

King Jehoram

When we come to consider the religious scene of so-called Christendom, we predominately see the Roman Catholic mother church and her harlot daughters (Rev. 17:3-6). She is the great apostasy described in the book of Revelation, being the great persecutor of Messiahs' brethren down through the ages. But there are others in Christendom who are sufficiently enlightened to identify the Harlot Woman as being the Roman religious system, yet who themselves cannot see their way to accepting the principles of the true Gospel message. The Protestants repudiate the religion headed by the bishop of Rome, yet paradoxically remain in the darkest apostasy themselves. Worshipping a mythical triune god, and believing in an immortal soul, and a personal devil, their own brand of apostasy is as dark as that which they repudiate.

We have this situation in our Old Testament reading for today, from 2 Kings chapter 3. The example of king Jehoram is very much like Christendom of today:

“And he wrought evil in the sight of Yahweh; but not like his father, and like his mother: for **he put away the image of Baal** that his father had made. **Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat**, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom” (2 Kings 3:2-3).

Here we find that although he was opposed to certain elements of idolatry, Jehoram was himself in the deepest of apostasy. He rejected the prime idol of his parents – Baal - yet held to other idols, and “departed not” from them. Just like the Protestants reject the divinity of the bishop of Rome, yet themselves worship the idolatrous god of the Trinity: a triune entity that is no more real than the calf-gods that Jeroboam had made.

When he married Jezebel, Ahab the father of Jehoram embraced her idolatry:

“And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, **and went and served Baal**, and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal, in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria” (1 Kings 16:31-32).

But although his son Jehoram rejected the Baal gods and put away an image (icon?) that Ahab had made, the nation itself had retained Baal worship. Following the death of Jehoram and his mother Jezebel, Jehu showed his zeal for Yahweh in seeking to destroy the Baal worshippers. He caused them to be gathered together in the house of Baal, under the pretence that he was going to lead them in worship to this empty idol. The house of Baal was filled with worshippers:

“and they smote them with the edge of the sword; and the guard and the captains cast them out, and went to the city of the house of Baal. And they brought forth the images out of the house of Baal and burned them. And they brake down the image of Baal, and brake down the house of Baal, and made it a draught house unto this day. Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel ...” (2 Kings 10:25-27).

So, Jehu did what Jehoram failed to do: destroy the prophets and adherents of Baal. However, tragically, although Jehu shared Jehoram’s hatred and opposition to the Baal gods, he also stumbled at the idols that Jeroboam had made:

“... But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of Yahweh God of Israel with all his heart: **for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam**, which made Israel to sin” (2 Kings 10:31).

THE SINS OF JEROBOAM

This aspect of continuing to sin after the manner of Jeroboam is mentioned a number of times in the history of the kings. The origin of Jeroboam's idolatry is described in the record of 1 Kings chapter 12. The context is to do with the dividing of the nation following the death of Solomon. The kingdom was divided between Rehoboam the son of Solomon, who reigned over Judah, and Jeroboam who reigned over Israel. Jeroboam's concern was that the people under his rule would return to Jerusalem, and therefore Rehoboam, to worship Yahweh in the temple which was there. His solution was to establish worship in two places in Israel, so that the people wouldn't have so far to go to worship:

"Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: if this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of Yahweh at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah. Wherefore the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold your gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Beth-el, and the other put he in Dan. And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan ..." (1 Kings 13:28-30).

It is significant that the people's choice was to worship the calf in Dan. The king was very shrewd: there was already a false system of worship in Dan, as described in Judges chapter 18. Jeroboam therefore, utilised the situation there, for the people to continue worshipping as they were accustomed to in that place – the only difference being that this was worship at a national level, rather than individual.

Judges chapters 17 & 18 describe the situation whereby false worship became established in Dan. A certain Ephraimite by the name of Micah stole some money from his mother. When he confessed what he had done, she used some of that silver to make an image to be worshipped. He then added it to the collection of his gods that he had acquired:

"... the man Micah had a house of gods, and made an Ephod and Teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest" (Judges 17:5).

He subsequently ordained a Levite to be his priest, and so set up a system of worship and priesthood that was an alternative to that which was established at the Tabernacle that Moses built. Judges 18 describes how that the tribe of Dan found Micah's house of gods, and took away both his idols and his priest (cp. Jug. 18:18) to themselves, and set up his silver graven image in Dan:

"... the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Moses, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. And they set them up Micah's graven image which he made, all the time that the house of God was at Shiloh" (Jug. 18:30-31).

Notice that this idolatrous house remained in Dan "until the day of the captivity of the land" – which means it was active during the days of Jeroboam, enabling him to add his molten calf to Micah's collection of idols. This meant that he was not establishing something new: he was simply enhancing the false worship that was already in the land. But the overriding lesson here, is that small sins can have great effects. The case of a man stealing from his mother led to an image being cast, which led to a priesthood, which led to a system of false worship being established, which, when imported by the tribe of Dan, ultimately led to a national apostasy, with many of the Israelitish kings and their subjects being ensnared by this idol.

The second place where Jeroboam placed his idols was Beth-el, which should have been the “House of El” (the meaning of the name), and not a house of idols. Yesterday’s reading in 2 Kings chapter 2 describes what happened at Beth-el, in the days of Elisha, not long after Elijah had ascended in a whirlwind:

“And he went up from thence unto Beth-el: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. And he turned back and looked upon them, and cursed them in the name of Yahweh. And there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them ...” (2 Kings 2:23-24).

Sometimes this incident is used to question the morality of the Bible – why should a group of little children be murdered by bears, simply for teasing the prophet? Actually, the word for “little children” is used elsewhere of young men who were in the service of the national army (1 Kings 20:14). They weren’t children therefore, they were grown young men, able to fight the king’s battles. And it was not the case that it was only a few infants: there were over 42 of them, all mocking Yahweh’s Prophet. Evidently they had seen, or heard about Elijah’s ascent, and in mocking Elisha, they urged him to “go up” likewise.

This situation mirrored the spiritual condition of the nation. 2 Chronicles chapter 36 describes how the people mocked the prophets who were sent to exhort them to turn from their ways:

“Yahweh God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: but they **mocked the messengers of God**, and despised his words, **and misused his prophets**, until the wrath of Yahweh arose against his people, till there was no remedy ...” (2 Chron. 36:15-16).

It wasn’t simply a case of a few infant children teasing the prophets therefore: it was rather a national departure from Yahweh. They mocked and rejected those who were sent of Yahweh, refusing to listen to their message – hence they would be destroyed by His judgments, like a raging bear (Cp. Hos. 13:8).

JEHORAM AND JEHOSHAPHAT

Returning to our reading of 2 Kings 3, we find that king Jehoshaphat made an alliance with Israel and Edom to fight against Moab. The king of Moab had rebelled against Jehoram following the death of his father Ahab, and so he organised a confederacy of Judah, Israel (Jehoram) and Edom to war against Moab. However, they did not consult Yahweh first, and so the mission nearly ended with disaster through lack of prayer. They ran out of water, and went thirsty, and all seemed to be lost. But amongst their company was Elisha, and the three kings of this unholy alliance therefore approached the prophet of Yahweh:

“And Elisha said, as Yahweh of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee ...” (2 Kings 3:14).

From these words, we see that Yahweh’s prophet had no respect for the idolatrous king of Israel. There are a number of passages that describe this kind of situation:

“Yahweh, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? ... he that backbiteth not with his tongue, Nor doeth evil to his neighbour. Nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes, **a vile person** is contemned, But he **honoureth them that fear Yahweh ...**” (Psa. 15:1-4).

So it was that the vile Jehoram was contemned in the eyes of Elisha, yet Jehoshaphat was honoured. Again, we read that there is:

“a time to love, and a time to hate: a time of war, and a time of peace” (Eccl. 3:8).

There is a time to join together in warfare, but also a time to hate those whose are “vile”, whose works and worship is evil. This is the approach of Elisha: but not so with the king Jehoshaphat, who was happy to be allied with the ungodly.

Again:

“Do not I hate them, O Yahweh, **that hate thee?** And am I not grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies ...” (Psa. 139:21-22).

There is a time to love, and a time to hate. We must love Yahweh with all our heart, soul and might (Deut. 6:5)– yet by definition if we do this, we will also hate the evil. The enemies of Yahweh are the enemies of those who worship him, and they will deal with them accordingly, rather to be allied to them like Jehoshaphat did:

“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that **the friendship of the world is enmity with God?** Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (Jas. 4:4).

By miraculous means, the Moabites were routed – yet despite this open display of Divine power, the king of Israel still did not turn from his wickedness.

Another instructive incident in the life of king Jehoram, is that recorded in 2 Kings chapter 6. Here, Elisha led the mighty men of the enemy forces into the midst of Samaria, having first smitten them with blindness by the power of Yahweh. Then Jehoram the king asked Elisha:

“My father, shall I smite them? Shall I smite them? And he answered, Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their Master” (2 Kings 6:21-22).

This scene is alluded to in the New Testament writings:

“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore **if thy enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink:** for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom.12:19-21).

Here is the lesson for us, how we should treat our enemies.

When we come to consider the reign of king Jehoram then, we see many principles for our learning. We have the importance of embracing the Truth as well as a hatred for error. We see the importance of going to the Word of God in any given enterprise that we might set our hands to. We see the importance of not being allied to men of the world. And we have the instruction of how we must treat our enemies. Tragically, Jehoram was slain by Jehu who executed the judgements of Yahweh, yet Jehu himself remained in the deepest of apostasy, worshipping the idols established by Jeroboam. We have many important principles bound up in Jehoram’s example of unbelief – let us take heed to them, lest we perish without hope, as he did.

Christopher Maddocks