

RUINS

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A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel.”
2 Chronicles 28:23.

I HAVE a little to say about the condition of Judah under Ahaz before I come to personal dealing with souls from this text. God had given to His people a very simple mode of worship. He was the invisible and only living God and they were to worship Him in spirit and in truth. There was to be one altar and that was to be at Jerusalem. But all the rest of the world was given up to idolatry and the Israelites were not a very spiritual people, so, by-and-by, they wanted something to see, some image, some symbol. When the 10 tribes broke off from Judah, they set up images of a bull to represent the strength of Deity. Those who kept to the worship of the invisible Jehovah without emblems, ridiculed these symbols, and called the bulls, in contempt, calves. But the calf-worship became very strong throughout Israel and there were many in Judah who were attracted to it. It was the worship of God, but it was the worship of God in a wrong way, for there was a very express Commandment which forbade it—“You shall not make unto you any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in Heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: you shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me.”

There are still many who worship idols and images, but they say, “No, we do not worship them; we worship God through them.” Just so, but that is as much forbidden in the Second Commandment as the worship of other gods is forbidden in the First—they are both violations of the Divine Law! When the people of Judah had gone so far as to worship God through images, they went still farther and bowed down to Baal and Ashtaroth. They even bowed down to the sun and even *flies*, for Baal-Zebub, the “God of Flies,” became one of their objects of adoration! Associated with this idolatry was everything that was sinful. I do not dare tell you what horrible and loathsome abominations were witnessed in connection with the worship of these gods.

Do not, however, condemn those Jews and Israelites without remembering another story. In this world, in later times, the Son of God set up a pure and undefiled religion in which there was no similitude of God whatever. But, after a while, they who professed to worship Christ felt they needed to have a cross and crucifix, pictures and images. Of course they did not worship the cross, or the crucifix, or the pictures, or the images! No, but they professed to worship Christ by *the help of these things*. That was the first violation of the simplicity of worship and it was, in reality, departing from the living God. In a very short time they took to the worship of saints—and from that they went to the worship of cast clouts and rotten rags until some of us have seen, with our own eyes, bones—supposed to be the bones of saints—decayed teeth and all kinds of rubbish made the subjects of worship when they have been exposed to the gaze of the deluded people! Into such idolatry, by slow degrees, did those fall who professed to call themselves Christians—and only three or four hundred years ago, from one end of this island to the other, the land was full of “holy crucifixes,” images, relics and I know not what! The people were utterly given up to idolatry and the Gospel of God was scarcely known!

Then rang out, clear and shrill, the voices of Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin and the like and, after a while, men arose who said, “We will worship none but God—and all these images we utterly abhor.” There was, for them, nothing but the prison, the stake and all manner of cruel deaths—but they were steadfast even unto the end! You know how brave Hugh

Latimer, as he began to burn at the stake in his old age, cheered up his companion by saying, “Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man! We shall, this day, light such a candle by God’s Grace in England as I trust shall never be put out.” And so they did. There came out to die for Christ, poor, humble, illiterate men and women—and some of noble rank! And even bishops could sometimes take their share of the persecution and die until, at last, men began to hate the idols by reason of the cruelty which was used in keeping them up! Then came a revolt against Romanism and all over England men smashed the “holy water” basins, defaced the pictures, pulled down the images and treated them with utter contempt! And England was freed from the idolatry under which she had groaned so long. We thought she would always remain free, but, alas, we only dreamed it. By-and-by there came men in the Established Church who did not bid us worship saints, nor did they, at first, go very far in idolatry, but they said that they must have vestments, incense and I know not what. And now they have boldly set up the crucifix—that calf of Baal, for it is nothing better—that image which they adore and which we loathe because it has become the thin end of the wedge—the first open return to idolatry!

Where is true Protestant feeling in England? It seems to me to be almost extinct! All that many care for is an ornate service—something beautiful for the eyes to rest upon, flowers more abundant than in a conservatory, music sweet to the ear, the scent of incense and thus, by-and-by—unless God prevents it—we shall get back to the old Roman idolatry and that would be the ruin of this land as it has been the ruin of every land where it has had the sway! Time was when God covered England with His wing, when Spain’s Armada was swept away by the tempest, like chaff before the wind, and God was with our country and gave her power and made her to be the empress of the seas. But if she forsakes her God, she will fall from her heights! If this land becomes full of images and idols again—and there are none found to protest against it—the God that lifted us up will throw us down! He that has used us for His Glory will reckon us to be unfit for His service and cast us away with other nations that He has forsaken because of their defilement through idolatry! I will not say more upon this matter, now, but I will pray about it, and I ask every man who feels as I do to continue to pray, lest it should be said of us, concerning these idols, “They were the ruin of him, and of all Israel,” for so it must be if we forsake the living God and turn aside unto gods that are not gods!

Now I come to a more practical matter as far as each individual is concerned and, first, I shall want you to notice *the man ruining himself*. Secondly, *the man in ruins*. And, thirdly, *other people ruined with him*.

I. First, look at THE MAN RUINING HIMSELF.

Sin will ruin any man. If it is not forsaken, it will eternally ruin him. Ahaz is the type of those who ruin themselves. I daresay many will at once exclaim, “This description does not belong to us!” Perhaps you suppose it never could belong to you. Listen, I have seen those who swore to live a holy life turn aside to the grossest immorality. Often they have been men who thought they were past temptation and believed it was utterly impossible that they should turn aside. Let us speak of Ahaz and, as we do so, let each man take to heart anything that belongs to himself—and that which does not belong to him, let him pray God to bless to the one to whom it is suitable.

Here, then, was one who, as a king, *began life by determining to be his own master*. He had been told to worship the invisible God with the simple rites of the Law, but he resolved that he would worship what he pleased, where he pleased and how he pleased. He was not to be dictated to! He would select his own gods and worship as many as he pleased. So he did, “but they were the ruin of him.” A man may begin life with this resolution—“I am not going to be bound by anybody. I shall do as I like, I shall have my own way. I shall be independent, I am not going to be obedient to God, nor to hearken to what His Book prescribes. I shall have what indulgences I choose.” If he does so, those indulgences will be “the ruin of him.” That character which has not for its cornerstone, obedience to God, is a character that will tumble down in ruins one day or another! O young man, begin life with this resolve, “I will serve God. I will seek to know His mind and His will, and I will say to all others, ‘Whether it is right to obey God rather than man, you judge.’”

This man, Ahaz, was also *very high-handed in his sin*. He even set up rival altars in the Temple itself! Dreadful as it seems, yet he imported an altar from Damascus and erected it in the place where had stood the altar of God! He went beyond his predecessors in his determination that idolatry should cover all the land—and he persecuted and oppressed the faithful servants of Jehovah. A man may be very high-handed against God and sneeringly ask, with Pharaoh, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice?” But if he does so, it will be “the ruin of him.” Pharaoh did not find the answer. He might continue to provoke Jehovah, but, in the end, when God had killed the first-born of Egypt, the chief of all her strength, he learned that it is perilous for a man to be high-handed with God!

Further, Ahaz also *lavished great treasure upon his sin*. All the wealth he had, he was willing to spend in order that he might have his own way and worship his own gods. Yet, “they were the ruin of him.” Perhaps he was ruined all the faster for that very reason. When a man has plenty of money and he lets it run away freely, simply that he may sin against his God and indulge his evil passions, he may seem to flourish for a while, but let no man envy him, for those passions will be “the ruin of him.” Though the land is full of silver and gold, though there is no end of the horses and chariots, yet, as the Lord lives, if a man shall use these in fighting against God, they will be “the ruin of him.” That is how it will end, sooner or later—and probably sooner!

Ahaz also *defied the chastisement of God*. The Lord punished him by permitting his enemies to invade his country. His people were carried away captive, yet he would not humble himself on account of that. The more he was distressed, the more he sinned. “This is that king Ahaz,” and we have seen men whom God has terribly smitten, but they have not yielded to Him. They have even risen from a sick bed more wicked than when they were stretched upon it—breaking their promises, casting their vows to the wind and going back, “like the dog to his own vomit, or the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.” They have said that they cared nothing for pain, sickness, illness—they would not turn unto the Lord—and thus their sins were the ruin of them. The blows of God came home to them, at last, and sin slew them, after all!

Yet further, Ahaz *was exceedingly clever*. He said, “I will make a friend of Tilgath-Pilneser, the king of Assyria, and he will protect me. I will put myself in vassalage under him and then the little kings of Syria and Israel will be afraid to touch me, and I shall be left in quiet.” Ah, men are sometimes very clever in their sin. At least they think they are! They will not yield to God. They will not become Christians—they are not such fools! They are so sharp, they will do well enough! They have a friend, somewhere. They have a card they have not yet played and a scheme which, when it is revealed, will astonish you! They will do well enough without God—let those who want Him pray to Him. Yet their sins will be the ruin of them, for the clever men shall be taken in their own craftiness and shall be destroyed by the very instruments with which they sought to promote their prosperity—even as this man was, for, when the king of Assyria came, he plundered the palace of Ahaz and took away his wealth—and did not help him in the least.

Ahaz was also *a man of great taste*. That was one reason why he was an idolater—the worship of God, in a simple manner, did not please him, or gratify his refined taste. He was a cultured and aesthetic individual, so, when he went down to Damascus and saw an idolatrous altar, he said, “That is my idea of an altar! I will have one like it.” So the pattern of it was sent off to Jerusalem and Uriah, the priest, made himself very busy in carrying out the king’s wishes so that, by the time Ahaz came back, there was his new altar all ready. I can imagine that he said, as he looked at it, “That is the style of altar for me! I want none of your old-fashioned Davidic altars.” Yet those fine ideas of his were “the ruin of him.” And I am afraid there are a great many persons who will be ruined by their taste—by allowing it to override conscience and suffering, themselves, to be guided by their whims and fancies—and not by the teaching of the Word of God. To me that seems beautiful which God ordains—and that is abominable which God abhors! May it be so with each one of us, but if we allow our own taste to lead us into sin, then we shall find that it will be the ruin of us and of all who do like unto us.

This man—I have not yet completed my portrait of him—had *some to back him who ought to have opposed him*. When his predecessor, Uzziah, went into the Temple to offer incense, the priests withstood him and thrust him out for he had no right there—and leprosy came upon his brow and he hasted to go out. But when Ahaz wanted this new altar, Uriah the priest was quite ready to adapt himself to his lord’s ideas. He would, of course, prefer the old-fashioned low church but, still, he was a very broad-minded man and he was willing to have a high church altar set up if his majesty wished it. And when his majesty said so and when he came and offered sacrifices upon it, Uriah did not say a word against it. How could he? It was a State church and, therefore, the king did as he liked! That style of action is often seen in religious and social life. A man does wrong and the Christian minister who ought to speak plainly to him about it, does not dare to do so! Perhaps the minister, who ought to be faithful for his Master’s sake, thinks that, for the sake of peace, he had better not interfere and so he does not. Then the guilty man says, “It does not matter what I do, I have a priest at the back of me, I shall be all right.” Yet his sins are “the ruin of him” for all that. “Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished.”

This man, Ahaz, had another thought within his mind, namely, that he *would imitate prosperous sinners*. “Look,” he said, “at the king of Syria. Look how he prospers! I will worship his gods and then I shall prosper, too.” “But they were the ruin of him.” That is where the emphasis of the text comes in. I have known a man say in deeds, if not in words, “I know what I will do. I have no trust in God nor in His Providence, but there is So-and-So who has a very clever way of making money, I shall do as he does.” Oh, the many who have found that this mode of action has been the ruin of them—when they have broken loose from the bonds of integrity and righteousness—and have begun to play fast and loose with honesty and truth! Take heed, dear Friends, not to imitate the prosperous sinner, for if you do, you may be sure that following his plans will be the ruin of you! Envy not the man who gets rich by that which is not straightforward, for he must come to an evil end.

It was so with Ahaz, for *he abandoned the worship of God altogether*. He broke up the holy vessels of God’s House, put out all the lamps which had burned perpetually and shut up the doors of the House of the Lord. This is the case, nowadays, with men who say that they have done with religion. Nobody in their house goes to a place of worship. They have no Bibles to bother them, they care nothing about the Sabbath. As for themselves, they never darken the doors of any House of Prayer—you never see them there, any more, and they say, “We have got rid of this, and of that, which used to be our custom.” But such conduct is the ruin of them! A man may harden himself until he becomes like the nether millstone, his conscience may seem to be suffocated and the last spark of goodness to be extinct within him—but he cannot, for all that, evade the impending doom—for his sins will be “the ruin of him.” It is hard work to have to speak thus, but there are some who must have this stern Truth of God spoken to them, lest they should die in their sins.

II. Secondly, and very briefly, I want you to look AT THE MAN IN RUINS.

You say, perhaps, that you will never be in that state. You are not converted, but you are honest, upright and truthful. Well, we shall see, or, at all events, *God* will see! I have beheld a man in ruins who once seemed a Christian. He came in and out among his brethren and they esteemed him. But he was living secretly in a defiled life. He was unchaste and that worm gnawed and gnawed, until, at last, his household was forsaken, domestic comfort was gone—and at this moment I scarcely know where he is. And no one wishes to know, for he has become so abandoned and so foul that those who once knew him can only sigh as they remember him.

I have known others of this sort. They were apparently doing well. They were admirable and excellent. They were the delight of every company in which they entered, but they took the intoxicating cup, a little, and then a little more, and then secret drinking became visible by certain tokens upon the face and, by-and-by, business was neglected, other things were not attended to and now the man may be known by his very clothing—if he is not in rags, he is near to it—his character is gone, for he is a confirmed drunk. He must acknowledge it—he cannot truthfully deny it. That is another kind of ruin. I have also seen a young Christian man apparently begin to go into bad company and join with those who were merry fellows. It is true they scoffed at religion a little, but he winked at that, for he enjoyed their society. They flattered him and now he has become just as bad as they are! Instead of being shocked at infidel sentiments, he is the first to vent them—a very ringleader in taking the chair of the scoffer—and sitting there a ruined man!

I have seen men ruined as to their peace. They once seemed bright and happy, but they are not so now—their laughter is but a mimic joy. They have sinned, they have turned aside from God and their peace is marred. In some, their character is ruined. Those who know them cannot trust them, so their prospects are ruined. They went aside, little by little, and, whereas we hoped they would have been useful and honorable men, they are the very reverse—they are like drowning men—they are, themselves, sinking—and they are pulling down others with them! Worst of all, their soul is ruined and, unless infinite mercy shall prevent it, they are ruined for eternity, ruined past all hope save that one grand hope—the door of which stands open even to the dying sinner—faith in Jesus Christ! But as yet they are ruined, utterly ruined, though once they seemed to bid as fair for goodness as any man in the world!

Whenever I see a ruin, I cannot help thinking of what it used to be. Can you? Here once sat knights at their tables, while the minstrel poured forth sweetest song. Now, all is a desolation! So, in that man was once everything that was hopeful—you would have been glad to go to the House of God in company with him. Look at him now—the victim of every passion, a waif and stray upon the great ocean of vice!

When you look at a ruin, you cannot help thinking what it might yet be. It was once a famous Church where the praises of God rang out both morning and evening. It might be so, still, but the roof is gone, the walls are tottering and

the windows let in the cold blasts. So, I see a man who once seemed to praise God, but he is a ruin. His sins have been “the ruin of him.” What do you often find in a ruin? Go there at night and hear the owl hooting to his fellow. Go by day and see all manner of loathsome creatures finding harbor there. So, go to the ruined man, the man who once promised as well as any man among us, but who departed from God and gave way to sin and, little by little, went further and further from the paths of rightness. Think of him with sorrow. He has lost his opportunity—think what he might have been. Ah, and think what he is now through his sins. “They were the ruin of him.”

If I had the time, I would like to indicate many things, perhaps to men here, that will be the ruin of them. But if there is one here who has begun to get away from God, who thinks that he can do without God, I implore him to stop before he goes further, for sin will be “the ruin of him!” There never was a man yet who made a good bargain with sin. There is not one man, now in eternity, whose course in this life is finished, who, when he takes his tablet to reckon up the result of a sinful life, can say that he was the gainer by it. What if it made him a king, if he waded through sin to a throne? What are his gains today? What if he grew rich—where is his wealth now? That solemn question of our Lord he can sorrowfully answer for himself—“What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” Oh, that God the blessed Spirit would send these warnings home to some who are beginning to trifle with sin, lest it should be the ruin of them!

III. I have one more point to dwell upon. Not only was there a man in ruins, but there were *others that were ruined with him*, for the text says, “They were the ruin of him, *and of all Israel.*”

Ahaz ruined all Israel as well as himself! This man did not perish alone in his iniquity! My Friends, if you perish in your sin, you will not perish alone. That is one of the most terrible things about evil. If I have preached to you, during my ministry here, false doctrines and that which is not God’s Word, there are many here who must perish with me. But then my lot would be more horrible than that of any one among you if I have misled you and if I have not been faithful. It will be an awful thing for a man who has occupied a pulpit and yet has not preached the Gospel, to go before the bar of God and have to answer for the souls committed to him! That ancient message still needs to be heard—“If the watchman sees the sword come and blows not the trumpet, and the people are not warned. If the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at the watchman’s hand.” This it is that makes our work so weighty that our knees, sometimes, knock together when we are thinking of going up to our pulpit again! It is no child’s play, Sirs, if there is to be a judgment and we are to answer for our faithfulness or unfaithfulness! What must be our account if we are not true to God and to man?

“Don’t speak so sharply,” says one. “You are very dogmatic, Sir,” says another. I know what is said, but what is that, compared with clearing my conscience so that I may stand up in the light of the Last Great Day an honest man? I have prayed many a time that I might be able, at the end of my ministry, to say what George Fox, the Quaker, said when he was dying, “I am clear, I am clear!” If we have been faithful in our testimony. If we have said what we felt and have not hesitated to speak out for fear of sinful men—and if we have never tried to put velvet on our lips, that we might restrain the Spirit’s course within us—to earn the approval of some few persons of taste—it will be well with us in the Great Day of Account!

“Well,” says someone, “I am not a minister.” No, perhaps you are not. But are you a father? Suppose your boy perishes through your iniquity, what will you say to that? One day I heard a man, who was given to drink, say to his son, “Open your shoulders, boy, and take it in like a man! I want you to drink like your father.” Who but his father made that boy a drunk? There was a father who dropped an oath. Do I mean you, you ask? Yes, if you are here tonight. When your boy took to cursing and swearing, you did not like it—but who taught him to swear? Are there not many men who will be the ruin of their children’s souls? And are there not mothers, in a different rank of life, who train their daughters for gaiety and frivolity, who will have to answer for the ruin of their souls? Do you not think that there are people who would like to be thought respectable, who are planning to bring up their children to be victims to sin? They know they are not putting them where they are likely to come under good influences, but where, according to the order of nature, they will be led away from Christ and from the service of God!

O Sirs, we all have vastly more influence than we reckon upon! The working man in the shop thinks that he is the victim of his companions’ bad example, but, if he had more backbone, he might be the master and leader of them! Now he follows suit and goes in the swim. But if he were to be converted, how many he might influence for good! I thank God

that when men are really turned by His Grace, those who have been the worst usually become the best! Did you not hear me speak, just now, of grand old Hugh Latimer, who burned so bravely for the faith? Yet he was, before his conversion, one of the most thoroughgoing Papists in the world—and was so violent that he would have put to death every heretic that he got hold of! But when the Grace of God arrested him, he became just as earnest for the Gospel of Jesus Christ as he had been earnest against it! If sin will be the ruin of men—and surely it will—yet our Lord Jesus Christ knows how to take ruined sinners and build them up to be temples for His indwelling! Christ will take the very castaways of the devil and use them for Himself. He delights to stoop over the dunghill and pick up a broken vessel that is thrown away and make it into a vessel meet for the Master's use!

Do we not sometimes sing to His praise that He has taken us from the dunghill and made us to sit amongst princes, even the princes of His people? Turn unto God, then, you wanderers! Turn unto Christ! It may be so with you! Look to the bleeding wounds of the great Redeemer! May His Spirit help you to do so at this very hour and, looking, you shall live! And then your sins shall not be the ruin of you, but the Repairer of these ruins shall come to build you up into a temple for His praise! The Lord bless these feeble words, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
2 CHRONICLES 28:1-5, 16-27; ISAIAH 2:6-22.

2 Chronicles 28:1. *Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem.* So that he died before he reached the prime of life—he was cut off by God in the very midst of his sin.

1, 2. *But he did not that which was right in the sight of the LORD, like David his father: for he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel.* They had set up the worship of God under emblems. There were the calves of Bethel, the representation of strength—it was the worship of God by imagery and Ahaz imitated it—and went even further in sin.

2. *And made also molten images for Baalim.* If we worship the true God under some symbol, the next step is to worship a false god.

3. *Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.* The worship of Moloch was one of the most horrible that can be imagined. A bronze image was made terribly hot and then children were thrust into its burning arms to be consumed. And this king went to such a length that he gave his own children to death in that cruel fashion in the place commonly called by the Jews, Topheth, or the Place of Spitting, since it was so loathsome to them to think of this false god.

4. *He sacrificed also and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.* According to the command of God, there was to be but one altar and that one was to be at Jerusalem. But these people multiplied their altars—there could not be a high place but they must have an idol shrine set up upon it.

5. *Therefore the LORD his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria; and they smote him, and carried away a great multitude of them captives, and brought them to Damascus. And he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who smote him with a great slaughter.* He received blow upon blow—God would not let him rest in his sin. Now turn to verse sixteen.

16. *At that time did king Ahaz send unto the kings of Assyria to help him.* The king of Assyria was the greatest potentate in that region—all the little kings were afraid of him and Ahaz, therefore, sent to him for help when they were in trouble. Ahaz made no appeal to God for the assistance he required—he turned to the arm of flesh.

17. *For again the Edomites had come and smitten Judah and carried away captives.* The Edomites had been under subjection to Judah, but now that God had left her, Judah could not hold her position.

18. *The Philistines also.* A people that one might have thought had become extinct, so weak were they that we scarcely hear of them, yet, “the Philistines also” —

18-20. *Had invaded the cities of the low country, and of the south of Judah, and had taken Beth-Shemesh, and Ajalon, and Gederoth, and Shocho with the villages thereof, and Timnah with the villages thereof, Gimzo, also, and the villages thereof: and they dwelt there. For the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz, king of Israel; for he made Judah*

naked and transgressed sorely against the LORD. And Tilgath-Pilneser king of Assyria came unto him and distressed him, but strengthened him not. How vain it is to seek relief apart from God!

21, 22. *For Ahaz took away a portion out of the House of the LORD, and out of the house of the king, and of the princes, and gave it unto the king of Assyria: but he helped him not. And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the LORD: this is that king Ahaz.* A black mark is put against his name, to show how greatly guilty he was. Those who rebel against Divine checks and will not be held in by the Providence of God are to be written down in capital letters as great sinners. They sin with emphasis who sin against the chastising rod!

23-25. *For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him: and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel. And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the House of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the House of God, and shut up the doors of the House of the LORD, and he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem. And in every single city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger the LORD God of his fathers.* He set up little shrines so that every passerby might worship which idol he pleased—and each man might present a little incense—thus the whole city was filled with idolatry.

26, 27. *Now the rest of his acts and of all his ways, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, even in Jerusalem; but they brought him not into the sepulchers of the kings of Israel.* There was a holy and reverent feeling among the remnant of God's people that a man who had lived as Ahaz had done should not lie with the good kings of Israel.

27. *And Hezekiah his son reigned in his place.* Now turn to Isaiah, the second chapter, and the sixth verse.

Isaiah 2:6. *Therefore You have forsaken Your people, the house of Jacob, because they are replenished from the east and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they are pleased with the children of strangers.* It was God's command that they should keep themselves separate and worship only Him, but, in the reign of this man Ahaz, they began to practice all the foul arts of the nations round about them. They had "soothsayers like the Philistines"—men who pretended to divine future events from the flights of birds, or from the entrails of victims—and a thousand other things. They went into witchcraft and the unhallowed arts of the heathen.

7-9. *Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots: their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made: and the mean man bows down, and the great man humbles himself: therefore forgive them not.* The poor men worshipped these idols and the rich did the same. All over the country the people were bowing before some symbol or other instead of worshipping the unseen God in spirit and in truth. Therefore the Prophet foretold that something terrible would happen to them.

10-16. *Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of His majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the LORD of Hosts shall be upon everyone that is proud and lofty, and upon everyone that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low: and upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan, and upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up, and upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall, and upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures.* These people were wealthy through the natural riches of their land and through commerce with other nations. They were skilled in the arts, according to the fashion of the times, but now God declares that because they were proud, all their treasures would be destroyed and the things wherein they boasted should be taken away from them.

17, 18. *And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols He shall utterly abolish.* They set them up at every street corner, they even put them before the House of God, itself. On every green hill and in every grove, they worshipped with filthy rites that can scarcely be thought of without a blush! But God declared that He would sweep them all away and so He did when He visited the land in His fierce anger.

19-22. *And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake terribly the earth. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made, each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the*

rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake terribly the earth. Cease you from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for of what account is he? Can you imagine Isaiah delivering this stern, but noble message—gorgeous in language, poetic and sublime to the very last degree? What courage it must have taken for him to stand forth and deliver this before an idolatrous king and a people who went greedily after him! Verily, the Lord has raised up His faithful servants in all times, and He gives them the courage of lions and voices that are very terrible! Yet the hearts of men are seldom moved. “Cease you,” says Isaiah, “cease you from man”—from the king of Assyria—from all powers in which you trust! “Cease you from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for of what account is he?”

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—471, 473, 526.

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