

ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE WRITING WHICH CAME TO JEHORAM FROM ELIJAH

“And there came a writing to him (Jehoram) from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, But hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, which were better than thyself: Behold, with a great plague will the LORD smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods: And thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day” (II Chronicles 21:12-15).

I. Elijah rests from his labors

At the time of his departure to heaven, king Jehoram, the son of Ahab, sat on the throne of the kingdom of Israel. Jehoshaphat reigned in Judah, and continued to do so until the eighth year after the removal of our prophet. He also had been gathered to his fathers, and his first-born, Ahab's son-in-law, the degenerate Jehoram, of the same name with his brother-in-law, the king of Israel, had ascended the throne. To this Jehoram, a writing comes, the contents of which were far from agreeable. The writing came from **“Elijah the Tishbite,”** who had departed in the chariot of fire to heaven at least six years before.

It is said by Paul, that Abel, in a figurative sense, **“being dead, yet speaketh.”** The quiet and godly character of this pious shepherd; his accepted sacrifice offered unto God in faith; his unnatural death, prefiguring to future ages what the children of God had to expect in this world; his blood, which cried to heaven for recompense; all this is a kind of speaking without the use of words.

And in this way many a pious departed person still speaks, though his tongue may have long been silent in the grave; and many a church and family is thus spoken to by the example of some departed member. What a cloud of such invisible witnesses encompasses us, my brethren; how many never-to-be-forgotten pilgrims of God, whose names still live in our hearts or memories, still preach to us encourage and comfort us by their still remembered words and examples! Thus their influence on earth has not ceased with their earthly life. But here, it would seem; that the prophet Elijah did not speak merely by example to those he left behind—he spoke by a writing.

We are not, however, to expect that many will believe this in the present age, which has for some time been endeavoring to cleanse every corner of the earth from the belief of whatever is miraculous and supernatural. But we cannot conceal our belief that this is one scriptural instance which teaches us, that between the kingdom of the blessed and the dark vale of our pilgrimage, there is not such a vast distance as most persons are apt to imagine.

And are there not several other instances in scripture which support this belief?

- Did not Samuel personally appear after his decease, and speak to Saul in common human language?
- Did not Elijah and Moses, more than a thousand years after their departure, meet their Saviour and his disciples on the mount of transfiguration?
- Did not the apostles, when they beheld their Divine Master walking on the sea, and again when he appeared after his resurrection, imagine they saw an apparition from the invisible world?
- Did not our Lord, instead of reproving them for this, as mere superstition, only appeal to their senses to convince them that he was not such an apparition as they supposed him to be.

Peter, too, after his deliverance from prison, was mistaken by the brethren for his spirit, as they had thought he had died in prison; and is there a word said in Scripture to contradict any such supposed erroneous notion, namely, of the possibility of departed saints reappearing in this visible world?

This awful writing comes to Jehoram six years after Elijah's removal from the earth; and this is all we learn from the sacred text, for no explanation is given.

How, then, is the fact to be explained? There are three different answers given to this question. The first is two-fold: either that the name Elijah is here put for Elisha, because the latter came in the spirit and power of the former; or else that it is put for Elisha by a mistake of the transcribers.

Now, neither part of this twofold answer is by any means satisfactory. The former supposition is unsatisfactory, because it is contrary to the whole analogy and simplicity of Scripture, in plain historical narration, that one man should be called by the name of another. The latter is unsatisfactory, because we have no evidence whatever that any mistake has here been made by the copyists, but all the evidence lies on the other side. For instance, the Septuagint version, which was very early made, and very widely spread, has it Elias; that is, according to its Greek, Elijah, and not Elisha, which latter word in Greek is Eliseus. Again, the Jewish historian, Josephus, in his Antiquities, a work also very widely spread in the world for ages, referring to this event, has expressly the word Elias, or Elijah.

The second answer that has been given to account for this writing coming to Jehoram at time, is, that Elijah wrote it by prophetic presence before he left the earth, and of course, before Jehoram ascended the throne of his father, either deposited it with the sons of the prophets, or committed it to the care of Elisha, and commissioned him to send it to Jehoram at a time scribed. But as we have no evidence of such a fact, so we have no probable assumption for posing it.

The third explanation remains to be considered; namely, that this writing literally came from Elijah the prophet, after his ascension from the earth.

And why not, as well as by the agency of angel, if it thus pleased God to make use of the prophet Elijah? In what manner it was done, we attempt not to explain, any more than we attempt to explain how this prophet appeared unto Peter, and James and John, at our Lord's transfiguration on the holy mount. We venture not to explain how far the powers and sphere of action vouchsafed to the "**spirits of just men made perfect**" are extended; much less to assert that they bear no relation to the state of the church militant here on earth.

It is in light, therefore, that we receive with simplicity the fact recorded before us; and with this explanation we dismiss the discussion, and proceed to the particulars of the narrative.

II. The awful writing which came to Jehoram contained unwonted language for a monarch's attention

Doubtless it must have occasioned momentary terror and alarm; but we read of no contrition, much less of true repentance on his part. Alas, to what insensibility and obduracy can a man arrive by pride, infidelity, and frivolity!

Yet surely this warning was sent by a merciful God, in order to alarm and awaken him to true repentance and conversion. Had it produced such an effect, doubtless the awful threatening would have been averted, as in the case of Nineveh; and, as in the case of his own father-in-law, evil had been partially averted by Ahab's partial humiliation. For God is slow to anger, and ready to forgive. He hath no pleasure at all in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live. Ezekiel 18:23. But, in case he repented not, the sentence announced in this writing was a judicial sentence; and this was awfully the case in the present instance.

Jehoram, when this writing came to him from Elijah the prophet, had nearly filled up the measure of his iniquity; and yet two years elapsed, after the arrival of the divine message to him, before the threat was fully accomplished in cutting him off from the earth. Such is the patience and longsuffering of God!

Let us now review the contents of the writing which came to him from Elijah. It commences with reminding him of his chief sins and provocations.

"Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, but hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, which were better than thyself."

How terrible this accusation! How abominable the sins here noticed! But be not deceived, as if the Holy Spirit of God can be vexed and grieved only with such sins as these of Jehoram.

God can say to many among ourselves, "I have given you the good word of life and ye have heard it and read it, and yet have gone on in sin and vanity. I have sent you one messenger after another, but ye have not hearkened to them; one affliction after another, but ye heard not the rod, nor Him who appointed it. I reminded you of one commandment after another, but ye have not laid them to heart!"

Elijah addresses Jehoram, "**Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father!**"

This was to recall to his memory what God had done for his family in times past, and therefore to remind him the more forcibly of his own ingratitude. It was also thus intimated to him that he only sat on the throne because it had been divinely promised to David that his house should continue to the coming of the Messiah; and, further, that he might have learnt, even from David's own history and language, that with the Lord there is abundant forgiveness and plenteous redemption. "**Because,**" continues the awful writing, "**thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of king of Judah, but hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel.**"

Here, therefore, is a remembrance of his own pious father and grandfather; and, consequently, an intimation of the so much greater heinousness of his guilt. Asa, his grandfather, had reigned forty-one years at Jerusalem, and had set an excellent example.

"He had done that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God, even as his father David had done; for he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves."

As a true shepherd of his people, he was not less anxious for their spiritual and eternal welfare, than for their temporal prosperity. By his own conduct and ordinances he had called upon Judah to "**seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment;**" and the Lord had crowned these pious endeavors with the happiest results.

Asa, as a thorough reformer, determined not to rest until the last idol in his land was burnt, and every heathenish altar thrown down. He had called his subjects back from the groves and high places to the altars of the Lord; and the people had obeyed the call, "**and entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul.**"

As a vigilant and indefatigable ruler, he labored to promote the social welfare of his people, and the external security of his kingdom; and, as a valiant general, he obtained many a triumph over mighty foes, because he trusted in the God of Israel, and marched out with the watchword, "**Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power**" (II Chronicles 14:11).

Towards the end of his life, indeed, he on one occasion resorted to the vain hope of man instead of looking supremely to the Lord, II Chronicles 16:12; and he had to repent of it bitterly. But he slept in God, and the people consecrated his ashes with tears of gratitude and affection.

A still more illustrious king than Asa was Jehoram's father, the excellent Jehoshaphat. His example shines to this day as worthy the imitation of all rulers. The sacred historian records of him that the Lord was with him because he "**walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim, but sought to the Lord God of his father, and walked in his commandments**" (I Chronicles 17:3, 4).

He continued and completed the reformation which his father Asa had begun, The well-being of his people, in the highest and holiest sense of the term, was the great object which he kept continually before him. He, more than once, travelled through the land, from Beersheba to the mountains of Ephraim, to strengthen his people in the faith, and to bring back many to the Lord, the God of their fathers; and the Lord gave great success to the labors of this royal missionary.

He sent also priests and Levites about the country with the book of God's law in their hands, to instruct the ignorant, and to establish the better informed. And we read that "the fear of God was upon all the kingdoms bordering upon Judah, when they heard that the Lord fought against the enemies of Israel. So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest round about" (II Chronicles 20:29, 30).

Also some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents and tribute-silver, and the Arabians brought him flocks, and Jehoshaphat waxed great exceedingly II Chronicles 17:10-12. And he set judges in the land throughout all the fenced cities of Judah, to watch over right and justice, and to determine individual disputes.

And he said to the judges, "**Take heed what ye do; for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of the Lord be upon you**" (II Chronicles 19: 5-7).

- If he went to war, his first preparation was by fasting and prayer II Chronicles 20:3.
- His army, distinguished both for discipline and courage, amounted to one million and eighty thousand strong II Chronicles 17:14, &c.

Yet his wars were entirely defensive. He gladly remained at peace whenever the foe left him at leisure, to improve his country and to give fresh impulse to its prosperity by founding new cities, and by promoting education and commerce. Thus did this worthy descendant of David reign. Happy the country which is blest with such a governor! Let us pray that the "**powers that be**" may ever be disposed to rule like Jehoshaphat. This is one of our plainest Christian duties. (See I Timothy 2:1, 2).

Such were the honorable ancestors of Jehoram. He had been trained up in the very beams of such excellent examples. Nevertheless he had wilfully yielded to his own natural vanity and pride, and by thus neglecting to hearken to instructors, and listening probably to flatterers, he gradually waxed worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived, till he became such a monster of iniquity, that a worse monarch never sat on the throne of David. It seems as if he had adopted a regular system of openly setting at nought the example of his excellent predecessors, by the disgusting contrast of his own; nay, as if he had made it his chief employment to root up and tread under foot, in the shortest possible time, the seed sown by his pious father.

No sooner had he buried his royal parent, and taken lawful possession of his throne at Jerusalem, that he threw off all disguise, and a horrible massacre opens the black catalogue of his crimes, followed by iniquity after iniquity.

His brothers, who were all of them better than he, seemed to stand in his way, and he appears to have lusted for their wealth, but more especially to have feared the reproach which his heathenish course of life would occasion him in their eyes; hence he hated them, and caused them to be massacred without mercy. Six of them thus died, and one of them only escaped. Many of the great men of the kingdom participated in their dreadful fate, as if the blood of his own brothers did not cry loud enough to heaven.

Jehoram, under the influence of his wife Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, was initiated in all vices and abominations of heathenism. The longsuffering of the Lord omitted not to send him serious warnings. The Edomites invade the country, and the city of Libna revolts from him. But Jehoram perseveres in sin and wickedness, and openly renouncing the God of his fathers, introduces the idolatry of Sidon, which had been expelled by Asa and Jehoshaphat, recalls the banished priests of Baal, erects altars, consecrates groves, invites a people to idolatrous festivals of licentiousness, and even compels Judah thereto with despotic intolerance.

To this the words in this awful writing of Elijah refer: **“Thou hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab.”** Do not be offended at this mode of expression. The Scripture of Divine truth cannot employ such equivocal expressions as are used in modern days; its appellations strike always at the root of things; hence; we are not surprised that its searching language and plain dealing should have always offended the hypocrite, the worldling, and the debauchee.

When men depart from the living God and cleave to any idol of their heart, whatever name it may bear, whether that of superior light, philosophy, talent, or liberality, the Scripture calls it whoredom, because it is nothing else, and, indeed, it is the worst and the vilest. The “Maker” of the church is the husband of the church; its innumerable members are collectively his betrothed wife. This mystical union between Christ and his church is insisted on in Scripture throughout; and when any member of the visible church acts not according to it, but idolizes the honors, gains, or pleasures of this world, the Scripture calls his conduct adultery, and pronounces judgment upon it as a thing of Divine abhorrence.

- How awful then is the provocation of those who are not only guilty of this conduct themselves, but by influence or example, in word or in writing, pour the intoxicating wine of their spiritual fornication into the cup of others!
- How awful when parents or tutors do this with respect to those committed to their care!
- How awful when ministers of Christ’s religion teach, under the name of morals and philosophy, **“another Gospel which is not another,”** corrupting and denying the plain and express Word of God!
- How awful when poets, journalists, and other popular writers endeavor, by every means, to seduce the people from the way of truth into deistical or atheistical sophistry!

Awful indeed are the denunciations of Scripture against all such companions of Balaam! Such murderers of souls! In the divine displeasure against Jehoram, they may behold the same against themselves.

The sins and crimes of Jehoram having been thus reproved, the writing next announces to him the sentence of God.

“Behold, with a great plague the Lord will smite thee. He will punish thy atrocities in thy people, thy children, thy wives, and all that thou hast, and finally, in thine own person. For thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness from day to day!”

O, fearful manifestation of the just judgment of Him who clothes himself with zeal as with a cloak, and repays his enemies to their face. Lo, smoke goeth forth from his nostrils, and consuming fire from his mouth! How fearful a thing thus to fall into the hands of the living God!

Jehoram reads the tremendous announcement; but, instead of repenting, he makes his face harder than a rock, and his neck as an iron sinew. Verily, men become hardened and obdurate through the deceitfulness of sin. Well might he shudder at reading such a writing. But it did not end in humiliation; and whatever will not bend must break.

The divine curse, like a growing storm, soon discharges itself. First, a furious hostile force of Philistines and Arabians suddenly attack the borders of his kingdom. Jehoram sends his armies against them, but they are defeated by the invaders. The blessing of God no longer attends the armies of Israel. With the faith of their fathers, their fathers' strength in war is departed. The enemy pours into the kingdom like a desolating flood. This was the first plague: the king was punished in his deluded and idolatrously revolted people.

But this is only the beginning of his troubles, for his ears are too dull of hearing to discern the voice of the rod and Him that had appointed it. The enemy advances to the capital, and Jehoram's host is vanquished wherever it shows itself. In a few days the conquering army of the heathen are under the walls of Jerusalem. The city is taken, and the remnant of the Jewish army scattered; the king's palace is stormed and taken, his treasure plundered, and all his wives, except Athaliah, who was reserved for a more tragic end, are carried away captive. Even his sons are obliged to leave their native land. One only remains behind, Jehoahaz the youngest; for the Lord remembered his word, **“David shall never want a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel.”**

All the rest go into miserable captivity. Woeful example of the righteous judgment of God! Here is indeed **“eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.”** The destroyer of the people becomes accursed of the people. The avaricious robber sees himself stripped of his family and treasures. The denier of the Lord and his word is denied by him in return, and given up to his own way. The voluptuary and fratricide is visited with the loss of his own wives and children. But his plagues do not end here. Lest his impenitent heart should soon devise a false peace for itself, he is condemned to suffer also in his own person.

The horrible disease in his bowels soon appears, and continues for two years together, baffling all the skill and wisdom of his physicians; so that **“it came to pass, after the end of two years, that his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness, and he died. His people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers. Howbeit they buried him in the city of David, but not in the sepulchres of the kings.”**

Thus was every word of the divine denunciation fulfilled. Let all who care not for God be admonished by it.

A writing like that prophetic one lies at their very door. It begins, **“Woe unto all that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to them that are wise in their own eyes, and pure in their own sight!”**

It continues, **“The lamp of the wicked shall be put out, and their feet hasten to destruction!”**

It concludes, **“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!”**

Neither shall one of these words fall to the ground; nevertheless they do not threaten unconditionally. There is appended to them the words, **“Except they repent and be converted, that their sins may be blotted out.”**

Rejoice at this. You may escape the curse which threatens you. Hear the voice of the Good Shepherd; begin to follow him, and believe in him, and then shall you shall obtain, through him, the forgiveness of all sins.

But **“there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.”**

~ end of chapter 28 ~

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