**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**2 CHRONICLES-007. JEHOSHAPHAT'S REFORM by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1. And Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead, and strengthened himself against Israel. 2. And he placed forces in all the fenced cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim, which Asa his father had taken. 3. And the Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim; 4. But sought to the Lord God of his father, and walked in His commandments, and not after the doings of Israel. 5. Therefore the Lord established the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents; and he had riches and honour in abundance. 6. And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord: moreover he took away the high places and groves out of Judah. 7. Also in the third year of his reign he sent to his princes, even to Ben-hail, and to Obadiah, and to Zechariah, and to Nethaneel, and to Michaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah. 8. And with them he sent Levites, even Shemaiah, and Nethaniah, and Zebadiah, and Asabel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehonathan, and Adonijah, and Tobijah, and Tobadonijah, Levites: and with them Elishama and Jehoram, priests. 9. And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of the Lord with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people. 10. And the fear of the Lord fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat."*

*2 Chronicles 17:1-10*

The first point to be noted in this passage is that Jehoshaphat followed in the steps of Asa his father. Stress is laid on his adherence to the ancestral faith, the first ways of his father David,--before his great fall,--and the paternal example, he sought to the God of his father. Such carrying on of a predecessor's work is rare in the line of kings of Judah, where father and son were seldom of the same mind in religion. The principle of hereditary monarchy secures peaceful succession, but not continuity of policy. Many a king of Judah had to say in his heart what Ecclesiastes puts into Solomon's mouth, I hated all my labour, ... seeing that I must leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? But it is not only in kings houses that that experience is realised. Many a home is saddened to-day because the children do not seek the God of their fathers. Instead of the fathers should come up thy children; but, alas! grandmother Lois and mother Eunice do not always see the boy who has known the Scriptures from a child grow up into a Timothy, in whom their unfeigned faith lives again. The neglect of religious instruction in professedly Christian families, the inconsistent lives of parents or their too rigid restraints, or, sometimes, their too lax discipline, are to be blamed for many such cases. But there are many instances in which not the parents, but the children, are to be blamed. An earnest Sunday-school teacher may do much to lead the children of godly parents to their father's God. Blessed is the home where the golden chain of common faith binds hearts together, and family love is elevated and hallowed by common love of God!

Jehoshaphat's religion was, further, resolutely held in the face of prevailing opposition. The Baalim were popular; it was fashionable to worship them. They were numerous, and all varieties of taste could find a Baal to please them. But this young king turned from the tempting ways that opened flower-strewn before him, and chose the narrow road that led upwards. So did not I, because of the fear of God, might have been his motto. A similar determined setting of our faces God-ward, in spite of the crowd of tempting false deities around us, must mark us, if we are to have any religion worth calling by the name. This king recoiled from the example of the neighbouring monarchy, and walked not after the doings of Israel. His seeking to God was very practical, for it was not shown simply by professed beliefs or by sentiment, but by ordering his life in obedience to God's will. The test of real religion is, after all, a life unlike the lives of the men who do not share our faith, and moulded in accordance with God's known will. It is vain to allege that we are seeking the Lord unless we are walking in His commandments.

Prosperity followed godliness, in accordance with the divinely appointed connection between them which characterised the Old Dispensation. Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the New, says Bacon. But the epigram is too neat to be entirely true, for the Book of Job and many a psalm show that the eternal problem of suffering innocence was raised by facts even in the old days, and in our days there are forms of well-being which are the natural fruits of well-doing. Still, the connection was closer in Judah than with us, and, in the case before us, the establishment of Jehoshaphat in the kingdom, his subject's love, which showed itself in voluntary gifts over and above the taxes imposed, and his wealth and honour, were the direct results of his true religion.

A really devout man must be a propagandist. True faith cannot be hid nor be dumb. As certainly as light must radiate must faith strive to communicate itself. So the account of Jehoshaphat's efforts to spread the worship of Jehovah follows the account of his personal godliness. His heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord. There are two kinds of lifted-up hearts; one when pride, self-sufficiency, and forgetfulness of God, raise a man to a giddy height, from which God's judgments are sure to cast him down and break him in the fall; one when a lowly heart is raised to high courage and devotion, and set on high, because it fears God's name. Such elevation is consistent with humility. It fears no fall; it is an elevation above earthly desires and terrors, neither of which can reach it, so as to hinder the man from walking in the ways of the Lord. This king was lifted to it by his happy experience of the blessed effects of obedience. These encouraged him to vigorous efforts to spread the religion which had thus gladdened and brightened his own life. Is that the use we make of the ease which God gives us?

Jehoshaphat had to destroy first, in order to build up. The high places and Asherim had to be taken out of Judah before the true worship could be established there. So it is still. The Christian has to carry a sword in the one hand, and a trowel in the other. Many a rotten old building, the stones of which have been cemented in blood, has to be swept away before the fair temple can be reared. The Devil is in possession of much of the world, and the lawful owner has to dispossess the squatter. No one can suppose that society is organised on Christian principles even in so-called Christian countries; and there is much overturning work to be done before He whose right it is to reign is really king over the whole earth. We, too, have our high places and Asherim to root out.

But that destructive work is not to be done by force. Institutions can only be swept away when public opinion has grown to see their evils. Forcible reformations of manners, and, still more, of religion, never last, but are sure to be followed by violent rebounds to the old order. So, side by side with the removal of idolatry, this king took care to diffuse the knowledge of the true worship, by sending out a body of influential commissioners to teach in Judah. That was a new departure of great importance. It presents several interesting features. The composition of the staff of instructors is remarkable. The principal men in it are five court officers, next to whom, and subordinate, as is shown not only by the order of enumeration, but by the phrase with them, were nine Levites, and, last and lowest of all, two priests. We might have expected that priests should be the most numerous and important members of such a body, and we are led to suspect that the priesthood was so corrupted as to be careless about religious reformation. A clerical order is not always the most ardent in religious revival. The commissioners were probably chosen, without regard to their being priests, Levites, or laymen, because of their zeal in the worship of Jehovah; and the five princes head the list in order to show the royal authority of the commission.

Another point is the emphasis with which their function of teaching is thrice mentioned in three verses. Apparently the bulk of the nation knew little or nothing of the law of the Lord, either on its spiritual and moral or its ceremonial side; and Jehoshaphat's object was to effect an enlightened, not a forcible and superficial, change. God's way of influencing actions is to reveal Himself to the understanding and the heart, that these may move the will, and that may shape the deeds. Wise men will imitate God's way. Jehoshaphat did not issue royal commands, but sent out teachers. In chapter xix. we find him despatching judges in similar fashion throughout Judah. They had the power to punish, but these teachers had only authority to explain and to exhort.

The present writer accepts the chronicler's statement that the teachers had the Book of the Law with them, though he recognises it as possible that that Book was not identical with the complete collection of documents which now bears the name. But, be that as it may, the incident of our text is remarkable as being the only recorded systematic and complete attempt to diffuse the remedy against idolatry throughout the kingdom, as putting religious reformation on its only sure ground, and as hinting at deep and widespread ignorance among the masses.

When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. So Judah found. A terror of the Lord fell upon all the kingdoms around. No doubt, the news filtered to them of how Jehovah was exerting His might on the nation, and a certain indefinable awe of this so potent god, who was defeating the Baalim, made them think that peace was the best policy. Each nation was supposed to have its own god, and the national god was supposed to fight for his worshippers; so that war was a struggle of deities as well as of men, and the stronger god won. Here was a god who had reconquered his territory, and had cast out usurpers. Prudence dictated keeping on good terms with him. But it never occurred to any of these peoples that their own gods were any less real than Judah s, or that Judah's God could ever become theirs.