

FORTY WASTED YEARS

"Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years, and departed without being desired. Howbeit they buried him in the city of Dauid, but not in the sepulchres of the kings" (II Chronicles 21:20).

Two old-timers met after months of separation, and one said to the other, "Have you heard of Sam's death?" Astonished, the other replied, "No, what was the complaint?" He answered, "No complaint; everybody was completely satisfied." Regardless of your reaction to this conversation, it is not irrelevant. It is exactly what happened with Jehoram who died at the age of forty, with no one to regret his death. He "departed without being desired."

As we read this statement from God's Word, we are reminded, by way of contrast, of people whom so many of us have missed, and whom we felt that we could not live without, so keenly did we feel their loss. When some people die, many mourn, but not to be missed by anybody when you are gone is certainly a great tragedy. It spells failure with capital letters. It is a terrible calamity for one to live in the presence of countless opportunities to serve God and to help people, as well as to live in such a manner as to win the respect and love of others, and then prove to be such a person that nobody misses you when you are gone.

From this ancient story God is trying to get us to see and to understand the weakness, the wickedness and the waywardness of man, and in contrast thereto God's way of righteousness and righteous living. From the story we learn that Jehoram knew about God. His father, Jehoshaphat, believed in God and worshiped Him. The Bible tells us that, when Jehoshaphat died, he was known as one who did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. Jehoram also knew the ups and downs of God's people. He knew about the blessings which came to them when they were obedient to God, and the judgments which came upon them when they were disobedient. He was aware of the penalty of sin, and also of the blessings which would come upon the people who walked in God's way. Jehoram had observed many around him who had walked in the pathway of sin. His own brothers were not free of wrongdoing. Jehoram was well acquainted with the judgments of God. Having married the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, he knew the end of these two exceedingly wicked people. Ahab died in battle and the dogs licked up his blood. Wicked Jezebel stood at the window, with her face painted, and looked down upon Jehu. He commanded some men to cast her down from that upstairs window. They threw her into the street and the horses trod her under their feet. When they went to bury her, all that they found of her was her skull, her feet and the palms of her hands (II Kings 9:35).

I. A Life.

Jehoram had the advantage of having a good father, Jehoshaphat, but his mother was a bad woman. The father may fail, but let the mother fail, and God pity the child. Nero's mother was a murderess, so it is no wonder that he fiddled while Rome burned. Jehoram's mother was a murderess too, so it is no wonder that he built his kingdom in blood. The mother of Coleridge taught him Bible stories from the old Dutch tile of the fireplace, so it is no wonder that he was a Christian as well as a poet. Patrick Henry's mother was eloquent, and that is why most school children know that memorable sentence, "Give me liberty or give me death."

Jehoram was the oldest of eight brothers, and the throne of his father was his by right of primogeniture. When his father died, and Jehoram ascended the throne, he inaugurated his godless regime by murdering his seven brothers and every prince whom

he thought might possibly stand in his way.

1. A wasted life.

How precious is this thing we call life! Yet, Jehoram wasted his life. Surely someone told him that his life was precious and that he should endeavor to make the most of it by spending it in the right manner, but he wasted it instead. Repeatedly we need to be reminded that we have,

"Just one life, 'twill soon be past;
Only what's done for Christ will last."

2. A wicked life.

In his lust for power, Jehoram had his brothers and others, who might have gotten in his way, slain with the sword. When a man begins to lust for power, it takes away from him all love for others. History abounds with the stories of those who have craved power and, in order to gain it, have taken the lives of others.

Paul said, "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself" (Romans 14:7). Regardless of the kind of life, it has its consequences in the lives of others. You may say, "I have my own life to live." In a sense this is true, but it is not true so far as duty, relationship and opportunity are concerned. Our lives are not our own. After all, life is short, so we must use every portion of it and not waste it in wickedness.

3. A weak life.

For eight years Jehoram was the king of Judah. He forced his subjects to notice him, honor him, and obey him, but search the Old Testament as diligently as you wish and you will find that after his diseased body was placed in a dishonored grave that his name fled from human lips and from divine literature.

A woman wrote to Mrs. Ann Landers and said, "A year ago our two-year old son, Earl, had difficulty breathing, so we took him to a doctor. We learned that Earl is allergic to cigarette smoke. My husband said we both had to quit smoking right then and there. He hasn't touched a cigarette since. I went back to smoking that same night."

"I don't know when little Earl is in the room, and it is awfully hard on me. My husband doesn't know I smoke, so I make excuses to go to the basement or out in the garage whenever I want a cigarette. Sneaking around is making me nervous."

"Do you think it would be wrong if we let a nice couple adopt little Earl--a couple who doesn't smoke? Then I could smoke in the open, and my husband could take it up again too?"

"The only problem is that my husband is crazy about the boy. I love him too, but I am more the practical type. What do you think, Ann?"

Ann Landers made this reply: "Dear Mrs. _____, I think a lot of people who read this letter are going to say I made it up. It's utterly fantastic that a woman would put cigarettes ahead of her own child."

"Don't present your wild idea to your husband. I wouldn't blame him if he decided to keep little Earl and unload you." (Chattanooga News-Free Press, Friday, October 29, 1965.)

4. A warned life.

Elijah gave his prophecy and told Jehoram what was going to take place. The Word of God was fulfilled.

Life is precious. It must not be wasted. It must not be spent in wickedness. It must not be given to weakness. We must continue to fight the battles of life and try to the very best of our ability to live for the Lord. Don't be afraid of the battles of life, because God has promised to be with His children. God blesses those who are faithful to Him, and His blessings will prove to be sufficient.

II. A Letter.

"And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the Lord 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 go a-whoring, like the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, which were better than thyself: Behold, with a great plague will the Lord smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods: And thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day." (II Chronicles 21:12-15)

Elijah was a fearless prophet. He was one of those few men of whom the "world was not worthy" (Hebrews 11:38). We can rejoice that such a man lived and wrought.

1. Elijah was disturbed by sin.

Elijah was disturbed by the sins of Ahab. Fearlessly he stood before Ahab and told him that the dogs would lick up his blood. God give us more courageous men--men like John the Baptist, who was not afraid to stand before Herod and Herodias, and denounce their sinfulness. God give us more men like Paul. When Paul stood before the Sanhedrin and the high priest commanded them to smite Paul on the mouth, the Apostle replied: "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall, and sittest thou to judge me according to the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?" (Acts 23:3). The sins of Ahab and Jehoram disturbed Elijah.

2. Elijah was incensed by compromise.

Standing before the people, Elijah inquired: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word" (I Kings 18:21). The Bible is opposed to compromising. Many attempt to please everybody. God's Word says, "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:16). Many compromise in the realm of beliefs, and others compromise in matters of right and wrong.

3. Elijah foretold the death of the king.

The preaching of judgment is never easy. It is so easy for the general public to laugh at the preaching of judgment. But Elijah did not care for that. He sent a letter to the king and told him what was going to happen. He told him that he had turned his people away from God; and because of this a great plague would strike his own family, and then he, the king, would have a great sickness.

III. A Loss.

"Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:15). Elijah's prophecy was fulfilled with reference to Jehoram.

1. Jehoram lost his family.

Jehoram's enemies came up against him and took away the substance found in his house, and also took his sons, and his wives. There was but one son left, Jehoahaz, the youngest. Sin brings suffering. And suffering is never for a single person. Many others suffer when you sin.

2. Jehoram lost his health.

After he had sinned so grievously, God smote Jehoram with an incurable disease.

3. Jehoram lost his life.

God's Word tells us that Jehoram "died of sore diseases."

4. Jehoram lost honor in death.

The Bible tells us that "his people made no burning for him, like burning of his fathers." This means that there was not any burning of aromatic woods for him as they had done for his forefathers. Jehoram lived for forty years and he died. He reigned as king for eight years just prior to his death. During those years of misrule he compelled the people to follow until God smote him with that dreadful disease that brought his miserable life to an end. When he died, there was not anybody who regretted his passing. His greatest contribution to society was his death. He was hated while he lived and neglected when he died. He did not have an honorable funeral service. Even though he died in the bloom of manhood--at forty years of age--no one regretted his death. They refused to place his body in the sepulchres where the other kings were buried.

He who hopes to be missed must labor to be useful.

"Oh, what a world of beauty a loving heart might plan,
If man but did his duty, and helped his fellow man."

The students and friends of Elijah begged permission from Elisha to seek and search for the body of Elijah with fifty strong men, for fear that he might have been lost in some lonely valley or some majestic mountain. For three whole days they continued

their search. Elijah had departed, but not without being desired. He had given his services, he had given himself, and when God translated him his friends took him to their hearts. Elijah was loved because he had loved and was lovable.

The story of Jehoram contains some wonderful and important lessons for all of us. It shouts to all young people, "Watch your friendships! Watch the alliances of your life! Walk with those who know, love and serve the Saviour!" Jehoram did not do these things. He married an evil woman who was the daughter of wicked parents, which was one of the greatest mistakes in all his forty years. His wife, Athaliah, was exalted in station, beautiful in person, and gifted with high mental endowments, but she was depraved. This should warn all parents against sacrificing their children's spiritual welfare to worldly interests, and especially in the fundamental associations of life. Because a man's marriage and home environment help to make or to mar him, it was not at all surprising that Jehoram's life turned out as it did, with Athaliah for a wife, Ahab for a father-in-law, and Jezebel for a Mother-in-law.

Modern society has many problems, but none more serious than that of marriage. The foundation stone of civilization is the home. The home is no stronger than the marriage relationship. So far as my observation goes, I have never known a broken home where both parties were faithful Christians, members of the same church, regular in their church attendance, and active in the service of the Lord.

It was in the realm of religion that Jehoram made the greatest of all his mistakes. He forsook the God of his fathers, and plunged into the idolatry of the family of his wife. He became a devotee of Baal. He established altars for heathen worship, but did not do it through ignorance. He knew what was right, but he refused to do it.

Another lesson which this story teaches us is the importance of avoiding sin. Not only avoid sin, but hate it. Hate every sin that weakens your thinking. Hate every sin that impoverishes your life. Hate every sin that takes away your consciousness of the presence of God. Jehoram wasted forty years. He gave forty years to Satan. He died just when life should have been taking on its greatest possibilities. He died at a time when men should have been respecting him and following him. But sin brought about the destruction of his army, the plundering of his palace, the extinguishing of his kingdom, and the deportation of his family. Sin caused him to be smitten of God with a loathsome disease at the age of forty, caused him to be a nuisance to himself and everybody else, to be unloved in life, and to die without being desired. People were glad when he died.

Do you want to be missed when you are gone? If you don't, you have a queer idea of life, and a most unworthy one. To each interested soul the great Master of life comes whispering the secret of abiding remembrance and everlasting love. He says that he who would be remembered by others must be forgetful of himself. He said, "Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."

If you have not already done so, I sincerely hope that here and now you will receive the crucified, buried and risen Christ as your personal Saviour, that you will acknowledge Him as your Lord, that henceforth you will serve Him faithfully, and that when you depart this life you will be missed by those who have known you.