

The chosen people having emerged from slavery to freedom with songs which celebrated national retribution, the commonwealth is in due time organized, and the Lord is King and rules by laws and penalties of his own appointment. Unquestionably a system of strict retributive justice, of which their Great King was the Administrator runs through both the earlier and the later periods of the national history. Obedience and transgression meet their reward and penalty with a regularity which was, notorious, visible and unfailing. Promises of prosperity were given to encourage national righteousness and fidelity; and disasters foreshadowed as the inevitable result of sin. The national history is thus a narrative of the proceedings of a tribunal administered with a justice which was infallible. For fifteen centuries we can trace these principles. We can see them in operation under Judges and Kings in peace and war, when they were victorious, and when they were vanquished, when they sat under booths in Judea rejoicing, or under Babel's willows mourning.

But how is the national will expressed? Through the ruling authorities; and during all the period just named we find that the condition of the people was materially affected by the moral character of its Rulers. Their piety or their impiety is index enough in most cases to the condition and fortunes of the people. When the Rulers walked in the law of the Lord it went well with the people. When they became idolatrous or vicious, they brought a curse upon themselves and a blight upon the nation.

By royal misgovernment the kingdom was divided, but the condition of prosperity was the same to the dynasty of the North as to that of the South. It is thus expressed, "And as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper." For moral causes, they suffered physical calamities. There were for a time partial judgments inflicted on both kingdoms.—Then first in the one, and long after in the other, an awful crash is heard as if the end had come. A great wail of agony rose when Shalmanezar carried away the captive Israelites, and yet a louder, deeper, tenderer lamentation, when the wrath of God burst upon Jerusalem, and Nebuchadnezzar, reduced to ashes, the city and temple and carried the people captives to Babylonia.