corroborative instances will here recur to the mind, such as the various sacrifices, the Paschal observances, and even the punishment of Uzziah, 2 Chronicles 26:18, 19.

- ¹⁴ How far the imagination of even the ablest critics can mislead them, appears from the account which Ewald gives (u.s., pp. 734, 735, 753, 754) of the origin of Deuteronomy. “To all appearance it was written in Egypt” by a fugitive from Judah in the time of Manasseh. “Slowly, and as it were, accidentally, the book spread into Palestine,” where a copy of it “accidentally” got into the Temple “through some priest.” In this fashion any kind of history might be constructed to suit the views of any school of “critics.”
- ¹⁵ It is impossible to say whether it was the royal wardrobe, or that of the Temple — or, indeed, any other.
- ¹⁶ So we render the word “Mishneh,” rather than “the second quarter.”
- ¹⁷ Comp. Riehm’s *Hand-Worterb.* 1., p. 685.
- ¹⁸ It is generally supposed that the number of the inhabitants of Jerusalem before the exile never greatly exceeded that at the time of Solomon.
- ¹⁹ According to the Talmud (*Meg.* 14*b*), she was descended from Joshua and Rahab. She is blamed for pride in saying, “Say to the man,” when sending her answer to the king. It is suggested that she was resorted to because women are more lenient in judgment than men. But Jeremiah (whose relative she was) was at the time absent, seeking to bring back the ten tribes. Other traditions need scarcely find a place here.
- ²⁰ The Talmud mentions seven prophetesses: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther.
- ²¹ “Priests of the second order” (2 Kings 23:4). We regard these as younger and subordinate priests — not as the suffragans of the high-priest.
- ²² Probably in the place where the manure for these fields was deposited. The reference to Bethel at the close of ver. 4 may possibly depend on some corruption in the text. It does not occur in 2 Chronicles 34:3, 4.
- ²³ Various derivations and explanations of the word have been proposed — none of them, however, quite satisfactory. The same designation occurs in Hosea 10:5 and Zephaniah 1:4. They are distinguished from the Levitical priests, or Kohanim.
- ²⁴ The place where the common people and strangers were buried. All those of the better classes had sepulchers of their own.

- ²⁵ “From Geba to Beer-sheba” (2 Kings 23:8). The former in Benjamin was a priest-city, and marked what afterwards was the northernmost town in the kingdom of Judah. Beer-sheba was the most southern seat of this worship { Amos 5:5; 8:14).
- ²⁶ As priests they had neither tribal possessions, nor yet other avocations. They were treated like priests in a state of Levitical impurity (Leviticus 21:21-23), but do not seem to have shared in the common meals of the regular priests. Probably they were allowed to discharge inferior functions (comp. Ezekiel 44:10-14).
- ²⁷ So according to all the best critics. The rendering alike in the A.V. and the R.V. gives not any intelligible meaning.
- ²⁸ That is, from where they were standing and broken down. We propose thus to translate 2 Kings 23:12 (A. and R.V.: “beat them down from thence”). The word should be pointed as Kimchi, and after him Thenius proposes **נִרְיָן** “he made run” — threw down the earthen *debris*.
- ²⁹ This seems the meaning of 2 Kings 23:16: “And as Josiah turned himself.”
- ³⁰ “Monuments:” Genesis 35:20; Jeremiah 31:21; Ezekiel 39:15.
- ³¹ With the generality of critics we read **בְּחָרְבֵי הָאֵם** comp. Psalm 109:10..
- ³² We have here to remember not only the preliminary character of the old dispensation, but also what were the spirit and the circumstances of the time.

- ³³ It would occupy too much space to analyze that account in detail. We mark only the following points as requiring briefest explanation. (a) From 2 Chronicles 35:3 it would appear that the Ark had been removed from its place. This probably — for other explanations have been offered — during the extensive repairs of the Temple. The most natural view of the clause, which, literally translated, is, “There is not to you a bearing [or burden] on the shoulder,” would be to regard it as explanatory of the direction now to place it in the Sanctuary. According to the letter of the Mosaic law, which had just been so fully carried out, the Ark was to be carried on their shoulders. But now it was different — and their service was confined to ministration in the Temple and to its worshippers (“and serve,” etc.). (b) From 2 Chronicles 35:4 we infer that there were written directions — a regular rubric — both by David and by Solomon, for the various ministrations in the Temple. But this, in our view, presupposes and implies the existence of the “Priest-Code” in the Pentateuch. And here it should also be noticed that Josiah seems to take for granted a general knowledge of these priestly regulations and rubrics. (c) As regards the date of the Passover: “in the 18th year of Josiah,” it is evident that the *commencement* of his Reformation, in the 18th year of his reign, was reckoned from the beginning of the *civil* year in the autumn (or Tishri), so that all could easily have been completed in spring [Nisan], when the Passover fell.
- ³⁴ The Passover was not only more universally attended than ever before, but observed in strictest accordance with all the requirements of the Mosaic Law [not merely according to former precedents]. Even in the Passover of Hezekiah there had, necessarily been a breach of the strict letter of the law (2 Chronicles 30:2, 3, 17-20).

CHAPTER 16

- ¹ Comp. Judith 3:11; 2 Maccabees 12:29, etc.
- ² *Kautzsch* in *Riehm's Hand-Worterb.* II. p. 1445*b.*
- ³ The actual number stated is twenty-eight years, but this seems exaggerated. The twenty-eight years would be between 633 and 605 B.C.

- ⁴ On the previous existence of such a canal, see the Note in Rawlinson's *Herodotus*, II. pp. 242, 243. According to Herodotus (ii. 158), no fewer than 120,000 laborers perished in the undertaking of Necho.
- ⁵ The Assyrian monuments leave us without clear information, and accounts are here very confused.
- ⁶ Of Babylonia more will be said in the sequel.
- ⁷ We cannot here enter into particulars, but refer generally to Schrader *die Keilinschr u. d. A.T.* pp. 358-361.
- ⁸ To this reference will be made in the sequel.
- ⁹ At the same time, such references to God — especially in the present circumstances — need not surprise us. Canon Cook (as quoted in the *Speaker's Commentary, ad loc.*) gives an almost exactly parallel expression from a Pharaoh of the year 750 B.C. The Eastern — in contradistinction to the Western- — mind, almost instinctively refers to the direct agency of the Divine Being certain human actions or remarkable events, and such expressions must not be too closely pressed according to our modern notions, nor yet literally understood.
- ¹⁰ The LXX. reads **התחזק** “he strengthened himself,” instead of our Massoretic **התחפש** “he disguised himself.”
- ¹¹ The order in 1 Chronicles iii. 15 seems not quite exact, since Shallum or Jehoahaz (comp. Jeremiah 22:11) seems to have been older than Zedekiah (comp. 2 Kings 23:31; 24:18).
- ¹² This probably because his appointment was out of the regular succession.
- ¹³ *Ant.* 10. 5, 2.
- ¹⁴ This is, according to Josephus, the explanation of Jehoahaz's appearance in Riblah. Manifestly it is the most natural explanation of his presence there.
- ¹⁵ Instead of “he came to Egypt” — **וַיָּבֹא** — 2 Kings 23:34, we read with the LXX. **וַיָּבִיֵא** “he brought *him*,” which agrees with 2 Chronicles 36:4.
- ¹⁶ *Ewald*, as quoted by Bahr, *ad loc.*

CHAPTER 17

- ¹ We are here chiefly following the researches of Schrader.
- ² According to Herodotus (i. 103, 106), Kyaxares had twice laid siege to Nineveh. On the second occasion the city was taken. The first siege was interrupted by the incursion of the Scythians.
- ³ But in the Biblical acceptance only to about 34 degrees latitude, north.
- ⁴ The prominent position occupied by the “crown-prince” Belshazzar in the life-time of his father has lately been established by a tablet, giving the annals of Nabonidos. Comp. Schrader, *u.s.* p. 434.
- ⁵ In the Book of Jeremiah he is also generally designated as Nebuchadrezzar, and always so by Ezekiel.
- ⁶ 2 Chronicles 36:6, where translate: “and put them in his palace at Babylon.”
- ⁷ Comp. generally Jos. *Ant.* x.ii, 1, who gives extracts from the historical works of Berosus and Megasthenes, and, *Ag. Ap.* I. 19.
- ⁸ By a clerical error in 2 Chronicles 36:9, his age is given as “eight years.” By a reversion of its component parts, his name is also written Joiachin (Ezekiel 1:2) and Coniah (Jeremiah. 22:24, 28; 37:1).
- ⁹ A somewhat different account is given in Jos. *Ant.* x. 7, 1 — and of the close of the previous reign in x. 6, 3.
- ¹⁰ These may have included altars, etc., while the gold-plating may have been stripped off from others.
- ¹¹ Others have, however, made the total number 10,000 — reckoning “the princes” at 2,000 and the craftsmen at 1,000. The computation does not seem to include the women and children — unless, indeed, we were to understand the numbers in Jeremiah 52:28 to refer exclusively to the male population. But this is, critically, not an easy passage, on the discussion of which we cannot enter in this place.
- ¹² Jewish legend speaks of the religious conversion of Jehoiachin (comp. Bar. 1., 3-7). The learned reader will find the detailed story, which is not very savoury, in *Vayyik. R’.* 19, end.

- ¹³ As that of Eliakim had been changed by Necho, comp. 2 Kings 23:34. We take this view rather than that the new king professed to be the fulfiller of the prophecy, Jeremiah 23:5-8.
- ¹⁴ So, correctly rendered. The concluding sentence in the verse forms the final commentary on that which precedes it.
- ¹⁵ See generally Kleinert's Summary (in Riehm's H. W. B. ii.:pp. 1791, 1792), to which we are indebted.
- ¹⁶ As throughout the chapter the reference is to Zedekiah, the mention of Jehoiakim in ver. 1. must be a clerical error. And some Codd. as well as the Syrian version, read there also: "Zedekiah."
- ¹⁷ A very interesting point here is that in the LXX. the mention of "the book" written by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25:13) is immediately followed by the prophecies against the various nations — contrary to the order of the chapters in our Hebrew Bible. And first of these stands the prophecy against Elam — in the Hebrew, Jeremiah 49:34-39, but in the LXX. Jeremiah 25:14-18. This is immediately followed in the LXX. by this sentence in 26:1: "In the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah came this word about Elam," the opening words corresponding to Hebrew Jeremiah 27:1, after which come the various prophecies against the nations.
- ¹⁸ This was a not uncommon Chaldean and ancient Persian mode of punishment when the object was to render a prince unfit for future government.
- ¹⁹ "A house of ward," rather than an actual prison, to which latter Jehoiachin had been confined. Blind Zedekiah was kept in a house of ward.
- ²⁰ Perhaps a month's respite was allowed, to ascertain the royal commands in regard to the city.
- ²¹ According to Josephus (*War*, vi 4. 8), this was also the day of the destruction of the Temple of Herod by the Romans.
- ²² An ancestor of Ezra. Comp. 2 Kings 25:18; 1 Chronicles 6:14; Ezra 7:1.
- ²³ "The son of Maaseiah." Comp. about him, Jeremiah 21:1; 29:25-29; 37:3.

- ²⁴ We have given this paraphrastic description of the first and the last mentioned of these officers, who, no doubt, were connected with the civil department of the army.
- ²⁵ The reference in 2 Chronicles 36:21 is to Jeremiah 25:11, 12, and Leviticus 26:34, 35. But it is not necessary to suppose that this seventy years Sabbath refers to an exact previous period of 490 years, during which the observance of Sabbatic years had been neglected.
- ²⁶ The time from the deportation of the last remnant to the decree of Cyrus was about fifty years.