

The Dangers of Maturer Years

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"Thou hast left thy first love" Revelation 2:4

It has become the usual thing in public addresses to exhort young believers to devotion to Christ, and to warn them against worldly and Satanic snares. The inference is that older ones are not in the same danger as their younger brethren; but is this true?

We were arrested recently in reading the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah, to find that it was not in youth that these kings who did right in the sight of the Lord went astray and turned their backs upon their God, but in middle life and old age.

Passing over the pathetic history of Solomon's decline, from which he does not seem to have recovered, we come to ASA, the son of Abijah (2 Chr. 14). He began his reign well, and showed much zeal in the removal of idolatry from the land, and made the law of the Lord God of their fathers the law of the land; so he prospered and his enemies were defeated, and he enjoyed a long peace. But after thirty-six years of the goodness of God to him in this respect, he turned from Him, and preferred the help of Benhadad of Damascus against his foes, to the arm of the Lord. Moreover, he persecuted God's prophet who pointed out his folly, and oppressed the people of God. During the last five years of his life he was afflicted by an "exceeding great" disease in his feet, which was but an outward evidence of the inward moral condition which had caused his departure from God.

JEHOSHAPHAT began well, and, indeed, to the end he maintained a tender conscience, and so the Lord was with him. Yet he joined hands with God's enemy, Ahab, and it would seem that his object in doing so was to make a suitable marriage for his son Jehoram. This act brought forth a harvest of sorrow for Judah.

JOASH did that which was right in the sight of the Lord in his tender years, and so long as Jehoiada, the priest, lived. But when that faithful counsellor was removed he fell a prey to the flattery of his princes, allowed them to bring back groves and idols; he slew Zachariah, the son of his old friend when he bore witness to the truth, and finally died by the hands of his own servants.

AMAZIAH did right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart, at the beginning of his reign, but in the end he worshipped the gods of Edom and would not listen to God's prophets. "Now, after the time that Amaziah did turn away from following the Lord, they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem . . . and slew him" (2 Chr. 25:27).

UZZIAH was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and he sought God, and He made him to prosper. But in his old age his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, and in his presumptuous pride he transgressed against the Lord God, and died a leper, in his sixty-ninth year.

HEZEKIAH was one of the most noble of Judah's kings, and was wonderfully helped of God in all his ways, but in his later years "he rendered not again according to the benefit done to him; for his heart was lifted up; therefore there was wrath upon him" (Chr. 32:25).

JOSIAH was eight years old when he began to reign; and full of instruction and encouragement is the record of his godly ways, but after thirty years he refused to listen to the voice of God, by Necho, and was slain.

These things are written for our learning and the failure of these seven kings of Judah should teach us that none are safe, no matter what their experience of God's goodness may have been, unless they continue in dependence upon Himself.

Biblical knowledge and spiritual experiences become a snare if the heart is lifted up because of them and if the soul is not kept in the sense of

its own nothingness and the need of constant grace from God. It was to the Ephesian church, after forty years' experience of the richest spiritual knowledge and blessing, that the Lord had to complain: "Thou hast left thy first love." May God preserve those who are growing older in spiritual experiences from pride of heart and keep them in exercise of soul and energy of faith for His glory, and the blessing of those who are younger in the faith.