

MUCH BUSINESS

“And Jehoshaphat ...had much business in the cities of Judah”.

(2 chronicles 17:12,13)

Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, began his reign well, in the fear of God. He was a good king who sought to walk in the paths of righteousness like his father David. Not being satisfied with such personal devotion alone, early in his reign, he sent out his princes along with the Levites, into all the cities of Judah, to teach the people the statutes and commandments of the Lord. Because of this zeal to honor the Lord, the Lord blessed him abundantly. The Philistines brought presents and tributes of silver to him. The Arabians brought flocks of rams and goats (verses 7-11) . Thus God fulfilled His promises. “them that honor me I will honor “. (1 Samuel 2:30)

One of the results of God’s blessing upon Jehoshaphat was material prosperity. But slowly, Jehoshaphat began to turn his eyes from the Giver to the gift itself. Slowly, love for these same material things began to gain ground in his life and cramp his soul. This is a snare about which we too have to be very careful. Love for worldly possessions will creep into our lives so subtly that we will hardly be aware of it. The enemy knows our weak points, and it is when we are much taken up with our blessings that he will take advantage of our carelessness, and gain entrance in to our lives.

There is a fort near Bellary designed and constructed many years ago by a French engineer for Tippu Sultan. Even today it appears imposing and impregnable. When this fort was completed, the engineer took Tippu Sultan proudly it. They came to a part of the fort from where Tippu Sultan noticed a hill just outside the fort. He sharply rebuked the engineer and said, “You foolish engineer, why did you leave that hill outside the fort?. You should have included it within the wall. Now the enemy can mount that hill and from there attack the fort, and easily capture it”. Much labor and money had been spent to build the fort; but because of one fundamental mistake, it was made practically useless. The engineer was so crest fallen at his lack of foresight, that he committed suicide. A few years later, from that very hill, the British forces mounted an offensive, and captured the fort . The enemy of our souls also is watching to find the weak parts in our lives, from where he can gain entrance into us and destroy us.

God had blessed Jehoshaphat so that he prospered greatly. But instead of remaining satisfied with what the Lord had given him, and attending to the responsibilities of his kingdom, Jehoshaphat was tempted to do more business to increase his wealth. Evidently, love of money was his weak point, and through it the enemy gained entrance into his life.

We see the same weakness-love for money in many preachers also these days. They are not satisfied with what the Lord gives them, but wish to increase their income by doing some side business. Some breed poultry and goats. Others are very busy during the months of November and December selling calendars, and dreaming of the discount they will receive from such sales . They profess to do it all as unto the Lord; but in their hearts they know that it is the money they are after. How tragic to see God’s servants so commercial-minded! Some preachers like to visit

only places where there are well-to-do people, where they themselves can have better prospects of income. When worldly people scheme and plan to earn money by every possible means, it does not cause much surprise. But when the servants of the Lord do this, it is truly pathetic.

Covetousness leads to chaos

In 2 Chronicles 17:14-19 we read of the captains and soldiers who served king Jehoshaphat. They were not only mighty men of valor, but they were men who loved the Lord, and wanted to serve Him. The Scriptures say that some of these men were so God-fearing that they willingly offered themselves to serve the Lord. They were not greedy or covetous men. They were not like the Government servants of today who are never satisfied with their income, and go to strike every year. These were men who had willingly offered themselves to serve the Lord, and Jehoshaphat could have had no excuse for wanting more money to pay his men. Yet, we read that he engaged himself in much business in the cities of Judah. Love for money had crept into Jehoshaphat's heart!

Love of money is the cause for the downfall of many servants of God. They might argue that it is really their wives and children who are to be blamed, and not themselves. All the same, the responsibility lies squarely on their shoulders.

When we read 2 Chronicles ch. 18, we might presume that it is here that the story of Jehoshaphat's downfall began. However, if we look carefully, we find that the story really begins in chapter 17:13: "He had much business in the cities of Judah". At the first reading, we might overlook this weakness in Jehoshaphat as a small thing; but we must remember, that this small weakness later led to a great downfall. It is true that Jehoshaphat secured much business, became more and more prosperous and amassed great wealth. But the devil made use of his excessive love for money to weaken him. In the same way Satan will first gain a little entrance into your life, and eventually overthrow you completely.

We read in 2 Chronicles 18 :1 that Jehoshaphat joined affinity with Ahab. Ahab was one of the worst kings who ever reigned in Israel (1 Kings 16:30-33). It was with such a king that Jehoshaphat entered into an alliance. When we ourselves become prosperous, wealthy and well known, we are tempted to seek the friendship of other people who are also well off in the world. We like to be on friendly terms with every one who is rich or in a high position. Many people love to go tea -parties, and dinner -parties, not only because of the nice things they can eat, but also because of the prospect of meeting important people there. It gives them a peculiar satisfaction to say their friends, "I know Mr. So and so (meaning a well known personality); come to me; I will speak to him and get your business problem or your official matter straightened out immediately".

This fondness for running after the big people of the world is sometime found even among servants of God. They have no time for prayer and Bible study, because they are always busy with their children and other people's children, getting them admitted into colleges or getting them married. All the time they think they are serving the Lord. Gradually, their burden for prayer becomes less and less. They begin to adopt more and more worldly ways and methods, and compromise with their worldly friends. They pay less and less attention to God have brought in worldly methods even into His service.

We read in 2 Kings 8:18 that Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram had married Ahab's daughter. This could not have happened all at once. Ahab was a very subtle man and knew that if he suddenly proposed this match, Jehoshaphat would immediately turn down the proposal. Was not Jehoshaphat a God-fearing man? Had he not sent Levites and princes into all his kingdom to preach and teach God's Word to the people? And was not Ahab's family well known for their Baal worship and for the heathen priests who are at the Queen's table? Ahab doubtless knew that it would not be easy to gain entrance into such a godly family as Jehoshaphat's. So in a clever way, he first made friendly alliance with Jehoshaphat as one king with another. After establishing his friendship, he slowly brought in the marriage proposal.

We do not know exactly what method Ahab adopted. Worldly Christians know many methods of deceiving even sincere believers. Like Ahab, first of all they make friends with these believers, and then, at a suitable time they bring out their marriage proposals. Perhaps Ahab might have even suggested to Jehoshaphat that because he was a God-fearing man, he would be able to convert the girl after she became his daughter-in-law. Somehow Jehoshaphat was persuaded to agree; and his son married Ahab's daughter. When a tragic downfall followed this marriage! After all the love and zeal Jehoshaphat had shown for God and His Word, now this marriage brought about his downfall.

To Still Lower Depths

After this marriage, Ahab invited Jehoshaphat to Samaria for a banquet. (see 2 Chronicles 18:2). Ahab might have said, "Now Jehoshaphat, we are not strangers any more. We are not more friends even; we are relatives. So you must come without fail and visit us" For the sake of courtesy, Jehoshaphat had to go. No doubt, this would have been repeated several times; and Jehoshaphat also would have invited Ahab in return for his hospitality.

Thus Ahab came to know what kind of food Jehoshaphat liked best. On one occasion, he brought first-class cooks, and arranged a grand in honor of Jehoshaphat, killing many oxen and goats and preparing all the dishes that Jehoshaphat liked (2 Chron. 18:1,2). After the feast, Ahab persuaded Jehoshaphat to go with him to battle against Ramoth-gilead. Having been charmed by the hospitality, the dainty dishes, and the silver tongue of Ahab, Jehoshaphat replied, "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war" (2 Chron. 18:3).

Notice how cunningly the enemy worked. Ahab did not say abruptly; "Come to my place in Samaria", or "Come with me to battle in Ramoth-gilead. He planned it all very cunningly in order to bring strong yet subtle pressure upon Jehoshaphat. First Ahab made friends with Jehoshaphat; he waited till the friendship became strong, then he got his daughter married to Jehoshaphat's son. Next, he arranged a big feast for Jehoshaphat, and persuaded him to go with him to battle at Ramoth - Gilead. By this time Jehoshaphat was so tightly caught in Ahab's net that he did not even pay attention to the warning given by the prophet Micaiah (2 Chronicles 18:18-22).

At first Jehoshaphat said to Ahab, "Enquiry, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord today ". It had been his custom, always to enquiry at the prophets of God before undertaking anything of real importance. Ahab was prepared for this matter also. He knew that Jehoshaphat honored the prophets of God; and so had kept four hundred false prophets ready for consultation . Thus when Jehoshaphat asked for one prophet, Ahab produced four hundred. Ahab wanted to create the impression that he too was a God -fearing man. But alas! Without an exception all the four hundred prophets were spiritually blind. They all said to Ahab." Go to the battle, and you will surely win ", "go up , the Lord is with thee ". They are not concerned about the safety of the thought in their hearts, if these kings die in the battle, let them die; what is that to us?

There are many preachers who are like these false prophets. They do not care to give God's message faithfully. They find out what kind of message. Their only desire is to enjoy great popularity, good food and much money. So they cater to the carnal appetites of the people.

God's Warning

However Jehoshaphat was a man of prayer, and he sensed there was something wrong with these four hundred prophets. In the same way, those who are spiritual can sense whether or not a preacher is a man of God .As Jehoshaphat heard them prophesy , he said to himself , "I do not think they are true prophets". So he asked "is there no other prophet here besides these?"(vs.6,7). Ahab replied "yes there is one more prophet. But I do not like him. I hate him. He always says things that I do not like ". Just to please Jehoshaphat however, Ahab commanded one of his officers this UN-conforming prophet-Micaiah. Ahab knew what Micaiah would say this time also. So he told the messenger, "you go to Micaiah, whisper in his ear and tell him what the four hundred prophets have said, and ask him to say the same thing' (2 Chro 18:12). Even today, in many places , someone will call the preacher aside before he goes to preach, and tell him what to preach and what not to preach. And woe unto him if does not heed to the advice! Sooner or later you,, who are servants of God , will face similar situations. Unless you watch your steps carefully, you also are likely to fall. That is why this word of warning is being brought to you so solemnly.

Micaiah was a faithful servant of God, and he gave God's message very truthfully (vs. 16-22). To make his message perfectly plain, Micaiah declared that the Lord had put a lying spirit in the mouths of the four hundred false prophets. He fulfilled his ministry very faithfully and boldly. But Ahab became so angry with him that straightway he ordered him to be put into prison (vs.26).

Jehoshaphat knew that Micaiah was a true prophet. He was a good king and outstandingly zealous one. But sad to say, he had fallen low under the influence of Ahab. Through the marriage alliance and through feasts and friendships, the devil had made him weak. Whenever we do anything wrong, even if we do it sincerely or unknowingly, we become weak spiritually.

In Deut 7:3 and Joshua 23:12, God has given solemn warnings against marriages with the heathen. Ahab had married a heathen woman, Jezebel, who was noted for her idolatrous practices. Now his family was no better than a heathen family. In spite of this Jehoshaphat had taken Ahab's daughter, Athaliah, to be his

son Jehoram's wife. Thus Jehoshaphat has fallen into Ahab's trap. Now like a slave he accompanied Ahab to the battle in spite of the prophet Micaiah's repeated and emphatic warnings.

On the battlefield, Ahab suggested to Jehoshaphat that he wear royal robes, while Ahab himself went in disguise (2 Chro 18:29) . Ahab might have thought that by this robe he would be able to save himself, and direct attention towards Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat, on the other hand, had become so foolish that he had even lost his common sense. Apparently his brain was not functioning. Being such a wise king he should have thought , "Why does Ahab want me to put on my royal robes when he himself is going under a disguise?", Whenever we disobey God , our brains will not function properly and we will behave like fools, rushing even to our own destruction.

Ahab's enemy had instructed his men to attack only the king of Israel and not any of the soldiers. So the men were specially looking for the king, to kill him. When they saw Jehoshaphat in his royal robes, they left everyone else in the armies of Israel , and surrounded they see my robes they will recognize that I am the king of Judah; and they will not come near me". But in the battlefield, Ahab had put Jehoshaphat in the front, the enemy was deceived into thinking that he was the king of Israel. Thus Jehoshaphat was brought into such a situation that any moment that he might have been killed. We see here how the downward path that Jehoshaphat had taken, led him to its natural culmination-DEATH. Any moment he might have been killed.

God In Mercy Wants To Forgive

In the hour of crisis on the battlefield, Jehoshaphat repented, and the Lord saved him (vs.31). How merciful our lord is! After all, Jehoshaphat was a man of God, even though he had fallen under the influence of Ahab and Jezebel, which had brought so much loss and blindness into his life. So now when Jehoshaphat cried unto the Lord, the Lord saved Him. But Ahab, the king of Israel, was killed (vs.32). His disguise was no protection for him.

Like Jehoshaphat many Christians, even servants of God, enter into contracts with worldly friends and worldly associations, and there by bring much damage and loss in their lives. They too may come the state when they despair of life -whether spiritually, or even literally. They wait till the last minute to repent, and then some of them that it is too late.

When Jehoshaphat returned to Judah in peace (2 Chro 19:1-8) , he tried to recover the loss, which had come upon him through his friendship with Ahab. The Lord was gracious to him, and again began to help him, and to deliver him from his enemies (2 Chro 20:2,3,22,25). The Ammonites and the Moabites and the Edomites came against him as an united force. Jehoshaphat was afraid: so he proclaimed a fast and set himself to seek the Lord. God heard his prayer, and brought confusion in the ranks of the enemy, so that they utterly destroyed one another, and the whole army lay dead on the battlefield. Jehoshaphat and his people had only to go and gather the spoil, which was so much that it took them three days to remove the same.

Jehoshaphat's End

One would think, that after all that he had suffered, Jehoshaphat would remain faithful for the rest of his life. But sad to say, after his great victory about which mention was made in the last paragraph, Jehoshaphat again began to rely upon his own wisdom. He again entered into an alliance -this time with Ahab's son Ahaziah. Is it not sad that Jehoshaphat should make such a mistake after all the bitter experiences of the past? there are many like him even today. They fall into the same sin, again and again, and each time they will say that they will never do it again. To them life is one great cycle of falling and rising, and confessing, and falling again. Jehoshaphat entered into a league with Ahab's son! After the bitter experience of the, past how could this have happened?

We read in 2 Chro 17:6, " Moreover he took away the high places and grooves out of Judah". But in Chapter 20:33, we find that the high places had come back. It is most probable that Jehoshaphat's worldly associations had much to do with the recurrence, of Idolatry. The people would have been emboldened by the flirtations of their king with the idolatrous Ahab, and by the fact of the king being away in Samaria, and had rebuilt the high places.

All over Asia, we can see temples and mosques in high places, Roman Catholics also love to build monasteries, convents and shrines on high places. Crowds of people go to these high places on pilgrimages, and make vows, which they believe will help them in their difficulties. For example, those who are childless believe that by going to these places and making vows, their wishes will be granted.

Although, at the beginning of his reign, King Jehoshaphat had removed all such high places, now he had become so weak spiritually that he allowed them to remain. This brought more darkness into his life, and he consolidated his friendship with Ahab's son Ahaziah who compelled Jehoshaphat to become a partner with him in sending ships to gather gold from far-off places.

Thus we see King Jehoshaphat, who began his reign well in the fear of the Lord, making a complete failure of his life towards the end, and even undoing the good work, which he had begun. The cause of all this was the love of money which had crept into his life, and which slowly permeated, weakening him and bringing about his downfall.

LET US BE WARNED