

PREPARATIONS OF THE BRIDE

Part 1

"ALL THINGS FIT THE PATTERN"

"Moreover we know that to those who love God, who are called according to His plan, EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS FITS INTO A PATTERN FOR GOOD. God, in His foreknowledge, chose them to bear the family likeness of His Son, THAT HE MIGHT BE THE ELDEST IN A FAMILY OF MANY BROTHERS. He chose them long ago; when the time came He called them, He made them righteous in His sight and then lifted them to the splendor of life as His own sons. In the face of all this, what is there left to Bay? If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:28-31, Phillips Translation).

What a wonderful peace comes into our hearts when once we come to understand God's sovereignty over all things. We know that He governs the affairs of mankind in general, because He has "declared the end from the beginning"; but HE ESPECIALLY PARTICIPATES IN THE LIVES OF THOSE WHO ARE CALLED TO PARTICIPATE IN HIS DIVINE PLAN! He is able to make ALL THINGS, whether they be positive or negative, work together for good... and every experience fit into a pattern that SERVES HIS PURPOSE! He is able to bring ORDER OUT OF CHAOS, and HARMONY OUT OF CONFUSION!

This truth is graphically illustrated in the first chapter of the Old Testament book of Hosea (we would encourage the reader at this time to reread this chapter.. or preferably the whole book). While this prophecy spake first of all to the house of Israel in Hosea's 5 generation (and spanning clear to the end of the age), we read that "all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (I Cor. 10:11). There are eternal principles revealed here, which speak not only on a national level, but to the individual as well. It is a revelation of God's sovereign sway over the lives of His people; a love story, showing us the utter beauty of God's merciful dealings with them... even after times of obvious regression.

The book begins with a very unusual word to Hosea: "Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord". Wow! What a way to get a point across! A fellow would definitely have to know the voice of God of a surety before he acted upon a word like this! Natural reasoning would tell him this sounds more like a word from the devil than from God! Nevertheless, Hosea recognized the Source, and responded in obedience, knowing full well what the consequences were. He was to become God's "visual aid" to his brethren!

Next, we read in verse 3: "So he went and took GOMER, the daughter of DIBLAIM; which conceived, and bare him a son". As if things weren't bad enough already, now he has the horrible misfortune of picking out a woman named GOMER! Just imagine what

that would be like, to have to call your wife GOMER! Have mercy, dear Lord! How much can a poor man take?

We are certain of one thing: GOD MAKES NO MISTAKES! Our story takes on tremendous depth when we examine the names of Gomer and her mama. Strong's Hebrew Dictionary gives the name GOMER (# 1586) to mean: "COMPLETION". It is taken from a primary root word (# 1584) which means: "TO END (in the sense of completion or failure); fail, perfect, perform". This definition sounds like a contrast, doesn't it? It begins to make sense, however, as we look on. Now Gomer's mother's name was DIBLAIM (# 1691), a plural word in Hebrew, meaning, "TWO CAKES". Its singular rt. form is DIBELAH (# 1690), meaning, "TO PRESS TOGETHER; a cake of pressed". Putting this all together we have: *"a coming to completion or total fulfillment by means of pressing two cakes together."*

What do the "two cakes" that are pressed together symbolize? FAILURE AND PERFECTION! As we shall see, God is able to take the life-experiences of OUR FAILURES (those times when we have come miserably short of the glory of God; revealing our weakness) and HIS PERFECTIONS (those times of refreshing that come from the presence of the Lord; which provide a revelation of His strength and sovereignty), press them together, and bring us to completion! He is able to make ALL THINGS work together for GOOD, that is, to a Godly end, by developing His divine nature within us, conforming us to His image! Praise God for His infinite wisdom!

(Incidentally, even the name HOSEA proves that this was a revelation of God's merciful interaction with His people. It comes from the Hebrew name YEHOSHUA, from whence also we get the name JOSHUA! YEHOSHUA means, "JEHOVAH IS SAVIOUR". . . the Old Testament equivalent to the New Testament name JESUS!)

TWO CAKES

Israel, at the time of this prophetic word, had departed from the Lord through idolatry. She had separated herself from her heavenly Husband through repeated acts of unfaithfulness. It was not as if He had left her; rather, she had deserted Him through her spiritual harlotry. Therefore, God's instruction to Hosea was typical of His relationship with Israel.. she was married to Jehovah, but she had abandoned her first love! She had become involved with other "lovers", so to speak, seeking to satisfy her lustful desires by worshiping pagan deities!

Because of this condition, it was necessary for the Lord to bring correction and discipline to Israel. But how would He do this? And how would it be illustrated? By allowing Gomer to reproduce CHILDREN! These "children of whoredoms" would typify to the house of Israel God's dealings by giving them over to THE FRUIT OF THEIR OWN DOING! God would allow her own backslidings to correct her, her own works to reprove her! He gave her exactly what she sought after (though it was not exactly what she was

expecting)!

As a result, there were three children born of Gomer: the first, JEZREEL (meaning, "God shall scatter and sow"); the second, LO-RUHAMA ("not pitied"); and the third, LO-AMMI ("not My people"). The first describes AN ACTION; the second, AN ATTITUDE; and third, AN AFFIRMATION. While there is much that may be said concerning these names, one thing is painstakingly clear: GOD IS NOT TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THESE CHILDREN! HE IS NOT TO BE BLAMED! Because these came forth from a womb of rebellion, God says, "THESE ARE NOT MY CHILDREN; I WILL NOT TAKE CREDIT FOR THEM". Of them, God says, "THESE ARE ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN; MY IDENTITY IS NOT FOUND IN THEM. THEY ARE NOT THE RESULT OF MY PLANNING... THEY DID NOT ORIGINATE IN MY PREDESTINATED PATTERN FOR YOUR LIFE"!

God was saying in effect: "the conception of these children was not the result of any pleasure I had, but because you desired the pleasures of sin for a season. They came forth from the womb, NOT because I ordained or planned for them from the beginning, but because you failed to abide in Me! Therefore, YOUR FAILURES have provoked this response from Me, YOUR RESISTANCE TO MY WILL has caused Me to forsake you! YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE BIRTH OF THESE CONDITIONS"!

(There are some who would disagree with the idea that God ever forsook His covenant people, despite the numerous places throughout the Old Testament that He said He would. Then there are others who would say that even if He did then, it was because they were under the old covenant. We, as New Testament believers, have nothing to worry about now, according to His promise in Heb. 13:5.. "I will NEVER leave thee, nor forsake thee". I can understand this reasoning, although I see it from a different light. It is interesting to make a comparison of the Hebrew and Greek definitions of this word translated "FORSAKEN". The Greek word used is "EGKATALEIPO" (#1459 in Strong's), which carries both positive and negative connotations. It means, "to leave behind in some place, i.e. (in a good sense) let remain over, or (in a bad sense) to desert: - forsake, leave". The most commonly used word in Hebrew, however, is "AW-ZAB" (#5800 in Strong's), meaning, "to loosen, i.e. to relinquish, permit".. in other words, TO ALLOW! While we are grateful that God has promised not to utterly DESERT us, ABANDON us, or leave us COMFORTLESS, it is certain that He ALLOWS or PERMITS many things to occur in our lives that He did not ordain! Though it is true that "no man is able to pluck us out of the Father's hand", He WILL "loosen" His grip on us if we choose to depart from Him! Then we must not "charge God foolishly" by laying the blame of OUR MISTAKES at HIS DOORSTEP; for WE are responsible for the consequences of OUR OWN decisions and actions, made independently of Him! As the old saying goes, IT'S OUR BABY, THEN)!

PRESSING DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND HUMAN FAILURE TOGETHER

As it pertained to natural Israel, God gave them over to their own devices. Just twenty-five years after Hosea's 5th prophecy, He proved to them how weak and defenseless they

were without Him! Because they chose to go astray from Him, they were scattered and sown among the nations (verse 4). "The bow of Israel" (their own strength) was broken "in the valley of Jezreel" (verse 5). No longer did He have mercy upon them, but allowed them to be taken away by their enemies (verse 6). Finally, He tells them, "Ye are not My people, and I will not be your God" (verses 8-9). They lost their national identity while in captivity. They took upon themselves the identities of the people around them, and the names of their gods! Worst of all, they lost the identity of JEHOVAH as their Father! They brought all this upon themselves!

Because of the miserable failures of the people, it looks as if there is absolutely no hope for them.. .but then we read these encouraging words: "...YET the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that IN THE PLACE where it was said unto them, Ye are NOT My people, THERE IT SHALL BE SAID UNTO THEM, YE ARE THE SONS OF THE LIVING GOD" (verse 10)! Glory to God! Now THIS is a clear definition of sovereignty! Even though He allowed them to make their own decisions, and even though those decisions caused them to fail greatly, distancing them from their God for a season, their mistakes were still not able to alter the final outcome, once they turned unto Him! God did not suddenly have to change to "PLAN B" to accomplish His purpose! He is still able to honor the covenant He had originally made with Abraham, just as He had planned from the beginning!

In spite of the failures, shortcomings, and disappointments, HE IS STILL ABLE TO BRING HIS OWN UNTO THEIR INTENDED COMPLETION! In fact, He is able to "adopt" our failures into His plan, so that they fit into the divine pattern! Listen to His words afterward to Hosea: "Say ye unto your brethren, AMMI ("My people"); and to your sisters, RUHAMAH ("having obtained mercy")..." (Hosea 2:1)! Praise God, they would receive A NEW NAME! What was He saying through this? "Though previously I would have nothing to do with these 'children', because you have turned to Me, I WILL TAKE THEM AS MY OWN. I WILL ACCEPT THEM AS MY RESPONSIBILITY. I WILL CAUSE THEM TO SERVE MY PURPOSE, AND TO MAKE MY PEOPLE KNOW WHO THEY ARE"!

This is possibly the greatest declaration of His sovereign authority conceivable! His sovereignty is not to be seen as some predetermined programming designed by God from the foundation of the world, which unchangeably "fixed" every finite detail in time and space, and restricted mankind, as well as all creation to certain mechanical actions like puppets on a string! If this were the case, then GOD WOULD BE RESPONSIBLE for the transgressions of all men, and would be unjust to ever

punish anyone! But His Greatness is evidenced by the fact that He can bring forth a creation, grant it the freedom of choice, and still see to it that EVERYTHING ULTIMATELY SERVES HIS ETERNAL PURPOSES IN THE END!

A. W. Tozer said it well in his classic work, "The Knowledge of the Holy": "God sovereignly decreed that man should be free to exercise moral choice, and man from the

beginning has fulfilled that decree by making his choice between good and evil. When he chooses to do evil, he does not thereby counter-veil the sovereign will of God but fulfills it, inasmuch as *the eternal decree decided not which choice the man should make but that he should be free to make it*. If in His absolute freedom God has willed to give man limited freedom, who is there to stay His hand or say, 'What doest thou?' Man's will is free because God is sovereign. *A God less than sovereign could not bestow moral freedom upon His creatures. He would be afraid to do so.*

"Perhaps a homely illustration might help us to understand. An ocean liner leaves New York bound for Liverpool. Its destination has been determined by proper authorities. Nothing can change it. This at least is a faint picture of sovereignty.

"On board the liner are several scores of passengers. These are not in chains, neither are their activities determined for them by decree. They are completely free to move about as they will. They eat, sleep, play, and lounge about on the deck, read, talk, altogether as they please; but all the while the great liner is carrying them steadily onward toward a predetermined port.

"Both freedom and sovereignty are present here and they do not contradict each other. So it is, I believe, with man's freedom and the sovereignty of God. The mighty liner of God's sovereign design keeps its steady course over the sea of history. God moves undisturbed and unhindered toward the fulfillment of those eternal purposes which He purposed in Christ Jesus before the world began. We do not know all that is in those purposes, but enough has been disclosed to furnish us with a broad outline of things to come and to give us good hope and firm assurance of future well-being" (*italics mine*) -- end quote.

As God said through Jeremiah concerning the prophesied Babylonian captivity, "...that after seventy years be accomplished in Babylon I WILL VISIT YOU, AND PERFORM MY GOOD WORD TOWARD YOU, in causing you to return to this place. FOR I KNOW THE THOUGHTS THAT I HAVE TOWARD YOU, saith the Lord, THOUGHTS OF PEACE, AND NOT OF EVIL, TO GIVE YOU AN EXPECTED END. Then shall ye call upon Me, and ye shall go and pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall seek Me with ALL YOUR HEART" (Jer. 29:10-13). God's thoughts toward us are GOOD THOUGHTS, THOUGHTS OF PEACE, TO BRING US TO AN EXPECTED (or, PREDESTINATED) END! Even when

we stray from Him, He is able to use the inevitable captivity we bring upon ourselves as a means of turning us back to Him: "I will go and return to My place, till they acknowledge their offense, and seek My face; IN THEIR AFFLICTION THEY WILL SEEK ME EARLY" (Hosea 5:15)!

"THE VALLEY OF JEZREEL"

In our personal dealings from the Lord, we find these same principles apply. Whenever we go "a whoring" after other "gods".. whether they be materialism, narcissism (self-

worship), or any of the varied forms of lusts known to man; we will find that God will not stop us. But we mustn't deceive ourselves into believing that we have gotten away with it, or that God predestined it for our lives, for "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"! God allows us to follow our own heart's lust until finally, "when LUST hath conceived, it bringeth forth SIN: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth DEATH" (James 1:15)! Just as God spake to Adam concerning the tree of knowledge of good and evil, "...in the day that thou eatest thereof THOU SHALT SURELY DIE" (Gen. 2:17), it was not physical death that He warned him of (seeing that Adam physically lived on for many years after the original sin), but rather, SPIRITUAL DEATH (of which physical death is but the last manifestation)! Adam "died" spiritually that very day from his transgressions, "death" being the "offspring" of his wayward activity! He fell from that high and heavenly place in the SPIRIT, to the low-lying valley of the FLESH! He condescended into the SOULISH REALM, the seat of his EMOTIONS, into the valley of sensuality, carnality, and death!

We have painfully discovered that even though we have been born again, we are not immune to temptations, fleshly allurements, or failures! We've not yet been completed, matured, or perfected; or, in John's words, "...it doth not yet appear what we shall be" (I Jn. 3:2)! As long as we abide in Christ, we have peace round about from our "enemies"; but we must never take this peace for granted. The potential still exists to intermingle with our "enemies~~, and be corrupted by their practices (for the sake of simplicity, and the lack of a better term, we will call them collectively "THE OLD MAN")! We should never underestimate his power and influence! It is when we are drawn away and enticed by this OLD MAN, "which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" (Eph. 4:22), that CONCEPTION TAKES PLACE. We then bring forth the consequences of our own rebellious deeds.

When this occurs, then we, like Israel of old, bring forth a "JEZREEL"! We are taken from our peaceful abode in the Spirit, and suddenly find ourselves "scattered and sown among the NATIONS". Practically speaking, what are the "NATIONS" we are led captive into? CondemNATION, indigNATION, and fearful imagiNATIONS, just to name a few (don't laugh---this kind of captivity is real)! It represents the SOULISH REALM, the place of emotional turmoil, confusion, upsetness, and woe!

The "Valley of Jezreel" is the place of divine judgment, where God deals with His people through the circumstances they have produced. Have you ever been there? I have (more times than I care to mention)! And may I say that there is nothing pleasant about it, except the outcome! As Paul said, "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless AFTERWARD it yieldeth THE PEACEABLE FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS unto them that are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12:11)! You see, He always "sends forth JUDGMENT UNTO VICTORY" (Matt. 12:20)! He will see to it that DEATH (the consequential result of our sins) is swallowed up in (His) VICTORY (I Cor. 15:54)! Hallelujah!

"THE SLAUGHTER OF JEZREEL"

"And the Lord said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause the kingdom of Israel to cease..." (Hosea 1:4).

To understand this, we must briefly turn back to the books of 1 and 2 Kings.

Jezreel, as it relates to our subject, surfaces in I Kings chapter 21. Briefly reviewing the story for your consideration, we read where Ahab king of Samaria coveted his neighbor's vineyard, Naboth the Jezreelite by name (verse 1). Ahab had it in his mind to join it to his kingdom, and to change it into an herb garden to suit his own desires. When Ahab made his interest known to Naboth, he refused to sell on the grounds that this vineyard was his inheritance passed down from his fathers (verse 3). Because Naboth rejected Ahab's offer, Ahab's wicked wife Jezebel conspired to obtain it for him through trickery and treachery. First she sought to draw Naboth from his vineyard, by having the elders of the city set him on high among the people. When once he consented to the exaltation, false witnesses came forth, and accused him of blasphemy. Because of this, he was stoned to death, according to Jezebel's wishes (verses 5-14). When once Ahab arose to possess the vineyard, the Lord spake to Elijah the prophet to meet him there.

As soon as he arrived, the word of the Lord came to him, saying unto Ahab, "Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?... In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine... Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity..." (verses 19-21). "And of Jezebel also spake the Lord, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel" (verse 23). Strangely enough, the place where Ahab intended to produce personal pleasure would later become a place of pain... literally a field of BLOOD!

Though judgment was prolonged, it was not forgotten! One thing we can be assured of, God honors His Word! Three years passed, while Ahab seemed to prosper in his ways. During this time, he dwelt peacefully with neighboring Syria. But once he made war with them, he was slain in battle at Ramoth-gilead. Therefore, the first portion of prophecy was executed when his blood was washed from his chariot at the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked it up (I Kings 22:37-38).

The sceptre changed hands twice, however, before the balance of this prophecy was completely fulfilled. We see in 2 Kings chapter 9, during the evil reign of Jehoram, son of Ahab and Jezebel (who reigned in his brother Ahaziah's stead after his death, because he had no children), there comes into the picture a man named Jehu, **ORDAINED OF GOD** to execute His Word. Jehu was chosen for a specific purpose, to bring an end to the house of Ahab, and to slay Jezebel for her vile wickedness (9:1-13). This he began to do with enthusiasm, slaying not only the king of Israel, but the king of Judah, as well (9:14-28). Next, he had Jezebel cast down from the wall, trodden under foot, and left for the dogs to eat her carcass (9:30-37). Finally, he went on to eliminate the entire posterity of Ahab, seventy sons in all, as well as forty two princes of Judah (II Kings 10:1-14). Thus the Word of the Lord came to pass, just as He said it would!

We would commend Jehu for removing these negative influences from the midst of Israel, were it not for the fact that as we examine our story, it becomes obvious that HIS MOTIVE WAS NOT RIGHT! His zeal was not for the sake of righteousness, but for how he might personally benefit from it! He seized this opportunity to overthrow the dynasty of Ahab, to ascend his throne, and to reign in his place; and he was willing to do anything he considered necessary, in order to get what he wanted! Therefore, innocent blood was shed in Jezreel, the king and princes of Judah, which had nothing to do with the original word of judgment! This was wholly the result of Jehu's destructive lust for power! Therefore, Hosea' 5 words are directed toward Jehu: "I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause the kingdom of Israel to cease..."! God says, "I will deal with Jehu"!

NABOTH'S VINEYARD.. AHAB'S DESIRE

It should be clear to the discerning heart that Ahab and Naboth represent the contrast of characters found within every believer: THE FLESH and THE SPIRIT! Galatians 5:17 says, "For THE FLESH lusteth against THE SPIRIT, and THE SPIRIT (is) against THE FLESH: and these are contrary the one to the other".

It is interesting that the name NABOTH in Hebrew means "FRUITS". It is fitting, therefore, that Naboth should have a VINEYARD in Jezreel...a place to produce his fruitfulness. Even as Naboth's vineyard was "the inheritance of his father's"; in like manner, our place of bearing fruit has come from our Father, "the Father of spirits"! He it is that enables us to produce "the fruit of the Spirit", having given unto us "the land", and having originally sown the "seeds" of eternal life in our hearts. Our responsibility is to simply DRESS AND KEEP the garden within; His responsibility is to make it grow! We should never forget that humbling fact! We of our own selves can do nothing!

While it would be wonderful if this truth went uncontested, and we always walked in the Spirit, abiding in the realm of fruitfulness, and giving glory to God for the expressions of His life manifested through us, we know that this does not always happen. There is another who covets the title deed to the vineyard: AHAB! Of a truth, "the flesh lusteth against the spirit", desiring to take credit for the fruit of the spirit, and to use it for his own personal satisfaction! Proud "Ahab" is ever seeking opportunities to increase his kingdom, to gain recognition, and to receive glory for his fine achievements! And he will certainly make an appeal to your better judgment, in hopes that he might obtain rights to the vineyard! HE WANTS WHAT THE SPIRIT MAN HAS!

What he cannot obtain on his own, his "wife" Jezebel will gladly help. She personifies the spirit of insubordination and rebellion, of harlotry and idolatry, which "stirs up" king Ahab, causing him to act the way he does! Through the use of flattery and fraud, through deceit and diversion, through manipulation and clever maneuvering, she knows how to get her way with the unsuspecting and the gullible! This "strange woman" is skilled in the art of strong delusion!

Had Naboth never hearkened when the elders sent for him, he would have never found himself in such a vulnerable position. He walked right into Jezebel's trap! He should have stayed in the vineyard! Nevertheless, when he allowed them to draw him out, and to exalt him in the eyes of the people, he was wide open for a fall! True is the proverb, "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18)! Naboth learned this the HARD way! So it is with us when we listen to the deceitful words of the enemy...we are headed down a "rocky road"! Our adversary seeks to silence the voice of our spirit, that is, our conscience; and to give unrestrained freedom to the flesh!

You can rest assured, however, that as soon as Ahab attempts to claim the vineyard for his own, "the prophetic Word of the Lord" will follow him there! Why? Because "the voice of his brother's blood crieth out from the ground"! Beloved, God will allow NO FLESH to glory in his Presence! Ahab has no business in the vineyard in the first place; he doesn't even know how to tend to the fruit (all he can produce is thorns, briars, and thistles)! It is because of this that God pronounces judgment upon the flesh, and upon his "sons" (that is, "the WORKS of the flesh")! God says, "For he that soweth to his

flesh shall of the flesh reap CORRUPTION. ." (Gal. 6:8a)! What was originally intended to be a place of blessing and bountifulness turns into a valley of cursing and bloodshed!

Even as I write this message, there are many precious saints who are in the midst of "great tribulation". I have never known a time when God's people have endured as intense a pressure as this! Everywhere I look, folks are struggling with something... be it marital problems, financial problems, physical problems, or moral problems... and the problems are increasing daily. It is certain that as we approach the end of this present age, God is going to shake everything that can be shaken, until only that which cannot be shaken remains. We should not think it strange when fiery trials come. These are to be expected. But we are admonished in Scripture to "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (II Cor. 13:5). It may be that God is desiring to speak to us through our circumstances! If all is well with us, then the message conveyed to us through our "thorn in the flesh" will be, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect through weakness" (II Cor. 12:7-10)! Our "thorn" may actually be keeping us from exalting ourselves, as Paul's did him. But if "Ahab" is already in our vineyard, and his "sons" are in the land, the prophetic word will be somewhat different! It will be a destructive word toward "Ahab's house", the works of the flesh; but constructive toward the spirit man. It will mean death to the flesh, but life to the spirit! One thing we can be assured of, however, is that whatever He speaks, or whatever means He chooses to deliver that message to us, IT IS ALL DONE IN MERCY! God's dealings with us are REDEMPTIVE IN NATURE; HE CHASTENS US BECAUSE HE LOVES US!

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I am sure that many who read these lines can relate to this scenario. The order of events seem all too familiar. And while God uses many different means to deal with the works

of the flesh in our lives, depending upon the degree of hold they have upon us, there is one way that will certainly bear witness to some.

We know that sometimes when we are in our own personal "Valley of Jezreel", the flesh having ascended above the spirit man, God allows certain individuals to come into our lives for the purpose of purging, correction, and discipline. The Lord may permit "the ministry of Jehu" to be personified through literally dozens of different ways, or in a variety of different characters, but the objective is the same! He uses them as instruments unaware, to perform His destroying work in us, and to serve His ultimate intentions! He is after Ahab and his sons!

I must say that Jehu sometimes uses very unorthodox ways to achieve his objective. He may discover a weakness in your life, and set out with everything in his power to expose you,

to slander and destroy you with it, rather than trying to restore you in the spirit of meekness. Quite possibly, he may come in the form of an envious rival, feigning to be on "a mission from God to expose deception", while spreading outright lies and distortions about you. He may come in the form of an angry and irate spouse, striking out in hopes of damaging your witness; a rebellious child, full of resentment and hostility; a bitter and wounded brother; a gossiping or tale-bearing preacher, or a jealous co-worker.. but his intentions are to bring out your bad points, in order to make himself look good! It does not matter if he has to shed "innocent blood" to accomplish his goal; he is driven with a zeal for destruction!

While Jehu's motive may not be right, we must guard our hearts from developing a vindictive or vengeful spirit. God says, "Yet a little while, and I WILL AVENGE the blood of Jezreel on the house of Jehu"! We must keep in mind that VENGEANCE IS HIS; HE WILL REPAY (Rom. 12:19)! One thing that He desires to do is to "break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel"! He wants to bring us to a place of absolute dependence upon Him; where we cease to defend ourselves (it usually doesn't do any good to try and vindicate yourself, anyway)! It helps to remember that if we hadn't allowed "Ahab" into Jezreel in the first place, none of this might have happened! We could have spared ourselves much pain, shame, and embarrassment! We can trust that God will deal with Jehu, because in his selfish endeavors, he fails to consider the life of "the king of Judah" (Heb. "PRAISE"). Jehu may not be concerned about your spiritual well-being, or your restoration. He may not care whether you ever look to Christ in your dilemma, and praise Him as your living Redeemer. Therefore, God will not overlook his callous and unmerciful ways. But Jehu does perform a valuable service for us. It goes without saying that his "ministry" is detrimental to one's reputation; but that's exactly how the Lord uses him! He helps to "crucify" the proud and idolatrous spirit of Ahab and Jezebel within our hearts! Praise God! We can certainly benefit from that!

PRESSED INTO THE PATTERN OF SONSHIP

"...And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not My people, there it shall be said unto them, YE ARE THE SONS OF THE LIVING GOD" (1:10).

Once God has accomplished His whole work in Jezreel, and caused us to turn to Him with all our hearts, He will turn it all in our favor. When we "wrestle with God" as Jacob did, we receive A CHANGE OF NAME! In Jacob's case, his was changed from JACOB (meaning, "trickster, schemer") to ISRAEL ("prince with God, one who prevailed"), signifying A CHANGE OF NATURE. So the Lord will do for us, calling us AMMI ("My people") and RUHAMA ("having obtained mercy"). He will write upon us A NEW NAME (nature), when we have prevailed with Him!

Be encouraged, saints of God! There is great consolation in the fact that no matter how bad you have failed, how miserably you have "come short of the glory of God", once we turn it over to Jesus, He is able to incorporate it into His pattern for good... press it together with His perfections, and bring us to COMPLETION! Hallelujah! HIS GRACE IS SUFFICIENT! He will use it all to mature us, to develop His Image within us, and to purge us, that we might bring forth more fruit (John 15:2)!

In the end, God shall have a company of Sons whose lives are put together like "PATCHWORK QUILTS".. with each square declaring a particular phase in their personal redemption story (for no two lives will be exactly the same), and every experience testifying of the abundant grace and mercy of God! Their lives shall be a unique composite of FAILURE AND PERFECTION, of NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE EVENTS, providing an opportunity for God to be glorified as THE MASTER WEAVER! At that time, He shall put them on display for all creation to behold, as living testimonies of the manifold wisdom of God! Hallelujah!

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