

CHAPTER 19

We have here a further account of the good reign of Jehoshaphat,

- I.** His return in peace to Jerusalem (v. 1).
- II.** The reproof given him for his league with Ahab, and his acting in conjunction with him (v. 2, 3).
- III.** The great care he took thereupon to reform his kingdom (v. 4).
- IV.** The instructions he gave to his judges, both those in the country towns that kept the inferior courts (v. 5-7), and those in Jerusalem that sat in the supreme judicature of the kingdom (v. 8-11).

<4400> 2 CHRONICLES 19:1-4

JEHOSHAPHAT'S PIETY

Here is,

I. The great favour God showed to Jehoshaphat,

1. In bringing him back in safety from his dangerous expedition with Ahab, which had like to have cost him dearly (v. 1): *He returned to his house in peace.* Notice is taken of this to intimate,

(1.) That he fared better than he had expected. He had been in imminent peril, and yet came home in peace. Whenever we return in peace to our houses we ought to acknowledge God's providence in preserving our going out and our coming in. But, if we have been kept through more than ordinary dangers, we are in a special manner bound to be thankful. There was but a step perhaps between us and death, and yet we are alive.

(2.) That he fared better than he deserved. He was out of the way of his duty, had been out upon an expedition which he could not well account for to God and his conscience, and yet he returned in peace; for God is not extreme to mark what we do amiss, nor does he withdraw his protection every time we forfeit it.

(3.) That he fared better than Ahab king of Israel did, who was brought home slain. Though Jehoshaphat had said to Ahab, *I am as thou art*, God distinguished him; for he knows and owns *the way of the righteous*, but *the way of the ungodly shall perish*. Distinguishing mercies are very obliging. here were two kings in the field together, *one taken and the other left*, one brought home in blood, the other in peace.

2. In sending him a reproof for his affinity with Ahab. It is a great mercy to be made sensible of our faults, and to be told in time wherein we have erred, that we may repent and amend the error before it be too late. The prophet by whom the reproof is sent is Jehu the son of Hanani. The father was an eminent prophet in the last reign, as appeared by Asa's putting him in the stocks for his plain dealing; yet the son was not afraid to reprove another king. Paul would have his son Timothy not only discouraged, but animated by his sufferings, ^{<SIB>}2 Timothy 3:11, 14.

(1.) The prophet told him plainly that he had done very ill in joining with Ahab: “*Shouldst thou, a godly man, help the ungodly, give them a hand of fellowship, and lend them a hand of assistance?*” Or, “*Shouldst thou love those that hate the Lord; wilt thou lay those in thy bosom whom God beholds afar off?*” It is the black character of wicked people that they are *haters of God*, ^{<SIB>}Romans 1:30. Idolaters are so reputed in the second commandment; and therefore it is not for those that love God to take delight in them or contract an intimacy with them. *Do I not hate those*, says David, *that hate thee?* ^{<SIB>}Psalms 139:21, 11. Those whom the grace of God has dignified ought not to debase themselves. Let God's people be of God's mind.

(2.) That God was displeased with him for doing this: “*There is wrath upon thee from before the Lord*, and thou must, by repentance, make thy peace with him, or it will be the worse for thee.” He did so, and God's anger was turned away. Yet his trouble, as recorded in the next chapter, was a rebuke to him for meddling with strife that belonged not to him. If he be so fond of war, he shall have enough of it. And the great mischief which his seed after him fell into by the house of Ahab was the just punishment of his affinity with that house.

(3.) Yet he took notice of that which was praiseworthy, as it is proper for us to do when we give a reproof (v. 3): “*There are good things found in thee*; and therefore, though God be displeased with thee, he does not, he will not, cast thee off.” His abolishing idolatry with a heart fixed for God

and engaged to seek him was a good thing, which God accepted and would have him go on with, notwithstanding the displeasure he had now incurred.

II. The return of duty which Jehoshaphat made to God for this favour. he took the reproof well, was not wroth with the seer as his father was, but submitted. *Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness.* See what effect the reproof had upon him.

1. He *dwelt at Jerusalem* (v. 4), minded his own business at home, and would not expose himself by paying any more such visits to Ahab. *Rebuke a wise man, and he will be yet wiser, and will take warning,* ~~2008~~ Proverbs 9:8, 9.

2. To atone (as I may say) for the visit he had paid to Ahab, he made a pious profitable visitation of his own kingdom: He *went out through the people* in his own person from Beersheba in the south to Mount Ephriam in the north, and *brought them back to the Lord God of their fathers*, that is, did all he could towards recovering them.

(1.) By what the prophet said he perceived that his former attempts for reformation were well pleasing to God, and therefore he revived them, and did what was then left undone. It is good when commendations thus quicken us to our duty, and when the more we are praised for doing well the more vigorous we are in well-doing.

(2.) Perhaps he found that his late affinity with the idolatrous house of Ahab and kingdom of Israel had had a bad influence upon his own kingdom. Many, we may suppose, were emboldened to revolt to idolatry when they saw even their reforming king so intimate with idolaters; and therefore he thought himself doubly obliged to do all he could to restore them. If we truly repent of our sin, we shall do our utmost to repair the damage we have any way done by it to religion or the souls of others. We are particularly concerned to recover those that have fallen into sin, or been hardened in it, by our example.

<4495>2 CHRONICLES 19:5-11

JEHOSHAPHAT'S PIETY

Jehoshaphat, having done what he could to make his people good, is here providing, if possible, to keep them so by the influence of a settled magistracy. He had sent preachers among them, to instruct them (<4470>2 Chronicles 17:7-9), and that provision did well; but now he saw it further requisite to send judges among them, to see the laws put in execution, and to be a terror to evil-doers. It is probable that there were judges up and down the country before, but either they neglected their business or the people slighted them, so that the end of the institution was not answered; and therefore it was necessary it should be new-modelled, new men employed, and a new charge given them. That is it which is here done.

I. He erected inferior courts of justice in the several cities of the kingdom, v. 5. The judges of these courts were to keep the people in the worship of God, to punish the violations of the law, and to decide controversies between man and man. Here is the charge he gave them (v. 6), in which we have,

1. The means he prescribes to them for the keeping of them closely to their duty; and these are two: —

(1.) Great caution and circumspection: *Take heed what you do*, v. 6. And again, “*Take heed and do it*, v. 7. Mind your business; take heed of making any mistakes; be afraid of misunderstanding any point of law, or the matter of fact.” Judges, of all men, have need to be cautious, because so much depends upon the correctness of their judgment.

(2.) Great piety and religion: “*Let the fear of God be upon you*, and that will be a restraint upon you to keep you from doing wrong (<4615> Nehemiah 5:15; <4628> Genesis 42:18) and an engagement to you to be active in doing the duty of your place.” Let destruction from God be a terror to them, as Job speaks (<4812> Job 31:23), and then they will be a terror to none but evil-doers.

2. The motives he would have them consider, to engage them to faithfulness. These are three, all taken from God: —

(1.) That from him they had their commission; his ministers they were. The powers that be are ordained by him and for him: “*You judge not for man, but for the Lord; your business is to glorify him, and serve the interests of his kingdom among men.*”

(2.) That his eye was upon them: “He is *with you in the judgment*, to take notice what you do and call you to an account if you do amiss.”

(3.) That he is the great example of justice to all magistrates: *There is no iniquity with him*, no bribery, nor respect of persons. Magistrates are called gods, and therefore must endeavour to resemble him.

II. He erected a supreme court at Jerusalem, which was advised with, and appealed to, in all the difficult causes that occurred in the inferior courts, and which gave judgment upon demurrers (to speak in the language of our own law), special verdicts, and writs of error. This court sat in Jerusalem; for *there were set the thrones of judgment*: there they would be under the inspection of the king himself. Observe,

1. The causes cognizable in this court; and they were of two kinds, as with us: —

(1.) Pleas of the crown, called here *the judgment of the Lord*, because the law of God was the law of the realm. All criminals were charged with the breach of some part of his law and were said to offend against his peace, his crown and dignity.

(2.) Common pleas, between party and party, called here *controversies* (v. 8) and *causes of their brethren* (v. 10), differences *between blood and blood* (this refers to ^{<B1708>}Deuteronomy 17:8), between the blood of the person slain and the blood of the man-slayer. Since the revolt of the ten tribes all the cities of refuge, except Hebron, belonged to the kingdom of Israel; and therefore, we may suppose, the courts of the temple, or the horns of the altar, were chiefly used as sanctuaries in that case, and hence the trial of homicides was reserved for the court at Jerusalem. If the inferior judges did not agree about the sense of any law or commandment, any statute or judgment, this court must determine the controversy.

2. The judges of this court were some of *the Levites and priests* that were most learned in the law, eminent for wisdom, and of approved integrity, and some of *the chief of the fathers of Israel, peers of the realm*, as I may call them, or persons of age and experience, that had been men of business,

who would be the most competent judges of matters of fact, as the priests and Levites were of the sense of the law.

3. The two chiefs, or presidents, of this court. Amariah, the high priest, was to preside in ecclesiastical causes, to direct the court and be the mouth of it, or perhaps to be last consulted in cases which the judges themselves doubted of. Zebadiah, the prime-minister of that state, was to preside in all civil causes, v. 11. Thus there are diversities of gifts and operations, but all from the same Spirit, and for the good of the body. Some best understand *the matters of the Lord*, others *the king's matters*; neither can say to the other, *I have no need of thee*, for God's Israel has need of both; and, as every one has received the gift, so let him minister the same. Blessed be God both for magistrates and ministers, scribes and statesmen, men of books and men of business.

4. The inferior officers of the court. "Some of *the Levites* (such as had not abilities to qualify them for judges) *shall be officers before you*," v. 11. They were to bring causes into the court, and to see the sentence of the judges executed. And these hands and feet were as necessary in their places as the eyes and heads (the judges) in theirs.

5. The charge which the king gave them.

(1.) They must see to it that they acted from a good principle; they must do all in the *fear of the Lord*, setting him always before them, and then they would act faithfully, conscientiously, and *with a perfect upright heart*, v. 9.

(2.) They must make it their great and constant care to prevent sin, *to warn the people that they trespass not against the Lord*, inspire them with a dread of sin, not only as hurtful to themselves and the public peace, but as an offence to God, and that which would bring wrath upon the people if they committed it and upon the magistrates if they did not punish it. "*This do, and you shall not trespass*;" this implies that those who have power in their hands contract the guilt of sin themselves if they do not use their power for the preventing and restraining of sin in others. "You trespass if you do not keep them from trespassing."

(3.) They must act with resolution. "Deal courageously, and fear not the face of man; be bold and daring in the discharge of your duty, and, whoever is against you, God will protect you: *The Lord shall be with the*

good.” Wherever he finds a good man, a good magistrate, he will be found a good God.