

tion to Assyria in the shape of an alliance to which Syria (under Rezin) Ammon, Moab, Edom, and the Philistines, acceded. The first move was to put one of his own party on the throne of Ahaz in Jerusalem.

Ahaz sent tribute to Tiglath-Pileser to bring him upon Pekah and Rezin. Damascus and Samaria both fell, and the two kings were slain.

Damascus became the capital of an Assyrian province. Samaria seems only to have been saved by the existence of an Assyrian faction in it whose head became the new king Hoshea.

Hoshea was one of the best of the kings of Israel, but it is one of the awful consequences of sin that it leads the nation to a state when the best man in it cannot save it from destruction. It must have seemed as if a revival of religion were come, when men went upon Hezekiah's invitation in numbers from the Ten Tribes to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 30), but whether this revival was vain because due to fear of misfortune and not faith in God, or because it was now too late, it did not avert the end. When Tiglath-Pileser died and Shalmanezar IV, his successor, was busy suppressing rebels, Hoshea refused him tribute, relying on the help of Egypt in case of war. This brought the Assyrians upon him. He was slain. Samaria was besieged for three years and taken (722 B.C.) by Sargon, Shalmanezar's successor, and the kingdom of Israel became a mere name.

Sargon in his monuments thus confirms the story of the Bible: "I besieged the city of Samaria. I carried off 27,280 citizens. I chose 50 chariots for myself from the whole number taken; all the other property of the people of the town I left for my servants to take. I appointed resident officers over them and imposed on them the same tribute as had formerly been paid. In the place of those taken into captivity I sent thither inhabitants of lands conquered by me, and imposed the tribute on them which I require from Assyrians."

Secret of the Fall.

(a) There was a reason for the fall. When you remember Israel, few in number and simply armed, brought out of Egypt, made conquerors of a land full of fenced cities; and you see an Israel strong in numbers and in arms carried into exile, you feel that there is a reason for the difference. God made it by

forsaking them. It is no accident that a nation goes to ruin—that the Roman Empire should crumble and fall, that Spain of the Armada should dwindle to misfortune, or Israel be carried to exile. God rules the world, meting out justice to the nations for their sin. "It is he that bringeth the princes to nothing. He maketh the judges of the earth as vanity."

(b) *The cause of the decline* may be said to be *immorality and selfishness*.

The blood of the murdered on the hands of so many of the kings, is only an indication of the selfishness and sin rampant among the people. Amos and Hosea tell us of priests guilty of blood, of the poor oppressed by the rich, of drunkenness and worse things at the religious feasts. The poor would hate their oppressors and refuse to die in battle to save them. The people would not esteem a murderer king nor follow him with a courage that could conquer. Luxury and debauchery had weakened the people, in body as in mind, and bravery was no more found in the land.

(c) *The true cause—idolatry.*

The Word of God gives a truer reason than this last. The selfishness of the people had its cause. They had ceased to worship the only true God in simple heart-felt devotion and service, they allowed the worship of idols, sensual and devilish in character, to take up their minds, and the sensualism and devilishness of their gods passed into their own character and lives,—as they will and must with every man—and paved the way to ruin.

Such a sinful people was no longer capable of having a part in God's work of redemption but must be set aside. More, their very sin deserved punishment. Hence the catastrophe.

NOTES ON TEXT.

V. 9. Did secret!—Under cover of the worship of Jehovah they introduced idolatrous practices.

Against God.—The secret of the fall of Israel. Their aims and life were contradictory to God's aims. God's thoughts were not their thoughts, neither their ways God's ways. Any man or nation thus against God must perish.

High places.—Altars in groves on high places.

At this period in Israel's history high places