

CHAPTER 21

Never surely did any kingdom change its king so much for the worse as Judah did, when Jehoram, one of the vilest, succeeded Jehoshaphat, one of the best. Thus were they punished for not making a better use of Jehoshaphat's good government, and their disaffectedness (or coldness at least) to his reformation, 20:33. Those that knew not now to value a good king are justly plagued with a bad one. Here is,

- I.** Jehoram's elevation to the throne (v. 1-3).
- II.** The wicked course he took to establish himself in it, by the murder of his brethren (v. 4).
- III.** The idolatries and other wickedness he was guilty of (v. 5, 6, 11).
- IV.** The prophecy of Elijah against him (v. 12-15).
- V.** The judgments of God upon him, in the revolt of his subjects from him (v. 8-10) and the success of his enemies against him (v. 16, 17).
- VI.** His miserable sickness and inglorious exit (v. 18-20).
- VII.** The preservation of the house of David notwithstanding (v. 7).

<4201>2 CHRONICLES 21:1-11

JEHORAM'S WICKED REIGN

We find here,

- I.** That Jehoshaphat was a very careful indulgent father to Jehoram. He had many sons, who are here named (v. 2), and it is said (v. 13) that they were better than Jehoram, had a great deal more wisdom and virtue, and lived up to their education, which he went counter to. They were very hopeful, and any of them more fit for the crown than he; and yet, because he was the first-born (v. 3), his father secured the kingdom to him, and portioned his brethren and disposed of them so as that they would be easy

and give him no disturbance; as Abraham, when he made Isaac his heir, dismissed his other children with gifts. Herein Jehoshaphat was very kind and fair to his son, which might have obliged him to be respectful to him, and tread in the steps of so good a father. But it is no new thing for the children that have been most indulged by their parents to be least dutiful to them. Whether in doing this he acted wisely and well for his people, and was just to them, I cannot say. His birthright entitled him to a double portion of his father's estate, ^{<45217>}Deuteronomy 21:17. But if he appeared utterly unfit for government (the end of which is the good of the people), and likely to undo all that his father had done, it would have been better perhaps to have set him aside, and taken the next that was hopeful, and not inclined as he was to idolatry. Power is a sacred thing, with which men may either do much good or much hurt; and therefore *Detur digniori* — *Let him that deserves it have it. Salus populi suprema lex* — *The security of the people is the first consideration.*

II. That Jehoram was a most barbarous brother to his father's sons. As soon as he had settled himself in the throne he slew all his brethren with the sword, either by false accusation, under colour of law, or rather by assassination. By some wicked hand or other he got them all murdered, pretending (it is likely) that he could not think himself safe in the government till they were taken out of the way. Those that mean ill themselves are commonly, without cause, jealous of those about them. The wicked fear where no fear is, or pretend to do so, in order to conceal their malice. Jehoram, it is likely, hated his brethren and slew them for the same reason that Cain hated Abel and slew him, because their piety condemned his impiety and won them that esteem with the people which he had lost. With them he slew divers of the princes of Israel, who adhered to them, or were likely to avenge their death. The princes of Judah, those who had taught the good knowledge of the Lord (^{<4470>}2 Chronicles 17:7), are here called princes of Israel, as before *fathers of Israel* (^{<4498>}2 Chronicles 19:8), because they were Israelites indeed, men of integrity. The sword which the good father had put into their hands this wicked son sheathed in their bowels. Woe unto him that thus *foundeth a kingdom in blood* (^{<3912>}Habakkuk 2:12); it will prove a foundation that will sink the superstructure.

III. That Jehoram was a most wicked king, who corrupted and debauched his kingdom, and ruined the reformation that his good father and

grandfather had carried on: He *walked in the way of the house of Ahab* (v. 6), made high places, which the people were of themselves too forward to make, and did his utmost to set up idolatry again, v. 11.

1. As for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, where he kept his court, he easily drew them into his spiritual whoredom: He *caused them to commit fornication*, seducing them *to eat things sacrificed to idols*, ^{<1123>}Revelation 2:20.

2. The country people seem to have been brought to it with more difficulty; but those that would not be corrupted by flatteries were driven by force to partake in his abominable idolatries: He *compelled Judah thereto*. He used that power for the destruction of the church which was given him for the edification of it.

IV. That when he forsook God and his worship his subjects withdrew from their allegiance to him.

1. Some of the provinces abroad that were tributaries to him did so. The Edomites revolted (v. 8), and, though he chastised them (v. 9), yet he could not reduce them, v. 10.

2. One of the cities of his own kingdom did so. Libnah revolted (v. 10) and set up for a free state, as of old it had a king of its own, ^{<1625>}Joshua 12:15. And the reason is here given, not only why God permitted it, but why they did it; they shook off his government because he had forsaken the Lord God of his fathers, had become an idolater and a worshipper of false gods, and they could not continue subject to him without some danger of being themselves also drawn away from God and their duty. While he adhered to God they adhered to him; but, when he cast God off, they cast him off. Whether this reason will justify them in their revolt of no, it will justify God's providence which ordered it so.

V. That yet God was tender of his covenant with the house of David, and therefore would not destroy the royal family, though it was so wretchedly corrupted and degenerated, v. 7. These things we had before, ^{<1189>}2 Kings 8:19-22. The tenour of the covenant was that David's seed should be visited for their transgressions, but the covenant should never be broken, ^{<1881>}Psalms 89:30, etc.

2 CHRONICLES 21:12-20

JEHORAM'S MISERABLE END

Here we have,

I. A warning from God sent to Jehoram by a writing from Elijah the prophet. By this it appears that Jehoram came to the throne, and showed himself what he was before Elijah's translation. It is true we find Elisha attending Jehoshaphat, and described as pouring water on the hands of Elijah, after the story of Elijah's translation (^{<1200>}2 Kings 3:11); but that might be, and that description might be given of him, while Elijah was yet on earth: and it is certain that that history is put out of its proper place, for we read of Jehoshaphat's death, and Jehoram's coming to the crown, before we read of Elijah's translation, ^{<1220>}1 Kings 22:50. We will suppose that the time of his departure was at hand, so that he could not go in person to Jehoram; but that, hearing of his great wickedness in murdering his brethren, he left this writing it is probable with Elisha, to be sent him by the first opportunity, that it might either be a means to reclaim him or a witness against him that he was fairly told what would be in the end hereof. The message is sent him in the name of *the Lord God of David his father* (v. 12), upbraiding him with his relation to David as that which, though it was his honour, was an aggravation of his degeneracy.

1. His crimes are plainly charged upon him — his departure from the good ways of God, in which he had been educated, and which he had been directed and encouraged to walk in by the example of his good father and grandfather, who lived and died in peace and honour (v. 12) — his conformity to the ways of the house of Ahab, that impious scandalous family — his setting up and enforcing idolatry in his kingdom — and his murdering his brethren because they were better than himself, v. 13. These are the heads of the indictment against him.

2. Judgment is given against him for these crimes; he is plainly told that his sin should certainly be the ruin,

(1.) Of his kingdom and family (v. 14): “With a heavy stroke, even that of war and captivity, *will the Lord smite thy people and thy children,*” etc. Bad men bring God's judgments upon all about them. His people justly

suffer because they had complied with his idolatry, and his wives because they had drawn him to it.

(2.) Of his health and life: “Thou shalt have great sickness, very painful and tedious, and at last mortal,” v. 15. This he is warned of before, that his blood might be upon his own head, the watchman having delivered his soul; and that when these things so particularly foretold, came to pass, it might appear that they did not come by chance, but as the punishment of his sins, and were so intended. And now if, as he had learned of Ahab to do wickedly, he had but learned even of Ahab to humble himself upon the receipt of this threatening message from Elijah — if, like (¹²⁷1 Kings 21:27), he had *rent his clothes, put on sackcloth, and fasted* — who knows but, like him, he might have obtained at least a reprieve? But it does not appear that he took any notice of it; he threw it by as waste-paper; Elijah seemed to him *as one that mocked*. But those that will not believe shall feel.

II. The threatened judgments brought upon him because he slighted the warning. No marvel that hardened sinners are not frightened from sin and to repentance by the threatenings of misery in another world, which is future and out of sight, when the certain prospect of misery in this world, the sinking of their estates and the ruin of their healths, will not restrain them from vicious courses.

1. See Jehoram here stripped of all his comforts. God *stirred up the spirit of his neighbours* against him, who had loved and feared Jehoshaphat, but hated and despised him, looking upon it as a scandalous thing for a nation to change their gods. Some occasion or other they took to quarrel with him, invaded his country, but, as it should seem, fought neither against small nor great, but the king's house only; they made directly to that, and *carried away all the substance that was found in it*. No mention is made of their carrying any away captive but the *king's wives* and *his sons*, v. 17. Thus God made it evident that the controversy was with him and his house. Here it is only said, They *carried away* his sons; but we find (¹²⁸2 Chronicles 22:1) that they *slew them all*. Blood for blood. He had slain all his brethren, to strengthen himself; and now all his sons are slain but one, and so he is weakened. If he had not been of the house of David, that one would not have escaped. When Jeroboam's house, and Baasha's, and Ahab's, were destroyed, there was none left; but David's house must not be

wholly extirpated, though sometimes wretchedly degenerated, because a blessing was in it, no less a blessing than that of the Messiah.

2. See him tormented with *sore diseases and of long continuance*, such as were threatened in the law against those that would not *fear the Lord their God*, ^{<DESS>}Deuteronomy 28:58, 59. His disease was very grievous. It lay in his bowels, producing a continual griping, and with this there was a complication of other sore diseases. The affliction was moreover very tedious. Two years he continued ill, and could get no relief; for the disease was incurable, though he was in the prime of life, not forty years old. Asa, whose heart was perfect with God though in some instances he stepped aside, was diseased only in his feet; but Jehoram, whose heart was wicked, was struck in his inwards, and he that had no bowels of compassion towards his brethren was so plagued in his bowels that they fell out. Even good men, and those who are very dear to God, may be afflicted with diseases of this kind; but to them they are fatherly chastisements, and by the support of divine consolations the soul may dwell at ease even then when the body lies in pain. These sore diseases seized him just after his house was plundered and his wives and children were carried away.

(1.) Perhaps his grief and anguish of mind for that calamity might occasion his sickness, or at least contribute to the heightening of it.

(2.) By this sickness he was disabled to do any thing for the recovery of them or the revenge of the injury done him.

(3.) It added, no doubt, very much to his grief, in his sickness, that he was deprived of the society of his wives and children and that all the substance of his house was carried away. To be sick and poor, sick and solitary, but especially to be sick and in sin, sick and under the curse of God, sick and destitute of grace to bear the affliction, and of comfort to counter-balance it — is a most deplorable case.

3. See him buried in disgrace. He reigned but eight years, and then *departed without being desired*, v. 20. Nobody valued him while he lived, none lamented him when he died, but all wished that no greater loss might ever come to Jerusalem. To show what little affection or respect they had for him, they would not *bury him in the sepulchres of the kings*, as thinking him unworthy to be numbered among them who had governed so ill. The excluding of his body from the sepulchres of his fathers might be ordered by Providence as an intimation of the everlasting separation of the

souls of the wicked after death, from the spirits of just men. This further disgrace they put upon him, that they *made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers*, v. 19. His memory was far from being sweet and precious to them, and therefore they did not honour it with any sweet odours or precious spices, though we may suppose that his dead body, after so long and loathsome a disease, needed something to perfume it. The generality of the people, though prone to idolatry, yet had no true kindness for their idolatrous kings. Wickedness and profaneness make men despicable even in the eyes of those who have but little religion themselves, while natural conscience itself often gives honour to those who are truly pious. Those that *despise God shall be lightly esteemed*, as Jehoram was.