



The house built on a rock

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AS MOSES BROUGHT the people whom God had purchased out of the bondage of Egypt, his song of thanksgiving declared God's purpose in doing so: "Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which Thou hast made for Thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established. The LORD shall reign for ever and ever" (Ex. 15:17,18).

Psalm 74:2 speaks of the "congregation, which Thou hast purchased", and identifies "the mountain of [His] inheritance" as Mount Zion. Later, God said to Moses: "let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them . . . And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from . . . between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony" (Ex. 25:8,22).

But it was not possible for the sanctuary to be erected on Mount Zion until David had cast out the native Jebusites. During the period of the Judges the sanctuary rested at Shiloh, and while "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25) the tabernacle had no doubt become weatherworn and neglected. This could conceivably have prompted David to "find out a place for the LORD, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob" (Ps. 132:5). This psalm was David's prayer as he brought up "the ark of God, Whose name is called by the name of the LORD of hosts That dwelleth between the cherubims . . . and set it in . . . the tabernacle that David had pitched for it" in Mount Zion (2 Sam. 6:2,17). It was when David had conquered the Jebusites that he named Zion "the city of David" (5:9).

That same city has a future described in Psalm 48, and there it is called "the city of the great King", and also, "the city of the LORD of hosts", the Divine Name enshrined in the ark (vv. 2,8). David's prayer in Psalm 132 shows that the city is inseparably linked to the covenant which God made with him: "The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David; He will not turn from it; Of the fruit

of thy body will I set upon thy throne . . . For the LORD hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation. This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell" (vv. 11-14).

The house of David

The book of Ruth begins in the town of Bethlehem, and tells how Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, as did later his two sons. The law, as laid down in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, required that a kinsman of a deceased man should marry his widow "to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance" (Ruth 4:10). Boaz was the man who stepped in to perform this duty, and the story of Ruth concludes: "Boaz begat Obed, and Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David" (vv. 21,22). So the line of David has its roots in that law, known as the levirate law.*

It was to Bethlehem that Samuel was sent to anoint David, "chosen out of the people" (Ps. 89:19). The shepherd boy became king. Having found a resting place for the ark, David later expressed his wish to build for it a more permanent structure. In turn, God promised David that He would make *him* a house: "the LORD telleth thee that He will make thee an house . . . I will set up thy seed after thee . . . He shall build an house for My name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever" (2 Sam. 7:11-13). The house of David was thus a Divine institution, "ordered in all things, and sure", made so by "the Rock of Israel" (23:5,3).

God also gave David this assurance: "there shall not fail thee . . . a man on the throne of Israel". However, this promise was made subject to the behaviour and conduct of his children:

* Readers may not be familiar with this term for the law of Deuteronomy 25:5-10. According to *Collin's English Dictionary* it is derived from the Latin *levir*, meaning 'a husband's brother', and has been in use since the eighteenth century.—*T.B.*

they were to “walk before [God] in truth with all their heart” (1 Kgs. 2:4). But David’s house was to be built upon a Rock; it was established and made sure, firm and steadfast. He knew that this Divine promise involved his own personal salvation, and that it had reference to his house “for a great while to come” (2 Sam. 7:19). And his enduring confidence is expressed in the words: “Be Thou a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me! Yea, Thou art my rock and my fortress” (Ps. 31:2,3, RSV). David sought refuge beneath the wings of “the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat” where God’s Name dwelt (Ps. 57:1; Heb. 9:5).

David, “being a prophet”, knew that “God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne” (Acts 2:30). In this promise he had every confidence. But his immediate sons according to the flesh were not all of his calibre; they did not all have the same degree of faith and obedience. David is held up to his sons as a standard by which they could be judged. But the record of his progeny, as contained in the books of Kings and Chronicles, makes very sad reading. The very first successor to the throne began very well, but his faithfulness was not permanent. The reign of Solomon in many ways points to the future, in the Millennium, but it turned to failure. He reigned for forty years, only for God to say that the kingdom would be rent from him, leaving him only “one tribe for My servant David’s sake, and for Jerusalem’s sake, the city which I have chosen . . .” (1 Kgs. 11:31,32).

The questions are sometimes asked, Did Solomon ever repent of his idolatry? and, Will he be in the Kingdom? We certainly trust that the answers will prove to be in the affirmative.

The history of David’s house

Solomon’s failures proved to be a burden on his people; they suffered “grievous servitude” and a “heavy yoke” under his rule (2 Chron. 10:4), and on his death the people demanded of his son Rehoboam that he make this burden lighter. The scene described in 2 Chronicles 10 was evidently in the mind of the “greater than Solomon”, the heir to the royal throne, when he said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest [relief, NEB]” (Mt. 12:42; 11:28). Rehoboam had spoken “roughly” (2 Chron. 10:13) in his reply; he had presented himself as an oppressive tyrant. But Jesus said,

“Bend your necks to my yoke, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble-hearted; and your souls will find relief. For my yoke is good to bear, my load is light” (Mt. 11:29,30, NEB).

The people came to Rehoboam to make him king; those who come to Jesus accept him as the appointed Son of David. The immediate benefit to them is that they can “lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us” (Heb. 12:1), but the longer view of Christ’s words suggests the time when “a king shall reign in righteousness” (Isa. 32:1), a king who will “spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy”, a time when “men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed” (Ps. 72:13,17).

The rending of the kingdom which followed this incident recorded in 2 Chronicles 10 diminished the sovereignty of the house of David; its future depended upon Divine oversight of its affairs. Rehoboam himself “forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him” (12:1). He died, “and was buried in the city of David: and Abijah [Abijam in 1 Kings] *his son* reigned in his stead” (v. 16). Those words “his son” occur in almost every case where a king in David’s line is succeeded by his son. They are a necessary link that registers the individual as being of the house of David.

1 Kings 15 speaks of Abijam as imperfect and walking in the sins of his father. He was nevertheless spared by God to be “a lamp” for David “in Jerusalem” (vv. 3,4). The Chronicles account presents him more favourably, standing firm for the covenant with David (2 Chron. 13:5-8).

Asa, his son, followed on the throne. He was a good king and did much to improve the morals of the nation. His reign provides an example of the way by which the Lord ministered to kings and people by His prophets, Azariah the son of Oded being the prophet in this instance. Jehoshaphat, son of Asa, came next. His was a very creditable reign, and 2 Chronicles 17:3-5 tells how the Lord established the kingdom in his hand because he walked in the ways of his father David.

Jehoshaphat’s son, Jehoram, was quite different; he murdered all his brothers, and walked in the way of the kings of Israel, but we are told: “Howbeit the LORD would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that He had made with David” (21:7). His enemies later killed all his sons except the youngest, Jehoahaz (also known as Ahaziah), who was providentially

preserved to be the next occupant of David's throne. But, despite his earlier preservation from death, he persisted in walking in the ways of Ahab. He was slain by Jehu, upon which his mother Athaliah "destroyed all the seed royal" (22:10). However, the youngest son, Joash, a babe at the time, was rescued to be the next king. Faithful Jehoiada the priest became his guide and tutor, and during the lifetime of Jehoiada Joash did well. Once his prop had died, Joash turned to idolatry and brought upon himself and the nation the wrath of God.

Reading through the history of Kings and Chronicles reveals how tenuous at times was the stability of David's house. Human nature was the enemy. Even when the king was righteous, the people were not. And when there was a pretence at keeping God's law, Isaiah found it necessary to tell them that their fasting would be more meaningful if they were "to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke" (58:6). The tyranny of Rehoboam was still there.

Space forbids a complete coverage of the history of these kings; some began well and turned away later, others deserved commendable mention. Jotham, for example, "became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the LORD his God" (2 Chron. 27:6). However, he was followed by a less creditable king, Ahaz, whose behaviour calls for special mention. Ahaz was threatened by an alliance between Rezin king of Syria and Pekah king of Israel. They planned to oust Ahaz and replace him on the throne of David by one called "the son of Tabeal" (Isa. 7:5,6). This is something the Rock of Israel could never permit: "Thus saith the Lord GOD, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass" (v. 7). Ahaz was told, "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established" (v. 9), as the kingdom was established to David. He was invited to ask for a sign, but he refused to do so. Therefore "the Lord Himself" gave a sign, not to him, but to the house of David, and the sign given was the promise of the virgin birth (v. 14). More of this later.

Ahaz's son Hezekiah was an exceptional case of faith and obedience. He did much to cleanse the nation from idolatry and to restore the temple order ordained by David and the prophets (2 Chron. 29:25). He arranged a Passover designed to include all the tribes of Israel.

His son Manasseh was a total disgrace for most of his reign, however, though he repented

in his old age; and Amon, Manasseh's son, followed his bad example. However, the next son, Josiah, has left a history worthy of Hezekiah, his great-grandfather. Jehoahaz followed, but was put down by the king of Egypt, who made his brother Eliakim king in his place, changing his name to Jehoiakim. This son of David calls for especial mention. He features several times in the prophecy of Jeremiah.

The fourth year of Jehoiakim was the first year of Nebuchadrezzar (Jer. 25:1). In the fifth year of Jehoiakim (36:9) he was presented with the scroll written by Jeremiah, which warned of judgement if the nation persisted in its evil ways. Jehoiakim listened to the scroll being read and then deliberately cut it with a knife and threw it on the fire. He did not want the Word of God. And in that very year, which would be the second year of Nebuchadrezzar (Dan. 2:1), God made known His purpose in a vision, not to a king of Judah, but to the king of Babylon, to the very man who had been raised up to overturn the kingdom of David. And how did that vision end? "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed . . . it shall stand for ever" (v. 44). This is what Moses foretold in Exodus 15, and what God had promised David.

Overtaken until . . .

Eventually the Divine patience was stretched to the limit; things could not continue as they were. Jehoiakim was followed by his son Coniah (alternatively Jehoiachin), and he was the very last son of David to occupy the throne. (Zedekiah reigned after him, but he was not the true heir and was placed there by the Babylonians.) We read of Coniah in Jeremiah 22:24-30: "As I live, saith the LORD, though Coniah . . . were the signet upon My right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence . . . I will cast thee out . . . a despised broken idol . . . Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah". No more would there be that statement: "his son reigned in his stead". That sounds like the end of the promise to David. But Ezekiel writes of that throne: "I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him" (21:27). It is suspended, not destroyed.

Jeremiah's very next chapter hastens to tell us: "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that

I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper . . . his name . . . shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (23:5,6). But if Coniah were to be childless, how was the line of David to be continued through his son? If we turn to 1 Chronicles 3:17,18 we shall find that Coniah *did* have sons, but according to Matthew 1:11,12 they were all born after he had been taken into captivity. That is why in 1 Chronicles 3:17 we read against his name that word Assir, which means 'the captive'. The reference in verse 16 to Zedekiah is qualified by what is written in 2 Kings 24:17.

Thus Coniah did have children; his firstborn son was named Salathiel. And there were six more, of whom the only one recorded as having children is Pedaiah (1 Chron. 3:17-19). So it was Salathiel, the firstborn, who was to be written childless. The firstborn of Pedaiah is Zerubbabel, and he, together with Joshua the high priest, features prominently in the return from Babylon, as we read in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. But when we read of Zerubbabel, he is never referred to as 'the son of Pediah', he is always called 'the son of Salathiel' (sometimes Shealtiel). There is only one conclusion which can be reasonably drawn, and that is that the levirate law had come into play again, and Pedaiah had married the widow of Salathiel "to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance" (Ruth 4:10), with the son born legally assuming the name of his deceased uncle. The suggestion that Salathiel adopted Zerubbabel does not do justice to the situation. Zerubbabel, together with Joshua, is a striking type of Christ, the King-Priest of the future age whom God raised up as "a righteous Branch".

Joshua and Zerubbabel worked together to rebuild the city and the temple, and are both the subjects of prophetic visions in the book of Zechariah. The prophecy of Haggai concludes with these words: "In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, *My servant, the son of Shealtiel* . . . and will make thee as a signet: for *I have chosen thee*, saith the LORD of hosts". The signet, the symbol of authority, which was removed from Coniah, is to be given to Zerubbabel. He is God's chosen, as was David. There is a striking resemblance between this passage and Isaiah 42:1: "Behold *My servant*, whom I uphold; Mine *elect* [chosen], in whom My soul delighteth".

The levirate law speaks of resurrection, and Zerubbabel points forward to Christ. God has

raised up Christ to sit upon David's throne (Acts 2:30), and the name of the dead has been raised up upon his inheritance. So we read in Psalm 2, which Acts 13:33 applies as post-resurrectional: "Yet have I set My king upon My holy hill of Zion . . . Thou art My Son . . . Ask of Me, and I shall give thee the heathen for *thine inheritance*, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession" (vv. 6-8).

The sign to the house of David

The Rock of Israel rules in the kingdom of men, and it was He Who made that decree by Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled: "Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) to be taxed [enrolled] with Mary" (Lk. 2:4,5). Had it not been for that decree, Jesus would have been born in Nazareth. Jesus, Son of David, was born in the very spot where David had been born. And the angel announced the royal birth with the words: "unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you . . ." (vv. 11,12). The virgin birth was the sign given to the house of David in the days of King Ahaz. Here was the guarantee that the throne of David is secure and made certain by God.

Both Joseph and Mary were descendants of the royal line. Their respective genealogies testify to this important fact in support of Jesus's claim to be the Messiah. It is worthy of note that both family trees include that vital link, "and Salathiel begat Zorobabel" (Mt. 1:12; Lk. 3:27). It need hardly be said that if Mary had come from any other root, Jesus would have been the Son of God but not the Son of David.

Unbelievers have claimed that the two records contradict each other, inasmuch as Joseph's father in Matthew is Jacob, while in Luke it is Heli. Matthew's account consistently uses the term "begat", as, for example, "Jacob begat Joseph". Jacob was clearly Joseph's actual father. But in Luke the recurring phrase is "which was the son of", the words "the son" being in italics, which means that they have been added by the translators to give the passage sense. Dr Bullinger informs us that Joseph would be the legal son-in-law of Heli by marriage to his daughter, and, as it was customary for Jews to trace a line back only through a male, it is usually accepted that Heli was the father of Mary. Luke's tree goes

right back to Adam, and therefore presents Jesus as being not only the Son of David but the seed of the woman as well.

Another point arises from Matthew's genealogy; in verse 17 of that first chapter he speaks of three groups, each of fourteen generations, from Abraham to Christ. Matthew must have had a Scriptural basis for this, and various views have been advanced in explanation. Whichever one is correct, it remains a fact that from Abraham to David inclusive there are fourteen names, from Solomon to Jehonias inclusive there are fourteen names, but from Salathiel to Jesus, although Matthew says there are fourteen, there are only thirteen names given. Did Matthew make a mistake? Has he forgotten one? As a tax collector Matthew would have been numerate and capable of elementary bookkeeping. He must have known there was one name missing. The following is a suggested explanation.

Jesus himself died childless. The question is asked, "who shall declare his generation?" (Isa. 53:8). But then we read: "when Thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed" (v. 10). Note how the words of Isaiah 8:18 have been picked up in Hebrews 2:13 and applied to Christ: "Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me". Furthermore, Psalm 45:16 says to Jesus: "Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth". Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were his natural fathers, but by virtue of the resurrection they will become his children. All those who shall be accounted worthy "are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection" (Lk. 20:35,36).

Zerubbabel was a type of Christ; he is on record as having eight children, and eight in Scripture is the number of resurrection; but none of them is called Abiud, the name of his son in Matthew 1. It is suggested that Abiud was a son of Zerubbabel omitted from the record in 1 Chronicles 3. But this is quite unacceptable; the Holy Spirit, in supervising the writing of Chroni-

cles, would not have left out the firstborn of Zerubbabel. The suggestion here is that in Matthew's list of names there is a gap between Zerubbabel and Abiud, who was possibly his grandson or great-grandson. If Zerubbabel represents Christ and his resurrection, his children could represent those "children of the resurrection" spoken of by Jesus. So did Matthew consider that it would be unfitting to actually name one of those "children of the resurrection" as being a progenitor of Jesus?

The house founded upon a rock

The concluding parable in the Sermon on the Mount, the parable of the two houses (Mt. 7:24-27), is obviously based on Isaiah 28:15-17. Here God says: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation". This stone is identified with the Lord Jesus Christ in 1 Peter 2:6. But he was not accepted by the nation, who chose to make lies their refuge (Isa. 28:15), a refuge which was to be swept away by the hail when "the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell" (Mt. 7:27). With sorrow, Jesus later told them how he had often wished to gather them together as a hen gathers her chickens under her wing (Lk. 13:34). He wanted them to be like David and find their refuge under those wings overshadowing the mercyseat (Ps. 57:1; Heb. 9:5); indeed, he wanted to be their mercyseat, but they would not, so he said: "Behold, your house [built on sand] is left unto you desolate" (Lk. 13:35).

Our house must be that one built upon the sure foundation of "the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ". The basis of our faith must be the Word of the Rock of Israel in which David put his trust. The Kingdom of God to be established for ever in Zion must be our absorbing interest, and we need to prepare ourselves to be found worthy of a share in that restored throne of David under the Kingship of Christ.

Humanism—The Subtle Delusion: reprint

In 1997 the book *Humanism—The Subtle Delusion* was published by the Bible Student Press, showing how the false and dangerous ideas of humanism affect many spheres of life. Various aspect of humanistic thinking are dealt with by separate authors, eleven in all. This book has proved popular, and has now been reprinted. It is offered at the price of £3.80 plus postage (66p for one copy in the UK). Orders to: Bible Student Press, 44 Colindeep Lane, Norwich, NR7 8EQ, UK, e-mail geoffandray@tesco.net. Cheques to "Bible Student Press".