

H. L. Rossier

**Comments on
the 2nd book of the
Chronicles**

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By H.L. Rossier

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Chapter 1 to 9

Solomon's Reign

The second book of Chronicles continues on from the first book without transition; originally they formed a single account in the Hebrew manuscripts. We have previously remarked the same thing in the second book of Kings about these artificial divisions which are not part of the inspired Word. In fact, the account of the Chronicles is a continuous one until the end of Solomon's reign (2 Chr. 10), and if we are looking for a moral division in our subject, it will not properly be introduced until 2 Chr. 11.

Let us recall a truth, already mentioned many times in First Chronicles: in Chronicles God gives us, in the form of types, an overview of His counsels concerning Christ's royalty, counsels prefigured in the history of David and Solomon. Solomon himself symbolizes the future reign of wisdom and peace that will be inaugurated by the Lord's coming. This is why, as we

have noted in 1 Chronicles in the history of David, Solomon's reign does not present any failures in Chronicles and even with the greatest carefulness, one cannot discover there the least allusion to the king's faults.

In the preceding book we have seen how Solomon was elevated to his father's throne before he was established on his own throne. These two facts speak very clearly to us of Christ's present heavenly kingdom and of His earthly kingdom which is yet to come. The account before us will present this latter to us, and here we will not find, as in Kings, a responsible and fallible sovereign, but rather the most perfect figure possible of a government of wisdom and of peace administered by the king according to the counsels of God.

Chapter 1

A King According to God's Counsels

One cannot sufficiently emphasize, at the beginning of this book, that Solomon's reign in Chronicles has an entirely differ-

Chapter 1 to 9 - Solomon's Reign

Chapter 1

A King According to God's Counsels

ent character than that of Solomon in the book of Kings. His righteousness exercised in judgment on his father's enemies — Adonijah who had opposed David, Shimei who had insulted and mocked him, Joab whose acts of violence and unrighteousness he had tolerated without being able to rebuke them — all this is omitted in Chronicles (cf. 1 Kings 1-2). The incident of the two prostitutes (1 Kings 3:16-28) is also passed over in complete silence, for if this scene shows us Solomon's wisdom, it shows us his wisdom in the service of righteousness in order to rule equitably. The king does not pursue the investigation further, and does not rebuke or cut off even the most guilty of these prostitutes. Chronicles does not present Solomon's reign according to the character we have just mentioned. It is above all a reign of peace, presided over by wisdom. It is no less true that during the millennium “every morning [He] will destroy all the wicked of the land,” and that prostitution will be neither tolerated nor even mentioned; but peace will reign. It is this that constitutes the subject of the first chapters of this book.

From the very first words of our chapter (2 Chr. 1:1), Solomon is presented to us as strengthening himself in his kingdom, whereas in 1 Kings 2:46 the kingdom was established in his hand after the judgment of all the personal enemies of David. Solomon strengthens himself here with his full personal authority, but nonetheless he remains the dependent man, for if he were not, he would not be the type of the True King according to God's counsels. "Ask of me," He is urged in Psalm 2, "and I will give Thee ... for Thy possession the ends of the earth." This is why in our passage we find: "And Jehovah his God was with him, and magnified him exceedingly." So too, as long as He retains the kingdom, the Lord remains the dependent Man; when He shall have concluded its administration, He will faithfully give it up into the hands of the One who entrusted it to Him and "then the Son also Himself shall be placed in subjection to Him who put all things in subjection to Him" (1 Cor. 15:28). Will any earthly kingdom ever resemble this marvelous reign during which for a period of a thousand years — without a single shortcoming, without one denial of justice, without any

decrease of peace — Christ will reign over His earthly people and over all the nations?

Dear Christian reader, let's get used to considering the Lord in this way for His own sake, and not only for the resources which He gives to meet our needs. This is the most lofty form of contemplation to which we are called, for we are set, so to say, in the company of our God to take delight in the perfections of this adorable Person. How numerous are those passages of Scripture that reveal, not what we possess in virtue of the work of Christ, but rather, what Christ is for God in virtue of His own perfections. God opens heaven on this Man and says: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I have found My delight." And when He was obliged to close heaven to Him at the moment when He was making propitiation for our sins, He says: "But Thou art the Same, and Thy years shall have no end." And again: "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Thy kingdom: Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness; therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy

companions.” In virtue of the perfection of His obedience and His humiliation, God “highly exalted Him, and granted Him a name, that which is above every name.” This Man is “the First-born of all creation”; He has all glory and all supremacy (Col. 1:15-20). It is because He laid down His life that He might take it again that the Father loves Him. In all this we find nothing of that which He has done for us. But in virtue of His accomplished work we are made capable of taking an interest in His Person and all His perfections. Let us cultivate this intimacy. Doubtless for our souls the outstanding trait of this adorable character is summed up in these words: “He loved me, and gave Himself for me”; whatever knowledge I may gain about Him, it always brings me back to His love. Thus, when He is presented to us as “the Prince of the kings of the earth,” we cry out: “To Him who loves us!” But what I want to say is that what He is in Himself is an unfailing source of joy for the believer. Nothing else so effectively takes him out of his natural egoism and out of the petty preoccupations of earth; he has

found the source of his eternal bliss in a perfect Object, with whom he is in intimate and direct relationship.

In verses 2 to 6, we have the scene at Gibeon, but without the imperfections which spoil its beauty in 1 Kings 3:1-4. In our passage the “only” which denotes a fault has disappeared: “Only the people sacrificed in high places”; “Only he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.” Here the scene is legitimate, if I may so express myself, and Gibeon is no longer “the great high place” (1 Kings 3:4); on the contrary, it is the place where “was God’s tent of meeting which Moses the servant of Jehovah had made in the wilderness ... and the brazen altar that Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made, was there before the tabernacle of Jehovah” (2 Chr. 1:3-5). Not a shadow of anything that would discredit! Solomon sacrifices on the altar, the token of atonement, where the people could meet their God. Was there anything that could be reproached in that? Not at all. No, doubtless the place was only provisional while awaiting the construction of the temple; doubtless also, God’s throne, the ark, was not to be found there, for from this

time on it was established in the city of David; but in Chronicles Solomon comes to Gibeon with his people to inaugurate the reign of peace which God could introduce on the basis of sacrifice. Indeed, Second Chronicles, as we have already seen, speaks to us much more of the reign of peace than of the reign of righteousness.

In verses 7 to 12, Solomon asks God for wisdom, and here again our account differs significantly from that in Kings (1 Kings 3:5-15). In our passage, Solomon is not “a little child” who “know[s] not to go out and to come in.” There is no question that First Chronicles refers to him as a little child, but as we have noted in studying that book, from a typical point of view his youth corresponds to the position Christ occupies in heaven on His Father's throne before the inauguration of His earthly kingdom. In Kings, Solomon is ignorant and lacks discernment “between good and bad” (1 Kings 3:9). In Chronicles this flaw has totally disappeared: the king says that he needs wisdom to go out and come in before the people and to govern them. For this he addresses the One who has made him king

and upon whom he is entirely dependent; this will also be Christ's relationship as Man and King with His God. But what is still more striking is that in our passage the question of responsibility is completely omitted, in contrast to 1 Kings 3:14: "If thou wilt walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments," says God, "then I will prolong thy days." In Chronicles, Solomon's responsibility is mentioned only once (1 Chr. 28:7-10), to depict Christ's dependence as Man, and not in any way to suppose that he might be found at fault. The book of Kings is completely different (see 1 Kings 3:14; 1 Kings 2:2, 6, 9; 1 Kings 6:11). Again, let us note that in 1 Kings God said to Solomon: "Because thou hast asked this thing ... behold, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart" (1 Kings 3:11-12). In 2 Chronicles God gives him wisdom and understanding "because this was in thy heart." A type of Christ, he receives these things as man, but his heart did not need to be fashioned to receive them.

Chapter 1 to 9 - Solomon's Reign

Chapter 1

A King According to God's Counsels

We shall not fail to see new proofs at every step of the marvelous precision with which the inspired Word pursues its object.

Verses 14-17. In the fact that Solomon accumulated much silver and gold at Jerusalem, and that his merchants brought him horses from Egypt, “and so they brought them by their means, for all the kings of the Hittites and for the kings of Syria,” some have thought to see proof of Solomon's unfaithfulness to the prescriptions of the law in Deuteronomy 17:16-17. The study of Chronicles causes us to reject such an interpretation. Here, Egypt is tributary to Solomon who treats it equitably. He lets foreign nations profit from the same advantages, and so it shall be under Christ's future reign. The same remark applies, as we shall see in 2 Chronicles 8:11, to Pharaoh's daughter.

Chapter 2

Solomon and Hiram (Hiram)

Here, as in all these chapters, we find King Solomon portrayed from the standpoint of the perfection of his reign. The nations are subject to him. The men to bear burdens, the stone cutters, and the overseers are taken exclusively from among the Canaanites living in the midst of Israel, whom the people had not succeeded in driving out (2 Chr. 2:1-2; 17-18; 2 Chr. 8:7-9): “But of the children of Israel, of them did Solomon make no bondmen for his work.” Thus a condition of things is realized under this glorious reign which, on account of the unfaithfulness of the people, had never existed previously. All their former mingling with the Canaanites has disappeared, and from now on the Lord's people are a free people that cannot be brought into servitude. Meanwhile the strangers whom unfaithful Israel had not exterminated from their land in time past are the only ones subjected to bondage, while the nations, possessing the riches of the earth and personified by the king of Tyre, are accepted as collaborators in this great work.

Here Solomon explains to Hiram the meaning and significance of the construction of the temple, and he does so in a different way than in the book of Kings: “Behold, I build a house unto the name of Jehovah my God to dedicate it to Him, to burn before Him sweet incense, and for the continual arrangement of the showbread, and for the morning and evening burnt-offerings and on the sabbaths and on the new moons, and on the set feasts of Jehovah our God. This is an ordinance forever to Israel” (v. 4). Here the temple is the place where God is to be approached in worship, a place open not only to Israel, but also to the nations whom Hiram represents. The temple is so much the place of worship in Solomon's mind, that only burnt offerings are mentioned here, without any reference to sin offerings; sweet incense of fragrant drugs, the symbol of praise, occupies the first place. When it is a question in Ezekiel 45 of the millennial service in the temple, whether for Israel, or for the “prince” of the house of David, Christ's viceroy on the earth, we find the sin offering, for all are in need of it. Here the thought is more general. Solomon declares to Hiram that this

great house which he is building is dedicated to the God of Israel “for great is our God above all gods. But who is able to build Him a house, seeing the heavens and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him?” Thus, this sovereign God, this God who is supreme and omnipresent, cannot limit His kingdom to the people of Israel. As for Solomon himself, he knows that he is only a weak human likeness of the King according to God's counsels: “Who am I,” he says, “that I should build Him a house?” Nevertheless he is there “to burn sacrifice before Him.” He presents himself as king and priest, without any mediator; he himself offers pure incense, as the people's mediator, a select incense which rises with the smoke of the burnt offering, a perfect, well-pleasing odor to God, and “This is an ordinance forever to Israel.”

Solomon entrusts to Hiram the direction of the work, while he himself is its executor, though confiding it into the hands of the nations. So it will be at the beginning of the millennium, according to what we are told about the temple in Zechariah 6:15 and about the walls of Jerusalem in Isaiah 60:10.

The sustenance of Hiram's workers here depends entirely on the king: He is the one who offers and appoints it (v. 10), and Hiram has nothing more to do than to receive it. It is otherwise in 1 Kings 5:9-11 where Hiram requests it and Solomon grants it.

Hiram (v. 11) acknowledges in writing (That which is written is an abiding declaration and is always available for reference): “Jehovah loved His people” in establishing Solomon as king over them, and he blesses “Jehovah the God of Israel,” but as Creator of the heavens and the earth — lovely picture of the praise of the nations who, in the age yet to come will submit themselves to the universal dominion of the Most High, Possessor of the heavens and the earth, represented by the true Son of David in the midst of His people Israel. Thus blessing will rise up to God Himself from those who, formerly idolaters, will be subjected to the dominion of Christ, the King of the nations.

Hiram is prompt to execute all that the king requires, and is prompt also to accept Solomon's gifts. In Chronicles we do not

see him disdainfully calling the cities which Solomon gives him “Cabul” (cf. 1 Kings 9:13), and in this way the fault committed by Solomon in alienating the Lord's inheritance is passed over in silence. Here on part of the representative of the nations there is only thankfulness and voluntary submission; he is prompt to accept and to receive, for to refuse the gifts of such a king would be only pride and rebellion.

Chapter 3 to 5

The Temple

2 Chronicles 3 and 2 Chronicles 4 correspond to 1 Kings 6 and 1 Kings 7, but with the difference that here the temple has a special significance. Whereas in Kings it is on the one hand the place where God dwells with His own, and on the other hand the center of His government in the midst of Israel, in Chronicles, as we have already noted, it is the place where one approaches God in order to worship Him, the “house of sacrifice” (2 Chr. 7:12). In speaking of a place of approach we are not alluding to the sinner who comes by the blood of Christ to be

justified before God; we are thinking of the worshipper who enters by that same way into the sanctuary. Thus in the Epistle to the Romans we see the sinner justified by Christ's blood, whereas the Epistle to the Hebrews introduces us into the most holy place by that same way. The fact that the temple is presented as the place of approach explains all the details of this chapter. Here we again find the brazen altar and the veil (2 Chr. 3:14; 2 Chr. 4:1), omitted in the description of the temple in the book of Kings; on the other hand, the priests' dwellings mentioned in Kings are missing in Chronicles. The prophet Ezekiel, who does not give us the typical picture but rather the actual description of Christ's millennial reign, in his description of the temple (Ezek. 40-45) brings together the characters of the books of Kings and Chronicles. There we find the altar, the door of the sanctuary, the dwelling places of the priests, and the attributes of God's government all together (Ezek. 40:47; Ezek. 41:22; Ezek. 41:6; Ezek. 41:18). In fact, Ezekiel's temple sets forth Jehovah, Christ, dwelling in the midst of a people of priests, exercising His righteous government, and become the

center of worship for both Israel and the nations; whereas the books of Kings and Chronicles, in order that we may better appreciate His glories, present them to us one after the other.

Other striking details confirm what we have just said. Chronicles mentions neither the sin offering nor the trespass offering; there the altar is solely the place of burnt offerings and peace offerings. Ezekiel, by contrast, insists upon the sin offering as the preparation for all the other offerings (Ezek. 43:25-27), and then names them not omitting even one (Ezek. 45:25).

A few more words about the brazen altar: This altar of Solomon's has a very important place in Chronicles. It is not the altar of the wilderness, kept at Gibeon, figure of the way in which God comes to meet the sinner and remains just while justifying him; but rather, it is the altar of burnt offering without which one may not approach Him. The dimensions of the altar at Gibeon are quite different from those of Solomon's altar: the first is five cubits long, five cubits wide, and three cubits high. Solomon's altar (2 Chr. 4:1) is twenty cubits long,

twenty cubits wide, and ten cubits high. The two principal dimensions are exactly the same as those of the most holy place (2 Chr. 3:8; 1 Kings 6:20; Ezek. 41:4). The altar, Christ, is perfectly suited to the sanctuary; the glories of the most holy place correspond to the greatness and perfection of the sacrifice represented by the altar. Moreover, as we have said, the altar being especially the expression of worship here, it also has the same measurements as the sanctuary; without being perfect in all its dimensions, it is worthy, in the highest degree, of the millennial scene which it represents.

Everything pertaining to Christ's millennial government and even to the emblems of this government is completely absent in Chronicles; for example, the house of the forest of Lebanon, seat of the throne of judgment, as well as the king's palace, and also the cherubim, special symbols of government which are found throughout the book of Kings, on the walls of the temple and even on the vessels of the courtyard.

Even when it is a question of Solomon's person and his deeds, the description which Chronicles gives is intentionally simplified. There the king is presented to us, not increasing in greatness, as in the book of Kings, but established on the throne according to God's counsels, endowed with perfect wisdom, surrounded by riches and glory. Not a single detail is given us about the exercise of his wisdom, whether in discerning evil, whether in judging, or whether in teaching that which is good by his words and writings (see 1 Kings 3:16-28; 1 Kings 4:29-34). Solomon is set before our eyes on his throne, in a posture, so to say, unchangeable; peace reigns, the counsels of God concerning His King are fulfilled, and this King Himself is God.

This scene of peace and well-being has its starting point on Mount Moriah, a detail, let us carefully note, which is missing in the book of Kings: “And Solomon began to build the house of Jehovah at Jerusalem on mount Moriah, where he appeared to David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite” (2 Chr. 3:1). It was at Moriah, first of all, that Abraham had offered Isaac on the altar

and received him again in figure by resurrection; there, all that the holiness of God demanded had been provided. Next, it was at Moriah where, on the occasion of David's failure, grace gloried over judgment. Solomon's reign of peace is thus established after resurrection, on the principle of grace, just as the future reign of the risen Christ will be based entirely on the grace that triumphed at the cross. Following the sacrifice of Moriah and in virtue of the sovereign monarch's personal perfection, the latter may from this time forward enter his temple. The eternal gates will lift up their heads to let the King of glory pass. He will have a rich entry into His own kingdom. Only in Chronicles do we find the immense height of this porch (2 Chr. 3:4; cf. Ps. 24:7, 9; Mal. 3:1; Hag. 2:7; 2 Peter 1:11, 17).

One more characteristic detail: here we see only palm trees and chains on the walls of the house; palm trees are the symbols of triumphant peace; the chains, which also ornament the pillars here, are not mentioned anywhere else except on the shoulder pieces and the breastplate of the high priest. They firmly unite the various parts and appear to symbolize the solidity of the

bond uniting the people of God. There are no more partially opened flowers, symbol of a reign that is beginning to blossom out, as in the book of Kings; here the reign is definitely established; there are no more cherubim hidden under the gold of the walls; they appear only on the veil; there are no more secret thoughts, no more hidden counsels of God; they are now made manifest in the person of Christ, but fixed on the veil — His flesh delivered to death. In the most holy place, two cherubim standing with wings extended face “toward the house” (2 Chr. 3:13), a fact mentioned only here, and contemplate the order of the people of God established from henceforth on. The pillars Jachin and Boaz (“He shall establish” and “In Him is strength”) are essential to this scene, emblems of a reign established from this time on and dependent entirely on the power which is in Christ.

Another interesting detail: Solomon “made ten tables, and placed them in the temple, five on the right hand and five on the left” (2 Chr. 4:8). 1 Kings 7:48 mentions only one. Is it not striking to see the loaves of shewbread thus multiplied tenfold?

Solomon is viewed as seated “on the throne of Jehovah” (1 Chr. 29:23); Israel increases under his reign; they ever remain the same tribes, but infinitely increased in the eyes of God, who beholds them and governs them. The true Solomon, Christ Himself, is the author of this multiplication (2 Chr. 4:8). In the millennium Israel will be complete, as presented to God by Christ, an offering well-pleasing to God.

In 2 Chronicles 5 the ark is brought up from the city of David to the magnificent house which Solomon has prepared for it. The tabernacle and all its vessels, which were at Gibeon, rejoin the ark in the temple: thus the remembrance of the wilderness journey ever remains before God. We are not told of the vessels of the court; most importantly, we are not told of the brazen altar that was set up by Moses and where God in grace came to meet a sinful people. This wilderness altar is replaced by Solomon's altar, itself corresponding to the altar David set up on the threshing-floor of Ornan. Solomon's altar is mentioned in passing in the book of Kings only when all has been finished (1 Kings 8:22). Kings, as we have said, has another object in view

than worship. The ark has at last found a place of rest, but the millennial scene, which these chapters pre-figure, is not the eternal, final rest for God's throne. The staves have not disappeared, although their position denotes that the ark will no longer journey. The entire scene of millennial blessing described here will end when the new heavens and the new earth are established.

The passage from verse 11 to 14 of our chapter is missing in the book of Kings: “And it came to pass when the priests were come out of the holy place (for all the priests that were present were hallowed without observing the courses; and the Levites the singers, all they of Asaph, of Heman, of Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, clad in byssus, with cymbals and lutes and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them a hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets), — it came to pass when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one voice to be heard in praising and thanking Jehovah; and when they lifted up their voice with trumpets, and cymbals, and instruments of music, and praised Jehovah: For He is good,

for His loving-kindness endures forever; that then the house, the house of Jehovah, was filled with a cloud, and the priests could not stand to do their service because of the cloud; for the glory of Jehovah had filled the house of God.” This is the appropriate picture of millennial worship when the “song of triumph and praise” shall be sounded (cf. 2 Chr. 20:22). There the Lord is praised “for He is good, for His loving-kindness endures forever.” (As to this song, see also: 1 Chr. 16:41; 2 Chr. 7:3, 6; Ps. 106:1; Ps. 107:1; Ps. 118; Ps. 136; Jer. 33:11). All the instruments of music resound, just as in Psalm 150 which describes the same scene. Here we have properly the dedication of the altar (2 Chr. 7:9) preceding the feast of tabernacles, but only Chronicles shows us the glory of the Lord filling the house twice. In fact, there were two feasts, one of seven days, the dedication of the altar, and one of eight days, the dedication of the house or the feast of tabernacles (2 Chr. 7:9). Both are found here, with the same hymn and the same presence of God's glory in His temple, a subject most appropriate to this

book which speaks of worship and of the fulfillment of God's counsels concerning His reign.

In Chronicles the dedication of the altar takes the place of the great day of atonement (cf. Lev. 23:26-36), while in Zechariah this day must precede the establishment of the messianic reign. Here it is not a question of afflicting their souls as on the day of atonement (Lev. 16:29), but of rejoicing, for by means of the altar God's loving-kindness which endures forever has ultimately brought the people to Himself.

The song: "His loving-kindness endures forever," so characteristic of the beginning of the millennial reign, is repeated in this book of Chronicles both times when the glory of Jehovah fills the temple; this hymn is completely absent in 1 Kings. The scene is much more complete here: the counsels of God as to the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth are in type at last accomplished. "The glory of Jehovah had filled the house of God" (cf. 1 Kings 8:11). The name of God often replaces that of Jehovah in these chapters, an allusion to His relation-

ship with the nations which acknowledge the God of Israel as their God.

In conclusion let us say that in the presence of all the differences in details between 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, every believer will be convinced of the wisdom and divine order which invariably preside in these accounts. The smallest omission as well as every word added in the sacred text are the fruit of an overall plan destined to display the various glories of Christ. We are far from having exhausted the enumeration of these differences; others may discover additional differences with real profit for their souls.

Chapter 6 to 7

Solomon's Prayer

Many important particulars differentiate this portion of our book from the corresponding chapter of Kings — 1 Kings 8. In the latter chapter, the feast, although prolonged for fourteen days, in actual fact corresponds only to the feast of tabernacles.

It is called “the dedication of the house” (cf. 1 Kings 8:63); but on the eighth day, the great day of the feast, the king sent the people away (1 Kings 8:65-66). The passage in Chronicles goes much further: it insists on the fact that “on the eighth day they held a solemn assembly” (2 Chr. 7:9); thus it introduces the type of ultimate general rest connected with the day of resurrection which the eighth day prefigures. In this way, the blessing is not restricted to the people of Israel alone, but belongs to all who have part in the day of resurrection.

Our passage in Chronicles offers another very interesting observation: Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord, in the presence of the whole congregation of Israel, “and spread forth his hands. For Solomon had made a platform of bronze, five cubits long, and five cubits broad, and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court; and upon it he stood, and he kneeled down on his knees before the whole congregation of Israel” and spread forth his hands towards the heavens. The entire portion of this passage within the quotation marks is lacking in the book of Kings. The platform Solomon made and on

which he stood in the presence of all the people had exactly the same dimensions as the brazen altar in Exodus 27:1. “And thou shalt make,” the Lord had said to Moses, “the altar of acacia wood, five cubits the length, and five cubits the breadth; the altar shall be square; and the height thereof three cubits.”

The wilderness altar was, as we have already said, one of the vessels not mentioned as having been brought from Gibeon to the temple (2 Chr. 5:5 & 1 Kings 8:4), for a new altar had been constructed there. But could the first altar be absolutely excluded? That was impossible! The altar of Moses represented solely the place where God could meet the sinner. A type of the cross, it was there that God could manifest Himself as righteous in justifying the guilty, and it was there that His love was in perfect accord with His righteousness to accomplish salvation. The brazen altar formed the basis of all of the Lord's relationships with his people; it was, so to speak, the first door of access to the sanctuary. Nevertheless our book passes over it in silence (not over its memorial, as we shall see) for the work introducing the reign of the King of peace is considered here as

completely finished. The altar of the tabernacle, the altar of atonement, in Chronicles is merely the starting point for leading the people to the altar of the temple, that is to say, to the altar of worship, the essential characteristic of Solomon's altar in this book. Thus the first altar of bronze has disappeared, only to reappear here in form of a platform, as a pedestal on which Solomon is placed in the sight of all the people. The place where the sin offering was sacrificed becomes the place where Solomon — Christ — is glorified. “Now,” says the Lord, speaking of the cross, “is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him” (John 13:31). This altar, representing final salvation forever for every believer — for for us there is no more sin offering: the cross of Christ henceforth remains void of its burden of iniquity — this altar has yet another meaning: it is the basis upon which the Son of man's glory is established. Because of His sacrifice the reins of government are placed in His hands, and He is presented as the Leader of His people.

But something else strikes us here: Solomon on his platform in reality is much more an intercessor, an advocate for Israel, than

a king. There, on the platform he bows the knee and spreads forth his hands in supplication toward heaven. And remarkably, here he is not, as in 1 Kings 8:54-61, a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, blessing God on behalf of the people and blessing the people on behalf of God, rising from before the altar to stand and bless: no, on his platform which once was an altar he assumes only the place of an intercessor, praying for the people who through their future conduct, their sin already to be seen, would bring to naught all God's counsels, if indeed His counsels could be brought to naught.

This role that Solomon filled on behalf of Israel is the very role the Lord fills today on our behalf. "If any one sin, we have a patron with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours alone, but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2). His office as Advocate is based on the propitiation which He has accomplished, just as Solomon's intercession was inseparable from this platform, mysterious and marvelous figure of the altar.

At the end of Solomon's prayer we find (2 Chr. 6:41-42) these words which are absent in the book of Kings: “And now, arise, Jehovah Elohim, into Thy resting-place, Thou, and the ark of Thy strength: let Thy priests, Jehovah Elohim, be clothed with salvation, and let Thy saints rejoice in Thy goodness. Jehovah Elohim, turn not away the face of Thine Anointed: remember mercies to David Thy servant.” These words are taken from Psalm 132. In this song, the object of David's afflictions was to find a habitation for the Mighty One of Jacob. This habitation had now been found, but in the imperfection which Solomon's request reveals. God in that Psalm then responds to the king's desire expressed in Chronicles. He shows him Zion, His house, His priesthood, His Anointed, as He sees them in their eternal perfection in answer to sufferings of Christ, the true David. God's rest is still to come, but here Solomon shows us that scene we anticipate.

Next in 2 Chronicles 7 we find in verses 1-3 and 6-7 a passage which is lacking in the book of Kings. “The fire came down from the heavens and consumed the burnt offering and the sac-

rifices; and the glory of Jehovah filled the house.” God sets His seal and His approval on the inauguration of this reign of peace; His glory fills the house which has been prepared for Him; all the people bow themselves with their faces to the ground, and extol the Lord with worship and praise. This passage tallies with and admirably harmonizes with the character of the millennial worship, as presented in Chronicles!

Verses 12 to 22 of 2 Chronicles 7 differ little from the account of Kings. Nevertheless it should be noted that here, as in 2 Chronicles 1:7, the Lord's appearance to Solomon has a character perhaps more direct than in the book of Kings, for it is not said that God appeared to him “in a dream” (v. 12). The house which the Lord had chosen is called “a house of sacrifice” according to its character as a place of worship which we have observed all through this book. God's free choice in grace is also emphasized more in our chapters: God chose Jerusalem, chose David, chose the house (2 Chr. 6:6; 2 Chr. 7:12). In response to the office of advocate and intercessor which Solomon had taken in the preceding chapter, God gives him a full answer

(vv. 13-14) which is absent in Kings. The consequences of the responsibility of the people and their leaders are exposed completely in this passage, as they had been in Solomon's prayer, but also the certainty that, by virtue of this intercession, God would forgive their sin and heal their land. And He assures His Beloved by this single word, omitted in the book of Kings: "Now mine eyes shall be open," etc. From the moment Solomon appears before God, the answer to his intercession is sure and, however delayed it must be on account of the people's unfaithfulness, it is no less real a fact granted at the request of the Lord's anointed.

For the second time in these books, Solomon's responsibility is mentioned (vv. 17-18. See 1 Chr. 28:7); but with the great difference that Chronicles in no way shows, as does the first book of Kings, that Solomon failed therein. Thus in our book his responsibility remains a responsibility to the glory of God, so that in type we see absolutely nothing lacking in the king of the counsels of God.

Chapter 8 to 9

Solomon's Relations With the Nations

These two chapters describe King Solomon's relations with the Gentiles. 2 Chronicles 2 has already referred to the Canaanites and to Hiram, king of Tyre, but only in relation to the construction of the temple, the work to which all were called to contribute. The first event related is the peaceful conquest, taking possession of and subjugating all the cities of the surrounding nations. Here we find a detail which is very interesting for understanding Chronicles. The first book of Kings (1 Kings 9:11-14) tells us that Solomon gave Hiram, the king of Tyre, “twenty cities in the land of Galilee.” Hiram despised this gift and called these cities the “land of Cabul” (good for nothing); and we have noted that if, on the one hand, the territory of the promised land never had any value for the world, on the other hand Solomon committed positive unfaithfulness in alienating Jehovah's land. As always in this book, Solomon's sin is passed over in silence. Such omissions, repeated over and over again, ought to show rationalists the futility of their criticisms in pres-

ence of a design of which they seem unconscious. Instead of seeing Solomon giving cities to Hiram, in verse 2 we see the latter giving cities to Solomon. A day is coming when the world, which Tyre represents in the Word, will come with its riches and acknowledge itself tributary to Christ, and offer its finest cities as dwelling places for the children of Israel. Solomon fortifies them, surrounds them with walls, equips them with gates and bars — in a word, prepares them for defense. There, too, he concentrates his armed forces, not to use them for warfare, but, knowing the unsubmissive heart of the nations, he prepares this power so that peace can rule. During his long reign of forty years we never see Solomon engaged in any war of conquest, but the weight of his scepter must be felt so that the nations will submit. The Word tells us, speaking of Christ: “Thou shalt break them with a scepter of iron.” During the millennium no nation will dare to lift the head in presence of the King, and He will have many other means, too, of making them feel the weight of His arm (see Zech. 14:12-16).

All the Canaanites remaining in the land of Israel also are subjected to Solomon (vv. 7-10), whereas the children of Israel are men of war and free, but free to serve the King.

Verse 11 tells us of Solomon's relations with Pharaoh's daughter: "And Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David to the house which he had built for her; for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy to which the ark of Jehovah has come." Many have thought that Solomon's union with the daughter of the king of Egypt was an act of unfaithfulness to the prescriptions of the law. Forgetfulness of the typical meaning of the Word may lead to such mistakes. Would we say that Joseph was unfaithful in marrying Asenath, the daughter of Potipherah, priest of On (Gen. 41:50)? that Moses was unfaithful in marrying Zipporah, daughter of the priest of Midian (Ex. 2:21)?

Always in their relations with the Canaanites, even long before Israel's entrance into the Promised Land, the Pharaohs had

given their daughters to various kings of these countries. For the king of Egypt it was a means of subjecting them, for they paid tribute to Pharaoh in exchange for the honor of being his sons-in-law. But never did the king of Egypt give his own daughter to the kings of the neighboring nations; to them he granted his concubines' daughters who had no right to the throne of Egypt and who were not of royal blood through their mothers. “The daughter of Pharaoh” was the daughter of the queen, his legitimate wife, and according to the Egyptian constitution she had the right to the throne in the absence of a son and heir. This daughter, the daughter of Pharaoh — not “one of his daughters” — was given to Solomon. Such a union was the affirmation of Solomon's eventual rights to the land of Egypt. It subjected Pharaoh's royalty to that of Israel's king who could thus become the ruler to whom Egypt must submit; evident proof that the most ancient of earth's kingdoms was consenting to submit to the yoke of Israel's great king. This fact has very real importance as one of the features of Christ's millennial dominion. A word added here is not found in the book of

Kings: Solomon said, “My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy to which the ark of Jehovah has come.” A daughter of the nations, however ancient and powerful her people might be, could not live there where the ark had even momentarily dwelt. Despite the union of the King of Peace with the nations, they could not enjoy the same intimacy with him as the chosen people. The ark was Jehovah's throne in relation to Israel; God had never chosen Egypt, but He had chosen Israel as His inheritance, Jerusalem as His seat, the temple as His dwelling place, and David and Solomon to be the shepherds of His people.

This people, today despised and rejected on account of their disobedience, will one day on account of the election by grace again find earthly blessing in Christ's kingdom, and in the Lord's presence. The great nations of the past, Egypt and Assyria, will receive a generous portion, but not that of absolute nearness (Isa. 19:23-25); they will be called the Lord's people and the work of the Lord's hands, but not His inheritance, as is Israel. Doubtless the fierce oppressors of God's people in

former days will have a place of privilege and blessing during Christ's reign, but it will be becoming to the glory of the King, once scorned and set at naught by the nations who oppressed His people, that His people receive highest honors in the presence of their former enemies. And will it not be the same for the faithful Church, when those of the synagogue of Satan will come to bow down at her feet and acknowledge that Jesus has loved her?

Verses 12-16 mention all the religious and priestly service as set before the eyes of the subjected nations and as having great importance for them. Everything is regulated according to the commandment of Moses and the ordinance of David. Sacrifices are offered (“as the duty of every day required”), but only the burnt offerings are mentioned. This is in accord with the design of the book, as we have already said more than once. This passage (vv. 13-16) is absent in the first book of Kings.

In verses 17-18 we once again find the king of Tyre's contribution to the splendor of Solomon's reign. It is no longer just a

matter of his collaboration in the work of the temple, but one of contributing to the outward opulence of this glorious reign under which gold was esteemed as stones in Jerusalem.

In 2 Chr. 9 the history of the queen of Sheba, so full of instruction and already dealt with in meditations on the book of Kings, closes the account of Solomon's intimate relations with the nations. We will limit ourselves to a few additional remarks.

Huram placed himself at Solomon's disposal out of affection for David, the king of grace, whom he had personally known; the Queen of Sheba is attracted by the wisdom and fame of the King, whose glorious and peaceful reign is the object of universal admiration. The word of others convinces her to come and see with her own eyes. She “heard of the fame of Solomon.” 1 Kings 10:1 adds: “in connection with the name of Jehovah”; but here Solomon, seated “on the throne of Jehovah” (1 Chr. 29:23), concentrates, so to say, the divine character in his person. We find the same thing in verse 8: “Blessed be Je-

Chapter 1 to 9 - Solomon's Reign

Chapter 8 to 9

Solomon's Relations With the Nations

hovah thy God, who delighted in thee, to set thee on His throne, to be king to Jehovah thy God!” whereas 1 Kings 10:9, the corresponding passage, simply says, “to set thee on the throne of Israel.” Thus it is Jehovah whom Solomon represents in Chronicles. One could multiply such details to show that they all work together, harmonizing in the smallest shades of difference in the picture given us here of Christ's millennial reign.

The Queen of Sheba needed nothing beyond what she had heard to make her hasten to Jerusalem; nevertheless she “gave no credit to their words” until she had come and her eyes had seen (2 Chr. 9:6). This will indeed be characteristic of believers in the days yet to come; their faith will spring from sight, whereas today, “Blessed they who have not seen and have believed” (John 20:29).

If the queen's joy was deep in presence of the splendors of this great reign, can her joy be compared to ours in the present day? Is it not said of us: “Whom, having not seen, ye love; on whom

though not now looking, but believing, ye exult with joy unspeakable and filled with the glory” (1 Peter 1:8)?

All the details of this incomparable reign are of interest to the Queen of Sheba; she rejoices in all, sees all, enumerates all — from the apparel of his servants to the marvelous ramp built by Solomon to connect his palace with the temple. Every treasure flows to Jerusalem, the center to which the king was drawing the riches of the entire world. “All the kings of Arabia” and the governors of various districts bring him gold, spices (which played such a considerable role in oriental courts), precious stones, and rare sandalwood. Gold in particular, that emblem of divine righteousness, came from all parts; the very footstool of the throne was made of gold (2 Chr. 9:18). The king's feet rested on pure gold when he sat on the throne of his kingdom. “Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of thy throne,” Psalm 89:14 tells us (cf. Ps. 97:2); but it also adds: “loving-kindness and truth go before thy face.” It was his presence which all the kings of the earth sought after, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart (v. 23). “To behold the

face of the king” was the supreme privilege; whoever was admitted to his presence could count himself happy. “Happy ... thy servants,” said the queen, “who stand continually before thee.” “Blessed,” it says again, “is the people that know the shout of joy: they walk, O Jehovah in the light of Thy countenance” (Ps. 89:15). To see the king's face is to be admitted to his intimacy. Supreme honor for the nations of the future, but so much the more our present day privilege! Ah, how such favor humbles us! We feel our nothingness before this glorious presence; we bow in the dust before such righteousness, wisdom and goodness. But here is what is said to us: “Happy”, says the queen, “are these thy servants, who ... hear thy wisdom.” It is not the voice of great waters and loud thunder, but a voice more gentle than the myrrh-scented breeze; a voice that goes through us; the voice of the Beloved, of Jedidiah, the voice of love! All these sentiments come from seeking His face and being admitted to His presence. And as happened with the queen of Sheba, there will be no more spirit in us. There is wonder and worship in the presence of such wisdom, holiness, right-

eousness, and glory; a very humble love, for it immediately senses that it is not to be compared with this love; the whole heart is ecstatic and longs only to lose itself in the contemplation of its cherished object. Such were the thoughts of the Shulamite when she contemplated the most perfect of the sons of men. Her eyes saw the King in his beauty (Isa. 33:17).

Verses 27-28, repeating what was told us in 2 Chronicles 1:15, 17 (cf. 1 Kings 10:27-29), describe the reign as it was established from its beginning and as in Chronicles it remains until the end. According to the character of this book, it has come up to all that God was expecting of it. One sees from verse 26 that Solomon's chariots and horses were not an infraction of the law of Moses (Deut. 17:16), but a means of maintaining his reign of peace over all the nations: “He ruled over all the kings from the river as far as the land of the Philistines, and up to the border of Egypt” (2 Chr. 9:26). These limits of the kingdom of Solomon in Israel correspond to those which God's counsels had assigned to His people in Joshua 1:4; they had never before been attained nor have they ever been since. They will only be

realized, and that in even greater measure, in the future reign of Christ.

Thus in these chapters we have seen the Canaanites, Tyre, the kings of Arabia, all the kings from the River to the border of Egypt, the Queen of Sheba, and lastly, all the kings of the earth converging upon the court of the great king. Thus ends the history of Solomon, without any alloy whatsoever tarnishing the pure metal of his character as Chronicles presents it. If we have alluded to his love, let us recall however that this is here not so much the hallmark of his reign as are wisdom and peace, but that Jehovah is celebrated on account of His loving-kindness which endures forever. Even his righteousness is presented in Chronicles only in the government of the nations; his throne is described (2 Chr. 9:17-19) because it has to do with the kingdom, but the house of the forest of Lebanon where the throne is found in its judicial character, is completely absent here (cf. 1 Kings 7:2-7). In that which is presented to us everything is perfect, and it is astonishing that writings of pious people can affirm the very opposite. No doubt this is because these persons

confuse the books of Kings and Chronicles. As a type, the Word can go no further, but let us remember that it cannot give us a picture of perfection when it uses the first Adam as an example unless it passes over his imperfections and serious sins in absolute silence.

At this point in our account we must notice the absolute omission in Chronicles of 1 Kings 11:1-40: Solomon's sin which was not forgiven; his love for many foreign women; the idolatry of his old age; God's wrath aroused against him; the adversaries raised up against him, Hadad the Edomite, and Rezon the son of Eliada (1 Kings 11:14-25); the judgment pronounced on his kingdom (1 Kings 11:11); and lastly, Jeroboam's revolt. Now such omissions make the purpose and general thought of our book shine out before our eyes.

Chapter 10 to 36

Solomon's Successors

The Era of the Prophets

2 Chronicles 10 marks the second division of Chronicles. Its first division has embraced the history of David and Solomon. Until the end of our book we now have the history of the kingdom of Judah, the counterpart of the kingdom of Israel taken up in the books of the Kings. But before studying Solomon's successors, we must give a brief exposition of what makes their history special.

We have said that Chronicles presents the picture of God's counsels with regard to the kingdom. These counsels have been accomplished in type, but only in type, under the reigns of David and Solomon. David, the suffering and rejected king, has become, in his Son, the king of peace, the king of glory who sits upon the throne of Jehovah. However, although Chronicles is careful to omit Solomon's faults entirely, he was not the true

king according to God's counsels. The words “I will be his father, and he shall be My son” (2 Sam. 7:14) could not find their complete fulfillment in him. The decree “Thou art My Son; I this day have begotten thee” (Ps. 2:7), did not relate to him, but directed hope to One greater and more perfect than he. But, in order that this future Son might be “the offspring of David,” David's line must be maintained until His appearing; this is why God had promised David “to give to him always a lamp, and to his sons” (2 Chr. 21:7). Now, how was this lamp going to shine in the royal house until the appearing of the promised Son? How was it to pass through man's poisoned air and moral darkness without being extinguished — which would have made David's true Heir's appearing impossible? Satan understood this. If he could succeed in extinguishing the lamp, all of God's counsels concerning the “Just Ruler over men” would come to naught. But, despite all the enemy's efforts to suppress this light, the Son of David appeared in the world, won the victory over Satan, and became for the Church the Yea and Amen of all God's promises. Yet this subject, re-

vealed in the New Testament, is not what is in question here; as we have seen, Chronicles deals only with the earthly kingdom of Christ over Israel and the nations. This kingdom was contested to the end by Satan. When the King whom the magi worshipped appeared as a small Child, the enemy sought to cut Him off through the murder of the children at Bethlehem. At the cross where he thought to make an end of Him, he could not prevent Him from being declared king of the Jews in sight of all by Pilate's inscription; and, when the enemy thought he was victorious, God resurrected His Anointed and made Him Lord and Christ before the eyes of the whole house of Israel.

Let us return to our book. If for the reasons above it does not show us Satan's maneuvers during Solomon's reign, it speaks of them in an all the more striking manner during the subsequent reigns. The enemy seduces the king and his people to lead them into idolatry; he uses violence in an effort to destroy and wipe out the royal line. But God's watchful care reaches the people's conscience and, when everything seems lost, the Spirit's breath comes to revive the wick that is going out. There

are situations where a Joram, an Ahaziah, an Ahaz are so reprobate that they are delivered up to consuming fire, for God Himself, always mindful of “good things,” can no longer acknowledge any good in these kings, and everything, absolutely everything, must be judged. The lamp is extinguished; deepest darkness reigns; Satan triumphs, but only in appearance. God preserves a feeble shoot of this reprobate trunk in the person of Ahaziah — yes, but this single shoot spared from the murder of the royal race, is himself found to be a dry branch destined for the fire. Anew the entire line is annihilated. Is it completely destroyed now? No, there it is — reborn in the person of Joash, and the Spirit of God is once again able to find in him “good things.” In this manner the royal succession continues, so that David's line is not wiped out by these reprobates (see Matt. 1). Thus Satan's struggle against God results in Satan's confusion. What, then, is the reason for his defeat? One thing explains it: the only thing that Satan, who knows so much, has never thought of nor could think of. The secret which he is ignorant of is grace, for his so cunning intelligence is completely imper-

Chapter 10 to 36 - The Era of the Prophets

The Era of the Prophets

The Era of the Prophets

vious to love. This entire second portion of Chronicles could thus be entitled The history of grace in relation to the kingdom of Judah. When grace can revive the flame so as to maintain the light of testimony, it does not fail to do so; when, in the face of the willful hardening of heart of the kings, it can produce nothing, it still raises up to them a posterity from which it can expect some fruit.

Thus we shall witness Satan's desperate struggle against God's counsels and, at the same time, the triumph of grace. This entire period is summarized in the words of the prophet: "Who is a God like unto Thee, that forgives iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retains not His anger for ever, because He delights in loving-kindness. He will yet again have compassion on us; He will tread under foot our iniquities: and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:18-19).

Nevertheless a time comes when the ruin appears irremediable, when in the struggle Satan's triumph seems assured. The king-

dom sinks under waves of judgment; although, as we have seen in the genealogies (1 Chr. 3:19, 24), feeble representatives of the royal line, without titles, without prerogatives, without authority and without a realm continue to exist. After them, the line — ever more obscure and brought low — perpetuates itself in silence until we reach a poor carpenter who becomes the reputed father of the “woman's Seed.” Christ is born!

Thus nothing has been able to thwart God's counsels — neither Satan's efforts, nor the unfaithfulness of the kings. No doubt, these counsels have been hidden for a time until the coming of the Messiah, depicted beforehand in the person of Solomon. The throne remained empty, but empty only in appearance, until the King of righteousness and peace could sit on it. Here He is! This little Child, lowly, rejected from the time of His appearance, possesses every title to the kingdom. But see Him, hear Him! The crowds seek Him to make Him king; He hides Himself and withdraws; He forbids His disciples to speak of His kingdom. This is because before He receives it, He has another mission, another service to accomplish. He declares Him-

self king before Pilate and this leads to His execution, but He goes to lay hold of a kingdom which is not of this world. He abandons all His rights — not reserving a single one of them — to the hands of His enemies; He is silent, like a sheep before its shearers. This is because He must carry out a completely different task, the immense work of redemption which leads Him to the cross.

Having accomplished this work, He receives, in resurrection, the heavenly sphere of the kingdom. Like Solomon of old He is seated on His Father's throne while waiting to be seated on His own throne. This moment will come for Him, the true King of Israel and of the nations, but it has not yet arrived. He awaits only a sign from His Father to take the reins of earthly government in hand.

From the moment of His appearing as a little Child, there is no more need of a royal succession*. The King exists, the King lives, the King is enthroned in heaven today; soon He will be proclaimed Lord of all the earth and the offspring of David for

His people Israel. But until His appearing, to maintain His line of descent, there is, as we have said, but one means: grace. This is why we have the remarkable peculiarity in Chronicles that everything, even in the worst of kings, that could be the fruit of grace, is carefully recorded. Everywhere that God can do so, He points it out. So, too, this account is not, as we find in Kings, the portrayal of responsible royalty, but the portrayal of the activity of grace in these men. The Spirit of God works even in the dreadfully hardened heart of a Manasseh in order to prolong the royal line of descent a little longer in an offspring (Josiah) who rules according to God's heart. Despite these momentary revivals, the ruin becomes increasingly accentuated. Differing in this from Kings and the prophet Jeremiah, Chronicles scarcely stoops to register Josiah's successors in a few verses before hastening to reach the end: the return from captivity, shining proof of God's grace toward this people.

- * We say “succession” because we would not forget that the “prince” or viceroy of Ezekiel is of royal seed (cf. Ezek. 46:1-18; Ezek. 48:21).

In order to accomplish the work of grace which would at last bring in the triumph of the kingdom in the person of Christ, it was necessary that the dispensation of the law, without being abolished, undergo an important modification. Under the kings, the system of law continued, for it did not end until Christ; the system of grace had not yet begun, for it finds its full expression at the cross; but during the period of the kings God intervened in an altogether new way in order to manifest His ways of grace under the system of law. He did this by having prophets appear.

Not that this appearing was restricted to the system begun by the kings, for it became evident from the moment that Israel's history was characterized by ruin. Thus we see the first prophets (not mentioning Enoch, then Moses) appearing when the ruin was complete in Israel. In the book of Judges, when the entire people failed, we see the prophetess Deborah arising (Judges 4:4), and later a prophet (Judges 6:7-10). Later on, when the priesthood was in ruin Samuel was raised up as a prophet (1 Sam. 3:20). In the books of Kings and Chronicles, at

last, when kingship failed, prophets appeared and multiplied beyond our ability to count them.* They inaugurated a new dispensation of God, become necessary when all was ruined, when the law had shown itself powerless to rule and keep in check the corrupt nature of man; when even combined with mercy (when the tables of the law were given to Moses a second time) it had in no way improved this condition. It was then that God sent His prophets. On certain occasions they announce only impending judgment, the last effort of divine mercy to save the people, through fire as it were; on other much more numerous occasions they are sent to exhort, to restore, to console, to strengthen, to call to repentance, while at the same time bringing out the judicial consequences for those who do not give heed. Thus the prophet simultaneously has a ministry of grace and of judgment: of grace because the Lord is a God of goodness, of judgment because the people are placed under law and prophecy does not abolish the law. On the contrary, it rests on the law while at the same time loudly proclaiming that at the least little returning to God, the sinner will

find mercy. It is no doubt an easing of the law: God grants the sinner all that is compatible with His holiness, but, on the other hand, He cannot deny His own character in face of man's responsibility. Prophecy does not abolish one iota of the law, but rather it accentuates, more than God had ever done up till now, the great fact that He loves mercy and forgiveness and takes account of the least indication of return towards Himself. "When the prophets come on the scene," a brother has said, "grace begins to shine anew." The very fact of their testimony was already grace toward a people who had violated the law. If they came looking for fruit and found nothing but sour grapes, nonetheless they announced God's promises in grace to the elect — grace as a reparation of the things which the people had spoiled. The gospel, which came afterwards, speaks of new creation, of a new life, and not of a reparation. In Isaiah 58:13-14 we see the different character of the law and of prophecy in the way in which they present the Sabbath: "If thou ... " says the prophet, "call the sabbath a delight, the holy day of Jehovah, honorable; and thou honor Him, not doing thine own

ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking idle words; then shalt thou delight thyself in Jehovah.”

* List of the prophets cited in the second book of Chronicles:

Nathan (2 Chr. 9:29);

Ahijah the Shilonite (2 Chr. 9:29; 2 Chr. 10:15).

Iddo the seer (2 Chr. 9:29; 2 Chr. 12:15; 2 Chr. 13:22).

Shemaiah the man of God (2 Chr. 11:2; 2 Chr. 12:5, 15).

Azariah the son of Oded (2 Chr. 15:1), and Oded (v. 8).

Hanani the seer (2 Chr. 16:7).

Micah (or Micaiah) the son of Imlah (2 Chr. 18:7).

Jehu the son of Hanani, the seer (2 Chr. 19:2; 2 Chr. 20:34).

Jahaziel the son of Zechariah (2 Chr. 20:14).

Eliezer the son of Dodavah (2 Chr. 20:37).

Elijah the prophet (2 Chr. 21:12).

Several prophets and Zechariah the son of Jehoiada (2 Chr. 24:19-20).

A man of God (2 Chr. 25:7).

A prophet (2 Chr. 25:15).

Zechariah the seer (2 Chr. 26:5).

Isaiah the son of Amoz (2 Chr. 26:22; 2 Chr. 32:32).

Oded (2 Chr. 28:9).

Micah the Morasthite (Jer. 26:18).

Some seers (or prophets) (2 Chr. 33:18-19, cf. 2 Kings 21:10).

Huldah the prophetess (2 Chr. 34:22)

Jeremiah (2 Chr. 35:2 Chr. 25; 2 Chr. 36:12, 21).

Messengers and prophets (2 Chr. 36:15-16); cf. Uriah the son of Shemaiah (Jer. 26:20).

Thus a special characteristic of God is expressed by the prophets. It is not the law, given at Sinai, still less is it the grace revealed in the gospel. It is rather a God who, while He shows His indignation against sin, takes no pleasure in judgment and whose true character of grace will always triumph in the end; a God who says: “Comfort ye, comfort ye My people” when they have “received ... double for all [their] sins.” Under pure law judgment triumphs over iniquity; under prophecy, grace and mercy triumph when judgment has been executed; and finally under the gospel, grace is exalted over judgment because love

and righteousness have kissed each other at the cross. The judgment executed on Christ has caused grace to triumph. Judgment fell on Him instead of on us — grace in its fullness, love, God Himself has been for us.

The entire role of prophecy is expressed in the passage from the prophet Micah cited above (Micah 7:18-19). It is impossible, and this is what the prophet announces here, for God to deny Himself, whether with regard to His judgments, or whether with regard to His promises of grace.

Such is the role of the prophets in Chronicles. If at first they appear singly, as in the Judges and then under the reign of Saul, of David, and of Solomon, they then multiply in the measure in which iniquity grows in the kingdom. This is what the Lord expresses in Matthew 21:34-36. After the few servants at the beginning, of whom the husbandmen beat one, killed another, and stoned a third, the householder sent other servants, more than the first, and the husbandmen treated them in the same way. At last He sent His Son.

Chapter 10-12

Rehoboam

Here we reach the dividing line in Chronicles separating the reign of David and Solomon from those of their successors. As we have said above, the subject we will take up will no longer present us the counsels of God regarding the kingdom, but rather the work of grace to maintain it until the appearance of the Messiah, in whom these counsels will be realized. Thus we have here the history — ordinarily distressing, sometimes comforting — of the kings of Judah, for the kings of Israel are not mentioned except in relation to Judah and Jerusalem. This is exactly the counterpart of the account in Kings.

It is a remarkable fact — and one confirming everything we have said particularly concerning David and Solomon, types of royalty according to God's counsels — that here the Word not only omits Solomon's sins at the end of his career, but it even omits their consequences, as it did earlier in the first book of Chronicles with the chastening that came on David because of

Uriah: evident proof that David and Solomon occupy a special place in these books. The accession of Jeroboam to the throne and the division of the kingdom are here presented as the consequence of Rehoboam's sin, and not that of his father; likewise, Ahijah's prophecy to Jeroboam is fulfilled, not because Solomon sinned, but because “[Rehoboam] hearkened not to the people” (2 Chr. 10:15). Moreover, we see in this same passage referred to in 1 Kings 11:31-33, that God does not intend to hide Solomon's faults, but that rather the purpose of the Holy Spirit is to omit them.

The establishment of Jeroboam the son of Nebat on the throne of Israel is also passed over in silence, which is important, for the history here is uniquely that of Judah, and not that of Israel (cf. 1 Kings 12:20). For the same reason our account omits Jeroboam's establishment of idolatry, the story of the old prophet, the illness of Abijah the son of Jeroboam, and Ahijah's prophecy on this occasion (1 Kings 12:25 — 14:20).

Rehoboam's history spans chapters 10 to 12, whereas Kings summarizes it in a few verses (1 Kings 14:21-31); but — the detail is characteristic — this latter passage presents the darkest picture of the condition of the people, whereas our chapters record the good which grace produces in the king's heart, though it is said of him (2 Chr. 12:14): “And he did evil, for he applied not his heart to seek Jehovah.” 2 Chronicles 11 tells us two important facts: Rehoboam had thought to bring the ten tribes back under the yoke of obedience, but in doing so he would have been opposing God's governmental dealings with Judah. The prophet Shemaiah turns him from a decision which would have led to his ruin and would have had the most serious consequences for the tribe of Judah, on which the eyes of the Lord were still resting, despite His judgments. Grace acts in the hearts of the people; he listens to the exhortation and does not follow through on his dangerous plan. From henceforth Rehoboam's only task was to build a system of defense against the enemies from without, enemies who were his own people and who had formerly been under his governing authority. Reho-

boam surrounds the territory of Judah and Benjamin with fortresses (2 Chr. 11:5-12). His only duty was to preserve that which was left to him, but how could he do so when evil was already present within and ravaging the kingdom? However his responsibility to guard the people was in no way diminished by evil which was already irreparable.

This principle is of great importance for us. Christendom's state of irremediable ruin in no way changes our obligation to defend souls against the harmful principles which are at work. We have the sad task of raising up strongholds against a world similar to the ten tribes, which called on the name of the Lord while giving themselves over to idolatry — against a world which decks itself out with the name of Christ while abandoning itself to its lusts. We are to make Christendom understand and feel that there is a separation between true Christians and mere professors whom God ranks with His enemies. This hostility brought on the conflict between Judah and Israel, and was bound up with the idolatrous worship which Jeroboam established and imposed on the ten tribes. Public and official main-

tenance of the worship of God in Judah had very blessed consequences: “The priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to him out of all their districts; for the Levites left their suburbs and their possessions, and came to Judah and Jerusalem ... and after them, those out of all the tribes of Israel that set their heart to seek Jehovah the God of Israel came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice to Jehovah the God of their fathers” (2 Chr. 11:13-16). All those who had an undivided heart for God, even though they had been caught up for the moment in the revolt of the ten tribes, understand that their place is not in the midst of these tribes and they leave this defiled ground in order to come to Judah and settle there. This is how faithful testimony, holy separation from the world, produces fruit in believers who have hitherto been detained by their circumstances in a sphere which the Lord no longer acknowledges, and how they are moved to join their brothers who gather around the Lord. If this gathering together soon lost its character, was it not because Judah and her kings abandoned the divine ground that they might themselves sacrifice to idols? Indeed, this testimony of separation

from evil lasted only a short time: “For during three years they walked in the way of David and Solomon,” and during this period “they strengthened the kingdom of Judah” (v. 17). For three years! Why didn't they continue! This was the path of blessing for Judah and her king, and is it not likewise for us? Blessing might have been complete even amidst the ultimate humiliation inflicted on Israel. It proved to be only temporary.

This momentary blessing through which the kingdom of Judah was strengthened and Israel established itself became a snare for Rehoboam. The flesh uses even God's favors as an occasion to depart from Him. “And it came to pass when the kingdom of Rehoboam was established, and when he had become strong, that he forsook the law of Jehovah, and all Israel with him” (2 Chr. 12:1). It is enough that one man, commissioned by the Lord to shepherd His people, turn aside: his example will be followed by all the rest. What a responsibility for him! Chastening soon follows: “And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, because they had transgressed against Jehovah, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem,

with twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand horsemen ... and he took the fortified cities that belonged to Judah, and came to Jerusalem” (2 Chr. 12:2-4). Judah did not fall prey to their brother Israel, against whose religion they rightfully defended themselves; they fell, a much deeper downfall, into the hands of a world from which God had once redeemed them by a strong hand and stretched-forth arm — and, as of old, they were brought under subjection to the king of Egypt.

God's purpose in chastening them is proclaimed in the prophecy of Shemaiah, the prophet: “That they may know My service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries” (v. 8). They could henceforth compare their three years of liberty and free blessing with the bondage of Egypt. As a result of the words of Shemaiah, the prophet: “Ye have forsaken Me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak,” there was a real work of conscience in the heart of the king and his princes, for they “humbled themselves; and they said, Jehovah is righteous,” and this humbling of themselves preserved Judah from complete destruction. “And when Jehovah saw that they

humbled themselves, the word of Jehovah came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves: I will not destroy them, but I will grant them a little deliverance; and My wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. Nevertheless they shall be his servants” (v. 7). This is grace, but, I repeat, Judah is obliged to suffer the consequences of having abandoned the word of God. All this work of repentance, the fruit of grace, is lacking — and with just cause — in 1 Kings 14. We shall see this same thing constantly repeated in the course of this book.

What shame for Rehoboam! Solomon's beautiful temple has existed but thirty years when it is stripped of its ornaments and all its treasures. Their worship has lost the splendor of its past; Shishak, we are told, took all. All! but nevertheless one thing still remains: the altar is there, God is there. For faith, amid desolation and humiliation this was much more than all the gold taken away by the king of Egypt. Is it not the same today? Christians are called upon to assess everything they are lacking as a result of the Church's unfaithfulness; and they must add,

The Lord is righteous; but they may also say, God is a God of grace and has not turned aside from us. We find a very touching word for our hearts here: When Rehoboam “humbled himself, the anger of Jehovah turned away from him, that He would not destroy him altogether; and also in Judah there were good things” (v. 12). Few things, perhaps — and this is exactly what this term gives us to understand — but in the final analysis, something that God could acknowledge. Final judgment was deferred because of these few favorable little things that were pleasing to God. Let us apply ourselves, each one individually, to maintain these good things before Him. May those around us notice some measure of devotion to Christ, some measure of love for Him, some measure of fear in the presence of His holiness, some measure of activity in His service. We may be sure that He will take it into account and that as long as it continues He will not remove the lamp from its place.

How fair our God is in His judgments, even in the presence of a state of which He says: “He did evil, for he applied not his heart to seek the Lord” (v. 14). It is marvelous grace indeed

that while not tolerating any evil at all, is pleased to acknowledge that which is good, and that discerns it when man's eye is incapable of seeing it, whether within or without himself. Think of this with regard to 1 Kings 14:22-24: "Judah did evil in the sight of Jehovah, and they provoked Him to jealousy with their sins which they committed more than all that their fathers had done. And they also built for themselves high places, and columns, and Asherahs on every high hill and under every green tree; and there were also sodomites in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations that Jehovah had dispossessed before the children of Israel." Reading these words, we marvel all the more at God's infinite goodness which, on account of a few righteous persons, was not willing entirely to destroy this people as He had once destroyed Sodom.

Let us mention yet one more detail before closing these chapters. The great number of Rehoboam's wives and concubines is an imitation of Solomon's sin which led to the ruin of his kingdom. It would seem that the relationship between the

conduct of son and father ought to be mentioned. But nothing is said. In 2 Chronicles, Solomon, as we have often said, is looked at as being without fault, and judgment is directed toward Rehoboam alone. Nevertheless, even amidst this disorder and when Rehoboam raises the daughter of Absalom, the rebel, and Abijah, this woman's son, to the first place, God is pleased to acknowledge that Rehoboam “dealt wisely” in dispersing his sons throughout all the lands of Judah in order to avoid discord in the kingdom (2 Chr. 11:18-23). This is similar to the praise of “the unrighteous steward because he had done prudently” (Luke 16:8).

Chapter 13

Abijah

The events related in this chapter are passed over in silence in 1 Kings 15. The latter limits itself to mentioning that there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life and that the same thing was so between Abijah and Jeroboam. It adds that Abijah “walked in all the sins of his father, which

he had done before him; and his heart was not perfect with Jehovah his God, as the heart of David his father. But for David's sake Jehovah his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing Jerusalem; because David did that which was right in the sight of Jehovah, and turned not aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite” (1 Kings 15:3-5). In this passage, it is on account of David that God gives a godly successor to Abijah in the person of Asa, his son, and also on account of Jerusalem which God had chosen as the city of His Anointed. Here, there is nothing of the kind. As always, in this part of Chronicles it is grace ruling in spite of everything. At most, Abijah's conduct is characterized in verse 21 as that in which he imitated King Solomon's walk as the book of Kings reveals it to us: “But Abijah ... took fourteen wives, and begot twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters.”

The battle between Abijah and Jeroboam, omitted in the book of Kings, gives us serious, solemn instruction as to Abijah's moral condition. Jeroboam, twice as strong as Abijah, had

800,000 chosen men against Judah's 400,000. We find the same proportion in Luke 14:31: “Or what king, going on his way to engage in war with another king, does not, sitting down first, take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him coming against him with twenty thousand?” Only Abijah does not sit down here to calculate. He counts on his religion which is the true one to resist Jeroboam with his false religion. His speech on Mount Zemaraim, for he had already invaded the territory of the ten tribes, proves it. The argument with which he opposes Jeroboam (vv. 5-12) is composed of five points in which Judah was perfectly justified:

1. The Lord's covenant with Judah, through David, was for ever. God's counsels concerning the royal line could never be reversed. Abijah was right to claim the unchangeable counsels of God against his enemy.
2. The ten tribes through their king were in open rebellion against the seed of David, the Lord's Anointed: “But Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of

David, rose up and rebelled against his lord. And vain men, sons of Belial, gathered to him and strengthened themselves against Rehoboam the son of Solomon, and Rehoboam was young and faint-hearted, and did not show himself strong against them” (vv. 6-7).

3. Moreover, they were idolaters and were counting on their false gods to gain the victory: “And now ye think to show yourselves strong against the kingdom of Jehovah in the hand of the sons of David; and ye are a great multitude, and ye have with you the golden calves that Jeroboam made you for gods.” (v. 8).
4. And furthermore, they had completely abandoned the worship of Jehovah; they had driven away the priests, and had established new ones according to their liking. “But as for us,” Abijah adds, “Jehovah is our God, and we have not forsaken Him.” All this condemned Israel and her king; all this was true.

5. Judah, for her part, had God at her head, and His priests, and His trumpets which were used to assemble the people; and in fact, what Jeroboam was doing was making war against God. Once again, all this was true. What was Judah lacking? Only this: Judah had the true religion, but without realizing her sin and disgrace. What she lacked was an awakened conscience.

Is it not the same in our day? One may, for example, be a Protestant, have God's Word, have knowledge of the true God, understand perfectly what is lacking in Catholicism, that semi-idolatrous religion, be able to refute its errors victoriously, possess all the truths that make up Christianity — and nevertheless be very far from God, without strength to withstand the twenty thousand. One has not first sat down to deliberate upon his own forces. Everything that Abijah brought forth was insufficient and could not give him the victory. He lacked something: an affected conscience; the realization of his own guilt, not in comparison to others and their errors, but rather by himself having to do with God.

The rest of this account bears this out. Jeroboam's 800,000 men are able to completely surround Abijah's 400,000 men. The result is that Judah is lost; it had to begin there. "And Judah looked back, and behold, they had the battle in front and behind; and they cried to Jehovah, and the priests sounded with the trumpets. And the men of Judah gave a shout" (vv. 14-15). It is only from this point: I am lost, that the loud-sounding trumpets can sound against the enemy (v. 12). Instead of confiding in his trumpets against the adversaries it is necessary to cry out to God for himself, and it is only then that the trumpets can resound, that is to say, that the testimony can be effective. Salvation can only come from Him and not from even the most orthodox forms of religion. We must always begin with our own condition, not with that of others; we then find that the cross is our only resource and, having found this for ourselves, we can apply it to all those who have as urgent a need of it as we. "Out of the depths do I call upon Thee, Jehovah," says the Psalmist. "Lord, hear my voice; let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication. If Thou, Jah, shouldst mark

iniquities, Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared ... ” and only then does he cry: “Let Israel hope in Jehovah ... He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities” (Ps. 130).

If this is so for the testimony, it is the same for the combat. From the moment we realize our lost condition and cry to the Lord, victory is ours. Judging others can not save ourselves; the secret of victory is in the conviction that sin robs us of all strength and makes us incapable of withstanding the enemy. This victory is not due to any effort on our part, since we are incapable; it can only come from God Himself: “God smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. And the children of Israel fled before Judah; and God delivered them into their hand” (vv. 15-16). From this moment on, the children of Judah no longer relied on their religion: “[They] were strengthened, because they relied upon Jehovah the God of their fathers” (v. 18). From that moment on all Jeroboam's strength dwindled, “and Jehovah smote him, and he died” (v. 20).

The realization of their complete lack of power brings Abijah and his people something even more important than victory: they recover Bethel, Jeshanah, and Ephron — but especially Bethel, the place where the faithful God had given promises to Jacob. Indeed, the way to acquire God's promises is to begin by recognizing one's self to be lost and crying out to the Lord. Our unfaithfulness has separated us from the place of promises, but if we acknowledge ourselves as lost and cry out to God, we will recover them all, for Christ has secured them for us, He, the Yea and Amen of all the promises of God. Without Bethel, Judah was morally decapitated, as it were. Moreover, Bethel was the place where one could not present himself before God without having buried his false gods (Gen. 35:2-4). It was therefore a momentary restoration of this poor people and their poor king — a very partial restoration, for Abijah still continued to follow a path (v. 21) which had brought on the division of the kingdom.

Chapter 14-16

Asa

Chapter 14

Rest and Strength

We come to the account of Asa's happy reign, introduced by the pure grace of God, as it is said in 1 Kings 15:4: “But for David's sake Jehovah his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem” in the person of Asa. All is blessing for Asa in the first part of his reign — and we shall see the cause for this — but in 2 Chronicles 16 we shall also find the cause of his decline.

We find much piety in Asa. He removes every trace of idolatry from Judah, including the high places which the kings who preceded him and even Solomon had tolerated — although it is not the purpose of Chronicles to mention the fault of the latter. In 2 Chronicles 15 we shall see that Asa did not maintain this energetic attitude to the end. But in Judah he was the first king

who, at the beginning of his reign, passed judgment on the high places and broke them down, whereas Jeroboam had made them a religious institution for the ten tribes, and had even established a special priesthood there (2 Chr. 11:15) in opposition to the worship of the Lord at Jerusalem. This is always the consequence of abandoning God who has revealed Himself in His Word. Man can not live without religion: if he does not have the religion of the true God, he will invent a false religion to satisfy his conscience and answer to his instincts. Atheism itself is a religion which delivers man, bound hand and foot, to superstition, that is to say, to the worship of demons and to anarchy. When man's own will becomes his god, Satan masters him and triumphs. What trouble, what agitation, what despair, what fatal sorrow gets hold of the fool who has said in his heart, "There is no God!" And, on the other hand, what rest there is in separation from evil and in the worship of the holy God, the true God! The Word insists on this point here: "In his days the land was quiet ten years" (v. 1). "The kingdom was quiet before him" (v. 5). "The land had rest ... Jehovah had

given him rest” (v. 6). “Jehovah ... has given us rest on every side” (v. 7).

How did Asa make use of this rest? He did not act like David who thought of resting while his own were in the field; on the contrary, he availed himself of this quiet which God granted him to defend himself against the enemy from without: “He said to Judah, Let us build these cities, and surround them with walls and towers, gates and bars, while the land is yet before us; for we have sought Jehovah our God, we have sought Him, and He has given us rest on every side. And they built and prospered” (vv. 6-7).

What instruction Asa's attitude gives us! When God gives us rest, it is so that we may concentrate all our activities to fore-arm ourselves against the attacks of the enemy. The latter will not be slow to return. Our means of defense and our fortresses are the Word and nothing but the Word. Let us use the time when we are not assailed by storms to ground ourselves in the Word and draw from it our strength to withstand. However, the

fortified cities — entry to which is forbidden the enemy — are not enough; Asa possesses an army inured to war. “And Asa had an army that bore targets and spears: out of Judah three hundred thousand; and out of Benjamin, that bore shields and drew the bow, two hundred and eighty thousand: all these, mighty men of valor” (v. 8). To avoid defeat in battle it is necessary to bear arms on the right hand and on the left, and above all to know how to use the two-edged sword which is the Word of God. It is only thus that we may, after having overcome all, stand firm when conflict arises.

Then comes the attack of Zerah the Ethiopian, passed over in silence in the first book of Kings. What will Asa do? He is in the same situation as his father was in relation to Jeroboam (2 Chr. 13); with 580,000 men he must fight Zerah who has a million at his command. But instead of relying like Abijah on the merits of his religion to win the battle, Asa first of all sits down and deliberates whether he with 10,000 men can withstand him who is coming against him with 20,000. The result of his deliberation leaves him no doubt; he goes out against the enemy.

What, then, is the source of his confidence? His being right? His religion, giving him the assurance, as it gave his father Abijah, that God must be with him? That is not where Asa's secret lies. Asa is a man of faith, who has learned in God's presence that he can have no confidence in the flesh, but that there is strength outside himself to which he may ever resort. His daily connection with the temple of God at Jerusalem caused him to know this; before his eyes at the entrance of the sanctuary he had the column of Boaz which means: "In Him is strength!" And so with what assurance, when it came to combat, he addresses Jehovah: "Jehovah, it makes no difference to Thee to help, whether there be much or no power: help us, O Jehovah our God, for we rely on Thee, and in Thy name have we come against this multitude. Jehovah, Thou art our God; let not man prevail against Thee" (v. 11). It is in this spirit that Asa undertakes the struggle; he recognizes great strength in the enemy, none in himself, but he goes forth in the name of the Lord, depending on Him, and in no way disturbed by his own weakness, because therein the strength of God is displayed.

This entire passage is the lesson of our strength; the most powerful enemy has no strength against God, and it requires only faith to make this experience. Satan himself was obliged to acknowledge this when his hatred attacked Christ: at the cross where he thought he was at last rid of Him, he met God's power in the weakness of God.

The Ethiopians flee; “they could not revive.” This was because Israel was not Asa's army but God's army: “They were crushed before Jehovah and before His army” (v. 13). This victory of Asa's involved not only the defeat of the enemy, but also the positive conquest of cities, spoil, flocks, and riches (vv. 14-15). So for us every victory over the Enemy, based on self-judgment, is the source of new, precious acquisitions, drawn out of the treasure of the unfathomable riches of Christ.

After the victory, Asa and his people “returned to Jerusalem.” There, in the city of God, close to Jehovah's temple, in fellowship with Him, they go on to renew their strength.

Secular history tells us nothing of this memorable combat. Zerah and his one million men are but a fable in the eyes of unbelievers. The monuments, so they tell us, do not mention this extraordinary combat. For the believer, this silence is very simple. Asa cannot claim his own victory over the Ethiopian; it is up to God, whose victory it is, to record it; therefore we cannot find this document save in the written Word. And do you think that Zerah would proclaim his defeat? Have you ever found an inscription of Egypt, Syria, Moab, or Assyria where their kings recorded a defeat? On their part there is absolute silence. Later the king of Moab will proclaim his victories (on the Moabite stone), but not the defeat that preceded them. Such is the confidence that we can place in the authenticity of history written by man.

Chapter 15

Strength and Purification

At this period of Asa's history, the prophet Azariah the son of Oded comes to encourage and exhort the king. The prophets of

Judah, compared to those of Israel, are distinguished by their great number. Even Hosea and Amos, prophets of Israel, have a special mission for Judah. It is true that Elijah and Elisha, those great prophets, were sent exclusively to Israel, but their ministry was a very special one. When the prophets of Baal and the false prophets were multiplying, they performed miracles in the midst of an apostate people fallen into idolatry. Their miracles were given for unbelievers and not for those who worshipped the true God. We have remarked elsewhere that we rarely see a prophet of Judah performing a miracle such as, for example, that of Ahaz's sundial. The first prophets of Judah speak; their successors write their prophecies. Under Rehoboam, the prophet Shemaiah, under Abijah the prophet Iddo, under Asa other prophets are not yet writing; it is only beginning with the reign of Uzziah that the major and minor prophets with their writings appear. In Israel, Elijah is a prophet of judgment; Elisha brings grace in the midst of a scene that is judged; the prophets of Judah announce judgments, but exhort the king and the people to repentance so that they may find mercy, for they

persist in grace. Only in their written prophecies do they predict a future day when the counsels of God concerning the kingdom will be accomplished; oral prophecy does not go so far, announcing events near at hand, whereas written prophecy has another range: “The scope of no prophecy of Scripture is had from its own particular interpretation” (2 Peter 1:20).

Here the prophecy of Azariah, or rather that of Oded his father whose messenger he is (v. 8), bears the character of all spoken prophecy. It addresses the king first of all, then the two faithful tribes, Judah and Benjamin. Azariah presents the conditions of the covenant of law: “Jehovah is with you, while ye are with Him; and if ye seek Him He will be found of you, but if ye forsake Him He will forsake you” (v. 2). It was necessary that this covenant be observed by both sides; on Jehovah's side it is always observed, for He is faithful, whereas Israel, if they were to be unfaithful, would of necessity fall under the judgment of God who must forsake them. Azariah then recalls the former days when all the people had been unfaithful; alluding particularly to the time of the Judges, when through Israel's disobedi-

ence the most complete disorder had reigned: “Now for a long while Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law, but in their trouble they turned to Jehovah the God of Israel, and sought Him, and He was found of them. And in those times there was no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in, but great disturbances were amongst all the inhabitants of the countries. And nation was broken against nation, and city against city; for God disturbed them with all manner of distress” (vv. 3-6). God, the priesthood, and the law had disappeared, so to speak; every man had been a law to himself. It was the reign of iniquity. Then how many times the people in their anguish had cried out to the Lord and returned to Him! And each time they had found God to be a Deliverer. There is “no peace” in forsaking God — no rest, no peace for the wicked, says Isaiah — but trouble upon trouble; on the contrary, from the moment the king returns again, as Asa did, there was peace and rest (cf. 2 Chr. 14:1).

Azariah does not speak of the ten tribes; he considers Judah and Benjamin the people of God; Israel is already conclusively

given up as a testimony of the Lord, although centuries must yet pass before her final rejection.

After the exhortation we find encouragement: “But as for you, be firm and let not your hands be weak: for there is a reward for your deeds” (v. 7). Do not we also, though we are under the regime of grace, need to pay heed to this exhortation? According to God's government, now hidden, but which exists no less in all its reality, there is a present reward, not only a future one, for our acts. This reward is peace, rest, and strength. This is what Asa had experienced, but the continuation of his history will show us just how much he needed to be exhorted — and all we together with him.

As soon as Asa had heard the words of this prophecy, “he took courage.” Here we find a new characteristic of strength, which does not consist, as previously, of victory over the Ethiopians, but rather in practical purification. Asa “put away the abominations out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities that he had taken from mount Ephraim” (v. 8). So it must

be for us too: Everything that is abominable in the sight of God, every defilement, must be resolutely banished from our lives so that we may enjoy unmingled fellowship with Him. This can only take place through the strength and energy of faith, that energy which the apostle Peter calls “virtue.” The Christian life does not allow letting things go. The prophet tells us, “Be firm.” We have at our disposal the strength, the power of the Spirit of God, based on His Word. We lack nothing; therefore let us make profitable use of our strength.

Asa does not confine himself, as he had done previously (2 Chr. 14:3-5), to purifying the cities of Judah: he also put away the abominations “out of the cities that he had taken from mount Ephraim.” After the king's victory God had enlarged his sphere of activity (2 Chr. 14:14), and he was now responsible that the same principles of holiness be adopted there as in the territory of Judah. But that was not sufficient: Asa “renewed the altar of Jehovah” (v. 8). I have no doubt that here it is a matter, as in many other passages, of renewing the sacrifices regularly offered on the altar according to the law. This altar,

built by Solomon, was still whole and did not need to be renewed, as when ungodly Ahaz substituted another altar in its place (2 Kings 16). In brief, Jehovah's worship according to the prescriptions of the Word — this worship, already neglected under the preceding reigns — was re-established according to God's mind. Wherever we find true and energetic separation from the defilement of the world, it does not take long for the worship of God's children to resume its honored place.

Another result of Asa's faithfulness was the regathering of Israel: “And he assembled all Judah and Benjamin, and the strangers with them out of Ephraim and Manasseh, and out of Simeon; for they fell away to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that Jehovah his God was with him” (v. 9). Worship having been re-established, Israel's unity is realized in the feeble measure befitting a time of division and ruin: the sight of God's favor manifested toward His faithful people acted upon the consciences of those who up till now had formed part of the ten tribes and who from their origin were found associated with Jeroboam's idolatry.

“And they assembled themselves at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa. And they sacrificed to Jehovah in that day, of the spoil that they had brought, seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep” (vv. 10-11). The results of the victory are here consecrated to the Lord, and so it should always be. If our successes lead us to depend on ourselves, to be self-satisfied, to increase our own well-being, victory will become a snare for us and will turn us aside from God instead of bringing us closer to Him.

The renewal of the covenant following the revival brought on by the prophetic word is accompanied by great joy, for they “sought [Jehovah] with all their heart; and He was found of them” (v. 15). Every renewal of the covenant accompanies a true work of conscience in the people. They had broken the covenant, they acknowledge it and humble themselves, they return to it and feel the blessing immediately. It was likewise under Hezekiah, Joash, Ezra, and Nehemiah — however we must add that the covenant was violated anew each time, for the man who still does not know himself must learn what he is on the

basis of responsibility. Be that as it may, joy is the result of every restoration, even of one that is partial and temporary. Jehovah “was found of them,” and never, even in the darkest moments of man's history, has He hidden Himself from those who seek Him. To find the Lord! What a treasure! Why should they not rejoice! What rest when He is found! “Jehovah gave them rest round about.” In the preceding chapter we saw the strength that follows rest; in our present chapter we see the rest that follows strength, and so it is that in a faithful life, strength and rest are continually renewed, the one by the other.

Asa does not content himself with repelling evil publicly; he purifies his own house. These two things must be accomplished together, otherwise our Christian life will be only an empty show. “And also Maacah, the mother of Asa the king, he removed her from being queen, because she had made an idol for the Asherah; and Asa cut down her idol, and stamped it, and burned it in the valley Kidron” (v. 16). Actually Maacah was Asa's grandmother who had probably been called to be regent with the title of queen at the time of Abijah's death. With what

energy Asa passes over natural ties, making no allowance for them when the honor of his God is involved! Nothing stops him; he takes away all hope of Maacah's exercising any influence whatever over God's people, and in the sight of all treats her as an enemy of Jehovah. May we imitate him! We are altogether too apt to treat Satan cautiously when it is a matter of sin in our own families, and this often obliges us to do the same when it is a matter of the family of God. We excuse evil while at the same time blaming it; we try to avoid spreading it about in order, so we think, not to produce scandal; we put up with doctrines contrary to God's Word and Christ's honor to avoid offending those who are circulating them and who perhaps are close to us, and thus evil spreads and defiles many. If the people had seen Asa tolerating idolatry in his own house while condemning it everywhere else, would they not have been led to follow his example, or at least not to deal too carefully with it?

All these decisions were to Asa's credit, yet nevertheless he failed in one detail which seemed insignificant. The Word tells

us (2 Chr. 14:5) that “he removed out of all the cities of Judah the high places,” but we learn in 2 Chronicles 15:17 that they “were not removed from Israel,” that is to say, I would believe, from the cities of Israel which he had conquered (v. 8). This seemed to be of little importance, for he had removed all the abominations from these same cities. But when it is a matter of separation from evil, nothing is unimportant. Beyond doubt Asa's heart is depicted as being “perfect all his days” (v. 17), a heart that was intelligent concerning what was befitting the Lord's holiness, but he failed to fully realize this in practice. This toleration of the high places was a grain of sand, compared to his overall activity, but a grain of sand can stop even the best constructed of machines; a flaw in an iron beam will cause the most solid bridge to break; and Judah's full security was based on Asa's scrupulous faithfulness to His God. From this moment on, after ten years of rest and prosperity, we notice decline in this man of God. Up till now Asa's faithful conduct had been the magnet attracting not only Judah to the Lord, but also to a certain degree, Israel, at a time when without this con-

duct Ephraim's loose ways would have brought a corrupting element into the midst of the two tribes. In his zeal Asa had not been a pleasant man according to the flesh; his attitude toward his grandmother proves this, for he might have been content with removing her idol, without publicly proclaiming its fall. This was an honorable deed of Asa's; he knew that worldly amiability never wins hearts to God and that it only smiles at hearts that are carnal. Love is quite different from amiability; it comes from God and shines out from Him onto all men, passing through the heart of the one who loves Him. Amiability is a pleasant characteristic of the natural heart, has no divine source, and never produces anything for God.

What we have seen up to this point was the effect of grace in the king's heart. God had prepared him long ago so that he might be an instrument of blessing, a lamp at Jerusalem for David's sake. The following chapter will show us how this lamp loses its brightness.

Chapter 16

Asa's Decline

Up to this point, as we have seen, Asa's heart had been “perfect” in two directions. In presence of the enemy he had acknowledged that he was without strength, and he had relied on the Lord to find strength in Him. In presence of idolatry he had given proof of real energy to purify the land and re-establish the worship of the Lord in every place. In one point only, no doubt yielding to some political notion, he had dealt in a somewhat compromising way with the cities he had acquired in Israel and perhaps also with the Israelites who had joined Judah: “The high places were not removed from Israel.” Cautions like this never have the results the Christian was hoping for.

Our chapter immediately mentions the measures Baasha took against Judah in the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign. [Note: This date may be a simple copyist's error.] Baasha, deprived of several of his cities, built Ramah in order to prevent any contact from that time forth, “in order to let none go out or come in to

Asa king of Judah” (v. 1). Unable to attack Asa without exposing himself to danger, he wanted in future to prevent his subjects from leaving him and joining God's testimony, and to prevent Asa from carrying out among his people what he considered to be a campaign of propaganda directed against himself and his influence. This principle occurs again and again: those who, like Baasha, still maintain a profession of true religion, though mixed with deadly errors, cannot tolerate near them a testimony which attracts souls. Alas! through a certain toleration of evil Asa presented an occasion for this hostility. Could not Baasha have thought: Asa claims to be closer to God than we are and yet he does the same things we do when they favor his ambitious views! Asa fears Baasha; since he has given way on one point, he can no longer esteem the world as a system with which he can make no compromise and from whom he can ask no aid. He is well aware of his lack of strength, as at the time of the Ethiopian's attack, but he no longer has the same assurance that all his strength is in God. The speck of dust in the machinery had done its work and,

however insignificant it might appear, it had weakened Asa's confidence in Jehovah alone as the source of his strength. He turns to the king of Syria; he calls a power to his assistance that is allied with Ephraim and, consequently, his own enemy. This is diplomacy and, no doubt from the human point of view, good politics, just as maintaining the high places had been. So it has been time and again; one tries to break an alliance and win one of the adversaries to one's own side. When faith has grown weak, it seems easier to depend on man than simply to trust in the One who is our pillar "Boaz." What foolishness — especially for one who had once experienced this miraculous strength!

At first Asa's unfaithfulness seems to bear excellent fruit. Benhadad accepts silver and gold brought out of the house of the Lord as tribute, breaks his alliance with Baasha and takes advantage of the occasion to smite the cities of Ephraim and make himself master of the store cities of Naphtali. Baasha leaves off building Ramah; Asa and his people carry its stones away to build fortresses against Israel. The king seems to have

escaped a great disaster by following this path, but all the blessing of a walk of faith is lost to him, and he is going to make sad proof of this. Oh! how much happier he was when he felt himself to be without strength and yet withstood the innumerable army of Zerah!

Then Hanani the prophet is sent to Asa (vv. 7-10). Later Jehu, the son of this same Hanani, will be sent to Baasha to announce judgment without mercy (1 Kings 16:1-4). Here too Hanani announces judgment but, mourning and full of deep pity, he has to recognize that Asa's heart is no longer perfect before God. Judgment must begin at the house of God and with His people, for it is above all to those who serve Him that He shows He is a holy God.

The principal accusation that Hanani brings is that Asa had not relied on the Lord: “Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on Jehovah thy God, therefore has the army of the king of Syria escaped out of thy hand. Were not the Ethiopians and the Libyans a huge army, with very many chari-

ots and horsemen? but when thou didst rely on Jehovah, He delivered them into thy hand. For the eyes of Jehovah run to and fro through the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward Him” (vv. 7-9).

Asa had behaved foolishly in this; “From henceforth,” the prophet adds, “thou shalt have wars.” He had lost his strength; now he loses his rest, the two great blessings at the beginning of his reign. But instead of humbling himself at the word of God conveyed by the prophet, Asa becomes angry and puts Hanani in prison. Alas! Together with him, he was imprisoning his own conscience. The king's heart was no longer perfect; it had been with respect to idols, but not with respect to the world. One cannot hope for blessing when, even while maintaining one of the great principles of Christian holiness, one abandons the other. Joy, peace, and strength are lost. And much more: in seeking the help and friendship of the world, Asa became an enemy of the word of God in the person of the one who was its bearer. He sinks lower still: “Asa oppressed some of the people,” no doubt those who were attached to the

prophet and deplored the ways of this king who had been so faithful to the Lord till now. Oh! how true it is that one quickly goes downhill when the heart is no longer perfect before God!

But God has not said everything yet. Precisely because he is dear to Him, Asa personally becomes the object of His discipline. In the thirty-ninth year of his reign for two years he was “diseased in his feet, until his disease was extremely great.” Sad to say, this discipline did not produce fruit! Having lost communion with God, having rejected His word, angered against the prophet and those who are faithful to him, he falls into moral hardening: “Yet in his disease he did not seek Jehovah, but the physicians.” That which had been inflicted on him to bring his heart closer to God is used as a pretext to depart even further. When it is a matter of his own health, he confides in weak, fallible instruments. The grace of God no longer speaks to his heart; There is no more place for repentance or humiliation, the fruit of grace. What a sad end — but this occurs more commonly than we would think — for a believer who was once so faithful!

“And they buried him in his own sepulchre, which he had excavated for himself in the city of David, and laid him in a bed filled with spices, a mixture of divers kinds prepared by the perfumer's art; and they made a very great burning for him” (v. 14). In his death, although much incense was lavished on him, there was nothing of sweet-smelling savor for God. Spices serve to cover or to delay the putrefaction of a cadaver and the world's incense cannot take the place of God's favor. Is this not often so with Christians who have sought the favor of men? Men praise them after their death in proportion to the confidence they have placed in men and refused to God. Eulogies which would never be expressed around the casket of one who is faithful abound in proportion to the unfaithfulness mixed into his career. Such incense is only testimony given to a believer's weaknesses; and if the world appreciates these eulogies because they tend to vindicate it in its own opinion, nevertheless God rejects all this incense as a foul odor before Him!

Chapter 17-20

Jehoshaphat

Chapter 17

The Teaching of the Law

The reign of Jehoshaphat offers many instructive details. First, like his predecessors, he “strengthened himself against Israel.” The true means of being at peace with the adversary is by organizing resistance against him in an efficient way. From that moment on, Satan leaves us in peace, but we must never treat him as anything other than an adversary. Jehoshaphat's subsequent history teaches us that he did not always retain this attitude, and this was very detrimental to him. To be at peace with the king of Israel while yet defending one's self against him is quite different from seeking an alliance with him, as Jehoshaphat later did to his own confusion. At the beginning of his reign all was according to the mind of God: “And Jehovah was with Jehoshaphat, for he walked in the first ways of his

father David, and sought not unto the Baals; but he sought the God of his father, and walked in His commandments, and not after the doings of Israel. And Jehovah established the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah gave gifts to Jehoshaphat; and he had riches and honor in abundance. And he took courage in the ways of Jehovah; moreover, he removed the high places and Asherahs out of Judah” (vv. 3-6).

The first book of Kings (1 Kings 22:43) seems to say the opposite: “Only, the high places were not removed: the people offered and burned incense still on the high places.” This passage, which seems to be contradictory, appears to be confirmed even in our book which says: “Only the high places were not removed; and as yet the people had not directed their hearts to the God of their fathers” (2 Chr. 20:33). This only proves that at the beginning of his reign Jehoshaphat undertook to abolish them and maintained this personally; but that the people, whose consciences had not been reached, quickly fell back into these idolatrous practices against which Jehoshaphat, weakened by his alliance with the king of Israel, was unable to exercise his

authority so as to lead the people in the right way. So it had been with Asa, too: In 2 Chronicles 14:5 we have seen that he “removed out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the sun-images”; then, in 2 Chronicles 15:17 that “the high places were not removed from Israel.” Elsewhere again, he “put away the abominations out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities that he had taken from mount Ephraim” (2 Chr. 15:8); then, in the first book of Kings (1 Kings 22:46) we learn that there were sodomites remaining in the days of Asa, and that Jehoshaphat “put [them] away from out of the land.” All this can easily be explained. Let us remember that God never contradicts Himself. Under the reign of these kings, purification had been only partial and temporary; evil sprang up again everywhere because the conscience of the people had never really been reached.

But these verses 3 to 6 teach us yet another truth, in harmony with the character of Chronicles. This book which emphasizes grace as the only means of maintaining the royal line of descent, at the time of the complete decline of the kingdom always

highlights the good which grace has produced, even if it be only for a moment, and shows that grace covers a multitude of sins. It is different when it is a matter of responsibility, as in the book of Kings. Then God reveals the evil in its full extent and shows us why it was necessary to execute judgment.

Here then, Jehoshaphat's faithfulness is especially noted and God brings it out, not only to exalt His own grace, but also in order to show us the consequences of faithfulness and of returning to God. Strength and rest had been the outcome at the beginning of Asa's reign; the establishment of the kingdom, peace, riches, and honor were the consequences of Jehoshaphat's faithfulness (v. 5).

But Jehoshaphat does not stop at separating himself from evil; he has at heart the establishment of that which is good, and this can only be through understanding the mind of God. It was necessary that the law, the Word of God, should be taught in every place and that the people should become familiar with it. Princes, Levites, and priests busied themselves in this with

great zeal everywhere (vv. 7-9). Israel, with its mixed religion, does not seem to have been won over by the understanding of the law which they saw in Judah, and in fact, the same thing takes place all the time. It is more difficult to convince those of the truth who, in the midst of their error, have preserved a few scraps of truth, for this understanding, mixed up though it be, maintains their illusion that they possess the truth. The nations, on the other hand, who had no ties or relationship with the people of God, are convinced by the power which the Word possesses, and submit themselves to him. They acknowledge the people of God; there were even Philistines who hastened to declare themselves tributary to the king of Judah (vv. 10-11). Likewise, when the Corinthians prophesied, unbelievers could be seen falling upon their faces and acknowledging that God was truly in the midst of the assembly (1 Cor. 14:25). Faithfulness to the Word of God brought about the establishment of Jehoshaphat's kingdom. Besides all his prosperity, he possessed an immense army compared to that of Asa, his father. One of its leaders, Amasiah, “willingly offered himself to Jehovah” (v.

16), and God testifies about him of this. This was no doubt one of the fruits of the teaching of the law in Judah. The need to dedicate one's self to the Lord springs up in the heart when one has tasted how good He is, and the revelation of this goodness is given us in the Word (1 Peter 2:2-3). Then one acknowledges His authority and knows that He has the right to expect the full consecration of our hearts.

Chapter 18

The Covenant with Ahab

We have little to say about this chapter which is the exact reproduction of 1 Kings 22, already meditated upon elsewhere.

Jehoshaphat's prosperity is a snare to him; for possessing earthly goods, even when given by God, easily orients our natural hearts towards the world and its alliances. Then, when our conscience reproves us of this unfaithfulness we try to quiet it by the thought that, after all, this world, like the ten tribes of old, has not denied the religious forms which it originally had.

Thus Jehoshaphat allies himself by marriage to Ahab, the wicked king of Israel; no doubt, not that he contracts this union himself, but he allows it and perhaps causes his son Jehoram to contract it (2 Chr. 21:6). Such alliances profoundly mar our spiritual vision: we begin by excusing those who are, in fact, the enemies of God and of His people; then we act in concert with them! Jehoshaphat suffers the consequences of his unfaithfulness; his disguise causes him to be mistaken for the king of Israel by the archers; they pursue him relentlessly; Jehoshaphat cries out; we see here to whom he cries out — a detail omitted in Kings; “Jehoshaphat cried out, and Jehovah helped him; and God diverted them from him” (v. 31). This detail is characteristic of Chronicles. Jehoshaphat cries out to Jehovah as Abijah had done before him (2 Chr. 13:14-15), for he realizes that God is his only resource. At this moment everything, absolutely everything — alliances, political motives, diplomacy, interests to which he has sacrificed that which was most precious, that is, fellowship with his God — all this loses its value and gives way before the prospect of

death. His soul again finds the Lord whom he should never have forgotten in order to obtain worldly advantage. The “depths” swallow up Jehoshaphat; he cries out to his God. Ah! If He should mark iniquities, should He not deliver him up to death? Then the Lord, the ever-faithful God who cannot deny Himself, hears the cry of His servant. He stops the impetuous onrush of his enemies; without their becoming aware of it He changes the direction of their thoughts, doing this at the very moment when the royal garments Jehoshaphat is wearing draw every eye to him.

What are we to think of Ahab's egoism, exposing his ally to every danger in order to protect himself? If we seek the world's friendship, we will never reap anything other than egoism, for the world can only have its “I” as the center of its thoughts. It will never give us that which is contrary to its own interests. How could Jehoshaphat have been so foolish as to seek something other than that which God had given him freely: peace, riches, and honor? Weren't these gifts enough for him? Poor carnal heart of the believer, led to its ruin by vain imaginations,

when in the presence of divine blessings it ought to have been crying out: “I lack nothing!” Nonetheless, as always in Chronicles, grace triumphs, even using Jehoshaphat's unfaithfulness. He had to come to this extremity to learn to know the love and deliverance and infinite resources of his God. Ahab, hidden from men's eyes under his borrowed clothing, does not escape God's eye or His judgment. An archer drawing a bow at a venture hits him. To the world it was chance, but that chance was God!

Chapter 19

Jehoshaphat and Jehu the Prophet

The scenes described in chapters 19 and 20 are completely absent from the book of Kings, which takes up the thread of its narrative again at verses of 2 Chronicles 20:35-37 (1 Kings 22:49-50). Furthermore, it is important to note that Chronicles omits Jehoshaphat's second major act of unfaithfulness when, after having made an alliance with Ahab against the king of Syria, he again fell into the same sin, allying himself with Je-

horam, the son of Ahab, against Moab (2 Kings 3). Thus, as usual in Chronicles, God omits as much as possible the sins of the kings of Judah which are stigmatized in the book of Kings.

The words of verse 1 of our chapter: “And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem,” historically come after the war against Moab, not mentioned here, but the Spirit of God in Chronicles connects them with the alliance with Ahab against the king of Syria.

After the great deliverance accorded to Jehoshaphat, he apparently enjoys a peace which his unfaithfulness certainly did not merit; yet God is a holy God and the moment comes when the king finds himself before His judgment seat and is obliged to acknowledge God's judgment on ways that offend His holiness. The prophet Jehu who comes out to meet him is the son of that Hanani who had prophesied to Asa, Jehoshaphat's father, when he had called Syria to his aid in resisting Baasha. Now the situation had changed and Jehoshaphat had relied on Israel to conquer Syria. Pure politics, ever opposed to God's thoughts! Be it

this way or that, one relies on man according to the interests of the moment; and without hesitation one changes his alliance in order to fight his former allies. God is nowhere considered in these schemes. At best we see a faithful heart, like Jehoshaphat's, consulting Him after getting involved in a path of self-will. But at last the moment comes when God through the prophet's mouth expresses His disapproval of such a walk and the motives for it.

Jehu accuses Jehoshaphat of two things: “Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate Jehovah?”

The second phrase is even more serious than the first. Loving the world involves associating one's self with it, becoming jointly liable with it in its enmity against God. “Adulteresses,” says James, “know ye not that friendship with the world is enmity with God?” (James 4:4). “No servant can serve two masters,” says Jesus, “for either he will hate the one and will love the other, or he will cleave to the one, and despise the other” (Luke 16:13). In spite of all our explanations and ex-

cuses, this is in fact how God considers things. Let us carefully hold on to this truth; may it prevent us from linking ourselves with the world under any pretext whatever, for whatever work, however attractive it may appear to be. If we pay no attention to these things, how shall we escape the judgment that will fall on the world? Grace, no doubt, can and will save us, but do we want to share the fate of Lot who was saved “but so as through the fire”? If it were only a question of our responsibility in the day of judgment, we would be lying among the dead; yet come what may, grace is pleased to see in the believer embarked on a wrong path anything that corresponds to its holiness and righteousness, and grace always takes account of this. This is the consoling thought continually recurring in Chronicles. Let us hear what the prophet says: “Therefore is wrath upon thee from Jehovah. Nevertheless there are good things found in thee; for thou hast put away the Asherahs out of the land, and hast directed thy heart to seek God” (vv. 2-3). The Spirit of God had already presented this same truth in regard to Rehoboam (2 Chr. 12:12). In seeking alliance with Ahab, Jehoshaphat had

feared the Lord and had insisted on seeking Him, but this in no way excused him (2 Chr. 18:6). It was only one point answering to God's thoughts and He takes account of it. Must we not say, What a God is ours!

Jehoshaphat says nothing in reply to the prophet; he accepts the judgment, yet not without having learned his lesson. Instead of answering, he acts. He again takes up the task begun in Judah of teaching the people the law (2 Chr. 17:7-9), a task so wretchedly interrupted by his relations with Ahab in 2 Chronicles 18. Now he applies himself to producing an awakening among the people and in all classes of the nation so that they may serve God and return to Him: “And Jehoshaphat dwelt in Jerusalem; and he went out again among the people from Beersheba to mount Ephraim, and brought them back to Jehovah the God of their fathers” (v. 4). In order to maintain the character of a holy people consecrated to Jehovah (for his predominant thought is interest in God's people) he establishes judges in Judah, city by city. “And he said to the judges, Take heed what ye do; for ye judge not for man, but for Jehovah, who will be

with you in the matter of judgment. And now, let the terror of Jehovah be upon you; be careful what ye do, for there is no iniquity with Jehovah, nor respect of persons, nor taking of presents” (vv. 6-7). He who had so sadly walked in the ways of man (2 Chr. 18:3), puts the judges under obligation to judge for Jehovah, not for man: proof that his conscience had been reached by the divine reproof. He to whom God had said, “Therefore is wrath upon thee,” says to the judges, “Let the terror of Jehovah be upon you!” because he himself had experienced it. Nothing is more powerful in exhorting our brethren than to have had dealings ourselves with God's discipline, and to have learned our lesson to the end, that is, until there is full deliverance. So it was that the apostle Peter, who had only a short while previously denied his Savior, could say: “Ye denied the holy and righteous One.”

Often there is no need to express in words the fact that we have learned our lesson of God — deeds speak more forcefully than words to show our repentance. If “there is no iniquity with Jehovah, nor respect of persons,” can there be such with us?

Thanks be to God, Jehoshaphat is now far from the alliance with Ahab or with Jehoram!

The priests and the elders are engaged in this work of righteous government of the people: “And moreover in Jerusalem did Jehoshaphat set some of the Levites and priests, and of the chief fathers of Israel, for the judgment of Jehovah and for causes. — And they returned to Jerusalem. And he charged them saying, Thus shall ye do in the fear of Jehovah faithfully and with a perfect heart. And what cause soever comes to you of your brethren that dwell in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and ordinances, ye shall even warn them that they trespass not against Jehovah, and so wrath come upon you and upon your brethren: this do and ye shall not trespass ... Be strong and do it, and Jehovah will be with the good” (vv. 8-11).

How beautiful are the king's words which we have italicized! There had been wrath upon Jehoshaphat; he does not want it to be upon his people. Without murmuring he accepts God's dis-

pleasure upon him so that Judah may be spared. This reminds us of David's words at Ornan's threshing floor (1 Chr. 21:17). Such also was Christ's character, only the Lord took the judgment upon Himself, having merited only His Father's "good pleasure." Jehoshaphat took the judgment upon himself, as having merited God's wrath, and as having been the cause of the evil from which he wished to spare the people.

In verse 11 the king introduces order into the government of the people: the chief priest for the matters of Jehovah; a prince of Judah for all the king's matters; the Levites over the people's matters. God is a God of order and is concerned that order be maintained in His house. This important truth is developed in the first epistle to the Corinthians. Disorder is contrary to our God's nature and we must carefully be on guard against it. Wherever we see it rising up among God's people we are responsible to intervene so that we can rightly lay claim to the character of the One to whom we belong. This order demands that every class of servants have its own place and function, recognized by all.

What the prophet said to Jehoshaphat found an echo in his conscience and in his heart. Notwithstanding the announcement of judgment, he was comforted by the Lord's encouragements: "There are good things found in thee ... thou ... hast directed thy heart to seek God." Now he can exhort his people to a vigorous, faithful walk, for he knows that "Jehovah will be with the good" (v. 11).

Chapter 20

War Again

In considering Jehoshaphat's reign as it has been presented to us up to this point, we see it characterized at first by special blessings as a consequence of the king's obedience. After having abolished the idols and the high places, he felt the need of instructing the people, and his faithfulness was rewarded by the submission of all the neighboring nations. But from the time of his unfaithfulness in forming an alliance with Ahab to make war on the king of Syria, the wrath of God must overtake him, and the prophet Jehu announces this to him. Jehoshaphat

humbles himself under this judgment and by his deeds shows that he not only acknowledges its righteousness, but also that he desires to substitute God's order for the disorder in the life of the people. We do not have to wait long for the consequence of his return to God. It is not peace, but war. We may be sure we will expose ourselves to this when we return from a wrong path, for repentance — which makes us recover fellowship with God — cannot suit Satan whose desire is to separate us from Him. When Jehoshaphat's spiritual state had been prosperous, the enemy, reduced to silence, had been humbled; but he patiently waited, lying in wait until the moment when having committed an irreparable error, the king would incur Jehovah's anger and be lost. As always, Satan did not take account of God's grace which had found good things in Jehoshaphat, nor of the work which grace had produced in the king's conscience; he could not understand that God would make use of the inevitable judgment, unleashed by war, to establish his servant and break the snares of the enemy. So it has ever been. During the first centuries of the Church when, hav-

ing left her first love, she was threatened with judgment that would remove her lamp from its place, she was thrown into a furnace and underwent tribulation for ten days. God permitted this in order to restore His Assembly; along with Philadelphia, Smyrna became the only church where the Lord had no need to pronounce further warnings. The situation is the same here: war breaks out, judgment is let loose, wrath runs its course, but we witness a completely different scene: that which grace produces in favor of the people and their king.

Let us look at the elements composing the enemy army. First, there was Moab. When we turn to 2 Kings 3 we learn the reason for Moab's hatred. Jehoshaphat had gone up against Moab with Jehoram, the king of Israel, and even though it seems that actually it was Israel alone that fought against Moab, Moab held a particular grudge against Judah. This is often the case; an alliance with the professing world becomes a disadvantage in particular to believers. Moab takes vengeance for the humiliation she has undergone, by attacking — not Israel — but Judah, comparatively so weak. But let us remember

the primary reason for this hostility: Judah represented the true God and He it was who proud Moab, instigated by Satan, was targeting.

Moab's allies are the children of Ammon, whom David had once so humiliated and defeated, and a portion of Edom,* the very same Edom which had briefly become the ally of Jehoram and Jehoshaphat against Moab (2 Kings 3:9), and which was now Moab's ally against Jehoshaphat.

* The Meunim or Maonites belonged to the territory of Edom, i.e. to mount Seir (v. 10). Today there still exists a city called Maan to the east of the Wadi-el-Arabah in this region. At the time of Chronicles, besides, Edom was no longer a compact kingdom (1 Kings 22:47).

As we have said, the attack of this confederation was the consequence of the king's error, an error which he had acknowledged by his actions, but whose inevitable result was God's judgment. We are also told (v. 3): Jehoshaphat feared. But this godly king cannot stop there, although he had indeed merited God's judgment. He does the only thing possible: “[He] feared,

and set himself to seek Jehovah.” In seeking Jehovah, will he meet with wrath? In no way; he meets with grace, the main subject of this entire portion of our book. Meanwhile, while seeking the Lord, he “proclaimed a fast throughout Judah” (v. 3); this is humiliation and brokenness in spirit, recognizing the righteousness of the blow which has been dealt to both him and his people but counting on a God who is rich in compassion. Judah gathers together in the same spirit “to ask help of Jehovah: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek Jehovah” (v. 4). The spirit animating the king spreads, and the people follow his example. Then Jehoshaphat is able to present himself on behalf of them all before God in His temple.

He reminds the Lord that He is the God of their fathers, God in the heavens, whose power none can withstand, who rules over the nations and who had dispossessed them in order to give their kingdoms to His people. He returns to God's character as it was at the beginning — and God cannot change; this was Israel's security. Back then He had acknowledged their father Abraham as His friend. In the beginning they themselves had

taken Him as their God, building Him a sanctuary. There God had accepted Solomon's supplication; considering, not Jehoshaphat, but the intercession of the king according to His counsels — the one He could not fail to hear. In times past in obedience to God they had spared Edom, mount Seir, but Seir in a time of declension had taken advantage of Judah's low condition to avenge themselves and return evil for good to them. Would God stand for this? Would He not judge them? Doubtless, if He were to take into account their present condition, it would be themselves, Judah, whom He ought to judge; but would He count all His past grace for nothing? Never! Nevertheless, it was in order for them to take the place before Him that their humiliation which was so right called for, as did also their faith. Jehoshaphat does not say as before (2 Chr. 19:11): "Be strong and do it," but rather: "We have no might in presence of this great company which comes against us, neither know we what to do." He reasons like his father Asa in the days when he was faithful (2 Chr. 14:11), but he also knows, as did his father, that no force can withstand the Lord. His one and

only resource thus is: “Our eyes are upon Thee!” Is this not the thought expressed in Psalm 123? “Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes are directed to Jehovah our God, until He be gracious unto us!”

All Judah, as later in Nehemiah's time, is present at this scene. “With their little ones, their wives, and their sons,” they all associate themselves with Jehoshaphat's supplication. Then they receive the Spirit of God's wonderful answer through Jahaziel, the son of Zechariah: “Be attentive, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat! Thus saith Jehovah unto you: Fear not, nor be dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow go down against them: behold, they come up by the ascent of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the valley, before the wilderness of Jeruel. Ye shall not have to fight on this occasion: set yourselves, stand and see the salvation of Jehovah who is with you! Judah and Jerusalem, fear not nor be dis-

mayed; tomorrow go out against them, and Jehovah will be with you” (vv. 15-17).

Isn't it remarkable that we find no reproach here, not even a remote allusion to the unfaithfulness of the people and their king? All is grace. Sin has been swallowed up, as it were, by grace. Ah! this reassuring word, twice repeated: “Fear not, nor be dismayed,” is breathed by the Spirit of Jesus. How often in the Gospels in the presence of sinful man, He would say, “Fear not.” He would have us trust in His power and goodness. His goodness is His glory, as He said to Moses and as we see in Psalm 63. Three times He encourages them with these words: “Go down, set yourselves, go out against them,” and twice He tells them, “Jehovah will be with you!”

God requires only one thing of His people: faith in His word. This must be evidenced before they receive what this word promises them. Faith must anticipate victory, for it is the confirmation of things not yet seen; it must count entirely on God without any confidence in man; faith must understand that this

battle is not theirs, but the Lord's, that the battle is against Satan who would thwart God's counsels concerning His people. They had only to stand there to see the salvation of Jehovah, the very same expression which Moses had spoken to the people when they went out of Egypt (Ex. 14:13).

As soon as the promise of salvation is given, it is a sure thing for faith although it has not yet been obtained. "He will swallow up death in victory," says the prophet, and the apostle adds: "But thanks to God, who gives us the victory by our Lord Jesus Christ." Then the king and the people fall on their faces before Jehovah to worship Him and the Levites stand up to praise Him (vv. 18-19).

After this thanksgiving for anticipated blessing the people go out toward the wilderness of Tekoa. Jehoshaphat stands before the people and says: "Believe in Jehovah your God, and ye shall be established; believe His prophets, and ye shall prosper!" The only thing necessary is faith; faith in God, faith in His Word, represented by the prophets. As of old, so it is

today and so it ever shall be in a time of ruin: the Word is the supreme resource; it is to the Word that the people are always referred.

In the face of fully equipped enemy troops, praise resounds a second time: “Give thanks to Jehovah; for His loving-kindness endures for ever!” No other song recurs more frequently than this one in the Old Testament. Usually it is the proclamation of grace which alone can introduce the reign of glory, but here it is the song of triumph before the victory is won, because to faith this victory is sure.

This triumph is from a source entirely divine: “Jehovah set li-ers-in-wait against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir.” Man has no part in it, whereas on other occasions he is called on to act and to fight. Just as at the beginning of their history, God today wants to cause His people to realize their own powerlessness and the power that fights for them.

The enemies destroy one another and Judah sees their defeat from on high, just as we do when we enter the sanctuary of our

mighty God; only in our chapter we see a conclusive victory, whereas faith alone realizes it today while we wait for the God of peace to bruise Satan under our feet.

The “song of triumph” anticipated victory (v. 22); now victory has come, and Judah celebrates it in the valley of Berachah, which means “blessing,” a picture of the place where God will be praised forever for the victory He has won for us. All this scene is in figure the accomplishment of God's counsels toward His people by the judgment of their enemies. After this the people return to Jerusalem with joy, Jehoshaphat at their head. All the instruments of praise, as in Psalm 150, celebrate Jehovah's triumph (v. 28). This is the prelude to the rest that remains for the people of God: “And the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet; and his God gave him rest round about” (v. 30). “And the terror of God was on all the kingdoms of the lands, when they had heard that Jehovah fought against the enemies of Israel” (v. 29).

In all these details it is impossible not to recognize the portrayal of Christ's future millennial reign and the events by which it will be introduced. Israel's humiliation, being reduced to a feeble remnant, their return to God, the Lord's direct intervention in their favor, the conclusive victory won by the Lord Himself over the enemy of the end times, the reign of peace this will introduce, the king of Israel himself leading his people to Jerusalem, the uninterrupted chords of joyful praise before God, and the kingdom's final rest. Solomon's reign sets us right into the midst of full millennial blessing; the end of Jehoshaphat's reign describes the manner in which it will be established.

Let us note yet that we find the very same expressions at the beginning and at the end of Jehoshaphat's reign: "And the terror of God was on all the kingdoms of the lands" (2 Chr. 17:10; 2 Chr. 20:29). In the beginning this terror was the fruit of the king's faithfulness, fruit which could not endure; at the end it is the fruit of God's faithfulness when everything on man's side has failed, and this fruit endures forever. This entire scene, a

type of the accomplishment of God's counsels, because it is this, has no place in the book of Kings.

In verses 31-37 we find, by contrast, a brief picture and a sort of summary of Jehoshaphat's reign from the aspect of his responsibility, a picture differing from the usual perspective of Chronicles. This aspect seems to have the aim of introducing us to the terrible reigns of Jehoram and of Ahaziah where only their responsibility comes before us without the possibility of grace intervening, except to spare them an offshoot. And this is not on their account, but on account of the promises made to David and in view of the future reign of Christ. This passage turns back so as briefly to describe the events that took place under the reign of Ahaziah, king of Israel, and which preceded the victory over Moab described in our chapter. It corresponds to 1 Kings 22:42-44, 48. Under the regime of responsibility, Jehoshaphat failed to abolish the high places (v. 33), whereas in 2 Chronicles 17:6 where he is presented under the regime of grace acting in his heart, the high places are removed. We have already explained this fancied contradiction. One more detail is

added here: the state of Judah itself did not measure up to God's thoughts: "The people had not directed their hearts to the God of their fathers" (v. 33).

Lastly, our passage records a commercial alliance between Jehoshaphat and Ahaziah, but without the correlative statement which the first book of Kings (1 Kings 22:49) supplies. In this latter passage we see indeed that after the destruction of his fleet at Ezion-geber, Jehoshaphat, having understood the warning Jehovah gave him, refused to renew the enterprise with Ahaziah. Here, there is nothing of the kind. Only God's judgment upon Jehoshaphat on the first occasion is recounted. If it were here a matter of the results of grace in the king's heart, the special characteristic of Chronicles, Jehoshaphat's refusal to enter into a new partnership could never have been omitted. The prophet Eliezer the son of Dodavah's intervention, omitted in Kings, confirms the point we are seeking to bring out: that is, that this brief passage speaks only of responsibility and departs from the usual character of this book. Indeed, Eliezer pronounces judgment without the softening which we have ob-

served in Jehu's prophecy (2 Chr. 19:3). He says: “Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, Jehovah has broken thy works,” and the ships were broken, and could not go to Tarshish.

In all this Jehoshaphat was indeed very guilty. What need did he have of riches acquired at the price of alliance with the leader of a people whose judgment was already decreed, and concerning whom he knew God's mind through his own experience? Had not the Lord given him abundance of riches at the faithful beginning of his career (2 Chr. 17:5; 2 Chr. 18:1)? Why did he want to draw from another source? Poor Jehoshaphat! poor in God's sight since he neither appreciated nor valued the riches that God gives and found himself poor enough to covet the riches that God did not give!

All this is very instructive for us. If we have realized that we cannot associate with the world to fight God's enemy, are we any more authorized to seek such association to better our temporal situation? We will certainly fail to find what we are look-

ing for. We cannot love God and “the mammon of unrighteousness” at the same time, for that would be serving two masters. It is not possible to love the one without hating the other; therefore we must choose and refuse resolutely any offer the world makes to this end, as Jehoshaphat did on this occasion in the book of Kings. We must understand that to seek for gain together with the world is no better than to attempt to fight evil at its side. This spirit is only too common among God's children. If they have any intelligence at all, they cannot think that they can cause the gospel to triumph by fighting against Satan together with his own slaves. But perhaps they do not view association with the world in order to satisfy their need of riches in the same way. May God preserve us from both these dangers! And if He judges it well to give riches to His servants, may they come from Him alone, so that they may not be used for themselves but be administered in the service of the Master to whom they belong.

Chapters 21 & 22

Chapter 21

Jehoram

The account of Jehoram's reign contained in 2 Kings 8:16-24 corresponds in substance to that which is said to us in verses 5 to 10 of this chapter, but except for these few verses all we are told about Jehoram here is new. We have spoken in Meditations on 2 Kings about the chronological difficulties raised with regard to this reign; these difficulties disappear before the fact that Jehoram was made regent during the lifetime of his father Jehoshaphat just as the latter, allying himself with Ahab, was seeking to reconquer Ramoth-Gilead, occupied by the king of Syria. This explains the expression in 2 Kings 8:16: “And in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab, king of Israel, Jehoshaphat being then king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, began to reign.” It was during his regency that Jehoram exterminated his six brothers whom Jehoshaphat had established in the fortified cities of Judah (v. 3).

The date is confirmed by what is said in verse 4: “Jehoram established himself” (or rose up) over the kingdom of his father and strengthened himself”; it is confirmed again by the fact that the writing of Elijah, who had not yet been taken up to heaven, mentions the murder of Jehoram's brothers (v. 13). These details confirm the perfect accuracy of the biblical account.

We have said above that the reigns of Jehoram and of Ahaziah, his son, offer not a single feature which does not call for final judgment on Judah. Nevertheless the Lord remains faithful to His promises and does not destroy “the house of David, because of the covenant that He had made with David, and as He had promised to give to him always a lamp, and to his sons” (v. 7). The revolt of Libnah, a priestly city (v. 10), seems to indicate that at least the priesthood in Judah protested against the king's abominations. The reason for this revolt is given us: Jehoram “had forsaken Jehovah the God of his fathers.” The royal house was spared only in view of the future heir who was to descend from it.

However, we do not have to wait long for the consequences of Jehoram's revolting conduct. Edom, until then tributary to Judah and which had no king but rather a governor (1 Kings 22:47), revolts, “and they set a king over themselves” (v. 8). Jehoram fights them successfully, but his victory is fruitless, for “unto this day” Edom has remained free from Judah's yoke.

“Moreover, he made high places on the mountains of Judah”; this was far worse than failing to destroy the existing high places, as several of his predecessors had done: Jehoram creates and establishes them, something no king of Judah had ever done before him. Much more, he promoted fornication at Jerusalem and “compelled Judah thereto” (v. 11). What a scene! This was voluntarily forsaking God for idolatry; in a word, this was apostasy and completely forgetting God's holiness, to which Jehoram preferred corruption and defilement.

Up until now we have seen the role of the prophets of Judah in rebuking, exhorting, encouraging, and filling hearts with fear at the imminent judgments of Jehovah. Now these precious help-

ers are not there. Only “a writing ... from Elijah,” prophet of Israel and prophet of judgment, reaches king Jehoram. Elijah had watched the first acts of this reign of violence and had written against the king. This writing, preserved after the prophet's rapture, gets to Jehoram. “Thus saith Jehovah, the 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 commit fornication, like the fornications of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren, thy father's house who were better than thyself: behold, Jehovah will smite with a great stroke thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy substance, and thyself with sore sicknesses, with a disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day” (vv. 12-15).

The three facts enumerated by Elijah to justify God's judgment are: abandoning Jehovah, corruption, and violence — all that characterizes man's sin on account of which God had once des-

troyed the world by the flood. But God is patient toward His people: He speaks only of personal judgment on the king. Jehoram is stricken in his bowels which fall out by reason of this terrible sickness, and he dies “in cruel sufferings.” Thus Elijah's prophecy is accomplished to the letter. Jehoram had chosen “the way of the kings of Israel”; he is condemned by a prophet of Israel, the only public witness who remained in the midst of the idolatry of the ten tribes and their king.

Defections continue. Not only Edom, but also the Philistines and the Arabians rise up against Judah; these nations overrun her territory as well as Jerusalem, plundering the king's treasure, carrying away his sons and his wives, and massacring the former, just as he himself had massacred his brothers. All that is left of his family is a single offshoot, Jehoahaz, otherwise known as Ahaziah, for the Lord wanted to preserve a lamp for David and his sons. Jehoram died “without being regretted”; no aromatic spices are burned for him as had been done for Asa. Although he is buried in the city of David, the honor of sharing the sepulchers of the kings is refused him at his burial.

What will become of the lamp which God is yet preserving for David?

Chapter 22

Ahaziah

Most of the details of this chapter are also found in 2 Kings 8:25-29; 2 Kings 9:27-28; 2 Kings 10:13-14; 2 Kings 11:1-3.

Jehoram was the eldest of Jehoshaphat's sons; up to this point the kingly line, so to say, followed the normal path, but no descendant was left to Jehoram except his youngest son, Ahaziah. The inhabitants of Jerusalem make him king; thus divine order is encroached upon on every side. The lamp is about to go out, but God who had spoken through the prophets cannot lie. Did He not say, in speaking of Jerusalem: "There will I cause the horn of David to bud forth; I have ordained a lamp for Mine anointed" (Ps. 132:17). Alas! what a lamp was this offshoot of kings! Spared amidst a scene of murder and carnage, witness of God's terrible judgments on his father, should he not have lifted

up his eyes to Jehovah and re-established contact with the God of Israel? Instead of this, he yields to all the bad influences surrounding him, without heeding the warnings from on high; he confides in his mother, Athaliah, daughter of Omri, an ambitious and cruel woman. “[She] was his counselor to do wickedly” (v. 3); as counselors he takes those of the house of Ahab who lead him “to his destruction.” On their advice he forms an alliance with Joram, the son of Ahab. Ramoth-Gilead, a possession of Israel, had remained under the power of the king of Syria ever since Ahab's vain undertaking to recover it, in company of Jehoshaphat, Ahaziah's grandfather. Ahaziah does not hesitate to help the wicked (cf. 2 Chr. 19:2), so estranged is his heart from the fear of the Lord.

But, if for Jehoshaphat it was a mistake, extenuated by the zeal he otherwise demonstrated for the Lord, this sin, shamelessly repeated despite the condemnation pronounced on Jehoshaphat by the prophet, here no longer has any extenuating circumstances. Joram, the king of Israel, wounded by the Syrians withdraws to Jezreel to be healed of his wounds. Ahaziah

comes there to visit him and there he meets his end: “But his coming to Joram was from God the complete ruin of Ahaziah.” He goes out with him “against Jehu the son of Nimshi, whom Jehovah had anointed to cut off the house of Ahab.” Joram dies, the sons of the brothers of Ahaziah and the princes of Judah are massacred by Jehu; Ahaziah flees to Samaria in an attempt to hide himself. He is discovered, chased, and wounded; he escapes to Megiddo, where he is once again discovered, brought to Jehu, and put to death (v. 9; cf. 2 Kings 9:27-28). His servants convey his body to Jerusalem where he was buried in the sepulchers of the kings, his fathers, for they said: “He is the son of Jehoshaphat, who sought Jehovah with all his heart” (v. 9). The only testimony that can be accorded him, the only reason Jehovah refrains from delivering him up to the dogs like Ahab, is that God remembers his grandfather. It is on his account that grace is granted to this unworthy descendant, even though that grace is shown in his death, for his life had come to an end under God's judgment.

And now still another terrible scene of murder unfolds. Jehoram had massacred his brothers; Judah's enemies massacred all of Jehoram's sons but Ahaziah; Jehu kills Ahaziah and massacres all the sons of his brothers; finally Athaliah exterminates all the royal seed in order that she alone might rule. And despite it all, the lamp of the Lord's Anointed is not extinguished. In the midst of this scene of murder God preserves a feeble nursling who in the first part of his reign is a type of the expected Messiah. Preserved, as Jesus later would be at the time of the massacre of the infants at Bethlehem; hidden from every eye, as Jesus at the time of the flight to Egypt — thus Joash is presented to us. He arises in the purity of his childhood out of a condemned race, the only offshoot upon whose shoulder is laid the key of David, a root out of a dry ground; brought up from his youth under the eye of God in His temple, he appears to us like the One who said: “Did ye not know that I ought to be occupied in my Father's business?” Thus Joash begins his career.

But let us note, he is at the same time the type of the Lord taking in His hands the reins of government of His kingdom. In

the seventh year, the sabbatical year, the year of rest for the earth, he appears before the eyes of all. Until that moment Joash had been hidden for six years in the house of God, just as the Lord is hidden before His future manifestation. When the doors of the temple open, when He comes forth out of heaven which until then contains Him, He will be at once avenged on those who conspired against Him and universally proclaimed the true King of His people, the only One with the right to wear the crown.

Chapters 23 & 24

Joash

Chapter 23

The Accession of Joash to the Throne

No other reign affords a more absolute contrast between its beginning and its end than that of Joash in Chronicles. One particular detail, contrasting with all we have noticed up to this

point, is that in the history of Joash the evil is mentioned more often than the good, whereas the second book of Kings omits a portion of it. The explanation of this fact is simple: The beginning of the reign of Joash is presented to us as an attempt to accomplish God's counsels as to the kingdom. Will he prove himself worthy of the divine favor resting upon him? If so, the king according to God's counsels will be called Joash. As we shall learn, this was not the case, but the beginnings of this reign were so favored that they seemed close to fulfilling the thoughts of God.

Another point is brought to light in our chapter. The proclamation of the kingdom does not take place without the Levitical priesthood being re-established in all its functions (vv. 1-9), for it is inseparable from the kingdom according to God's counsels and is subordinated to it. Moreover, the high priesthood in the person of Jehoiada is intimately associated with the kingdom and this association is one of the remarkable features of Chronicles, although the kingdom and the priesthood are not here invested in the same person as they will be when Christ "shall be

a priest upon His throne” (Zech. 6:13). Here the entire Levitical priesthood is present at the anointing and coronation of the king (v. 8). All the captains also unite at this solemn ceremony; and all the people are present, too. Every man bears David's weapons (v. 9) and thus the reign of Joash is directly related to that of David, who was rejected in former days.

“And all the congregation made a covenant with the king in the house of God. And [Jehoiada] said to them, Behold, the king's son shall reign, as Jehovah has said of the sons of David” (v. 3). After this the entire priestly service is reinstated (vv. 18-19), and the king, who has been given the crown and the testimony — the king, whose reign of righteousness accomplishes all that is written in the law — sits on the throne of his kingdom. He reigns “as Jehovah has said of the sons of David”; he is “the king's son”; he is the Anointed, acclaimed by all with the cry: Long live the king! He is really in type the Prince of life!

This glorious scene is established only through vengeance. Athaliah, that idolatrous usurper of the kingdom who had

thought to put an end to David's family forever, falls before the revived kingdom together with all the idolatry she had instituted. In the same way, the Antichrist, a murderer, persecutor and idolater, will fall along with all his power before the revived kingdom at the refreshing dawn of the miraculous reign of the Son of David. Rejoicing and singing are the happy accompaniment of this scene.

Chapter 24

The Reign of Joash

“For the wicked Athaliah and her sons had devastated the house of God; and also all the hallowed things of the house of Jehovah had they employed for the Baals” (v. 7). Joash's first concern was to restore the temple, and he sent the priests and the Levites through the cities of Judah in order to collect the money necessary for this work. The tribute ordained by Moses in the wilderness for the building of the tabernacle (Ex. 30:11-16; Ex. 35:4-9, 20-29) was to be employed for the restoration of the temple, but the Levites did not hasten the matter; the

breaches were not repaired, and the gifts no doubt were used to support the priesthood.

In all this, Joash adhered to the Word alone. Circumstances had changed since the years in the wilderness. Moses had ordained a tribute for the construction of the tabernacle; the tabernacle had disappeared and had given place to a temple. Was it necessary to adhere to the original ordinance that had been given in quite different circumstances? Moreover, the temple had been defiled, despoiled of all its treasures, and partially destroyed. Was it really necessary to go to so much trouble to repair it? Couldn't Moses' tribute be used to support the Levites? Doubtless Joash was surrounded by people who reasoned in this way, but all this was not according to God, even though a godly high priest did not oppose it. His opinion had no value for Joash; and the young king rebuked the old high priest, for the Word of God was of greater authority for him than the thoughts of the most eminent of men. That which the Word commands must be used the way the Word designates; it is not possible — without becoming unfaithful — to make any change in divine regula-

tions. The natural heart's unbelief would term these ordinances outdated, but that they are not, for the Word is unchangeable and eternal. Work on the house is not the same thing as helping the servants who labor for the Lord and who are worthy of their wages; there was the tithe for the Levites, but each has its place, and for Joash the most urgent thing was to repair the breaches in the house. He proved himself here to be more of a true Levite than the Levites themselves; he followed the steps of the One who said: "The zeal of Thy house has devoured Me."

Is there no voice for us in these things? Should not our time, our resources, and our efforts be employed to cement those bonds, today destroyed, that join together the precious materials of God's building, His Assembly? Is it of no importance to God whether the place of habitation where He dwells on earth through the Spirit be to the honor or dishonor of its divine Host? It is our responsibility to repair the breaches, to exert our zeal and energy so that God may be honored by the union cemented between His children, the only remedy for complete

ruin. There is only one house of God: everything being built besides it has no value for Him. What resources are being expended uselessly on what are merely human houses. Likewise, the gifts collected by the Levites were of no use to Jehovah and were being expended in vain.

Henceforth it was necessary that the tribute of Moses be used entirely for repairs to the house of God. The king (not Jehoiada, as in the book of Kings) commands that a chest be set at the door of the house of Jehovah to collect the offerings. When all the work is completed, what remains is used to make utensils of gold and silver for the temple (v. 14). This passage does not contradict 2 Kings 12:13 which simply tells us that while the work was in progress silver was not used for anything else.

All is beautiful, all is pure at the beginning of this reign. As is customary in Chronicles, the high places, spared by Joash (2 Kings 12:3), are passed over in silence. As long as the kingdom represents that of the promised Messiah, as it were, this book

views it as pure and without reproach; but all changes: a scene of grief and horror is about to open before our eyes.

The entire passage between verses 15 and 22 is lacking in the book of Kings.

Jehoiada dies and is buried “in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God and toward his house” (v. 16) — fresh proof of the intimate connection between the kingdom and the priesthood in Chronicles.

After this death, everything changes. Joash demonstrates himself unworthy of answering to God's thoughts concerning the kingdom. His safety and his strength had been in his connection with the priesthood, and when it disappeared, everything collapsed. Henceforth “the princes of Judah” became the king's counselors through flattery: “[they] made obeisance to the king: then the king hearkened to them” (v. 17). In gaining control of the spirit of Joash they had in view only the re-establishment of idolatry in Judah. Two paths lay open before Joash: to

remain faithful to the house of God where he had spent the years of his youth, and associate himself with the servants of Jehovah, or to take the world's side and seek the friendship of those who govern it. He abandons the first course and chooses the second; the natural heart is always inclined toward those who flatter it, and the princes of this world are Satan's instruments to lead men astray to idols. And so the people “forsook the house of Jehovah the God of their fathers, and served the Asherahs and idols.”

And now we see prophets again appearing. What proof of God's longsuffering as long as there remains a glimmer of hope for the people! “And He sent prophets among them to bring them again to Jehovah, and they testified against them; but they would not give ear. And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest; and he stood up above the people and said unto them, Thus saith God: Wherefore do ye transgress the commandments of Jehovah? And ye cannot prosper; for ye have forsaken Jehovah, and He has forsaken you” (v. 19-20).

Joash has forgotten everything: his deep affection and respect for the memory of the high priest; the love he owed the son of such a servant, and so much the more as this son was the bearer of God's word to turn the people and their king from their evil ways. What dreadful havoc unfaithfulness can bring about in just a few moments in a heart that has opened its door to it! Would there be anything astonishing about the great men and the people conspiring against the priesthood they take umbrage at and against the prophet who exhorts them? — but no, Zechariah the son of Jehoiada is stoned “at the command of the king in the court of the house of Jehovah.” Our hearts revolt at such ingratitude and cruelty. “And king Joash remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son” (v. 22).

One wonders how such a thing could be possible on part of a king whose beginnings announced a righteous, irreproachable reign. We have given several reasons in our study of 2 Kings, but here these reasons are not given. This reign foundered in crime and violence. Blinded by Satan, the king's heart falls

prey to this terrible enemy as soon as he turns his back on the priesthood and the house of Jehovah.

In taking control of Joash, Satan thought to bring God's counsels to naught. In this despite all his efforts he has been, is, and will continue to be fooled, for God has Christ in view, and the fall of a Joash does not destroy His counsels. Still, judgment must be executed against evil. The cry of vengeance out of the mouth of the dying prophet: "Jehovah see and require it!" (v. 22) is the cry of the violated law. Christ and His blood speak better things than Abel or Zechariah: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." On the cross He intercedes for transgressors and His blood says: Grace! grace! Stephen, who suffers the same fate as Zechariah, cries: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge"; but here, I repeat, we find ourselves under the rule of the law, even though the ministry of the prophets had modified its character.

The fact that Zechariah is slain in the court "between the temple and the altar" makes the king's sin infinitely worse. God

on His throne between the cherubim is witness to this scene, whereas at the beginning of this reign, Athaliah, that wicked woman, had been forcibly removed from the temple court so as to be put to death in the king's house. Joab, smitten when he took hold of the horns of the altar, was not before the ark which David had brought to Zion.

Verses 23-27. The attack of Hazael, whose motive is not given in 2 Kings, is here the answer to Zechariah's cry for vengeance. All the princes of the people who had conspired against the prophet to put him to death receive the just chastisement of their iniquity (v. 23). These verses correspond, though with many differences, to 2 Kings 12:17-21. Thus we find here that the army of the Syrians came to Jerusalem “with a small company of men” to the shame of the “very great army” of Joash (v. 24). They take everything and send the spoil to Damascus. In 2 Kings Joash tries to escape from the enemy by giving Hazael all the holy things and the gold of the temple and that of the king's house. Our passage does not mention this fact except with these words: “the greatness of the burdens laid upon him”

(v. 27). After the tribute is paid, Hazael withdraws from Jerusalem. In our passage he re-enters it and “executed judgment upon Joash” (v. 24). It is probable that between these two events, Joash had rebelled against the king of Syria, for here there is no mention of spoil, but rather of vengeance executed against the princes of the people and the king. Joash is left by the enemy “in great diseases,” the consequences, no doubt, of all his distresses, but above all of God's judgment which pursues him. And moreover, his own servants conspire against this one who had allied himself with conspirators. The avenging sword of a holy God strikes him: a Moabite and an Ammonite, two idolators, are the murderers of this king who had re-established the worship of idols. The blood of the righteous is avenged; Joash does not even have the honor of being buried in the sepulchres of the kings — similar in this respect to ungodly Jehoram who suffered the same fate (2 Chr. 21:20); solemn example of a judgment executed even in death, for the Lord shows men that He wants to be feared!

Chapter 25 to 28

Chapter 25

Amaziah

Amaziah succeeds Joash his father. God in His patience would, so to say, ever begin to test the kingdom anew. Will this reign turn out better than the preceding one? No, the very same history repeats itself. At first there is faithfulness and the fear of God, but then there is a resounding fall. Amaziah “did what was right in the sight of Jehovah, yet not with a perfect heart” (v. 2). Something was lacking in his piety and 2 Kings 14:3-4 informs us about this. He did not abolish the high places although he did not himself sacrifice there, but the people sacrificed there; and this revealed a sinful indifference in Amaziah with regard to the condition of the nation for which he was responsible. Let us repeat here that in Chronicles God in His grace mentions as little as possible the fact that the high places were tolerated. It is as though He had resolved to occupy us only with the things produced in the heart by grace, and not to

insist upon a weakness in the godly kings which often stemmed from a lack of moral authority and energy to repress the idolatrous tendencies of their people.

One other thing by contrast is found to be to the praise of Amaziah; he follows the example given by Joash, his father, in the days of his youth and prosperity. The Word, represented at that time by “the book of Moses,” is binding upon him and this is what directs his decisions. If he does away with his father's murderers as Solomon had once done with David's enemies, he does not put their sons to death, for he did “according to that which is written in the law in the book of Moses, wherein Jehovah commanded saying, The fathers shall not die for the children, nor shall the children die for the fathers, but every man shall die for his own sin” (v. 4; cf. Deut. 24:16).

But this was not the entire Word, and to produce a faithful walk the entire Word is necessary. The same Moses had said in Numbers 33:52: “All their high places shall ye lay waste.” How often the lack of submission to certain parts of the divine

word spoils and corrupts the testimony in an otherwise faithful Christian life. Who can tell us that this tolerance of one of the practices of idolatry — perhaps the least hateful of them — did not have something to do with the shocking defection exemplified in Amaziah's career?

For the moment his life had not yet sunk into evil; but we find in Amaziah a conscience little exercised about association with Israel, already given over to judgment. Doubtless finding his army small in number (and there was indeed an immense difference between his military strength and that of Jehoshaphat: 2 Chr. 17:12-19), he hires 100,000 volunteers from Israel as paid mercenaries for one hundred talents of silver. There was no longer a positive direction, an express Scripture passage, which should have governed the king's conduct as to this, but rather the communion of thoughts with God and the example of blessings linked with faith. Should he not have known that the Lord could “save by many or by few”? Had not Asa, with the same sized army as Amaziah had, destroyed Zerah's million men? (2 Chr. 14:8-9). To sum things up, our faults in such

cases always come from a lack of confidence in God and a blind confidence in human resources. Amaziah had neglected to consult Jehovah, but He does not leave him without exhortations. A prophet, a man of God, comes to him to warn him. Whereas the ten tribes are left to themselves, God reveals His thoughts by His prophets there where a people which still acknowledges Him is found. He exhorts, warns, and announces judgments for disobedience, but all this is mingled with grace. The prophet does not abolish the law in any way, but on the contrary, depends on it; the law and prophecy are presented as having equal authority. Indeed, Amaziah depends on the law of Moses in verse 4 and in verse 10 it is at the prophet's word that he changes his conduct. Had he hardened himself, the system of law not having been abolished, he would have incurred judgment without mercy; but the prophet's word of reproof is full of grace and gentleness: "O king, let not the host of Israel go with thee; for Jehovah is not with Israel, with all the children of Ephraim. But if thou wilt go, do it; be strong for the battle: God will make thee fall before the enemy, for there is

with God power to help and to cast down” (vv. 7-8). Amaziah listens to the prophet, but so that he may remember this serious warning, God wishes that his act of self-will bear certain bitter fruits. First of all the question is raised: “But what is to be done for the hundred talents which I have given to the troop of Israel?” This act of obedience would involve a loss of money, but this was a loss which he would have avoided if he had not without consulting the Lord committed himself to a path that dishonored Him. How much material or moral sorrow the simple path of faith will spare us! No doubt, certain difficulties will always be met in this path, but these trials are not mingled with any bitterness, as we see in the epistle to the Philippians — what am I saying? — no bitterness? They are the occasion of unmingled joy. Certainly the apostle had met with nothing but difficulties along his pathway, and the epistle to the Philippians enumerates a great number of these: his chains, his material needs, the hatred of those who sought to add affliction to his bonds, the lack of harmony among the dear children of God, the enemies of the cross of Christ walking in the Christian

pathway, each seeking his own interest, and many other things; but he was sustained above all his trials, for they were fellowship in the sufferings of Christ and not the chastening of his conduct.

What shall we do? asks Amaziah. The prophet answers: “Jehovah is able to give thee much more than this.” The king has nothing to do but to believe that God is willing to give to him, but his faith will of necessity be put to the test. Will his faith emerge victorious? He puts up with being obliged to renounce the “hundred talents which [he had] given to the troop of Israel” without gaining any profit from them. He sees the anger of the men of Ephraim flaring up against Judah, for they regarded their dismissal as an offense (v. 10). He passes through still other trials: “But those of the troop that Amaziah had sent back, that they should not go with him to battle, fell upon the cities of Judah from Samaria as far as Beth-horon, and smote three thousand of them, and took much spoil” (v. 13). If Amaziah's faith wins a signal victory over the Edomites, as the prophet had told him, nevertheless he must as discipline be

beaten in another quarter by these very men in whom he had placed his confidence. Has Amaziah learned his lesson? Has he humbled himself before God in on the one hand winning a victory, the fruit of God's free grace, and in on the other hand suffering a defeat, the fruit of his independence? The continuation of his history shows us that in reality humiliation was foreign to him. The victory puffs him up; he credits himself with the defeat of the Edomites and forgets God. Shame on him! He forgets God so completely "that he brought the gods of the children of Seir, and set them up to be his gods, and bowed himself down before them, and burned incense to them" (v. 14). He worships the very same gods who had not delivered their people from his hand! This time the wrath of God is kindled against him decidedly, yet still He sends a prophet to him to endeavor one more time to bring him to repentance. "Why dost thou seek after the gods of a people who have not delivered their own people out of thy hand?" Is not this "why" touching? Will Amaziah perhaps humble himself and acknowledge his guilt? This "why" is opening a door of repentance to him. This

effort to restore him is very much a part of the prophet's merciful calling! Amaziah had listened to the first prophet, but without a deep conviction of the evil path in which he was involved; what will he now respond to the second prophet? Instead of taking account of God's wrath against himself, his own wrath is kindled against the man of God. "Hast thou been made the king's counsellor?" How do you dare speak to me? "Forbear; why shouldest thou be smitten?" Pride speaks through the mouth of the king. His victory over Edom has only nursed the high opinion he has of himself. Certainly, he can do without the prophet and his questions — he who could do without the Lord! Indeed, the man of God withdraws, but not without pronouncing these solemn words: "I know that God has determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened to my counsel."

This sentence does not stop Amaziah; there are times when a heart, hardened of its own accord, is left to itself — when a man is delivered over to Satan who uses him as a plaything. Pride at having conquered Edom and bitter resentment against

Ephraim which had pillaged the cities of Judah gives birth in Amaziah's heart to a plan to provoke the king of Israel and to avenge himself against him. He completely rejects the idea of discipline on part of God toward himself, for a spirit of vengeance is never consistent with a humble heart. Joash, the king of Israel, responds to this challenge with a fable, illustrating the fact that once already Jehu had trodden Judah under foot — Judah which had sought alliances through marriage with the family of the king at Samaria. Amaziah “would not hear”; this hardening came from God, as was once the case with Pharaoh. He is smitten, taken prisoner, and brought to Jerusalem. The wall of Jerusalem is destroyed between the gate of Ephraim and the corner gate; the city itself, the temple treasures, and the treasures of the king are taken as spoil. Amaziah lives for fifteen more years after the death of Joash, but without any evidence of a return to God.

And what a solemn occurrence! From the time that he turned aside from following the Lord, a conspiracy hatched against him simmers for many years until one day it breaks out. In the

face of this conspiracy the king flees to Lachish. Why did he not seek refuge with the One whom he had offended? Such a decision could still have suspended judgment, for this was the only refuge where judgment had no access, and even the best fortified city could not prevent God's wrath from reaching the king.

Up until this point, except for two absolutely perverse reigns, the kings begin with God, whose grace is present to encourage them to persevere in this path; but their end is unlike their beginning: it leads to shipwreck. We have not yet reached the period of the revivals when we will find the more comforting picture of kings who learn to count exclusively on grace.

Chapter 26

Uzziah

The second book of Kings mentions the contents of this chapter only very briefly. See 2 Kings 14:21-22 and 2 Kings 15:1-7.

We find the same principle at work in the reign of Uzziah (Azariah) as in the reigns of Joash and Amaziah: the grace of God establishes a new king, blesses him abundantly at the beginning of his reign, and then for one reason or another this reign ends in moral disaster and the judgment that is its consequence. As usual, Chronicles presents the beginning of this reign without mentioning the blot of the high places.

Uzziah built Eloth (or Elath), a city situated near Ezion-Geber on the eastern arm of the Red Sea, which had once belonged to Solomon (2 Chr. 8:17) and which had then passed into the hands of Edom. The beginning of this reign was excellent in every aspect. “He sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God; and in the days that he sought Jehovah, God made him to prosper” (v. 5). This Zechariah does not appear in any other passage; it is certain that he was of the priestly line; moreover, he had understanding in the visions of God; he was therefore a prophet and moreover a seer — not all prophets necessarily having this character. Often they sought the truth in their own writings, studying them

and gaining understanding, but they were not necessarily able to explain the visions of God. Joseph had this gift, and Daniel was in the same position as Zechariah; he had “understanding in all visions and dreams” (Dan. 1:17), and moreover, in line with the example of other prophets, he understood God's thoughts through studying their writings (Dan. 9:2).

Understanding in the visions of God enables us to teach and exhort others. Prophecy is not necessarily a revelation of new things; this is certainly not its character in our days when the Holy Scriptures give us the complete revelation of God's mind; nevertheless today's prophet possesses an understanding in the mysteries of God (the things which were hidden but are hidden no longer, being now revealed in the Word). This understanding makes him capable of edifying, comforting, and exhorting (1 Cor. 14:3). This was precisely what was needed by the kings of Judah who passed through times of ruin, such as we today pass through also. This is what Zechariah did. Under his ministry Uzziah sought the Lord and prospered. Like him, we must pay careful attention to the Word of God and to the mysteries it

reveals to us. If we diligently seek to understand them, like Uzziah, we will enter upon an era of spiritual prosperity. Only, let us not forget that this prosperity itself brings us into conflict with the enemy. The most desperate enemies were those at the gates of Judah. In those difficult times the Philistines had taken possession of part of Israel's territory and stood their ground there. We can compare this enemy to nominal Christendom, established without right within the confines of the people of God. What are we to do about them? The same thing that Uzziah did when he broke down the walls of the Philistines and built cities in their midst. In the interests of the people of God we ought likewise to prove the emptiness of Christendom's pretensions and lift high the divine principles of the Word as the only way of withstanding it.

After this, Uzziah is able to carry on the war beyond his borders. “God helped him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians that dwelt in Gur-Baal, and the Maonites [Edomites]. And the Ammonites gave gifts to Uzziah: and his name spread abroad to the entrance of Egypt; for he became exceedingly

strong” (vv. 7-8)! Applying this to the gospel's conquests, we usually find the same pattern. It begins like Gideon and so many others within a restricted circle, often the circle of the family, and then spreads beyond. Andrew first of all brought his brother Simon to Jesus; the delivered demoniac tells his own house what great things God had done for him; the apostles preach at Jerusalem; from there, the Gospel spreads to Samaria, then to Caesarea among the Gentile proselytes, and finally, through Paul, to the nations. If after having been converted we are faithful in our immediate circle, we may be certain that the Lord will extend our limits.

“And Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the corner gate, and at the valley gate, and at the angle, and fortified them” (v. 9). Towers are built to defend the gates. Two of these towers face the valley of Hinnom, where Joash, king of Israel, had broken down the wall after having conquered Amaziah (2 Chr. 25:23). Uzziah also fortified the “corner gate,” a weak and exposed part of Jerusalem's fortifications by which one might gain access to the temple and capture it. In other words, Uzziah was

not content simply to rebuild that which the enemy had destroyed but sought to secure God's temple from any attack. All this demanded very earnest labor; let us apply ourselves to do the same. It is not enough to fight the enemy without; we must care for the Assembly of God.

“And he built towers in the desert and digged many cisterns; for he had much cattle, both in the lowland and on the plateau, husbandmen also and vinedressers on the mountains and in Carmel; for he loved husbandry” (v. 10). Besides having to fight enemies from without and within and make Jehovah's city secure, he also had to face many other dangers. The watchtowers in the wilderness were used not only to alert against wild animals, but more importantly, to signal the presence of those who would pillage the flocks. One of the king's functions was to fill the office of shepherd and protect the sheep. This solicitude for the flocks confided to his care is shown in yet another manner: Uzziah dug many wells in order to provide drinking water for his men and his cattle. The patriarchs had done likewise, in particular Isaac, that great digger of

wells and great seeker of living water. He knew that without this living water, neither man nor beast could survive — a striking image of the Word of God which the enemy always seeks to steal from us (proved by all the attacks which he directs against it), as in former days the Philistines blocked up the wells dug by Abraham and filled them with earth (Gen. 26:15).

We are also told — a very rare thing in Scripture — that Uzziah “loved husbandry.” He showed an interest in the flocks and their pasturelands, in the laborers toiling to harvest “the precious fruit of the earth,” the wheat which gives food and strength, and in the vinedressers laboring to bring joy to the heart of man overwhelmed with troubles.

All this activity in no way hindered the king's constant concern for his army, for perfecting offensive weaponry, and at Jerusalem, machinery for defense (vv. 11-15).

Such solicitude for all branches of government and administration, such expertise in organization we find but little in the history of the kings, except in that of Solomon. Thus, despite the

painful contrast between the kingdom's present and past, despite its division and humiliation, despite its enemies without and within, the Lord was pleased to sketch anew the history of the king according to His counsels in order to show that the ruin would not prevent him from growing up “before Him as a tender sapling, and as a root out of dry ground” (Isa. 53:2). The Lord was with Uzziah: “His name spread far abroad; for he was marvelously helped, till he became strong” (v. 15).

Up to this point not a single defect, not a single weakness is pointed out in this king's life (the book of Kings, which has an entirely different object, does mention some). If he had continued thus, Israel's Deliverer would have been found at last! Alas! the hour of shipwreck is striking! “But when he became strong, his heart was lifted up to his downfall” (v. 16). Uzziah's pride was feeding on the blessings he had received and he lifts himself up against the very One to whom he owed his exaltation. Usurping the right of burning incense on the golden altar, a right belonging to the priests alone, he enters into Jehovah's temple into which only those who had been sanctified to exer-

cise priestly functions were allowed to penetrate. When Korah rebelled (Num. 16:36-40), the brazen censers of those who had conspired against Moses had been beaten into plates to cover the brazen altar: a figure indicating in a striking way that since the natural man's pretensions to make his offering acceptable to God have no other place than the altar for sin offering, they must be nailed to the cross of Christ. Only one offering and one intercession were valid in themselves without need of atonement: only one was acknowledged as being effective: that of Aaron with his censer (Num. 16:47). The priests — and we ourselves — could not be consecrated to God and fulfil their role of intercessors except by virtue of the sacrifice and the blood put on the mercy seat (Lev. 8:24-28). Our High Priest intercedes by virtue of His personal perfection, and yet He did not assume this priestly office until after His death and resurrection. As it was with intercession, so also with praise: it was the privilege of the priests alone and the high priest was their leader. This applies to us Christians, too. By virtue of redemption we are a priestly family and no one outside this family, not

even a King Uzziah, can take our place in the worship rendered to God. All this seems to have been without importance to the king blinded by his pride. Had he perhaps imbibed the idea for his profane act from that which his father did when he burned incense to the gods of Edom? (2 Chr. 25:14).

The priests could do nothing other than to set themselves against such an act. They had been sanctified, placed under the sprinkling of the blood which had been poured out at the brazen altar, anointed with the anointing oil so that they might present themselves before God as worshippers and intercessors. Is it not the same for us Christians? Purified from all sin by the blood of the cross, anointed by the Holy Spirit of promise, set apart for God, we can present ourselves in the sanctuary to worship, having our golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of saints.

Uzziah, rebuked by the priests, is enraged. In considering him carefully, we find with him and with his predecessors and their counselors a certain jealousy against the priesthood according

to God — the source of all kinds of evil actions (see 2 Chr. 24:17-22; 2 Chr. 25:14). It cannot suit the man in the flesh to be excluded from God's presence and from His worship and to be unable to form some kind of link in a chain that can connect God with the fallen creature. This is the reason for the religious world's animosity against the children of God who cannot share in nor acknowledge what it calls its worship.

On account of this transgression immediate judgment falls on Uzziah. Like Miriam, Aaron's sister, who being a prophetess, had wished to make herself equal to him who was king in Jeshurun and a prophet as no other ever was — like Gehazi who, despising God's glory and that of His prophet, was stricken with the defilement from which a Gentile had been healed — like Joab, outraging Jehovah by the murder of Abner and seeing leprosy afflict his family forever (Num. 12:10; 2 Kings 5:27; 2 Sam. 3:29): so the king is stricken with leprosy for having disregarded God's holiness. He himself with vain remorse at his act and conscious of his uncleanness hastens to go out from the presence of Jehovah under the chastisement which has

been inflicted upon him. There is no remission for him, as there had been for Miriam; the king, chosen to accomplish God's counsels, is declared unclean forever, banished from His presence, excluded from His house, separated from the people over whom he had been consecrated king, isolated in a separate house, incapable of governing, a living dead man, obliged to confer the government upon his son Jotham (v. 21).

The divine curse rests on this man who at the beginning of his reign had done that which was right in the eyes of the Lord and had sought Him until the day when he lifted himself up. He is even deprived of the tomb of the kings, his fathers; he is buried in their burial ground, but not in their sepulcher. Sovereign expression of God's displeasure: even at their death these kings, like Jehoram, like Joash, are deprived of the honors of burial.

In the year that king Uzziah died, Isaiah the prophet had a vision. In the presence of the Lord seated on a throne high and lifted up, His train filling the temple, this man of God said: "Woe unto me! for I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I

dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts” (Isa. 6:5). It was not only Uzziah who was unclean and defiled in the presence of the Lord; so also was the prophet. Isaiah saw the glory of Christ (John 12:41), the true, the only King according to God's counsels who was never touched by defilement, the only One whose presence judges every defilement: in His presence the prophet accepts judgment, and even more, pronounces it upon himself. Moreover, he condemns the condition of the people, of this people of unclean lips in the midst of whom he was dwelling. Thus everything was lost on part of the kingdom, the people, and the prophet. The seventh woe (see the first six woes in Isa. 5), the fullness of the curse, was pronounced! What was left?

There remains that which the entire account of Chronicles aims to bring out. Firstly, the King, the true King, Jehovah of hosts, who sums up in Himself all the perfections of the future kingdom and in whom all the counsels of God are accomplished — and then grace; grace based upon the sacrifice of the Victim

consumed on the altar of God. Thus the prophet's iniquity was removed and his sin was purged (Isa. 6:7). It seems that in the history of Uzziah this great truth is particularly brought to light: Grace based on sacrifice is the only resource of the best of kings and of the greatest of prophets.

The statement of this truth leads us to remark that the judgments pronounced on the kings in this book do not necessarily imply their future eternal lot. What is shown us in Chronicles is God's government with regard to the earth and His counsels with regard to the earthly kingdom, but not His counsels with regard to Christ's heavenly glory and the eternal blessings which are the portion of the elect. A king stricken with leprosy, driven out from the presence of God, excluded from the sepulchers of the kings, has lost every right to the privileges of the kingdom upon earth, but God's grace with regard to heaven is not frustrated by these judgments. We find many similar examples, beginning with that of Solomon so as the book of Kings presents him. This remark is important in order to keep our thoughts within the limits which the Word assigns them and

to prevent them from pitting one truth against another: truths which taken out of their context would cease to be truths. It is perfectly true that such an idolatrous and murderous king can be lost eternally, but it is just as true that another king, faithful at the beginning but then become a transgressor and judged severely on earth, may be saved as through the fire. In everything we are called upon to avoid confusing the truths which the Word of God presents, and this is doubly necessary when we are dealing with the Old Testament which presents man's responsibility and the results of God's government here below.

Chapter 27

Jotham

In this chapter Jotham personally is without reproach: “He did what was right in the sight of Jehovah, according to all that his father Uzziah had done; only he entered not into the temple of Jehovah” (v. 2). The Word compares his reign at its beginning to that of Uzziah who was so “marvelously helped”; his reign

differs from it in that he does not imitate the pride of his father who wanted to usurp the holy priesthood's place in the temple. Uzziah had begun his career by taking heed to the prophetic word and he had prospered, but he had forsaken the Word when in his prosperity he had put his confidence in himself and had become puffed up. Jotham was well aware of the consequences of his father's behavior and took care not to follow the same path. It is a great blessing to have eyes and ears attentive to the Lord's ways. "The fear of God" properly consists of this, and we can say that this fear characterized Jotham's life. Through Zechariah, his father might perhaps have had more understanding in the visions of God had he entered into the knowledge of divine revelation sooner. Yet, precious as this knowledge was, it had not prevented Uzziah from a very serious fall. It is all-important for us to remember this truth. Jotham carefully avoided that which had caused his father's ruin, that is, disobedience to the Word of God which he nevertheless knew so well; he "prepared his ways before Jehovah his God"; he walked uprightly according to the word of the prophet Micah

who began to prophesy under his reign: “Is Jehovah impatient? are these His doings? Do not my words do good to him that walks uprightly?” (Micah 2:7). We are also told that “Jotham became strong.” Uzziah, likewise, at the beginning of his reign “became exceeding strong” (2 Chr. 26:8). Strength always accompanies obedience; but it becomes a snare when we consider it as our strength. This is what happened to Uzziah: “He was marvelously helped, till he became strong” (2 Chr. 26:15). In contrast to Uzziah, Jotham saw his strength fully maintained, because he “prepared his ways before Jehovah his God.” Psalm 50 tells us: “To him that orders his way will I show the salvation of God.” To prepare one’s way is to fashion it after an unchangeable model, just as one sets a clock according to a regulator. Jotham prepared his way according to the thoughts God had expressed concerning His Anointed; he sought to be like this God-given model and he succeeded.

As usual, that which was lacking in him with regard to the Lord’s service is not given us in Chronicles, but the book of Kings tells us: “Only, the high places were not removed: the

people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places” (2 Kings 15:35). Doubtless Jotham, who prepared his ways, had no fellowship with the high places, but he lacked the necessary authority to forbid them to the people. Here we clearly see that if the king's moral condition was good, that of the people was bad: “The people still acted corruptly” (2 Chr. 27:2). We see the same thing in 2 Kings 15: “The people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.” Thus it was primarily the condition of the people that provoked the Lord's displeasure and necessitated His discipline. The book of Micah as well as Psalm 50 already quoted, expose this throughout. The state of the people is in question in the prophet, not that of the king. Micah began to prophesy under Jotham and tells us of the people, of their leaders — chief men and princes — of their prophets, without even mentioning the king. Read Micah 1:9; Micah 2:2-3, 8-10; Micah 3:1-2, 5-12; Micah 6:2-5; Micah 7:2-3, 18; everywhere you will find the state of the people presented as the principal cause of judgment. This will be what characterizes prophecy from this point onward until the end. Proph-

ecy will address itself to the people and lay bare their condition. Up to this point the numerous prophets mentioned in Chronicles address themselves to the king; but when prophecy, proclaimed under the kings, is written rather than spoken, it presents the condition of the people themselves and the powers that constitute the people. In that day the people were no longer excusable. In presence of Jotham's godliness and faithful walk, should not their conscience have spoken to them? The opposite took place.

Jotham's godliness is shown in a very interesting way in the defense of the house of God. Uzziah (2 Chr. 26:9) had built towers to protect the city; Jotham built towers to protect the temple. "He ... built the upper gate of the house of Jehovah, and on the wall of Ophel he built much" (v. 3). Ophel, situated in the southwest of Jerusalem, connected the king's gardens, etc. with the temple. Jotham completed the defensive works Uzziah had neglected: "He built cities in the hill-country of Judah, and in the forests he built castles and towers" (v. 4). Lastly, he made war against the king of the children of Ammon

who doubtless (cf. 2 Chr. 26:8), were refusing to recognize Judah's suzerainty. During the three years following Jotham's victory they paid him a heavy tribute. His strength had its source in his godliness, and godliness was precious enough to him to keep him from exalting himself.

Chronicles intentionally omits a fact reported in 2 Kings 15:37: “In those days Jehovah began to send against Judah Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah.” This fact is connected with Judah's sin; it is against Judah that God sends these enemies, and not against Jotham; but in Chronicles the beauty of this reign would have been weakened if the aggression of Israel and Syria could have been interpreted as being due to some unfaithfulness in the king. In the midst of the ruins of the kingdom in Judah our hearts are made glad at Jotham's example. Let us imitate him and prepare our ways before our God!

Chapter 28

Ahaz

As far as his relations with the Lord are concerned, Ahaz's reign is particularly bad — and let us not forget that these relations are the essential question, really the only question of every good reign in Judah. One cannot insist enough on the fact that Israel, in this regard quite different from other nations, had no destiny or reason for existence apart from the worship of the true God. This explains why the role of the religious and priestly element weighs so heavily in the history of the kingdom as Chronicles presents it. When the king, the responsible representative of the people before God, was faithful, what characterized his reign above all else was the temple, the priesthood, the observance of worship and feasts; when he did not uphold the worship of the Lord but fell into idolatry, he was responsible for the national decadence which was its consequence and for God's judgments on the people.

Yet we have also seen that, under the reign of Jotham, the people, despite the king's faithfulness, corrupted themselves more and more, justifying the sentence pronounced against them and their leaders by all the prophets who succeeded one another from that time on.

The re-establishment of worship in Judah was therefore of capital importance — as was the forsaking of worship. Forsaken, it would bring Judah back down to the level of the idolatrous nations and bring upon her the same judgments; re-established, worship would draw God's favor down anew on this poor people even as they were advancing so quickly toward ruin.

From the beginning, Israel's kings had forsaken the worship of the true God in favor of establishing national idols, and so God's judgments which had come upon them from the beginning were about to become conclusive. Would Judah suffer the same fate? Without any doubt whatsoever, for God does not have a double system of weights and measures. But one fact yet remained in Judah's favor: God had purposes for Judah; He

loved Jerusalem and had chosen it to become the seat of the kingdom, and He had chosen a son of David to fulfill this. Now, this was naught but grace, without which, as we have often said, nothing could subsist, but also God could not cease to exercise grace without denying Himself. This alone allows us to understand the alternatives that characterize the time of the end: judgment, where everything seems to be lost; restoration, where everything seems to have been found anew. The history of Ahaz gives us a solemn example of the former.

His history differs significantly from that in Second Kings, except for the fact that the role of Ahaz is loathsome in both accounts. Far from mitigating his idolatry, Chronicles presents an even more serious matter, telling us: He “even made molten images for the Baals; and he burned incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom” (vv. 2-3). The abominable worship of Moloch which demanded human sacrifices and the fact that he himself sacrificed on the high places, serve as prelude to this wicked reign.

The passage: 2 Chr. 28:5 to 15, differs from the account in 2 Kings 16. In the latter, Jerusalem, attacked by Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, is preserved from the entry of these allied princes. Chronicles is silent about this deliverance, as well as about Rezin's capture of Elath, a city once recovered by Amaziah (2 Chr. 26:2) and very important for Judah's naval power. The account in Chronicles teaches us, by contrast, that a great number of captives of Judah fell into the hands of Rezin who led them away to Damascus. From this time on we are told no more concerning these captives, but we can conclude from the words of Hezekiah (2 Chr. 29:9) that Tilgath-pilneser, the king of Assyria, after having taken Damascus, did not surrender them to Ahaz when Ahaz went down to Damascus to see him. Tilgath-pilneser “troubled him”, verse 20 informs us.

The defeat which Pekah, the king of Israel, inflicted on Judah was serious in quite a different way. In one day Pekah killed 120,000 men of Judah, all valiant men, “because they had forsaken Jehovah the God of their fathers.” God's judgment is therefore not only, as we have said, the consequence of the

king's unfaithfulness, but also that of the people's unfaithfulness during the reign of faithful Jotham. A king's son and a prince destined for the regency of the kingdom are taken and massacred; 200,000 captives, both men and women, are carried away by Israel together with much spoil. The kingdom of Judah, so tried, stricken by so many blows, seems to collapse finally. Nevertheless, in spite of all God does not allow the son of Tabeal to be substituted for the true posterity of David, as the allied princes had intended (see Isa. 7:6), for God cannot be unfaithful to His own promises.

But now we see a prophet rise up in Israel, something very rare since Elisha's time, and particularly rare in the days when the ten tribes had already been given up by God. At the moment when the prophets who so often lift up their voices to address the kings of Judah fall silent the voice of Oded is heard in Israel (v. 9). The Lord had not yet decreed the overthrow of the kingdom in Judah, and for the moment still wanted to preserve a part of the guilty people. When He can no longer cause the voice of prophets to be heard in Judah, He sends one on behalf

of Judah to Israel. What grace for this people whose state ought to have called down heavenly vengeance!

Oded shows His people that their victory is only the result of God's wrath against Judah, but that Israel had slain “in a rage that reaches up to heaven”; and now Israel was wanting “to subjugate the children of Judah and Jerusalem as [their] bondmen and bondwomen”! Oded proclaims before all that the divine center of government is in Judah and claims that this tribe is chosen by Jehovah. If a prophet of Israel said these things, what must have been the humiliation of the ten tribes! “Are there not with you,” he says to them, “even with you, trespasses against Jehovah your God?” (v. 10). Indeed, in these things Ephraim had a portion of guilt that concerned only him. On account of his sins “the fierce wrath of Jehovah [was] upon [him]”; he should have taken heed to this. If the people of Israel were God's rod to punish their brethren, were they any less guilty because their brethren had merited this judgment?

Oded's appeal is very timely for us too. When conflicts and divisions arise among Christians, the humiliating consequence of their sin, the strife blazing in their midst is a severe judgment that strikes them. But is it any less severe for the defeated party than for the party winning? Does the latter as winner have God's approval any more than his adversary? In no wise. The wrath of God rested equally on victors and vanquished in this conflict. "Are there not with you, even with you, trespasses against Jehovah your God?"

"And now hear me," adds Oded: "and send back the captives again, whom ye have taken captive of your brethren" (v. 11). Let us bear in mind that it would not be proper for this victory to be of any profit to Israel. Men, women, and all the spoil must be sent back. The people must not even entertain the thought that if they were victorious, their cause was just. If they had been Jehovah's sword against Judah, and if He had wielded His sword in His wrath, they must remember that this same sword was now being directed against themselves.

Four of the heads of Ephraim accept the words of the prophet by faith. His words act upon their consciences and make them capable of speaking to the people with full conviction, for they acknowledge their part in the sin, the wrong, the transgression of all the people. They rise up against those who are coming from the army and tell them: “Ye shall not bring in the captives hither; because, for our guilt before Jehovah, ye think to increase our sins and our trespasses: for our trespass is great, and fierce wrath is upon Israel” (v. 13). Oded's words, “The fierce wrath of Jehovah is upon you,” produce such an impression on the consciences of these four faithful men that they repeat: “Fierce wrath is upon Israel.” God speaks through their mouth, because the Word has first of all exerted its authority on their consciences, and it possesses a power of conviction that brings souls into subjection. However powerless in appearance the four instruments used by the Word might seem to be, God has the upper hand. The men are heeded: the people leave this multitude of captives alone — without resources, weakened, and who had lost all their possessions.

But the energy of faith of the four men who had exhorted their brethren does not stop there. They alone complete the task, they alone are honored by the full result of their work. The Word insists on this: “The men that have been expressed by name rose up.” They take the captives, give clothing to all those who were naked, use the spoil for their benefit, provide them with shoes, give them to eat and drink, and anoint them with oil. What kind solicitude! Who could have made these four men ready for such a task? The change was wrought in their hearts by the word of God! In them, three things follow one another in a wonderful way: faith in the Word, repentance which the Word produces, and lastly, love — inseparable from the work of God in the heart: love for the guilty, love for our brethren. Thus they accomplish the work of grace toward others. If we ask ourselves whether at that time such faith, such devotion, such energy could be found in Judah, we can without hesitation answer in the negative. Israel was already given up to final judgment and, at this last moment the word of God was resounding in the midst of this flock about to be led to the

slaughter. Four men give heed; four righteous men are found, far less than Abraham's eyes had discerned in Sodom, and their faith saves Israel from the immediate destruction already decreed against this people by God's wrath!

The work of these men is not finished; they must still bring back all these poor people to their own land for their safety. Jericho — once the city of the curse, now the city of palm trees, the city of peaceful protection, Jericho, whose foul waters had once been healed by the prophet — becomes their refuge. Only after having brought them back under the protection of their God do these four men leave them and return to Samaria. Only then is their mission accomplished.

May we follow the example of these men and by faith walk in the same path, in self-judgment, not fearing to announce to the religious world surrounding us the fate that is reserved for it. May we be tirelessly and unreservedly devoted to those in misery, filled with this energy of love which is not satisfied un-

til it has brought souls under the Savior's protection, in the happy security of the children of God!

About this time and before the invasion of Judah by Rezin and Pekah, Ahaz appeals to Assyria, which leads him to hypocritically refuse Isaiah's proposal to ask a sign of Jehovah (Isa. 7:10-12). His choice was made, his plan was prepared; actually he had confidence in man and no confidence whatsoever in God. Poor Ahaz! he might well enrich the Assyrian in an attempt to gain his good will with all the treasures of the king, of his chief men, and of the house of Jehovah; impoverishing himself in order to gain the protection of Tilgath-pilneser: he gained nothing. The latter “came to him, and troubled him, and did not support him”; “he was of no help to him” (vv. 20-21).

If you seek the help and support of the world instead of trusting in God, you who boast of bearing the name of Christ and whom He has enriched with so many privileges, you will find what Ahaz found. And this poor man, not content with seeking such a support, substitutes the gods of Syria for the true God,

saying: “Since the gods of the kings of Syria help them, I will sacrifice to them, that they may help me” (v. 23). He forsook the humble altar of God, the altar of atonement, to replace it by the splendid altar of the gods of Damascus. He despised the vessels of the sanctuary, broke them to pieces and destroyed them. Finally — a thing unheard of — he closed the doors of the house of Jehovah as one closes the doors of an uninhabited house or of a house for rent, with the same stroke abolishing the worship and the priesthood and depriving the people of access to God. Ahaz's conduct is called apostasy, the most complete forsaking of the God of Israel.

God cuts him off; he dies, “but they brought him not into the sepulchres of the kings of Israel” (v. 27). It seems, and we will return to this, that this is the ultimate sentence, even in death itself, by which God shows his final reprobation.

Chapter 29 to 32

Hezekiah

Chapter 29

Purification

This chapter and those that follow bring out the character of Chronicles, compared to that of the book of Kings. Indeed, Kings does not speak of the re-establishment of the worship, of the purification of the temple, or of the reorganization of the levitical priesthood; Chronicles, by contrast, presents these measures as the only condition by which the kingdom of the son of David, and Judah itself, as a people, could subsist. Also, in Chronicles judgment is stayed or suspended each time the worship is re-established, even after the reign of Ahaz appeared to have deprived grace of any possibility of going on with its ways toward Judah and the house of David.

We do not find a single word in the book of Kings concerning that which is contained between 2 Chronicles 29:3 and 2 Chronicles 31:19. Kings elaborates much more than Chronicles on the king of Assyria's attacks, which in Kings have a significant bearing from the prophetic point of view. An even more impressive feature is that Chronicles does not say a single word about the capture of Samaria by Shalmaneser or the transportation of the ten tribes to Halah; in a word, it does not mention the final rejection of Ephraim. Indeed, what could be said about it here? From its beginning the history of the ten tribes had been characterized by their abandoning their relationship with God and His worship and substituting idols for it; according to the principle of Chronicles this state of things was from its origin condemned unremittingly. Not for one moment could God have said of Israel what He said of Judah: "There were good things found in Judah."

Thus the reign of Hezekiah is not contrasted with the state of the kingdom of Israel here, so much the more since during the reign of Ahaz, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, more

faith and obedience was found in Israel than in Judah. Here God brings out the contrast between Hezekiah's reign and that of Ahaz. If God's grace had not had in view His promises and their fulfillment in the future, Judah would have been undone at that very moment. The fact that the worship of Jehovah had been abolished and that the doors of the temple had been closed took away from Judah any reason for subsisting as the people of God. Hezekiah is raised up: immediately everything changes. Deep darkness is suddenly followed by light radiating from the sanctuary through its opened doors: “[Hezekiah], in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of Jehovah, and repaired them” (v. 3). Then he assembled the priests and the Levites, and he whose father had committed these abominations, without breaking the commandment “Honor thy father,” openly confesses the sin committed: “Our fathers have transgressed, and done evil in the sight of Jehovah our God, and have forsaken Him and turned away their faces from the habitation of Jehovah, and have turned their backs” (v. 6). This denial of God had had as a con-

sequence wrath, destruction, the sword, and captivity (vv. 8-9), but how terrible must have been the condition which called for such judgments! “They have shut up the doors of the porch”: no more entrance into God's presence to worship Him! “[They have] put out the lamps”: deepest night there where the Spirit's seven lamps ought to have shed their full light. “[They] have not burned incense”: no more intercession before the golden altar or before the mercy seat. “[They have not] offered up burnt-offerings in the sanctuary to the God of Israel”: no more offering on the brazen altar to make the one approaching God acceptable. In a word, it was the abolition of all worship in Israel!

And there was yet more: The sanctuary itself, God's dwelling place in the midst of His people, was defiled (vv. 15-17). Thus, the Lord who was still waiting patiently before His glory should leave all these abominations had dwelt in the midst of this defilement! Oh! how cleverly Satan had succeeded in his plans! To banish God from before the eyes of the people — to suppress the people from before the eyes of God, who could not tolerate an unclean, idolatrous nation — to remove the altar

of atonement: the only means of renewing relations with Jehovah — to take away His glory as the Son of David from the future Messiah — the enemy seemed to have conclusively achieved all this. But the enemy is fooled once again in his expectations, as he always will be. The Creator of all things shows that He can also create hearts for His glory. His grace goes to work and produces Hezekiah. What zeal the Holy Spirit kindles in the heart of this man of God! Without losing a single day he undertakes the work of purification and finishes it on the sixteenth day of the month. The first condition of this work was to sanctify themselves. This is what the Levites, the priests, and those engaged in the service of the sanctuary did. Indeed, how could they purify anything at all if they were defiled themselves? This work demanded meticulous care: no uncleanness, not even the least, could be tolerated: the priests must be able to say: “We have cleansed all the house of Jehovah.” All the vessels must be in proper condition, and everything which Ahaz had profaned during his guilty reign must be sanctified and placed before the altar, for water was

not sufficient, although it was inseparable from the blood of the victim; that is, purification was inseparable from expiation.

After the purification of the sanctuary we find the sin offering (vv. 20-30). It is offered: 1) for the kingdom; 2) for the sanctuary; 3) for Judah. The essence of this purification was the sprinkling of blood, and it is the same for us: “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” This sprinkling is done on the brazen altar, the only place where God and the sinner meet, where God can in the same stroke judge and abolish sin. According to the desire and mind of the king, the work of purification extends far beyond the limits of Judah, “because for all Israel, said the king, is the burnt-offering and the sin-offering” (v. 24). Hezekiah was the first king since the division of the kingdom who desired that all Israel, purified, should come up to Jerusalem to worship there. If the deportation of the ten tribes had taken place at that moment, their poor remnant would have drawn out the same sympathy from Hezekiah's heart. He desired to see Israel reformed and united around the sanctuary so that they might come and worship God at Jerus-

alem; and in this he represents the character of the future King according to God's counsels.

After propitiation is accomplished it is possible to offer praise to the Lord. It is rendered “according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet”; only there is added that “the commandment was of Jehovah through His prophets” (v. 25). Always in this period of Israel's history prophecy takes the first place in directing the people. Then “the instruments of David” are employed and the “trumpets of the priests,” announcing a new era, resound from the moment the burnt offering begins. The burnt offering was the offering whose sweet savor rendered one acceptable and well-pleasing before God. How could the instruments of praise refrain from ringing out all together at that very moment? The king and those with him bow themselves, full of joy, and command the Levites “to sing praise to Jehovah with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer.” In every detail we see a strict returning to the inspired Word of God.

The sanctuary, the kingdom, the priesthood, Judah, and all Israel having been cleansed by the blood of the sacrifice, and henceforth consecrated to Jehovah (v. 31; cf. Ex. 28:41), Hezekiah invites them to draw near. We are almost present at a scene approaching the one described in Hebrews 10:19-22: a scene which is the happy consummation of the whole Epistle. All the worshippers are accepted by God according to the value of the burnt offering; only here one sees how this service was defective and defective exactly in that aspect where one had a right to expect completion. The priests were too few and the Levites had to replace them in order to flay the burnt offerings, “for the Levites were more upright in heart to hallow themselves than the priests” (v. 34). Exactly the opposite occurred in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah; there, there were too few Levites. In any case, that which both the one and the other did was a great evil which can easily apply to present day Christianity. Either the worshippers — the priests — are too few, resulting in the ministers — the Levites — occupying their place and carrying out functions which properly do not belong

to them; or on the other hand, when there is some intelligence in worship worshippers are numerous, whereas ministers show much indifference about discharging their task.

“And the service of the house of Jehovah was set in order. And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people; for the thing was done suddenly” (v. 36). Thus, according to the precious teaching of Chronicles, grace alone, by the powerful action of the Holy Spirit, had prepared the king and acted in the heart of the people to produce this restoration.

Chapter 30

The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread

Godliness always gives intelligence. The soul that drinks at the fountain and enjoys communion with the Lord cannot be at a loss to know what is appropriate to Him and what conduct will glorify Him. All this appears clearly in Hezekiah's situation. It would seem very difficult amid the circumstances of that period to discern the path to follow: the kingdom was divided;

Ephraim was idolatrous, and the two and a half tribes beyond Jordan had descended to the same level; the ten tribes had in fact been carried away into captivity; some poor vine-gleanings remained in Israel; Judah had only yesterday been cleansed from Ahaz's abominable idolatry.

Would it be necessary to get accustomed to this state of things and adapt one's conduct and that of the people to the miserable condition in which they were found? No; by virtue of the cleansing that had taken place the people could return to the things they had known and practiced at the beginning. What was the very first of these things? The Passover, prelude to the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Commemorating the redeeming sacrifice was the first step in returning to the old ways. "Since the time of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, there had not been the like in Jerusalem" (v. 26). Here we have proof that one can enjoy the most complete blessings in days of ruin and that this is possible even though, since the time of Solomon when there had still been relative prosperity, these blessings were gone.

Chapter 29 to 32 - Hezekiah

Chapter 30

The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread

Hezekiah understood this, but he also understood that it was the entire people's portion to be present for the celebration of the Passover, for the people were one and the Passover was offered for one people alone. The unity of the people of God no longer existed before the eyes of men and this truth had been completely buried for nearly 250 years. Hezekiah was the first since Solomon to understand that despite all appearance to the contrary this unity existed and that it was possible to realize it. Let us ask the same question: Is the unity of the Church without importance because it is no longer visible in its entirety as a testimony before the world? On the contrary, when everything is absolutely ruined, it is all the more important to bring to light the truths which were from the beginning. The unity of the people of God is one of these truths; it even forms a part of the counsels of God, according to which the Assembly forms one body with the glorified Christ in heaven. Therefore we understand the importance of the Passover in Hezekiah's eyes. It was not only the memorial of the work which had sheltered the people from God's judgment and had redeemed

them out of Egypt, but it was also the witness that this work had been done for the entire people. It was also — and our chapter especially insists on this — the point of departure for the Feast of Unleavened Bread, symbol of the life of practical holiness which is associated with redemption. All these blessings were recovered in the celebration of the Passover under Hezekiah through the fact that he returned to the things instituted from the beginning.

Did this state continue? Doubtless not, and this was due to the fact that the people, linked to the Lord through the covenant of the law, showed themselves to be ever incapable of keeping the terms of this contract. The pressing appeal addressed to the people by the king was heeded but for an instant. A new covenant, based upon the faithfulness of God alone, is necessary so that these things might be realized forever. The account we have before us still belongs to the old covenant, a bilateral contract but one in which, as we have seen all through Chronicles, God loves to display His character of grace and mercy, never turning away from the one returning to Him. The exhortation of

verses 6 to 9 is based on this legal covenant, although not without mercy. Here Hezekiah exercises a prophetic ministry which we have seen at work since the time of Solomon, a ministry containing a partial revelation of the grace of God, suited to touch the heart and reach the conscience of the people: “Ye children of Israel, return to Jehovah the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and He will return to the remnant of you that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria. And be not like your fathers and like your brethren, who transgressed against Jehovah the God of their fathers, so that He gave them up to desolation, as ye see. Now harden not your necks, as your fathers; yield yourselves to Jehovah, and come to His sanctuary, which He has sanctified for ever; and serve Jehovah your God, that the fierceness of His anger may turn away from you. For if ye return to Jehovah, your brethren and your children shall find compassion with those that have carried them captive, so that they shall come again unto this land; for Jehovah your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away His face from you, if ye return to Him” (vv. 6-9).

How touching were all these appeals in these days when the fire of judgment had already broken out on the people on all sides. There remained yet one resource which was pointed out to them: Would they lay hold of it?

Let us note in passing that in professing Christendom the Gospel preached to the world barely goes beyond the appeal that we have just quoted and which I would call : the gospel of the prophets. A Christian of this category said in my presence to one who was dying: “Salvation is the hand of man taking hold of the hand of Jesus Christ” (cf. v. 8). The great majority of the “Revival Hymns” do not go beyond this limit.

All that was left of Ephraim was only a despised remnant left in the land by the king of Assyria, but there were still some gleanings to harvest in the vine of Israel, and these few, united to the remnant of Judah, sufficed to represent the unity of the people and the privileges associated with that unity. Alas! their state was far from satisfactory! Had they dreamed of hallowing themselves in order to celebrate the Passover? Even many of

the priests had neglected to do that and “a multitude of the people, many of Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves” (v. 18). The priests could not offer the memorial under these conditions; the Feast of Unleavened Bread, figure of a life of practical holiness, having the blood of the passover lamb (from which it was inseparable) as its starting point, could not be celebrated by those who were still defiled. Thus, this ceremony was affected by these failures; it was not celebrated until the second month, according to Numbers 9:11. God had made provision in His Word beforehand for just such a miserable condition as this, thus granting the priesthood time to sanctify themselves. As for the defilement of the people celebrating the feast, Hezekiah interceded and God gave heed to his prayer. Isn't this deeply touching? This act of disobedience had resulted in the beginning of a plague, somewhat like the disobedience of the Corinthians who ate and drank judgment to themselves (1 Cor. 11:29-30), but “Hezekiah prayed for them saying, Jehovah, who is good, forgive every one that has directed his heart to seek God, Jehovah

the God of his fathers, though not according to the purification of the sanctuary. And Jehovah hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people.” (vv. 18-20).

In spite of this incomplete purification, Hezekiah's pressing appeal was heard. “Certain of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem” (v. 11), yet in a general way, when “the couriers passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, even to Zebulun ... they laughed them to scorn and mocked them” (v. 10).

Is it any different in the present day when judgment, much more terrible than Israel's judgment, is about to descend on Christendom? Write as did Hezekiah, and send it everywhere, saying: God's people is one people; let them hasten to gather together to worship. Let them bear witness at the Lord's table of this unity formed by the Holy Spirit; let them purify themselves from every association with a defiled world, and, however great the humiliation, they may recover the blessings of the beginning! Do you think you will find many attentive souls,

or will your appeal rather meet with indifference, mockery, and disdain?

This was not a reason for Hezekiah to become discouraged. He had the joy of seeing many Levites, moved with shame, hal-
lowing themselves and taking the place they should never have
allowed to be taken away from themselves “according to the
law of Moses the man of God” (v. 16). Thus God's Word as it
was revealed at that time, became their rule for the service of
the Lord.

But what did they think in Israel of these dreamers who, in
their Utopias wanted to reconstruct the unity of the people?
Wasn't it more reasonable simply to accept things as they were
and be content? Doubtless no one went so far as to try to
present ruin, captivity, idolatry, and disorder as a development
of their fathers' religion. This monstrous pretension was re-
served for the final stage of Christendom which terms all the
evil it has caused “good” and “spiritual development”: an ex-
cellent reason which Satan provides the religious world for not

humbling itself. Today it seems good and desirable that the escapees of Israel should group themselves under the banner of the calves of Bethel and that the remnant of Judah should group themselves under the banner of Hezekiah. If these escapees, so satisfied with their state, had come to the Passover, they would certainly have found something quite different from that. The night that the Passover was slain in Egypt the people had but one banner, the banner of the Lord, to lead them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and into Canaan by way of the wilderness. Hezekiah had no other thought than to reunite God's people under the banner of Jehovah.

The blessed result of his obedience and faithfulness was not long in waiting: “The children of Israel, that were present at Jerusalem, held the feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness” (v. 21). “And the whole congregation took counsel to observe other seven days; and they observed the seven days with gladness” (v. 23). “And there was great joy in Jerusalem” (v. 26). Everyone's heart was full and overflowing, for true joy needs to be shared with others. Thus the psalmist

said in the Song of the Beloved: “My heart is welling forth with a good matter: I say what I have composed touching the King. My tongue is the pen of a ready writer” (Ps. 45:1).

For one who is redeemed there are thousands of reasons to rejoice: see, for example, John 15:11; John 16:24, 22; John 17:13, but the greatest joy of all is found in contemplation of Christ and His work and in fellowship with Him (1 John 1:4; John 16:22). Whether we see Him as a little child in a manger (Luke 2:10); or contemplate Him as the Lamb of God, the Word become flesh, or as the Bridegroom, associating His bride with Himself (John 3:29); or resurrected and taking His place in the midst of the gathered saints (John 20:20); or ascending to heaven (Luke 24:52); or, symbol of a future scene, entering Jerusalem as king (Luke 19:37); or about to be revealed to His own (1 Peter 1:8) — joy always overflows in hearts occupied with Him. It is clear that this joy is rarely unmingled (I do not mean to say that it is not “full”) as long as we are in this body of weakness and in an environment which so easily distracts our gaze from Him as our sole object; yet nev-

ertheless how great is this joy! But, how His own joy differs from ours! It is manifested in the salvation of the lost, whereas our joy flows from the possession of a perfect Object. His is the joy of the good Shepherd who has found His lost sheep, the joy of the Holy Spirit, the same joy as that of the Father falling on the neck of the prodigal son. When God presents the joy of this labor of love, He does not mention our own joy; it is surely too incomplete and poor to be compared to divine joy! The joy of the prodigal son disappears in the presence of the joy of the Father who embraces him. He rejoices to open His house to His child, to clothe him with the first-born son's robe, and to feed him at His table, but can we imagine the Father's future joy, and that of the Son when He will have all His own around Himself as the fruit of the travail of His soul, and when He will be fully satisfied? “He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love; He will exult over thee with singing!” (Zeph. 3:17).

Peace is perhaps even deeper than joy. It is the quiet enjoyment of the presence of God, between whom and us there is no more

barrier, nor obstacle, nor veil, nor any question whatsoever to be settled. Peace does not use many words or make many speeches. It is “rest in ... love,” as our passage in Zephaniah expresses it, whereas joy must unbosom itself, must communicate. Nonetheless joy, in its highest expression, is not the exuberant manifestation of happiness which bursts like a shower of quickly fading fireworks. When a newly converted soul finds salvation, we often see a joy which is delightful to contemplate but which does not last, because the soul, still immature, needs to get to know itself. For joy to be lasting, something greater is needed than to have found salvation; it is necessary to find the Savior, a Person who satisfies all our needs and answers to all the desires of our soul. This is the joy that the apostle recommended to the Philippians, sure that it could never be shaken: “Rejoice in the Lord always!”

Judah and Israel's joy prompted them to prolong the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which they were celebrating, as we have seen, for twice seven days. There is no means more powerful for prolonging a life of practical holiness than joy in the Lord's

presence, and on the other hand, nothing sustains this joy like a holy life, separated from all that the world loves and seeks.

At the end of this chapter we find Jehovah's blessed answer to this priestly intercession. "The priests the Levites arose and blessed the people; and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to His holy habitation, to the heavens" (v. 27). In the midst of ruin the people, no doubt few in number, had regained the order proper to God's house, but had also found the joy of the presence of the Lord in a measure hitherto unknown. And who is to tell us, my brethren in Christ, that our obedience to the Word and the joy that these blessings promised to the faithful have brought us, will not win other souls and will not cause them to desire to be joined to the testimony of the Lord?

Chapter 31

The Order of the House of God

The abolition of idolatry, which here is not attributed to Hezekiah himself (cf. 2 Kings 18:4), is produced in the people

following the king's faithfulness. Let us note that the overthrow of idols in the midst of Judah and Israel does not take place until God's temple had been opened and purified, and the worship re-established as at the beginning (vv. 1-4).

This fact is very important: It is useless to undertake the overthrow of error if one has not begun by establishing the truth based upon the Word of God. Moreover, the power to overthrow evil will never be entirely effective if that which has been built is not unadulterated truth, as the Word teaches us. If our enemies can prove to us that in many points we ourselves are not on the ground of the Word which we are defending, we have lost all authority in the contest. When the people, gathered at Jerusalem, had tasted the great joy accompanying the blessings recovered, they understood that it was impossible to allow a foreign religion to co-exist alongside the worship of the true God.

In saying these things, let us not forget that before celebrating the Passover the people had already removed “the altars that

were in Jerusalem; and ... all the altars for incense” and had thrown them into the brook Kidron (2 Chr. 30:14). This does not in any way weaken what we have just said. It is evident that was impossible to associate the celebration of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread with idolatrous practices. The place where the Passover was celebrated and where God dwelt in the assembly of His people had to be completely purified from every foreign element before the feast could be celebrated. It is the same today in respect to the Lord's table: it cannot be associated with the world's religion, and should this happen, it will never be a powerful motive for holy conduct, as represented by the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Purification from all idolatry was all the more serious because the people had already experienced its benefits at Jerusalem; now purification must be complete, absolute. Ephraim and Manasseh, however few in number, having joined themselves to Judah for the Passover, were responsible to make the same arrangements at home as were taken in Judah. If they had acted otherwise, they would have associated their past idolatry with

the worship of Jehovah, which would have been monstrous. Thus, “all Israel that were present went out to the cities of Judah, and broke the columns, and hewed down the Asherahs, and demolished the high places and the altars in all Judah and Benjamin, in Ephraim also and Manasseh, until they had destroyed them all” (2 Chr. 31:1). The unity of the people which had just been realized in the primordial feast of the Passover was now put into practice through common action against that which dishonored the Lord.

After these things Hezekiah establishes the order of the priesthood, pays personally out of his own possessions for the sacrifices and solemn feasts, and commands that those employed in the service of the sanctuary be not neglected. Today, as then, it is necessary to observe the order befitting the house of God, but in no way is this an order established by man; the Word alone must determine and regulate this order. In this, as in all things, it is necessary to adhere to “the law of the Lord” (v. 4). In order to know the order and plan of the house of God, let us not consult our own thoughts, but rather the Scriptures such as

the First Epistle to the Corinthians and the First Epistle to Timothy. There we will find this plan in its entirety as the Holy Spirit has revealed it to us. In no way can we dispense with the what the Word teaches us as to assembly order nor as to any other matter; nor can we substitute our own organizational plan.

At the king's command, the people abundantly brought in the tithes for the benefit of the priests and Levites, “that,” says Hezekiah, “they might be encouraged in the law of Jehovah” (v. 4). The servants of God need to be encouraged in their work by the interest and cooperation of God's people. When true piety accompanies restoration according to God love is always active toward the Lord's laborers, and the faithful do not allow these dear servants, their brothers, to lack in anything. This activity of love is totally different from a fixed salary for services rendered, a salary given for certain functions with which the laborer is charged. The object of the tithe was to encourage the Levites in the law of Jehovah, not to give them a means of earning their living. Even at a time when they were given by

law and consequently were not the fruit of grace, how different were such principles from what professing Christendom today thinks about the ministry!

The people take the king's command to heart; the tithe is brought in liberally and goes far beyond what was enjoined by the law of Moses. (See Deut. 14:26-29; Deut. 18:3-7; Deut. 26:12; Num. 18:12-19.) Hezekiah and the princes, witnesses of this liberality, bless the Lord and His people Israel. Likewise the apostle Paul when considering the work of grace in the hearts of the brethren, whether at Philippi, or at Thessalonica, gave thanks to God, acknowledging all the good produced by the Holy Spirit in their hearts, and also blessed those who had been the instruments of this liberality. This zeal brings abundance; each one eats and is satisfied, and plenty is left over. The situation was the same when the Lord multiplied the loaves. Here Hezekiah is a weak type of the king according to God's counsels, of whom it is said: “[He] will satisfy her needy ones with bread.” Divine service is considerably augmented by this prosperity, fruit of God's grace in the heart. It is quite otherwise

when the world enriches the servants of God. Here order rules in the distribution (vv. 14-19) and many are occupied with this. A ministry consisting exclusively in caring for material needs is not an unimportant function. Such occupations are modest, no doubt, and do not stand out, but without them the order of God's house would suffer. In Nehemiah 13:10-14 we see the consequences that neglecting the tithes had on the entire service and worship of God.

All these organizational details completed, Jehovah delights to bear witness to Hezekiah and tell us that he had His approval. Would He be able to say the same of us? “Thus did Hezekiah throughout Judah, and wrought what was good and right and true before Jehovah his God” (v. 20). What an adornment for the believer are these three things: goodness, uprightness, and truth! This was Christ's adornment as man; it made the psalmist's lips overflow with praise when he saw Him who was “fairer than the sons of men” adorned with “truth and meekness and righteousness” (Ps. 45:4). We are also told (v. 21), that Hezekiah's every work was undertaken “to seek his God” and

that he “did it with all his heart.” What a beautiful testimony is rendered to this man of God! An undivided heart, a simple eye, occupied with seeking his God: this was the secret of his spiritual life, and the Word adds: “[He] prospered.”

This portrait of Hezekiah concludes the first division of his history, a division completely omitted in the book of Kings, and one which presents his moral history in its relation with the service of Jehovah. The following chapter will occupy us with his attitude in relation to a world hostile to God.

Chapter 32

Hezekiah's Three Trials

The account in this chapter differs considerably from that of Kings, the latter reproducing nearly word for word the account of Isaiah (Isa. 36-39), except for the “prayer of Hezekiah,” omitted altogether in both Chronicles and Kings, concerning which we have already spoken. Note: See Meditations on the Second Book of Kings.

“After these things and this faithfulness, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and entered into Judah, and encamped against the fortified cities, and thought to break into them” (v. 1). How precious it is to hear God acknowledging the faithfulness of His servant here! In this regard Hezekiah had been irreproachable and had already reaped an abundance of joy and prosperity in this world. But if his religious life had God's approval, would he manifest the same faithfulness in relation to the world? Notice that the Assyrian's attack is presented here as a test and in no way as a judgment of God in which the Assyrian would have been an instrument against Hezekiah. All the past history of the kings and people of Judah which we have just perused called for this judgment, but not at the moment when Hezekiah had manifested an upright heart toward God was this chastisement to fall on him and on his people. The situation was quite different with the ten tribes whose history had terminated in final captivity at the very time when God yet saw “good things” in Judah. The latter had returned to Jehovah and had destroyed their idols, although in fact their heart was not

changed, as we see in Isaiah 22. Nor was it a case of Hezekiah being punished for having done wrongly in rebelling against the king of Assyria (2 Kings 18:7), an incident about which, moreover, Chronicles is silent. In the entire chapter before us Hezekiah is not chastened, but put to the test, precisely because until then he had been faithful to his God.

The first of these tests thus is the assault of the Assyrian who thought to break into the fortified cities and take Jerusalem. What was Hezekiah to do in face of this attack? God's grace suggests the solution to him: “And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib was come, and that he was minded to fight against Jerusalem, he took counsel with his princes and his mighty men to stop the fountains of waters that were outside the city; and they helped him. And there was gathered together much people, and they stopped all the fountains, and the torrent that flows through the midst of the land, [Note: Properly: “The torrent that overflows” in the valley of Kidron.] saying, Why should the kings of Assyria come and find much water?” (vv. 2-4). Hezekiah was determined not to leave the fountains that

fed the city, whether on the east or on the west, to the hands of the enemy. Had the Assyrian taken possession of them, they would have furnished a valuable resource for continuing the siege of Jerusalem at the very time the people of the city would have been reduced to dying of thirst. Sennacherib was ignorant of the vast labor which Hezekiah and his people had undertaken to ward off this danger. While Jerusalem was abundantly provided with living water, Sennacherib through his servants says to the people: “Does not Hezekiah persuade you, to give yourselves over to die by famine and by thirst?” (v. 11). God bears witness to the king concerning all the zeal he expended in this respect: “And he, Hezekiah, stopped the upper outlet of the waters of Gihon, and brought it straight down to the west side of the city of David” (v. 30). The works, impressive for that time, have been found by means of which the fountain of Gihon and the overflowing fountain were brought inside Jerusalem's walls. All this showed great foresight in face of this dangerous trial.

We can draw a serious lesson from this fact ourselves. In Psalm 87:7 the inhabitants of Jerusalem say: “All my springs are in Thee.” It is the same for us; all the springs from which we drink are in Christ. He Himself is the spring of living water and can say: “If any one thirst, let him come to Me and drink.” Our springs are the knowledge of Christ and fellowship with Him. This is what the world, the enemy of our souls, will ever seek to take away from us. The world knows only too well that a Christianity that does not drink at the fountain, that does not feed on Christ, will not sustain our life. The world's whole effort therefore consists in separating the Christian from Christ. It has a thousand means of occupying our hearts and our thoughts with anything but Him. Moreover, the world pretends to possess that which is exclusively ours. Let us not allow it to rob us of our springs, neither let us take the world's word that it possesses them. When we deal with the world, let us clearly prove to it the vanity of its pretensions. This is the greatest service which we can render to it; it can only discover Christ in the city of God by becoming part of the people of God. If we “stop the

fountains,” we can prove to the world that it does not possess them and show it that the only way to possess them is to be, not on the side of the enemies of Christ, but of His friends. Our activity must not be limited to guarding ourselves from being plundered by the world; we must expend all the energy possible to set Christ within the reach of all His redeemed, so that they may constantly drink of the living water and the unsearchable riches of Christ. We do not need a commonplace Christ, a Christ who is the world's property as well as ours; we need a Christ who has nothing in common with the image the world has made of Him — the world which fashions Him, so to say, for its own use. These waters which flow in the midst of the land must become like the waters of Gihon for us, hidden deeply under the surface of the ground and reaching to the very heart of the city of God.

This was Hezekiah's first care, but on the other hand he neglected nothing for Jerusalem's defense. He who had stopped the fountains also turns his attention to the walls: “And he strengthened himself, and built up all the wall that was broken

down, and raised it up to the towers, and built another wall outside, and fortified the Millo of the city of David” (v. 5). It is not that Hezekiah trusts in his own resources and strength to resist the king of Assyria: quite to the contrary, when the king of Assyria presents himself, he cries out: “There is not strength to bring forth” (Isa. 37:3), knowing that help can be found in dependence on God alone; but all this in no way excludes constant vigilance in relation to the enemy. If through negligence we have let breaches be made through which the enemy may mount an attack, we must diligently repair them instead of allowing them to become larger. Moreover, Hezekiah made “darts and shields in abundance.” In anticipation of an attack, weapons were necessary for all. This necessity still exists today. To fight the enemy victoriously it is not enough that one or two eminent persons among God's people be provided with the necessary weapons. These weapons, as we see in Ephesians 6, are not only the Word of God, but also a state of soul in conformity with the knowledge of God. Without doubt, when the enemy presents himself, it is God who fights for His people, as

Hezekiah says here: “Be strong and courageous ... for there are more with us than with him: with him is an arm of flesh, but with us is Jehovah our God to help us and to fight our battles.” But that is in no way to hinder us from putting on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:11). God desires on the one hand, the confidence and dependence among His own that so remarkably characterized Hezekiah's career; but on the other hand He also desires the energy of faith that contends, withstands, and stands firm with the arms of the Spirit so that the Lord may be glorified in our warfare, just as He is to be glorified in our walk.

How humiliating that this deliverance which the Lord brought about could only be momentary! Even if the Assyrian could not seize Jerusalem, later on Babylon succeeded in doing so, because not only was the king's heart lifted up, but above all, the people's heart had not changed. “Ye have not had regard,” says Isaiah, alluding to the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib, “unto the Maker thereof, neither have ye looked unto Him that fashioned it long ago” (Isa. 22:11). And so the historic judgment through Babylon came upon this people before the prophetic

judgment that will come through the Assyrian in the last days. We find a very interesting description of this latter judgment in Isaiah 22, which alludes to the historical events we are considering in order to make known what will take place at the time of the end. Firstly, in verses 1 to 6 we find an obvious allusion to the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, as it is described in 2 Kings 25:4-5; then, in verses 7 to 11, an allusion that is just as striking to the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib under Hezekiah; but this siege reveals the moral condition of the people (v. 11), resulting not in their deliverance, but in their judgment, for their iniquity is not forgiven (v. 14). This whole scene ends with the destruction of Shebna, the unfaithful administrator, (the Antichrist); and with the establishment of Eliakim, (Christ), who will in righteousness bear the whole administration of the kingdom of David (vv. 15-25). The first siege of Jerusalem in the last days corresponds to the two events in this chapter, whereas the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib under Hezekiah is in fact a picture of the second prophetic siege in which Jerusalem will be spared and her last

enemy, the Assyrian, will be destroyed by the Lord's appearing. [Note: For fuller details concerning the prophetic bearing of the two sieges of Jerusalem, see: The Prophetic History of the Last Days and the Song of Degrees by H. L. Rossier.]

In verses 9 to 15 of our chapter Sennacherib sends his servants to Jerusalem to Hezekiah and all those of Judah who were in Jerusalem. Here we see the enemy's delusion. He says: "On what do ye rely that ye abide in the siege in Jerusalem?" (v. 10). He considers the people to be besieged even before he has begun the siege. He little suspects that he, Sennacherib, will be the one besieged by God, and he does not know that his power and all the great army with which he is covering the land, conquering all its fortified cities, will not stand for one day before a handful of weak, distressed people whose confidence, however, is in the Lord. "If God be for us, who against us?" Sennacherib says: "Does not Hezekiah persuade you, to give yourselves over to die by famine and by thirst?" (v. 11), and he is unaware that Jerusalem already possesses for herself alone all the hidden fountains of water and will soon be channeling

them away in view of future aggression! Where do such delusions on part of the enemy come from? From knowing neither God nor His power. Sennacherib's pride causes him to esteem his own power much higher than that of the God of Israel, whom he likens to the idols of the nations. He confounds the false gods with the true God. To him, it is foolish to want only one God, only one altar. Are such thoughts foreign to the present-day world? True, the world has not yet “reproached the living God” like Sennacherib, but does it have any more esteem for God than for its own idols, and in the objects of its lusts is it not seeking something to put its conscience to sleep with regard to the judgment which is rapidly approaching?

In our book Sennacherib particularly emphasizes these words: “How much less shall your God deliver you out of my hand!” (v. 15). What a terrible awakening this proud, ungodly man will have: the destruction of his army, shame, and his own children becoming his murderers!

Sennacherib despises and blasphemes the Lord, and likens Him to idols (see vv. 14, 15, 16, 17, 19), and this stands out in our account whose brevity contrasts with those of Kings and Isaiah. His servants speak “against Jehovah, the true God, and against His servant Hezekiah.” What a privilege for this godly king! The enemy in his hatred points him out as a companion of the sovereign God! Indeed, Hezekiah, following the example of Christ, could say: “The reproaches of them that reproach Thee have fallen upon me,” and, again, “He that rejects me, rejects Him that sent me” (Ps. 69:9; Luke 10:16).

The enemy sought to frighten the people of Jerusalem and “to trouble them, that they might take the city” (v. 18). It is the same in all ages. When Satan fails to seduces us he seeks to frighten us in order to rob us of our possessions, spoil us of our joy, and replace the security and peace that we enjoy under our God's protection with agitation, distress, and grief. Let us be firm, like Hezekiah, and we shall see the enemy's defeat: “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly,” and nothing will stop this judgment. The angel of Jehovah annihil-

ates Sennacherib's army; he himself falls beneath the blows of those “that came forth of his own bowels” in the presence of a powerless god whose protection he was seeking and whom he opposed to the living God; whereas Hezekiah is delivered, protected on every hand, overwhelmed with goods, and magnified in the sight of all the nations (vv. 22-23).

Thus ends the first trial of Hezekiah, to the glory of the God whom he served.

In verse 24 we find the second trial. The accounts of 2 Kings 20:1-11 and Isaiah 38:1-22 are quite different. Our account here consists of but few words: “In those days” — in the days when Hezekiah was grappling with the Assyrian — ”Hezekiah was sick unto death, and he prayed to Jehovah; and He spoke to him and gave him a sign” (v. 24). We will limit ourselves to what is told us here, having treated this subject in detail elsewhere.

Death by sickness, the usual end of all men, here threatens the faithful king. What is even more poignant is that he, God's in-

strument for the salvation of the people, is about to be brusquely cut off at the very moment when Judah needs him more than ever. Hezekiah's only resource is to commit himself to God in humble dependence on Him: “He prayed to Jehovah”; he had recourse to the One who had raised him up and guided him up to that very point. And Jehovah “spoke to him.” Wasn't that worth more than anything else? For such a result, was the trial too great? When the believer can say, “The Lord spoke to me in the trial,” would he desire, however it may be, to have escaped the suffering? “And [God] gave him a sign”; He worked a miracle in his favor. How precious Hezekiah was to God! In the trial he not only experienced divine communications, but he obtained certainty of the immense interest God bore toward him. Hezekiah was reduced to the most complete nothingness here; after having been without strength in the presence of the enemy he found himself without resource in the presence of death; yet nevertheless his position was infinitely elevated, since he had God for him, identifying Himself with

all his interests and all his being! Thus, in this second trial Hezekiah acquires new blessings.

There remains yet a third trial for him. Job had had the same number and the same kind of trials: first enemies (Job 1:13-22), then sickness (Job 2:7-10), and lastly friends (Job 2:11-13). Such also was Hezekiah's third trial. Would he come through victoriously when, facing the same trial, Job had sinned in words and had fallen?

In verse 31 we read: “However in the matter of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent to him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.” Such was Hezekiah's trial and also the occasion of his fall. Berodach-baladan seeks his friendship and compliments him on his recovery. At this moment the Lord leaves Hezekiah to himself to prove him. This was necessary; this man of God had to learn to know his own heart. God could have kept him from falling just as on the first two occasions, but then he would not have experienced the

root of evil that was within himself. Here was a matter much more important than certain partial failings, or certain acts of sin, of which Hezekiah's career, considered in the three accounts we have of it, offers more than one example; this was a trial which, as in Job's case, exposed the evil hidden in the depths of his heart and caused the patriarch to say: "I abhor myself!"

Verse 25 shows us what this trial by which Hezekiah was worsted consisted of: "Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was lifted up; and there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem." When Jehovah Himself had magnified him in the sight of all nations (v. 23), Hezekiah's heart was lifted up. Instead of continuing in the humble attitude that characterized him at the time of the first two trials, he used divine blessings to feed his pride, that pride which ever since Adam is at the very bottom of sinful man's heart.

We will not lay stress on the details of Hezekiah's fall, related elsewhere; it seems to us that even to mention them would be to spoil the impression the Word of God would give us here. Our account is so well suited to the divine plan of Chronicles that any other addition would detract. Chronicles brings out grace, not responsibility. But here it shows us a believer's heart left to his own responsibility only one time, without grace intervening. The only time in Hezekiah's history where this took place his fall is complete and deep, even irremediable, since its consequence was the destruction of Jerusalem and the carrying away of Judah. But now our book insists on one thing that the other two accounts scarcely mention: At the moment when everything is irremediably ruined grace intervenes to set Hezekiah's conscience before God, in a condition which He can fully approve. If sin has abounded, grace much more abounds; grace triumphs and delivers Hezekiah and his people (momentarily, no doubt, for here it is not a matter of the counsels of God, but rather of His ways) from a judgment which would have utterly destroyed them. "Hezekiah," we are told,

“humbled himself for the pride of his heart, he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of Jehovah came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah” (v. 26). The king humbled himself with regard to the pride that he had nourished in his heart and manifested outwardly. Having learned his lesson, he again takes his only proper place in the presence of God, and in the words of another, says like Job: “Behold, I am nought: what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth” (Job 40:4). Like Job, Hezekiah added: “I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6).

What a precious thing it is that Hezekiah's humiliation produces fruit in those around him; “the inhabitants of Jerusalem” humbled themselves with him. Once again the eyes of the Lord could discover “good things” in Judah; it is interesting to see that God attentively looks for any manifestation of conscience that may give Him an occasion to continue in patience toward His people. “The Lord ... is longsuffering towards you,” the apostle Peter tells us. Now the trial is over; the lesson has been learned. God can give to His beloved king which He will give

in another measure altogether to Christ, the king according to His counsels, because He has always walked — that which Hezekiah failed to do — in the path of humility and meekness, yet at the same time in the path of truth and righteousness (Ps. 45:4).

“Hezekiah had very much riches and honor: and he made himself treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant vessels; storehouses also for the increase of corn and new wine and oil, and stalls for all manner of beasts, and he procured flocks for the stalls. And he provided for himself cities, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance; for God gave him very much substance” (vv. 27-29).

The friendship of the world is the greatest danger we can run up against. In this trial Hezekiah was worsted, but the God of grace did not abandon him; He restored him, and, after this restoration, bore testimony to him. Even in his death God gives him a place of honor that no other son of David ever had!

“They buried him in the highest place of the sepulchers of the sons of David: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honor at his death” (v. 33).

What a God is ours! He it is who gives grace and glory. If man is to be reckoned with at all, it will only show that he does not merit grace nor would ever attain to glory!

Chapter 33

Manasseh, Amon

Manasseh's history as it is recounted here has considerable importance as an example of the future relations of Jehovah with His people. In Hezekiah's history we have seen that God had announced to him Judah's captivity in Babylon as the consequence of the sin of pride which he had committed. Hezekiah and his people humbled themselves before this sentence and God postponed the execution of judgment to a future time. After Hezekiah's death unfaithfulness came to such a point, idolatry took on such proportions that nothing remained but to

execute the judgment announced. Manasseh was led captive to Babylon, which in those days was under the power of the Assyrian. Thus, the fate of this king was the prelude and the anticipation in type of the future captivity of Judah, but more importantly, it was also the picture of the state of anguish and humiliation that will precede the final restoration of this people under the reign of the Messiah.

Properly speaking, the symbolic history as Chronicles presents it to us is closed with Manasseh's restoration. Amon succeeds him, beginning anew, so to say, the account of Judah's ruin from the historical point of view. The reign of Josiah which follows is, as it were, the last effort of the Spirit of God again to bring the king according to His counsels onto the scene, an effort without result, on account of the imperfection of the best human instrument whom God could have used, and followed by the lamentable picture of the kingdom coming to its end in Judah.

Let us examine the reign of Manasseh more closely, so different in Chronicles from this same reign in the book of Kings. Its beginning is described to us (vv. 1-9) as the most awful imaginable from the religious point of view; all the more awful in that it followed the days of faithful Hezekiah who was crowned with favor and prosperity on account of this very faithfulness. Manasseh's perversity drives quite an abyss between his reign and that of his father: "He wrought evil beyond measure in the sight of Jehovah" (v. 6). In everything he acted according to the abominations of the Canaanites whom the Lord had dispossessed before Israel when their iniquity was full. He rebuilds the high places demolished by Hezekiah, rears up altars to Baal, re-establishes the worship of Astarte, the worship of the stars, sacrifices his children to Molech, practices occult sciences, enchantments, and magic, profanes Jerusalem and the house of God by building altars there to false gods, and sets an abominable idol in the temple, as the Antichrist will do at the time of the end. He defies God Himself who had said: "In this house, and in Jerusalem ... will I put My name for ever" (v. 7).

And this faithful God had added: “Neither will I any more remove the foot of Israel from out of the land that I have appointed to your fathers; if they will only take heed to do all that I commanded them through Moses, according to all the law and the statutes and the ordinances” (v. 8). The people needed only to have obeyed; in every instance where they had shown themselves to be obedient to the law and the commandments God had kept His promise, and now ... what more could be done? Manasseh's example was followed by his people. He himself was responsible for this ruin, but the people did not repent any more than did their king. When God spoke to both by His servants the prophets, they paid no attention (v. 10). Then “Jehovah brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with fetters, and bound him with chains of brass, and carried him to Babylon” (v. 11). That which Jehovah had done in figure to the Assyrian He did in reality to Manasseh: “I will put my ring in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips” (2 Kings 19:28).

Note: “The fetters” seem to have about the same signification as the nose ring, an iron ring or hook with which the nose or the lips of captives were pierced.

And now with judgment having been consummated, we see the inexhaustible, marvelous, worship-inspiring grace of God appear. Distress has produced its effects in Manasseh's heart: he becomes a striking type of the remnant of Israel in the last days. “When he was in affliction, he besought Jehovah his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed to Him. And He was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that Jehovah, he was God” (vv. 12-13).

He cried from the bottom of the pit and humbled himself before the God of his fathers: this is repentance. He prayed: this is dependence and the renewal of his relations with Jehovah. he was reinstated in his kingdom and he proclaimed the sovereignty of the God whom he had denied. Grace caused him to

acknowledge God in His judgments and grace restored him. From this moment on, Manasseh was a new man.

His reign of 55 years is divided into three periods: idolatry, captivity, return, or: apostasy, judgment, restoration. The latter is complete, because it is the fruit of grace.

From this time onward we see Manasseh at work for Jerusalem and for God. On the north he built the entire outer wall which had offered a weak point to the attacks of the Assyrian; on the southwest he surrounds Ophel with the high wall that was later totally destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and that was not even rebuilt at the time of Nehemiah. He places the fortified cities of Judah under the supervision of captains of war. As far as worship is concerned, he entirely destroys that of the false gods which he had instituted everywhere; he removes the abominable idol from the house of God where he had set it up and casts all the unclean things out of the city. But the work would have been only half done if Manasseh had not re-established the worship of Jehovah and commanded Judah to serve Him.

The high places, it is true, were not entirely suppressed, but at least they were not intended for use for anything but the worship of Jehovah.

We have already noticed that even in death God expresses His approval or His dissatisfaction with the conduct of the kings. If a great number of them, and not always the best, were buried in the city of David and among the sepulchers of the kings (besides, even these cases offer some slight differences), others were deprived of this burial. Thus Joash was buried “in the city of David, but they did not bury him in the sepulchers of the kings,” the righteous consequence of the murder of Zechariah (2 Chr. 24:22). Uzziah was buried “in the burial-ground of the kings” (which is different from their sepulchers) because he was leprous, a judgment on his act of profanity (2 Chr. 26:23); godless Ahaz was “buried ... in the city, in Jerusalem; but they brought him not into the sepulchers of the kings of Israel” (2 Chr. 28:27); Manasseh was buried in his own house (v. 20) or, as it is expressed in the book of Kings, “in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzza” (2 Kings 21:18). Only Man-

asseh after his repentance seems to me to have personally chosen the place of his burial, feeling himself unworthy of the royal sepulchers. If this is so, it adds a touching feature to his humiliation.

Amon (vv. 21-25) returns to the traditions of Manasseh's reign at its beginning. He re-establishes the idolatrous worship of his father, and “did not humble himself before Jehovah, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; for he, Amon, multiplied trespass” (v. 23). He was slain in his own house and Chronicles does not tell us where he was buried, but 2 Kings 21:26 informs us that like his father he was buried “in his sepulcher, in the garden of Uzza.” Manasseh acknowledged his crime by this choice; Amon's crime is declared by God Himself. Later Josiah, greatly honored for his godliness, is buried “in the sepulchers of his fathers” (2 Chr. 35:24). Lastly, of the last four kings, three (Jehoahaz, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah) die in Egypt or Babylon, whereas Jehoiakim is overtaken by the judgment pronounced in Jeremiah 36:30: “His dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost.”

Chapters 34 & 35

Josiah

Chapter 34

The Word of God Recovered

At last we come to the reign of Josiah, the final light cast by a candle-end about to flicker out, followed by a deep night until the time when day breaks anew with the appearance of the true King according to God's counsels. Yet by grace this lamp of David shines with an outstanding burst of light before disappearing, making us anticipate future blessings. The Word tells us: Josiah “did what was right in the sight of Jehovah, and walked in the ways of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand nor to the left” (v. 2). “The ways of David his father” — this same thing had been said of his two great predecessors, Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah (2 Chr. 17:3; 2 Chr. 29:2).

God's Word is not bountiful in its use of this praise which relates the ways of faithful kings back to the glorious beginnings of the kingdom of Israel. But even if this was so with the king, the people did not merit the same praise. Under the kings in a general way the nation corrupted itself more and more, awakening momentarily under the influence of an energetic and faithful king, but after him falling back quickly into the idolatry which, in fact, they had never abandoned since they came out of Egypt. Jeremiah, who began to prophesy in the days of Josiah, says, precisely in reference to this reign: "Traacherous ... Judah has not returned unto Me with her whole heart, but with falsehood, saith Jehovah" (Jer. 3:10). This quotation, among many others, suffices to reveal Judah's moral state, even in the best days of the kingdom.

Verses 3 to 7 of our chapter describe Josiah's activity of cleansing Judah and Jerusalem from idolatry, and this dated from the beginning of his kingdom when he was still a young boy. Second Kings (2 Kings 23:4-20, 24-27) describes Josiah's activity of cleansing the temple after he had reigned eighteen

years. These two accounts give us two equally interesting instructions. The account in Kings connects the cleansing of the temple and of the city (and afterward the destruction of the altar at Bethel) to the discovery of the book of the law in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign (2 Kings 22:3). The reading of the “book of the covenant” (2 Kings 23:2) incited the king to undertake this work (Jer. 11:1-8). The account in Chronicles has a bearing different from this. In accord with the account in Kings, the book of the law was found in the temple in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign; in accord with this same account the discovery of the book of the law led to the renewing of the covenant between the king and all his people with God. Only, following this covenant, Chronicles does not mention the abolition of idolatry in the temple and at Jerusalem, but rather, the celebration of the Passover. This latter is mentioned only in passing in 2 Kings 23:21-23, whereas it occupies all of 2 Chronicles 35.

Thus an incident common to both accounts, the discovery of the book of the law, in Kings resulted in the complete rejection

of idolatry, beginning at the temple and its surroundings, and in Chronicles, in the solemnity of the Passover. This difference is simple when we consider the character of the book we are studying. Everything that treats of worship and the priesthood is inseparable, as we have already often noted, from the institution of the kingdom according to God's counsels. For the last time God gives an example in Judah and shows, as we shall see in the next chapter, what blessings are associated with the celebration of the Passover.

But the fact is that discovering and bringing to light the Scriptures, buried in the dust of a sanctuary abandoned for so long, brings with it these two capital features of the testimony in Israel: the rejection of idolatry and the feast of redemption. So likewise in our days for the Christian testimony it brings separation from the world and from evil, and the gathering of God's children around their passover, Christ, and around the memorial of His work.

As we have seen (vv. 3-7), devotion to the Lord had begun at a very early age in Josiah: between his sixteenth and twentieth years. He was still very ignorant of God's thoughts and the consequences of the people's guilt, but he had an ardent desire to see Jehovah's land and city cleansed from so much uncleanness. The blessings granted to his ancestors' faith and the restoration of his grandfather Manasseh doubtless served as powerful motivations for him to walk in their ways. Added to this were the horror caused by the wretched example of his father Amon and the terrible fate which he had consequently suffered.

God blesses Josiah's zeal, causing him to discover His Word. If, as we see here, having Israel's cleansing at heart, he had limited himself to that alone, without feeling the need to repair the breaches of the house of God and giving it back its importance, the discovery of the book of the law would never have taken place. In our times the same thing has happened over and over again to Christians, full of zeal against the idolatrous practices of the Roman Church. Their efforts have not been crowned

with success, however, because they did not have at heart the Church, the true Assembly of Christ.

The reading of this book works powerfully upon Josiah's conscience: “And it came to pass when the king heard the words of the law, that he rent his garments” (v. 19). He immediately feels the need to consult the Lord, for he recognizes his own guilt and that of “them that are left in Israel and in Judah.” He declares that the evil goes back to “our fathers [who] have not kept the word of Jehovah.” It is the confession of the complete ruin of all, the fruit of a common disobedience. Does any hope remain? When the prophetess Huldah is consulted, she gives the final answer: All the curses pronounced by the law cannot be revoked. Jehovah's wrath will overtake Jerusalem like an unquenchable fire, but as for the king, he will be the object of grace, for — the prophetess insists on this twice — he humbled himself before God (v. 27), rent his garments as a sign of mourning and distress, and wept tears of repentance. Because of this, he would be taken away before the evil, as it is said in Isaiah: “The righteous perishes, and no man lays it to heart: and

merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from before the evil. He enters into peace: they rest in their beds, each one that has walked in his uprightness” (Isa. 57:1-2).

It might seem in the face of this explicit declaration on God's part that Josiah had nothing to do but to wait for deliverance without troubling himself about what would follow. Exactly the opposite effect is produced in this man of God. The understanding that he had received through the Word, “knowing therefore the terror of the Lord,” impels him to shield the people while there is still time. He makes a covenant with Jehovah and “caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it” (v. 32), the only means of returning to God under the law as long as a new covenant involving God alone had not yet been established. Josiah “made to serve, all that were found in Israel — to serve Jehovah their God” (v. 33). It was zeal for these souls, fear of the coming judgment for them, that made him act in this way. Josiah carried out the word spoken by the master to his bondservant: “Compel [them] to

come in” (Luke 14:23). What impelled him to this activity was the knowledge of grace for himself, announced by the word of the prophetess, and the revelation of the judgments which, while sparing the king, would overtake the people. Why should there not also be grace for others, he might ask himself — he who had realized through the reading of the book of the law that this judgment ought to have overtaken him as well?

Chapter 35

The Passover and Worship

As we have already noticed, we have one of the great results of the recovered Word here: the celebration of the Passover united with worship, the highest expression of divine life in the believer. The Passover was the foundation of worship, and thus the description of this feast is given in much greater detail than at the time of Hezekiah's Passover (2 Chr. 30:15-27), for it is accompanied by all the implements of the service of worship. In fact, in Hezekiah's times as we have already noticed, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, symbol of a holy life entirely con-

secrated to Jehovah, following the sacrifice of the paschal lamb, is emphasized much more than the worship itself.

Let us examine in detail the contents of this interesting chapter. It has been remarked, firstly, that worship is based on the revelation the Word of God had given about it to the people. No detail whatever is left to man's discretion or good pleasure. The books of Moses had been found again in the temple; they regulated the institution of the Passover and also of all the sacrifices that were offered on the occasion of this solemn feast. The Levites, having no further need now to bear the ark on their shoulders, were once again to put it in the most holy place, from which Amon had probably cast it out. This modified their service: Now they were to serve Jehovah their God and His people Israel (v. 3). Taking their place henceforth in the holy place, they were to slaughter the Passover and prepare it for their brethren. Moreover, they were at the service of the priests. They set apart the burnt offerings, roasted the passover with fire, and boiled the sacrifices of peace offerings in pots for the people; they prepared their own portions and those of the sons

of Aaron. Their service was regulated according to the king's commandment (vv. 10, 16), but this commandment itself was “according to the word of Jehovah through Moses ... as it is written in the book of Moses ... according to the ordinance” (vv. 6, 12, 13). Here we also see that the Word of God contained all the inspired writings given up to the time of Josiah. All was to be prepared and ordered “according to the writing of David king of Israel, and according to the writing of Solomon his son” (v. 4), and lastly, “according to the commandment of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and Jeduthun the king's seer.” Thus no portion of the Word was neglected where it was a matter of worship and the order appropriate to the house of God.

How necessary this is in our day as well! It is exactly in these things that Christians, often even the most godly of them, fail completely. Being ignorant of what worship is — the collective adoration of God's children, joined together around the Lord's table — they also do not know what the service of the Levites (corresponding to present day ministries) consists of, confusing this service with that of the priests. They are just as completely

ignorant that the Word alone has the right to regulate the order and organization in the house of God when it is a matter of the Assembly's service, just as in former days when it was a matter of the service of the temple. For us Christians the First Epistle to the Corinthians determines this order, just as the First Epistle to Timothy regulates the manner in which one is to conduct himself in the house of God. At the time of the celebration of Josiah's Passover we see order and conduct re-established according to the Word. Not only did the priests and the Levites occupy the places assigned to them, but also the singers, according to the commandment of David, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun; and also the doorkeepers, who did not have to depart from their service, for their brethren the Levites prepared for them. Thus each part of this organism was at its appointed place, each one faithfully fulfilling his functions. That which bound all together into one common activity was the levitical service, coming down from its original high duties (carrying the ark), from now on no longer needed, to the most humble duties for the benefit of their brethren.

The functioning of the Assembly, the Church, the body of Christ, presents these same characteristics, when God's Word is directing it. Read, for example, Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12 (the whole chapter), as well as 1 Corinthians 14: there you will find the same principles and the same truths that are presented in our chapter.

Josiah's Passover was celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first month, not in the second month like Hezekiah's Passover, because the priests and the Levites had hallowed themselves and consecrated themselves to the Lord. This date corresponds to the year of the restoration of the temple, that is, the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign. As long as God's dwelling in the midst of His people was not an acknowledged fact, established once again, it was impossible to celebrate this feast. There cannot be any worship as long as the Lord's promise to be present in the midst of His own is not realized. A memorial to His death can be found everywhere, but how incomplete the memorial of the Passover would have been under Josiah, without the whole sphere of blessings associated with the priesthood

and the worship of Jehovah. To celebrate the Passover as a simple memorial there would have been no need of all the service of worship with which Josiah surrounded it. Each Israelite family could have taken it in their own home. But though this memorial was the basis of worship, it was not worship itself. When the Passover was celebrated on the night of the departure from Egypt, or when on the night in which He was delivered up the memorial of the Savior's death was entrusted by Him to His disciples, this was not worship, properly speaking. Worship was not understood and realized until after deliverance, and it will keep this character eternally when it will be celebrated around the Lamb who was slain, His expiatory work being its basis and its center.

Thus we find three inseparable things in this chapter. They make up the greatness of this ceremony, of which it is said: "There was no passover like to that holden in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel hold such a passover as Josiah held, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the in-

habitants of Jerusalem” (v. 18). The year of the restoration of the temple and of setting the ark in its place — the year of the discovery of the book of the law — that year the Passover was celebrated and worship was recovered. So it is in our days, too. When the Assembly of the Living God, the dwelling place of God through the Spirit, is known; when the Word of God, the whole Word and nothing but the Word, is discovered and brought to light as the one and only rule for the Christian; then worship can take place in an intelligent manner around the memorial of the death and to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The realization of these things is of necessity accompanied by great liberty and great joy. Never yet under the dispensation of the prophets had such a Passover been seen. Compare the voluntary offerings of the king, the princes, the priests, and the Levites (vv. 7-9) with those that were offered under the reign of Hezekiah (2 Chr. 30:24), and you will easily ascertain the difference between these two Passovers.

Alas! this scene of joy is followed by a disaster. Josiah shows that he is not the king according to God's counsels. As so often happens, he fails in precisely that area in which, being his strongest point, he seemed to have the least need to be on guard. He does not acknowledge the word of God when it is addressed to him — he whose ears until then had always been prompt to hear. “He hearkened not to the words of Necho from the mouth of God” (v. 22). What business did he have to enter into the conflict of the nations when it did not concern the people of God? Should he not have considered these events as directed by Jehovah and refrained from interfering? To engage in men's conflicts, to seek to anticipate their plans in order to thwart them, to participate in their politics, is to run headlong to certain defeat. Let us never forget that God has the upper hand over all that happens in the world. Man takes credit for directing these events, but he is only, like Pharaoh Necho, an instrument that God is using to attain the purpose which He — not man — proposes.

Thus, mortally wounded in combat, Josiah ends his career. There is a general mourning; the prophet Jeremiah writes his Lamentations about his death. As a prophet he understands that the last hope of a reign according to God has disappeared with this godly king; that is why these Lamentations are established as “an ordinance for Israel.” But in presence of this mourning the eyes of Jeremiah turn to Another than Josiah: to Him who could say: “I am the Man that has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath” (Lam. 3:1) — to Him who “sits solitary and keeps silence, because He has laid it upon Him. He puts His mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope. He gives His cheek to him that smites Him; He is filled full with reproach (Lam. 3:28-30) — to Him who says: “Waters streamed over My head; I said, I am cut off: (Lam. 3:54) — but who through His very sufferings will bring an end to Israel's judgment: “The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; He will no more carry thee away into captivity” (Lam. 4:22) — to Him finally who will establish His throne forever there where faithful Josiah's throne sank down and disappeared: “Thou, Jehovah,

dweldest for ever; Thy throne is from generation to generation”
(Lam. 5:19).

Chapter 36

The Last Kings

This chapter is only a summary, intentionally very brief, of the account contained in the last chapters of the book of Kings (2 Kings 23:31 - 25). The collapse of the kingdom is complete and final under the kings who succeeded Josiah. It hardly seems necessary to the inspired author to record these last convulsions. They have no more real importance in the book of Chronicles except to count, as far as history follows them, the links of the chain which will end with the Lord's Anointed. This is also why the Spirit of God in a remarkable way links the end of Chronicles to the book of Ezra, literally repeating in verses 22 and 23 of our chapter the words with which the following book begins. Indeed, Zerubbabel, in the book of Ezra, is still a weak offshoot of Judah's royalty. Then come the revivals

of Ezra and Nehemiah, revivals produced in the midst of a remnant returned from Babylon to await the promised Messiah; but these revivals also are without lasting result, and when at last the true King of Israel appears, His people crucify Him. Nevertheless God's counsels are fulfilled: the sufferings of Christ open the door to the establishment of His glorious throne on earth.

All the last kings “did evil in the sight of Jehovah.” Jehoahaz (vv. 1-4) is bound with chains by Pharaoh Necho whom Josiah had the temerity to fight. Thus this pious king's only fault resulted in hastening the kingdom's decline. Carried away to Egypt, Jehoahaz dies there after having reigned for three months at Jerusalem.

Jehoiakim (vv. 5-7) commits abominations; bound with chains of brass, he is led away by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon where he dies the death of an evil-doer (Jer. 36:30). His mother's name is lacking in Chronicles, as is the case for all the evil kings after Hezekiah.

Jehoichin, his son, is carried away to Babylon. His restoration at the court of Evil-merodach, after 37 years of captivity, is not mentioned here (see 2 Kings 25:27-30), for here it is only a matter of accentuating the complete and final ruin of the kingdom in Judah.

The enumeration ends with Zedekiah. We have spoken elsewhere (2 Kings) of his reign in relation to that which is told us in the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Verses 12 and 13 summarize all of his sad history: he did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah his God. When the word of Jehovah is addressed to him by the prophet Jeremiah, he does not humble himself. He rebels against the power established over him as a chastisement from God; much more, he breaks an oath made in the name of Jehovah. What could be more odious than this act towards idolatrous nations and in the eyes of God whose holy name had been desecrated by perjury and cast into the mud? Finally, he stiffens his neck and hardens his heart, refusing to return to the Lord. An irrevocable decision is taken against Him, for Zedekiah refused God.

Thus the history of the kingdom ends. The priests' end and that of the people was no better (vv. 14-21). "They defiled the house of Jehovah." And still, right to the end God shows them His grace, the characteristic that is so remarkable in Chronicles: "Jehovah the God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending; because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling-place" (v. 15). They answered Him by mocking, despising, and scoffing at the prophets. Finally wrath came upon them for the final time: The king of the Chaldeans came up against Jerusalem. From the account in Kings and the prophet Jeremiah we know what Zedekiah's fate was. Here without any other detail he is, as it were, engulfed in the general judgment. God had "had compassion on His people and on His dwelling-place" up to that final moment, but the hour came when He "spared not young man nor maiden, old man nor him of hoary head: He gave them all" into the hand of the king of the Chaldeans (v. 17). The Chaldeans "burned the house of God, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all the palaces thereof with fire, and

all the precious vessels thereof were given up to destruction. And them that had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they became servants to him and his sons, until the reign of the kingdom of Persia; to fulfill the word of Jehovah by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years” (vv. 19-21).

By his fall the first Adam had brought God's counsels with regard to him to naught; God has answered by the Second Adam. The kingdom of Israel had done the same; God will answer by anointing His King in Zion, the mountain of His holiness! (Ps. 2:6).

