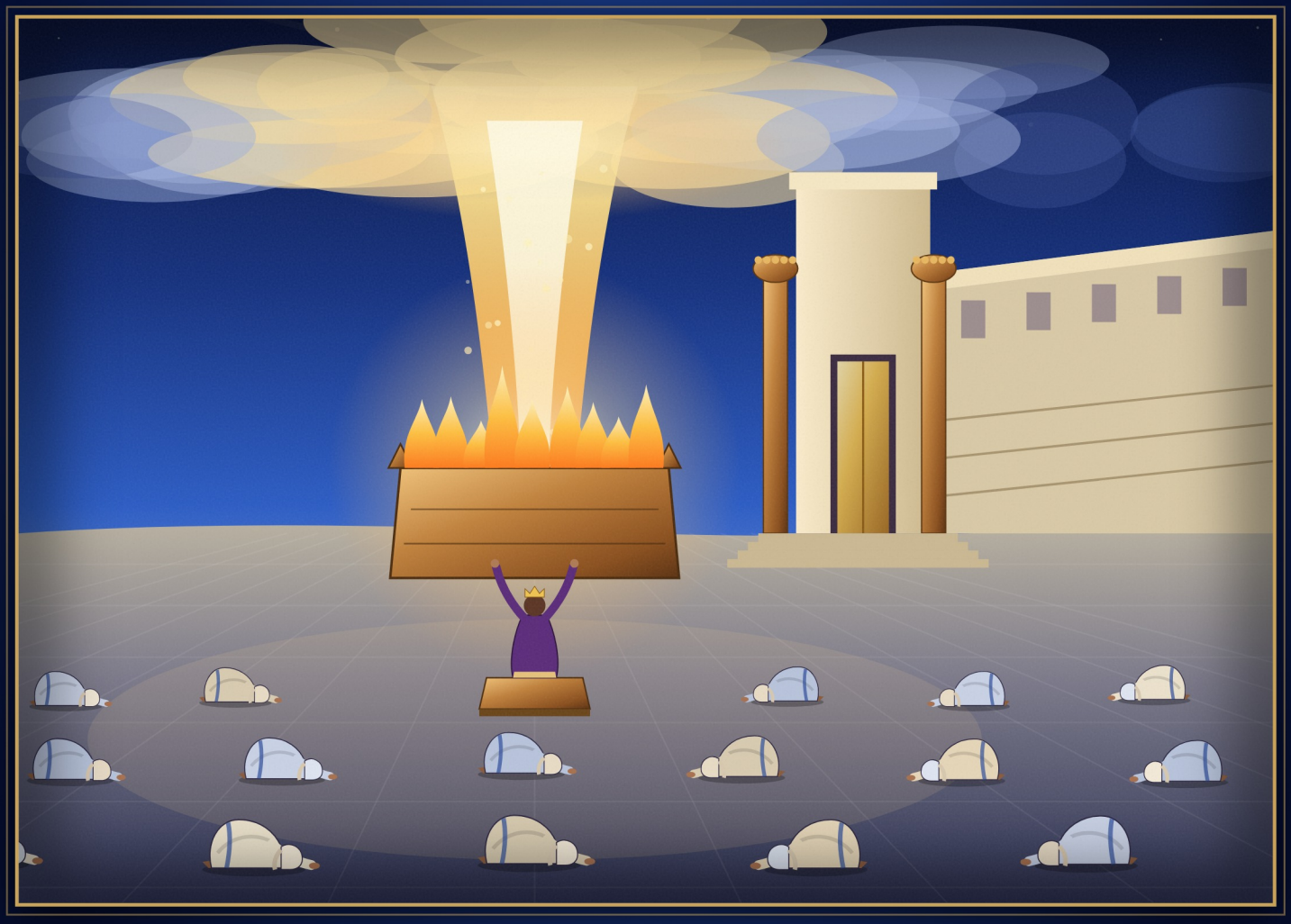
2 CHRONICLES

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study



Solomon's prayer and fire from heaven, kings who sought the LORD and kings who forsook Him, and a God who hears when His people humble themselves

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2 Chronicles Bible Study

A Verse-by-Verse Study

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2 Chronicles Bible Study: A Verse-by-Verse Study

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the book of 2 Chronicles. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

2 Chronicles is the story of the house of David and the house of God. It opens with Solomon asking God for wisdom, building the temple and seeing the glory of the LORD fill it. Then it follows the kings of Judah, one after another, for nearly four hundred years. Some sought the LORD, and God blessed them. Others forsook Him, and trouble came. Again and again, when a king or the people humbled themselves and prayed, God heard. The book ends with the temple burned and the people carried to Babylon, and then, in its last two verses, with King Cyrus of Persia telling the Jews they may go home and build the house of God again. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on 2 Chronicles. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and understand His Word. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters a great deal in 2 Chronicles. It was written after the exile, for Jews who had come home from Babylon to a small, poor land with no king and a humble rebuilt temple. They were asking: Is God still with us? Are His promises to David still good? The Chronicler, as I will call the writer, answers by retelling their history with a few things always in view: God's covenant with David (1 Chronicles 17), the temple and its worship, and God's mercy to everyone who seeks Him. Much of what he tells is also in 1 and 2 Kings. Kings was written to explain why the exile happened. Chronicles was written to show the returned exiles how to live now. If we keep that in

mind, we will understand why the Chronicler includes some things, leaves others out, and keeps coming back to one word: seek.

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written. 2 Chronicles is history, and this study takes it at its word: Solomon really did build the temple, fire really did fall from heaven, and God really did hear the prayers of kings like Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Manasseh. The New Testament reads it the same way. Jesus spoke of Solomon in all his glory and of the queen of the south who came to hear his wisdom (Matthew 6:29; 12:42), and He spoke of the murder of Zechariah the priest between the altar and the house (Luke 11:51; 2 Chronicles 24:20-22). Matthew's family line of Jesus runs through the kings of this book (Matthew 1:6-11). A note on the name of God: in the SLB, when you see "LORD" in capital letters, it stands for God's personal name, Yahweh (often written YHWH), which He made known to Moses (Exodus 3:14-15). When you see "Lord" in regular letters, it translates a word that means master. When you see "LORD God," it stands for the two together. When you see "God," it usually translates Elohim, the general Hebrew word for God.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Hebrew, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

How This Study Is Laid Out

Each chapter of this study follows the same pattern as my study of Revelation:

- Scripture: the full text of the chapter, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the chapter covers.
- Study: the chapter again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the main points of the chapter in a few lines.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live. Some of them are personal. In a group, no one should ever have to answer one aloud, and what is shared in the group stays there.

Some chapters of 2 Chronicles are full of measurements and lists, such as the building and furnishing of the temple (chapters 3 and 4) and the lists of priests, Levites and gifts in Hezekiah's day (chapters 29 to 31). In those places I group the verses and say what the list is, why God put it there, and what it teaches us. Many chapters tell the same events as 1 and 2 Kings. I note those parallels in a short phrase so you can read them if you wish, but this study is written to stand on its own.

Using This Study With a Group

This study works for one person or for a group. 2 Chronicles has 36 chapters, so here are two ways a group can pace it:

- One chapter a week: thirty-six weeks, or about nine months. If you like, add a first meeting to read the Introduction and the Background together.
- A faster pace of about twenty-six weeks: take chapters 3 and 4, 8 and 9, 11 and 12, 14 and 15, 21 and 22, 23 and 24, 27 and 28, 30 and 31, 33 and 34, and 35 and 36 two at a time, and

the rest one at a time. Chapters 6 and 7, Solomon's prayer and God's answer, are long and rich, and some groups may want to give each of them two weeks.

For each meeting, I suggest reading the Scripture out loud together first, straight through, before anyone comments. In the list chapters you may want to read only the first and last verses of each section aloud. Then walk through the Study section, stopping where the group has questions, and finish with the Study Questions and prayer. The first questions in each list can be answered from the text. The later ones are more personal, and no one should feel pressed to answer them aloud.

Some parts of 2 Chronicles are hard to read. Under Asa the people swear that anyone who will not seek the LORD should be put to death (chapter 15). A spirit of falsehood is sent into the mouths of Ahab's prophets (chapter 18). A king murders his brothers (chapter 21), a queen tries to wipe out the royal family (chapter 22), a priest is stoned in the temple court at the king's command (chapter 24), captives are thrown from a cliff (chapter 25), and kings burn their own sons in the fire to false gods (chapters 28 and 33). The book ends with Jerusalem burned and its young men killed even in the sanctuary (chapter 36). I do not skip these passages, and I try to explain them honestly in their setting, without making them a pattern for anyone today. If you lead a group, read those sections ahead of time and be ready to listen. Some people in your group may have been hurt by violence in their family, by the abuse of power, or by people who used God's name to justify cruelty. If someone shares something that puts them or another person in danger, help them get help right away.

I look forward to walking with you through the book of 2 Chronicles. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of 2 Chronicles

2 Chronicles is the fourteenth book of the Bible in our English order, one of the historical books that run from Joshua through Esther. In the Hebrew Bible, 1 and 2 Chronicles were one book, and it stands last of all, among the Writings, so the Hebrew Bible ends with Cyrus' words, "let him go up." The Greek translators split it in two and called it the things left out, because it adds much that Samuel and Kings do not tell. Our English name comes from Jerome, who called it a chronicle of the whole sacred history.

In Israel's history, 2 Chronicles covers nearly four hundred years, from the start of Solomon's reign about 970 B.C. to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., and then jumps ahead to the decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C. It tells of Solomon's wisdom and the building and dedication of the temple, the split of the kingdom about 930 B.C., and the nineteen kings and one queen who ruled in Jerusalem after him. Unlike Kings, it follows only Judah and the line of David. The northern kingdom of Israel appears only when it touches Judah.

The theme of 2 Chronicles is that God hears and restores those who seek Him. Every king is measured by whether he sought the LORD or forsook Him. God put the promise into words when He answered Solomon's prayer:

2 Chronicles 7:14 (SLB)

"and My people, over whom My name is called, humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways, then I Myself will hear from the heavens, and I will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land."

The rest of the book shows that promise at work, again and again. Rehoboam humbles himself and is spared (12:6-7). Asa cries out and is helped (14:11). Jehoshaphat's people fast and pray and see God fight for them (chapter 20). Hezekiah leads the nation back and God heals the people (30:18-20). Even Manasseh, the worst king of all, humbles himself in chains in Babylon and is brought home (33:12-13). The prophet Hanani said it best: "the LORD, His eyes are roving in all the earth to show Himself strong with those whose heart is complete toward Him" (16:9).

2 Chronicles has 36 chapters and 822 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: The Reign of Solomon (chapters 1 to 9)

- Chapter 1: Solomon Asks for Wisdom
- Chapter 2: Solomon Prepares to Build the Temple
- Chapter 3: Solomon Builds the Temple
- Chapter 4: The Temple Furnishings
- Chapter 5: The Ark Comes into the Temple
- Chapter 6: Solomon's Prayer of Dedication
- Chapter 7: Fire from Heaven and the LORD's Answer

- Chapter 8: Solomon's Other Works
- Chapter 9: The Queen of Sheba and Solomon's Splendor

Part Two: The Kingdom Divides and Judah's Early Kings (chapters 10 to 20)

- Chapter 10: The Kingdom Divides
- Chapter 11: Rehoboam Strengthens Judah
- Chapter 12: Shishak Invades and Rehoboam Humbles Himself
- Chapter 13: Abijah's War with Jeroboam
- Chapter 14: Asa Relies on the LORD
- Chapter 15: Azariah's Message and Asa's Covenant
- Chapter 16: Asa's Last Years
- Chapter 17: Jehoshaphat Teaches the Law
- Chapter 18: Micaiah and the Death of Ahab
- Chapter 19: Jehoshaphat Appoints Judges
- Chapter 20: The Battle Is the LORD's

Part Three: Judah's Decline from Jehoram to Ahaz (chapters 21 to 28)

- Chapter 21: Jehoram's Evil Reign
- Chapter 22: Ahaziah and Athaliah
- Chapter 23: Jehoiada Crowns Joash
- Chapter 24: Joash Repairs the Temple and Turns Away
- Chapter 25: Amaziah's Divided Heart
- Chapter 26: Uzziah's Strength and Pride
- Chapter 27: Jotham Walks Before the LORD
- Chapter 28: Ahaz's Unfaithfulness

Part Four: Hezekiah to the Exile and the Decree of Cyrus (chapters 29 to 36)

- Chapter 29: Hezekiah Cleanses the Temple
- Chapter 30: Hezekiah's Great Passover
- Chapter 31: Hezekiah Restores the Offerings
- Chapter 32: Sennacherib's Invasion and Hezekiah's Last Years
- Chapter 33: Manasseh's Sin and Repentance, and Amon
- Chapter 34: Josiah Finds the Book of the Law
- Chapter 35: Josiah's Passover and Death
- Chapter 36: The Fall of Jerusalem and the Decree of Cyrus

Where this book points to Christ: 2 Chronicles is built on God's promise to David that his son would build God's house and that God would establish his throne forever (1 Chronicles 17:11-14).

Solomon built a house of stone, and the kings of David's line sat on the throne until 586 B.C. Then the throne was empty. But the promise was not broken. The angel told Mary that God would give her Son "the throne of David His father," and of His kingdom there would be no end (Luke 1:32-33). The temple, where God put His name and His glory dwelt, points to Jesus, who spoke of His own body as the temple (John 2:19-21), and in whom the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Solomon asked, "will God really dwell with mankind on the earth?" (6:18), and Bethlehem is God's answer. Jesus said that in Him "something greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:42). And the book's last word, that God's people may go up to build His house, looks ahead to the Son of David who will one day reign in Jerusalem over all the earth.

Background of the Book

Author: The book does not name its author. Jewish tradition holds that Ezra the priest and scribe wrote Chronicles. The last two verses of 2 Chronicles are nearly the same as the first verses of Ezra (2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-3), and the two books share the same interest in the temple, the priests and Levites, and the Law of Moses. Many modern scholars speak of an unnamed writer they call the Chronicler and date the book somewhat later, about 400 to 300 B.C. I take the traditional view as likely, and in this study I call the writer the Chronicler either way.

Who it was written to: The Jews who had returned from exile in Babylon to Jerusalem and Judah. They had a rebuilt temple but no king, and they lived under the rule of Persia. Chronicles told them who they were, reminded them that God's covenant with David still stood, and showed them that the way forward was to seek the LORD and worship Him as He commanded.

Setting: Almost the whole book takes place in Judah and Jerusalem, centered on the temple on Mount Moriah. Other places include Gibeon, where Solomon met God; Shechem, where the kingdom split; Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom; Ramoth-gilead east of the Jordan; and finally Babylon, where the people were carried away.

When it was written: About 450 to 430 B.C., after the return from exile, in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Some date it a little later, to about 400 B.C. The family line of David in 1 Chronicles 3 runs several generations past Zerubbabel, who led the first return, which fits a date in the middle or late 400s B.C.

When the events happened: About 970 to 586 B.C., with the closing verses in 538 B.C. Solomon reigned about 970 to 930 B.C. and began the temple about 966 B.C. The kingdom divided about 930 B.C. Jerusalem fell to Babylon in 586 B.C., and Cyrus allowed the Jews to return in 538 B.C.

Dates of the kings: The reign lengths overlap in places, because some kings ruled alongside their fathers for a time (a co-regency), and Israel and Judah did not always count a king's first year the same way. Bible scholars have worked out slightly different dates. In this study I follow one standard set, the dates worked out by Edwin Thiele, the same ones used in my studies of Kings, and I give them with "about."

Sources: The Chronicler names many of the records he used: the book of the kings of Judah and Israel, and the writings of prophets such as Nathan, Ahijah, Iddo, Shemaiah, Jehu son of Hanani and Isaiah (for example 9:29; 12:15; 16:11; 20:34; 32:32). He also clearly knew Samuel and Kings, and often follows them word for word.

Kings and Chronicles: Much of 2 Chronicles tells the same events as 1 Kings 1-22 and 2 Kings. Chronicles often adds details, especially about worship, prophets and prayer, and it leaves out much about the northern kingdom and some of the sins of David and Solomon that its readers already knew from Kings. Now and then the two books give different numbers. Where that happens, I say so plainly and give the common explanations, such as an error in copying a number or a difference in what was counted. Some of the army numbers in Chronicles are very

large. I take them as written, and I mention that some scholars read the Hebrew word for "thousand" as a military unit or clan.

Purpose: To show God's people that He keeps His covenant with David and that He is merciful to all who seek Him. The book teaches that faithfulness brings blessing and forsaking God brings trouble, but its loudest message is hope: no king and no people are so far gone that God will not hear them when they humble themselves, pray, seek His face and turn from their evil ways.

Chapter 1: Solomon Asks for Wisdom

Scripture

1:1-17 And Solomon the son of David strengthened himself over his kingdom, and the LORD his God ***was*** with him and made him exceedingly great. And Solomon spoke to all Israel, to the commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds, and to the judges, and to every leader of all Israel, the heads of the fathers. And Solomon and all the assembly with him went to the high place which ***was*** at Gibeon, for there was the tent of meeting of God, which Moses the servant of the LORD had made in the wilderness. But the ark of God David had brought up from Kiriath-jearim to ***the place that*** David had prepared for it, for he had pitched a tent for it in Jerusalem. And the altar of bronze which Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made, he had put before the tabernacle of the LORD; and Solomon and the assembly sought it. And Solomon went up there to the altar of bronze before the LORD, which ***was*** at the tent of meeting, and he offered up on it a thousand burnt offerings. In that night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, "Ask what I shall give to you." And Solomon said to God, "You Yourself have done great steadfast love with David my father, and You have made me king in place of him. Now, O LORD God, let Your word with David my father be confirmed, for You Yourself have made me king over a people numerous like the dust of the earth. Now give me wisdom and knowledge, and let me go out before this people and let me come in; for who will judge this great people of Yours?" And God said to Solomon, "Because this was with your heart, and you have not asked for riches, wealth, and honor, and the life of those who hate you, and also many days you have not asked for, and you have asked for yourself wisdom and knowledge that you may judge My people over whom I have made you king, the wisdom and the knowledge ***are*** given to you; and riches and wealth and honor I will give to you, which has not been so for the kings who ***were*** before you, and after you it will not be so." And Solomon came from the high place which ***was*** at Gibeon to Jerusalem, from before the tent of meeting, and he reigned over Israel. And Solomon gathered chariotry and horsemen, and he had one thousand four hundred chariots and twelve thousand horsemen, and he placed them in the cities of the chariotry and with the king in Jerusalem. And the king made the silver and the gold in Jerusalem like the stones, and the cedars he made like the sycamores which ***are*** in the Shephelah, for abundance. And the export of the horses which Solomon had ***was*** from Egypt and from Kue; the traders of the king would take ***them*** from Kue at a price. And they brought up and brought out from Egypt a chariot for approximately 15 pounds (six hundred ***shekels***) of silver, and a horse for approximately 3.75 pounds (a hundred and fifty ***shekels***); and thus for all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Syria, by their hand they brought ***them*** out.

Chapter 1 Preview

1 Chronicles ended with David's death and Solomon on the throne. 2 Chronicles opens with Solomon firmly in place and the LORD with him. His first act as king is to lead all Israel to Gibeon, where the old tabernacle of Moses still stood, and to worship. That night God appears to him and says, "Ask what I shall give to you." Solomon asks for wisdom and knowledge to lead God's people, and God gives him that and riches and honor besides.

The chapter closes with a short look at Solomon's chariots, horses, silver and gold. The Chronicler wants us to see from the first page that the blessing of the kingdom flows from seeking God. That is the message of the whole book. Kings tells the same events in 1 Kings 3 and 10.

Chapter 1 Study

1:1 *And Solomon the son of David strengthened himself over his kingdom, and the LORD his God **was** with him and made him exceedingly great.*

"Solomon the son of David strengthened himself over his kingdom." Solomon did not start in a vacuum. He was "the son of David," the heir of God's covenant promise that a son of David would sit on the throne and build God's house (1 Chronicles 17:11-14).

The key line is "the LORD his God was with him and made him exceedingly great." Solomon's greatness came from God. The Chronicler wrote for Jews who had come home from exile in Babylon with no king and very little power. He wanted them to know where real strength comes from. It did not come from armies or gold. It came from the LORD being with His people. That is still true for us.

1:2-6 *And Solomon spoke to all Israel, to the commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds, and to the judges, and to every leader of all Israel, the heads of the fathers. And Solomon and all the assembly with him went to the high place which **was** at Gibeon, for there was the tent of meeting of God, which Moses the servant of the LORD had made in the wilderness. But the ark of God David had brought up from Kiriath-jearim to **the place that** David had prepared for it, for he had pitched a tent for it in Jerusalem. And the altar of bronze which Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made, he had put before the tabernacle of the LORD; and Solomon and the assembly sought it. And Solomon went up there to the altar of bronze before the LORD, which **was** at the tent of meeting, and he offered up on it a thousand burnt offerings.*

Solomon gathered "all Israel," the commanders, judges and family heads, and they went together "to the high place which was at Gibeon." A high place was a hilltop place of worship. Later in this book high places are usually bad, because they were places of idols or of worship God had not approved. Gibeon was different. The Chronicler explains why: "there was the tent of meeting of God, which Moses the servant of the LORD had made in the wilderness." The tabernacle, the portable tent of worship from the days of Moses, stood there, along with the bronze altar that Bezalel made (Exodus 31:1-5; 38:1-2).

The ark of the covenant, the gold-covered chest that held the tablets of the Law, was no longer with the tent. David had brought it up to Jerusalem and pitched a tent for it there (1 Chronicles 15-16). So for a time Israel's worship was split between two places.

"Solomon and the assembly sought it." That word "sought" is one of the great words of Chronicles. To seek God is to turn to Him, depend on Him and worship Him. Solomon offered "a thousand burnt offerings." A burnt offering was an animal wholly burned on the altar, a sign of complete devotion to God. The new king began his reign on his knees. What would it look like for us to begin each new season of life the same way?

1:7 *In that night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, "Ask what I shall give to you."*

"In that night God appeared to Solomon," and God said to him, "Ask what I shall give to you." This is one of the most remarkable offers in the Bible. God put no limit on it. 1 Kings 3:5 tells us it came in a dream.

Why would God make such an offer? I believe it was a test of Solomon's heart. What we ask for when we can ask for anything shows what we really love. Jesus gave His disciples a similar promise, that the Father would give whatever they asked in His name (John 16:23). That promise is not a blank check for selfishness. It is for those whose hearts are set on God's will.

1:8-10 *And Solomon said to God, "You Yourself have done great steadfast love with David my father, and You have made me king in place of him. Now, O LORD God, let Your word with David my father be confirmed, for You Yourself have made me king over a people numerous like the dust of the earth. Now give me wisdom and knowledge, and let me go out before this people and let me come in; for who will judge this great people of Yours?"*

Solomon's answer starts with God, not with himself. "You Yourself have done great steadfast love with David my father." Steadfast love is the Hebrew word hesed. It means God's loyal, covenant love, the love that keeps its promises. Solomon saw his own throne as proof of God's faithfulness to David.

Then he prayed God's promise back to Him: "let Your word with David my father be confirmed." He knew he had been made king "over a people numerous like the dust of the earth," which echoes God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 13:16). The job was too big for him.

So he asked, "Now give me wisdom and knowledge." He wanted to "go out before this people" and "come in," a Hebrew way of saying to lead them in daily life and in war. His question shows his humility: "for who will judge this great people of Yours?" Notice "Yours." Solomon knew Israel was God's people, not his. Every leader, pastor and parent needs to remember that. The people we lead belong to God.

1:11-12 *And God said to Solomon, "Because this was with your heart, and you have not asked for riches, wealth, and honor, and the life of those who hate you, and also many days you have not asked for, and you have asked for yourself wisdom and knowledge that you may judge My people over whom I have made you king, the wisdom and the knowledge **are** given to you; and riches and wealth and honor I will give to you, which has not been so for the kings who **were** before you, and after you it will not be so."*

God was pleased. Solomon had not asked for "riches, wealth, and honor," or for the death of his enemies, or for a long life. He had asked for wisdom to serve others. So God gave him what he asked: "the wisdom and the knowledge are given to you." And then God added what he did not ask: "riches and wealth and honor I will give to you," more than any king before or after him.

Jesus taught the same principle: "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). When we put God's purposes first, He takes

care of the rest. James 1:5 tells us that God gives wisdom to anyone who asks Him in faith. You do not have to be a king to ask.

1 Kings 3:14 adds a promise of long life if Solomon walked in God's ways. The Chronicler leaves that out and moves straight on, but both books show that Solomon's later life did not match this good start.

1:13 *And Solomon came from the high place which **was** at Gibeon to Jerusalem, from before the tent of meeting, and he reigned over Israel.*

Solomon "came from the high place which was at Gibeon to Jerusalem," and "he reigned over Israel." 1 Kings 3:15 says that when he came back he stood before the ark and offered more sacrifices. The Chronicler's point is simple. The reign that followed grew out of that night at Gibeon. Solomon received wisdom from God first, and then he ruled.

1:14-17 *And Solomon gathered chariotry and horsemen, and he had one thousand four hundred chariots and twelve thousand horsemen, and he placed them in the cities of the chariotry and with the king in Jerusalem. And the king made the silver and the gold in Jerusalem like the stones, and the cedars he made like the sycamores which **are** in the Shephelah, for abundance. And the export of the horses which Solomon had **was** from Egypt and from Kue; the traders of the king would take **them** from Kue at a price. And they brought up and brought out from Egypt a chariot for approximately 15 pounds (six hundred **shekels**) of silver, and a horse for approximately 3.75 pounds (a hundred and fifty **shekels**); and thus for all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Syria, by their hand they brought **them** out.*

Now the Chronicler shows God's promise of wealth coming true. Solomon had "one thousand four hundred chariots and twelve thousand horsemen." He "made the silver and the gold in Jerusalem like the stones," and cedar, a costly wood, was as common as the sycamore fig trees in the Shephelah, the low hills west of Judah. His traders bought horses from Egypt and from Kue (an area in what is now southern Turkey) and sold them on to the kings of the Hittites and of Syria.

These verses appear again in 9:25-28, and 1 Kings 10:26-29 tells the same thing. The Chronicler places them here to show that God kept His word right away. But a careful reader of the Law will feel a warning too. Moses said Israel's king must not multiply horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt for them, nor multiply silver and gold (Deuteronomy 17:16-17). Solomon was doing exactly that. The gifts God gave were good. The danger was letting the gifts take the place of the Giver.

That is a danger for us too. God often blesses those who seek Him. But the blessings can slowly become what we trust and love most. The answer is to keep seeking the Lord as Solomon did at Gibeon, every day.

Chapter 1 Summary

Solomon was established as king, and the LORD made him very great. He led all Israel to Gibeon, where the tabernacle of Moses and the bronze altar stood, and offered a thousand burnt

offerings. That night God told him to ask for whatever he wanted. Solomon praised God's steadfast love to David and asked for wisdom and knowledge to lead God's great people. God gave him wisdom and also riches, wealth and honor beyond any other king. Solomon returned to Jerusalem to reign, and the chapter closes with his chariots, horsemen, silver, gold and horse trade, the first signs that God kept His word.

Chapter 1 Study Questions

1. What does verse 1 say was the source of Solomon's greatness? (1:1)

2. Why did Solomon go to Gibeon, and what was there? (1:3-6)

3. What did God offer Solomon, and what did Solomon ask for? (1:7-10)

4. Why did Solomon call Israel "this great people of Yours"? What does that teach leaders today? (1:10)

5. What did God give Solomon besides what he asked for? (1:11-12; Matthew 6:33)

6. What does Deuteronomy 17:16-17 warn a king about, and how do verses 14-17 relate to it?

7. The Chronicler uses the word "sought" in verse 5. What does it mean to seek God?

8. If God said to you, "Ask what I shall give to you," what would you ask for, and what would that show about your heart?

9. James 1:5 promises wisdom to those who ask. Where in your life do you need God's wisdom right now?

10. How can we enjoy God's blessings without letting them take His place in our hearts?

Chapter 2: Solomon Prepares to Build the Temple

Scripture

2:1-10 And Solomon said to build a house for the name of the LORD and a house for his kingship. And Solomon counted seventy thousand men, burden bearers, and eighty thousand men, stonecutters in the hill country, and overseers over them, three thousand six hundred. And Solomon sent to Hiram the king of Tyre, saying, "Just as you dealt with David my father, and you sent him cedars to build for him a house to dwell in, look, I am about to build a house for the name of the LORD my God, to consecrate ***it*** to Him, to burn before Him incense of fragrant spices, and the continual row, and burnt offerings for the morning and for the evening, for the Sabbaths and for the new moons and for the appointed times of the LORD our God; this ***is*** on Israel forever. And the house which I am about to build ***will be*** great, for our God ***is*** great above all the gods. And who will retain strength to build Him a house, for the heavens and the heavens of the heavens do not contain Him? And who ***am*** I that I should build Him a house, except to burn ***incense*** before Him? And now send me a skillful man to work in gold and in silver and in bronze and in iron and in purple and crimson and blue, and who knows ***how*** to engrave engravings, with the skillful men who ***are*** with me in Judah and in Jerusalem, whom David my father prepared. And send me timber of cedars, cypresses, and algums from Lebanon, for I know that your servants know ***how*** to cut the timber of Lebanon; and look, my servants ***will be*** with your servants, and to prepare for me timber in abundance, for the house which I am about to build ***will be*** great and wonderful. And look, to the woodcutters, to those who cut the timber, I give to your servants crushed wheat, approximately 120,000 bushels (twenty thousand kors), and barley, approximately 120,000 bushels (twenty thousand kors), and wine, approximately 120,000 gallons (twenty thousand baths), and oil, approximately 120,000 gallons (twenty thousand baths)."

2:11-18 And Hiram the king of Tyre said in a writing, and he sent ***it*** to Solomon: "Because the LORD loves His people, He has given you ***as*** king over them." And Hiram said, "Blessed ***be*** the LORD, the God of Israel, who made the heavens and the earth, who has given to David the king a wise son, knowing insight and understanding, who will build a house for the LORD and a house for his kingship. And now I have sent a skillful man, knowing understanding, Huram-abi, the son of a woman from the daughters of Dan, and his father ***was*** a Tyrian man, knowing ***how*** to work in gold and in silver, in bronze, in iron, in stones and in wood, in purple, in blue, and in fine linen and in crimson, and to engrave every engraving and to devise every design which will be given to him, with your skillful men and the skillful men of my lord David your father. And now the wheat and the barley, the oil and the wine, which my lord has said, let him send to his servants. And we will cut timber from Lebanon according to all your need, and we will bring it to you ***as*** rafts on ***the*** sea ***to*** Joppa; and you will take it up ***to*** Jerusalem." And Solomon counted all the men, the sojourners who ***were*** in the land of Israel, after the census with which David his father had counted them; and they were found ***to be*** one hundred fifty thousand and three thousand six hundred. And he made of them seventy thousand burden bearers and eighty thousand stonecutters in the hill country, and three thousand six hundred overseers to make the people work.

Chapter 2 Preview

Solomon sets his mind to build "a house for the name of the LORD." He counts his workers and sends a letter to Hiram king of Tyre, the same king who had helped his father David. He asks for a master craftsman and for cedar, cypress and algum timber from Lebanon, and he promises to pay Hiram's woodcutters in wheat, barley, wine and oil. In the middle of his letter Solomon stops to say something every worshiper should remember: the heavens of heavens cannot contain God, so who is he to build Him a house?

Hiram answers warmly. He praises the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth, for giving David a wise son. He sends a skilled man named Huram-abi and promises to float the timber down the coast on rafts. The chapter ends with Solomon putting the foreigners living in Israel to work on the project. 1 Kings 5 tells the same story.

Chapter 2 Study

2:1-2 *And Solomon said to build a house for the name of the LORD and a house for his kingship. And Solomon counted seventy thousand men, burden bearers, and eighty thousand men, stonecutters in the hill country, and overseers over them, three thousand six hundred.*

"Solomon said to build a house for the name of the LORD and a house for his kingship." The temple came first. His own palace came second, and Chronicles says very little about the palace. The Chronicler cares most about the house of God.

Why "for the name of the LORD"? In the Bible a name stands for the person himself, his character and his presence. God would put His name there, meaning He would make Himself known and meet His people there (Deuteronomy 12:5).

Solomon counted "seventy thousand men, burden bearers, and eighty thousand men, stonecutters in the hill country," with 3,600 overseers. Verses 17-18 tell us these workers were foreigners living in the land. This was a huge project, and Solomon planned it carefully. Good work for God still takes planning.

2:3-6 *And Solomon sent to Hiram the king of Tyre, saying, "Just as you dealt with David my father, and you sent him cedars to build for him a house to dwell in, look, I am about to build a house for the name of the LORD my God, to consecrate **it** to Him, to burn before Him incense of fragrant spices, and the continual row, and burnt offerings for the morning and for the evening, for the Sabbaths and for the new moons and for the appointed times of the LORD our God; this **is** on Israel forever. And the house which I am about to build **will be** great, for our God **is** great above all the gods. And who will retain strength to build Him a house, for the heavens and the heavens of the heavens do not contain Him? And who **am** I that I should build Him a house, except to burn **incense** before Him?*

Solomon wrote to Hiram, reminding him of his kindness to David, when Hiram sent cedars for David's palace (1 Chronicles 14:1). Then he told Hiram the purpose of the house. It was "to consecrate it to Him," that is, to set it apart for God alone. The priests would burn incense there,

set out "the continual row," which is the bread of the presence kept on a gold table before God, and offer burnt offerings morning and evening, on the Sabbaths, on new moons and at the appointed feasts. "This is on Israel forever," Solomon said. Worship was not a hobby for Israel. It was their calling.

"The house which I am about to build will be great, for our God is great above all the gods." Solomon wanted the building to fit the God it was for. But he knew no building could. "And who will retain strength to build Him a house, for the heavens and the heavens of the heavens do not contain Him?" He will say this again at the dedication (6:18). "And who am I that I should build Him a house, except to burn incense before Him?"

That is the right attitude in service to God. Solomon was the richest king on earth, and he still asked, "who am I?" God does not need our buildings, our gifts or our work (Acts 17:24-25). He lets us serve Him because He is gracious, and the best we can offer is worship.

2:7-10 *And now send me a skillful man to work in gold and in silver and in bronze and in iron and in purple and crimson and blue, and who knows **how** to engrave engravings, with the skillful men who **are** with me in Judah and in Jerusalem, whom David my father prepared. And send me timber of cedars, cypresses, and algums from Lebanon, for I know that your servants know **how** to cut the timber of Lebanon; and look, my servants **will be** with your servants, and to prepare for me timber in abundance, for the house which I am about to build **will be** great and wonderful. And look, to the woodcutters, to those who cut the timber, I give to your servants crushed wheat, approximately 120,000 bushels (twenty thousand kors), and barley, approximately 120,000 bushels (twenty thousand kors), and wine, approximately 120,000 gallons (twenty thousand baths), and oil, approximately 120,000 gallons (twenty thousand baths)."*

Solomon asked for two things. First, "a skillful man" who could work in gold, silver, bronze, iron, colored yarn and engraving, to work beside the skilled men David had already gathered. Second, timber: cedar, cypress and algum from Lebanon. The forests of Lebanon were famous, and the men of Tyre and Sidon knew how to cut them.

He offered generous pay for Hiram's woodcutters: twenty thousand kors each of wheat and barley, and twenty thousand baths each of wine and oil. A kor was a dry measure of about six bushels, and a bath was a liquid measure of about six gallons, so these were very large amounts.

1 Kings 5:11 describes a yearly payment of wheat and oil for Hiram's household. That seems to be a different payment from the one here, which was for the workers. Both could be true.

I notice how honest Solomon was. He did not try to get the timber cheap because he was building for God. He paid fairly. Christians who work for the Lord should be the most honest people in any deal.

2:11-12 *And Hiram the king of Tyre said in a writing, and he sent **it** to Solomon: "Because the LORD loves His people, He has given you **as** king over them." And Hiram said, "Blessed **be** the LORD, the God of Israel, who made the heavens and the earth, who has given to David the king a wise son, knowing insight and understanding, who will build a house for the LORD and a house for his kingship.*

Hiram answered in writing: "Because the LORD loves His people, He has given you as king over them." Then he blessed the LORD, "the God of Israel, who made the heavens and the earth." These are striking words from a Gentile king. We don't know whether Hiram truly turned to the LORD or was being a good neighbor and a polite trading partner. Kings of that time often praised the gods of other nations. But what he said was true. A good king is a gift from God's love for His people.

He also praised God for giving David "a wise son, knowing insight and understanding." The wisdom God gave Solomon at Gibeon (1:12) was already known beyond Israel's borders.

2:13-14 *And now I have sent a skillful man, knowing understanding, Huram-abi, the son of a woman from the daughters of Dan, and his father **was** a Tyrian man, knowing **how** to work in gold and in silver, in bronze, in iron, in stones and in wood, in purple, in blue, and in fine linen and in crimson, and to engrave every engraving and to devise every design which will be given to him, with your skillful men and the skillful men of my lord David your father.*

Hiram sent "a skillful man, knowing understanding, Huram-abi." His mother was "from the daughters of Dan," and his father was a man of Tyre. 1 Kings 7:13-14 calls him Hiram and says his mother was a widow of the tribe of Naphtali. A common explanation is that she was of Dan by birth and lived in Naphtali's land, or that she was first married into Naphtali, was widowed and later married a man of Tyre. Scripture does not tell us which.

Huram-abi's skill covered metal, stone, wood and cloth. He reminds us of Bezalel and Oholiab, the craftsmen God filled with His Spirit to build the tabernacle (Exodus 31:1-6). Oholiab was from the tribe of Dan too. God values skilled hands. Craftsmen, builders and artists can serve Him as truly as priests.

2:15-16 *And now the wheat and the barley, the oil and the wine, which my lord has said, let him send to his servants. And we will cut timber from Lebanon according to all your need, and we will bring it to you **as** rafts on **the** sea **to** Joppa; and you will take it up **to** Jerusalem."*

Hiram accepted Solomon's terms. "We will cut timber from Lebanon according to all your need," he said, and "bring it to you as rafts on the sea to Joppa." Joppa was the seaport about 35 miles west of Jerusalem. From there the logs went overland and uphill to the city.

Many centuries later, when the second temple was built after the exile, cedar was again brought from Lebanon by sea to Joppa (Ezra 3:7). The Chronicler's first readers would have recognized that. They were doing the same work their fathers had done under Solomon.

2:17-18 *And Solomon counted all the men, the sojourners who **were** in the land of Israel, after the census with which David his father had counted them; and they were found **to be** one hundred fifty thousand and three thousand six hundred. And he made of them seventy thousand burden bearers and eighty thousand stonecutters in the hill country, and three thousand six hundred overseers to make the people work.*

"Solomon counted all the men, the sojourners who were in the land of Israel." A sojourner was a foreigner living among Israel. Many of them came from the Canaanite peoples left in the land (8:7-8). The count came to 153,600, and Solomon divided them into burden bearers, stonecutters and 3,600 overseers.

1 Kings 5:16 gives 3,300 overseers, and 1 Kings 9:23 adds 550 chief officers, for 3,850 in all. Chronicles gives 3,600 overseers here, and 8:10 adds 250 chief officers, also 3,850 in all. The two books seem to count the ranks of officers differently, but they reach the same total.

Kings also mentions a labor force of 30,000 Israelites who took turns in Lebanon (1 Kings 5:13-14). The Chronicler focuses on the foreigners. The temple was built by many hands, from many nations, for the one true God. That is a small picture of what God is doing now, building one house of living stones from every nation through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5).

Chapter 2 Summary

Solomon decided to build a house for the LORD's name and a palace. He organized a large workforce and wrote to Hiram king of Tyre. He explained that the temple was for incense, the bread of the presence and the regular offerings, and that it would be great because God is great, though the heavens cannot contain Him. He asked for a master craftsman and for timber from Lebanon and promised generous food and drink for the woodcutters. Hiram praised the LORD for giving David a wise son, sent the skilled craftsman Huram-abi, and agreed to float the timber to Joppa. Solomon put the foreigners living in Israel to work as burden bearers, stonecutters and overseers.

Chapter 2 Study Questions

1. What two houses did Solomon plan to build, and which one does the Chronicler care most about? (2:1)

2. What did Solomon say the temple was for? (2:4)

3. Why did Solomon ask, "who am I that I should build Him a house"? (2:6)

4. What did Solomon ask Hiram to send, and what did he offer in return? (2:7-10)

5. How did Hiram describe the LORD and Solomon? (2:11-12)

6. Who was Huram-abi, and what could he do? (2:13-14)

7. How do the numbers of overseers in Chronicles and Kings fit together? (2:18; 8:10; 1 Kings 5:16; 9:23)

8. Solomon was the richest king on earth and still felt unworthy to build God a house. How should that shape the way we serve God?

9. God used the skills of a craftsman from Tyre for His house. What skills has God given you, and how could you use them for Him?

10. Ephesians 2:19-22 says believers are being built into a dwelling place for God. What part are you playing in that building?

Chapter 3: Solomon Builds the Temple

Scripture

3:1-17 And Solomon began to build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem on the mountain of Moriah, where He had appeared to David his father, which he had prepared in the place of David, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. And he began to build in the second month, on the second ***day***, in the fourth year of his reign. And these ***are what*** Solomon founded to build the house of God: the length, ***in*** cubits by the former measurement, ***was*** approximately 90 feet (sixty cubits), and the breadth approximately 30 feet (twenty cubits). And the porch which ***was*** on the front, ***its*** length on the front of the breadth of the house ***was*** approximately 30 feet (twenty cubits), and the height approximately 180 feet (a hundred and twenty ***cubits***); and he overlaid it within ***with*** pure gold. And the great house he covered ***with*** timber of cypresses, and he covered it ***with*** good gold, and he put up on it palm trees and chains. And he overlaid the house ***with*** precious stone for splendor; and the gold ***was*** gold of Parvaim. And he covered the house, the beams, the thresholds, and its walls and its doors, ***with*** gold; and he engraved cherubim on the walls. And he made the house of the holy of holies: its length, on the front of the breadth of the house, ***was*** approximately 30 feet (twenty cubits), and its breadth approximately 30 feet (twenty cubits); and he covered it ***with*** good gold, to approximately 45,000 pounds (six hundred talents). And the weight for the nails ***was*** approximately 20 ounces (fifty shekels) of gold; and the upper rooms he covered ***with*** gold. And he made in the house of the holy of holies two cherubim, a work of castings, and they overlaid them ***with*** gold. And the wings of the cherubim, their length ***was*** approximately 30 feet (twenty cubits): the wing of the one, approximately 7.5 feet (five cubits), ***was*** touching the wall of the house, and the other wing, approximately 7.5 feet (five cubits), ***was*** touching the wing of the other cherub. And the wing of the one cherub, approximately 7.5 feet (five cubits), ***was*** touching the wall of the house, and the other wing, approximately 7.5 feet (five cubits), ***was*** clinging to the wing of the other cherub. The wings of these cherubim ***were*** spreading out approximately 30 feet (twenty cubits); and they ***were*** standing on their feet, and their faces ***were*** toward the house. And he made the veil ***of*** blue and purple and crimson and fine linen, and he put up cherubim on it. And he made before the house two pillars, approximately 52.5 feet (thirty and five cubits) ***in*** length, and the capital which ***was*** on its top approximately 7.5 feet (five cubits). And he made chains in the inner room and put ***them*** on the top of the pillars; and he made a hundred pomegranates and put ***them*** on the chains. And he set up the pillars on the front of the temple, one on the right and one on the left; and he called the name of the right ***one*** Jachin, and the name of the left ***one*** Boaz.

Chapter 3 Preview

Now the building begins. The Chronicler tells us where the temple stood and when the work started, and then he gives the main measurements: the length and width of the house, the porch at the front, the gold that covered everything, the holy of holies with its two great cherubim, the veil, and the two bronze pillars named Jachin and Boaz.

This is a chapter of measurements, so I will group the verses and focus on what the details teach rather than on every number. The place matters most. The temple stood on Mount Moriah, where

Abraham offered Isaac and where God stopped the angel of judgment in David's day. God's house was built where sacrifice had been provided and mercy had been shown. 1 Kings 6 tells the same story with more detail.

Chapter 3 Study

3:1-2 *And Solomon began to build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem on the mountain of Moriah, where He had appeared to David his father, which he had prepared in the place of David, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. And he began to build in the second month, on the second* ***day****, in the fourth year of his reign.*

"Solomon began to build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem," on Mount Moriah. This is the only place outside Genesis where the name Moriah appears. In Genesis 22:2 God sent Abraham to the land of Moriah to offer Isaac, and there God provided a ram in Isaac's place. Many believe it was the same ridge.

The Chronicler adds two more links. It was the place "where He had appeared to David his father," and it was "the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite." In 1 Chronicles 21, after David's sinful census, the angel of the LORD stood over Jerusalem with his sword drawn. David bought Ornan's threshing floor, built an altar, offered sacrifices, and God answered by fire and the plague stopped. (2 Samuel 24 calls Ornan by the name Araunah.)

So the temple was built on a spot marked twice by God's mercy through sacrifice. Abraham's son was spared because God provided a substitute. Jerusalem was spared because David offered a sacrifice and God accepted it. Nearly a thousand years later, just outside the walls of that same city, God gave His own Son as the final sacrifice for sin (Romans 8:32). The cross stands on the same line as Moriah and Ornan's threshing floor.

Work began "in the second month, on the second day, in the fourth year of his reign." The second month is about April and May. Using the dates I follow in this study, that was about 966 B.C. 1 Kings 6:1 says it was the 480th year after Israel came out of Egypt.

3:3-7 *And these* ***are what*** *Solomon founded to build the house of God: the length,* ***in*** *cubits by the former measurement,* ***was*** *approximately 90 feet (sixty cubits), and the breadth approximately 30 feet (twenty cubits). And the porch which* ***was*** *on the front,* ***its*** *length on the front of the breadth of the house* ***was*** *approximately 30 feet (twenty cubits), and the height approximately 180 feet (a hundred and twenty* ***cubits****); and he overlaid it within* ***with*** *pure gold. And the great house he covered* ***with*** *timber of cypresses, and he covered it* ***with*** *good gold, and he put up on it palm trees and chains. And he overlaid the house* ***with*** *precious stone for splendor; and the gold* ***was*** *gold of Parvaim. And he covered the house, the beams, the thresholds, and its walls and its doors,* ***with*** *gold; and he engraved cherubim on the walls.*

The house was sixty cubits long and twenty wide. A cubit was the length from elbow to fingertip, about 18 inches, so the main building was about 90 feet long and 30 feet wide. The Chronicler says this was "by the former measurement," the older, longer cubit, which shows he was writing for readers in a later age who used a different cubit.

That is not very large by modern standards. It was about twice the size of the tabernacle. The temple was not a hall for crowds. The people gathered in the courts outside. The house itself was God's dwelling, where only the priests went in.

The porch at the front was twenty cubits wide, and the SLB gives its height as a hundred and twenty cubits, about 180 feet. That would make a tall tower over a building only thirty cubits high (1 Kings 6:2). Some old Greek and Syriac copies read twenty cubits here, and many scholars think a copyist's error crept into the number. Others think the porch really was a tall tower. I take the text as we have it and admit the question is open.

Inside, Solomon lined the walls with cypress, "covered it with good gold," and carved palm trees and chains on it. He set "precious stone for splendor" and used "gold of Parvaim," probably the name of a place known for fine gold, though no one is sure where it was. He engraved cherubim on the walls. Cherubim are a high order of angels who guard God's holiness and surround His throne (Genesis 3:24; Ezekiel 10). The walls of the temple reminded every priest that he stood in heaven's courtroom.

Why all this gold and beauty? Because the house was for the King of kings. It was a picture on earth of God's glory in heaven (Hebrews 8:5).

3:8-9 *And he made the house of the holy of holies: its length, on the front of the breadth of the house,* ***was*** *approximately 30 feet (twenty cubits), and its breadth approximately 30 feet (twenty cubits); and he covered it* ***with*** *good gold, to approximately 45,000 pounds (six hundred talents). And the weight for the nails* ***was*** *approximately 20 ounces (fifty shekels) of gold; and the upper rooms he covered* ***with*** *gold.*

"He made the house of the holy of holies." This was the inner room, a perfect cube, twenty cubits long, wide and high (1 Kings 6:20), about 30 feet each way. Only the high priest entered it, once a year on the Day of Atonement, with the blood of a sacrifice (Leviticus 16). The book of Revelation describes the New Jerusalem as a cube too, length, width and height equal (Revelation 21:16). Many teachers see in that the whole eternal city as God's holy of holies, where His people will see His face (Revelation 22:4).

The room was covered with gold, six hundred talents of it. A talent was about 75 pounds, so this was about 45,000 pounds of gold. Even the nails were gold, and the upper rooms were covered in gold too. No cost was spared for the place where God's presence would rest.

3:10-13 *And he made in the house of the holy of holies two cherubim, a work of castings, and they overlaid them **with** gold. And the wings of the cherubim, their length **was** approximately 30 feet (twenty cubits): the wing of the one, approximately 7.5 feet (five cubits), **was** touching the wall of the house, and the other wing, approximately 7.5 feet (five cubits), **was** touching the wing of the other cherub. And the wing of the one cherub, approximately 7.5 feet (five cubits), **was** touching the wall of the house, and the other wing, approximately 7.5 feet (five cubits), **was** clinging to the wing of the other cherub. The wings of these cherubim **were** spreading out approximately 30 feet (twenty cubits); and they **were** standing on their feet, and their faces **were** toward the house.*

Solomon made "two cherubim, a work of castings," overlaid with gold. Each stood ten cubits tall (1 Kings 6:23), and their wings stretched twenty cubits from wall to wall, one wing of each touching a wall and the other wings touching in the middle. They stood "on their feet, and their faces were toward the house," facing out toward the holy place.

These two great cherubim stood over the ark of the covenant, which had its own two small gold cherubim on its lid, the mercy seat (Exodus 25:18-22). God is described as the One who sits enthroned above the cherubim (1 Chronicles 13:6). The holy of holies was His throne room on earth.

3:14 *And he made the veil **of** blue and purple and crimson and fine linen, and he put up cherubim on it.*

"He made the veil of blue and purple and crimson and fine linen, and he put up cherubim on it." The veil was a heavy curtain that separated the holy place from the holy of holies. It was a constant message: sinful people cannot simply walk into the presence of a holy God.

1 Kings 6:31-32 also speaks of doors of olive wood for the inner room, so the temple seems to have had both. The veil is the detail the New Testament takes up. When Jesus died on the cross, "the veil of the temple was torn into two from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51; the temple of Jesus' day had its own veil). Hebrews 10:19-20 says we now have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, through the veil, that is, His flesh. What the veil kept closed, Christ opened.

3:15-17 *And he made before the house two pillars, approximately 52.5 feet (thirty and five cubits) **in** length, and the capital which **was** on its top approximately 7.5 feet (five cubits). And he made chains in the inner room and put **them** on the top of the pillars; and he made a hundred pomegranates and put **them** on the chains. And he set up the pillars on the front of the temple, one on the right and one on the left; and he called the name of the right **one** Jachin, and the name of the left **one** Boaz.*

In front of the house Solomon set up "two pillars," with a capital on top of each, decorated with chains and a hundred pomegranates. The Chronicler gives their length as thirty-five cubits. 1 Kings 7:15 and Jeremiah 52:21 give each pillar eighteen cubits. A common explanation is that Chronicles gives the combined length of both pillars (eighteen plus eighteen, rounded or measured without a base), while Kings gives each one. Others think a number was miscopied. Either way, they were huge, hollow bronze columns about 27 feet tall by Kings' measure.

He named them. The right one was "Jachin," which means He establishes. The left one was "Boaz," which most take to mean in Him is strength. Every worshiper who walked into the temple courts passed between two bronze sermons: God establishes, and in God is strength. They also echoed God's promise to establish the throne of David's son (1 Chronicles 17:11-12).

We need the same reminders. Our lives, families and churches stand only because God establishes them, and our strength is in Him, not in ourselves (Psalm 127:1).

Chapter 3 Summary

Solomon began building the temple in the second month of his fourth year, on Mount Moriah, at the threshing floor of Ornan, where God had shown mercy to David. The house was sixty cubits long and twenty wide, with a tall porch at the front, and Solomon covered the inside with cypress, gold, precious stones and carved cherubim. The holy of holies was a cube covered with six hundred talents of gold, and in it stood two great gold-covered cherubim whose wings reached from wall to wall. A veil of blue, purple, crimson and fine linen hung before it. In front of the house stood two bronze pillars named Jachin and Boaz.

Chapter 3 Study Questions

1. Where did Solomon build the temple, and what two earlier events happened there? (3:1; Genesis 22:2; 1 Chronicles 21)

2. When did the work begin? (3:2)

3. How big was the main house, and why do you think it was not built to hold crowds? (3:3)

4. What was the holy of holies, and who could enter it? (3:8; Leviticus 16)

5. What did the two cherubim look like, and where did they face? (3:10-13)

6. What was the veil for, and what happened to the temple veil when Jesus died? (3:14; Matthew 27:51)

7. What were the names of the two pillars, and what do they mean? (3:17)

8. The temple was built where God had provided a sacrifice and shown mercy. How does that point us to the cross?

9. Hebrews 10:19-20 says we can now come near to God through Jesus. How often do you take that privilege for granted?

10. Which of the two pillar names do you most need to remember this week, He establishes, or in Him is strength? Why?

Chapter 4: The Temple Furnishings

Scripture

4:1-10 And he made an altar of bronze: its length ***was*** approximately 30 feet (twenty cubits), and its breadth approximately 30 feet (twenty cubits), and its height approximately 15 feet (ten cubits). And he made the sea, cast, approximately 15 feet (ten by the cubit) from its brim to its brim, round all around, and its height approximately 7.5 feet (five by the cubit); and a line of approximately 45 feet (thirty by the cubit) would go around it all around. And the likeness of oxen ***was*** under it, all around, all around, surrounding it, ten in approximately 18 inches (a cubit), encircling the sea all around; the oxen ***were*** two rows, cast in its casting. It ***was*** standing on twelve oxen: three turning northward, and three turning westward, and three turning southward, and three turning eastward; and the sea ***was*** on them above, and all their hindquarters ***were*** inward. And its thickness ***was*** approximately 3 inches (a handbreadth), and its brim ***was*** like the work of the brim of a cup, a blossom of lily; holding, it would contain approximately 18,000 gallons (three thousand baths). And he made ten lavers, and he put five on the right and five on the left, to wash in them; the work of the burnt offering they would rinse in them; and the sea ***was*** for the priests to wash in. And he made the lampstands of gold, ten, according to their ordinance, and he put ***them*** in the temple, five on the right and five on the left. And he made ten tables and placed ***them*** in the temple, five on the right and five on the left; and he made a hundred bowls of gold. And he made the court of the priests and the great enclosure, and doors for the enclosure, and their doors he overlaid ***with*** bronze. And the sea he put on the right side, eastward, opposite ***the*** south.

4:11-22 And Hiram made the pots and the shovels and the bowls. And Hiram finished doing the work which he did for King Solomon on the house of God: two pillars, and the bowls and the capitals on the top of the two pillars, and the two networks to cover the two bowls of the capitals which ***were*** on the top of the pillars; and the four hundred pomegranates for the two networks, two rows of pomegranates for the one network, to cover the two bowls of the capitals which ***were*** on the face of the pillars. And the stands he made, and the lavers he made on the stands; the one sea, and the twelve oxen under it; and the pots and the shovels and the forks and all their utensils Huram-abi made for King Solomon for the house of the LORD, ***of*** polished bronze. In the plain of the Jordan the king cast them, in the thickness of the ground, between Succoth and Zeredah. And Solomon made all these utensils in abundance, exceedingly, for the weight of the bronze was not searched out. And Solomon made all the utensils which ***were for*** the house of God, and the altar of the gold, and the tables, and on them the bread of the presence; and the lampstands and their lamps, to burn them according to the ordinance before the inner room, ***of*** refined gold; and the blossom and the lamps and the tongs ***of*** gold; it ***was*** the perfection of gold; and the snuffers and the bowls and the pans and the fire pans ***of*** refined gold; and the entrance of the house, its inner doors to the holy of holies, and the doors of the house, of the temple, ***of*** gold.

Chapter 4 Preview

With the house built, Solomon makes what goes in it and around it. Outside stand the great bronze altar for sacrifice, the huge bronze basin called the sea, resting on twelve bronze oxen, and

ten smaller basins for washing. Inside the holy place stand ten gold lampstands and ten tables, along with the gold altar for incense and all the gold bowls, snuffers and pans. Huram-abi, the skilled craftsman from Tyre, casts the bronze work in clay ground near the Jordan. There was so much bronze that no one weighed it.

This is another list chapter, and I group it. Every piece had a purpose in worship. Each one reminded Israel that sinful people may come to a holy God only through sacrifice, cleansing and God's own light and provision. 1 Kings 7:13-51 tells the same thing.

Chapter 4 Study

4:1 *And he made an altar of bronze: its length **was** approximately 30 feet (twenty cubits), and its breadth approximately 30 feet (twenty cubits), and its height approximately 15 feet (ten cubits).*

"He made an altar of bronze," twenty cubits long and wide and ten cubits high, about 30 feet square and 15 feet tall. That is far larger than the bronze altar of the tabernacle, which was five cubits square (Exodus 27:1). It stood in the courtyard in front of the house. Every worshiper had to pass it before coming near God.

This was the altar of burnt offering. Here the animals were sacrificed day after day. Its message was plain: without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22). Kings does not mention this altar in its list, but it speaks of the bronze altar at the dedication (1 Kings 8:64). The altar was the first thing a worshiper met, and the cross is the first place any sinner must come today.

4:2-5 *And he made the sea, cast, approximately 15 feet (ten by the cubit) from its brim to its brim, round all around, and its height approximately 7.5 feet (five by the cubit); and a line of approximately 45 feet (thirty by the cubit) would go around it all around. And the likeness of oxen **was** under it, all around, all around, surrounding it, ten in approximately 18 inches (a cubit), encircling the sea all around; the oxen **were** two rows, cast in its casting. It **was** standing on twelve oxen: three turning northward, and three turning westward, and three turning southward, and three turning eastward; and the sea **was** on them above, and all their hindquarters **were** inward. And its thickness **was** approximately 3 inches (a handbreadth), and its brim **was** like the work of the brim of a cup, a blossom of lily; holding, it would contain approximately 18,000 gallons (three thousand baths).*

"He made the sea, cast." This was a giant round bronze basin, ten cubits across from rim to rim and five cubits high, about 15 feet across and 7.5 feet high. Its rim curved out "like the work of the brim of a cup, a blossom of lily," and it was about a handbreadth thick, around 3 inches.

It rested on twelve bronze oxen, three facing each direction. Twelve oxen may have stood for the twelve tribes of Israel, all supporting the work of the priests. Under the rim were two rows of decorations. Chronicles calls them "the likeness of oxen." 1 Kings 7:24 calls them gourds. The two Hebrew words look very much alike, and many think a copyist confused them, or that the gourd-shaped knobs were also shaped like oxen heads.

The sea held "three thousand baths," about 18,000 gallons. 1 Kings 7:26 says two thousand baths. A common explanation is that two thousand was its normal working load and three thousand its full capacity filled to the brim. Others think a number was miscopied. Either way, it was a huge amount of water.

Some readers have noticed that a circle ten cubits across with a line of thirty cubits around it gives a value of pi of about 3. The measure across was probably taken from the outer edge of the curved rim and the line measured lower down, under the rim. The text gives round numbers, and it is not making a mistake.

4:6 *And he made ten lavers, and he put five on the right and five on the left, to wash in them; the work of the burnt offering they would rinse in them; and the sea **was** for the priests to wash in.*

"He made ten lavers, and he put five on the right and five on the left, to wash in them." These were smaller bronze basins on wheeled stands (1 Kings 7:27-39). The parts of the burnt offerings were rinsed in them. The great sea "was for the priests to wash in."

The priests had to be clean to serve. Under the Law they washed their hands and feet before entering the tent of meeting or approaching the altar, or they would die (Exodus 30:17-21). God is holy, and those who come near Him must be cleansed.

Today Christ cleanses us. Paul says He saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), and John says that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us and to cleanse us (1 John 1:9). The bronze basins are a picture of that daily need.

4:7-8 *And he made the lampstands of gold, ten, according to their ordinance, and he put **them** in the temple, five on the right and five on the left. And he made ten tables and placed **them** in the temple, five on the right and five on the left; and he made a hundred bowls of gold.*

Inside the holy place Solomon set "the lampstands of gold, ten," and ten tables, five on each side. The tabernacle had one lampstand and one table (Exodus 25:23-40). Solomon's temple multiplied them. On the tables was set the bread of the presence (verse 19), twelve loaves always before God, one for each tribe (Leviticus 24:5-9). He also made "a hundred bowls of gold."

The holy place had little daylight, since Kings speaks only of windows of closed frames (1 Kings 6:4). Its light came from the lampstands. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12), and He also said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). I see the lampstands and the bread as pictures of what Christ is to His people. Scripture does not tie these two pieces of furniture to Him directly, but the pictures fit His own words.

4:9-10 *And he made the court of the priests and the great enclosure, and doors for the enclosure, and their doors he overlaid **with** bronze. And the sea he put on the right side, eastward, opposite **the** south.*

Solomon made "the court of the priests and the great enclosure," with bronze-covered doors. The inner court was for the priests and the altar. The great court around it was where the people

gathered. Some think the great court also held Solomon's palace buildings. The sea was set on the southeast side of the house.

The layout taught a lesson. There was a way in, from the outer court to the inner court to the holy place to the holy of holies. Each step was closer to God and more restricted. Only by God's appointed way could anyone come near. In Christ, the way into God's presence is now open to every believer (Hebrews 10:19-22).

4:11-18 *And Hiram made the pots and the shovels and the bowls. And Hiram finished doing the work which he did for King Solomon on the house of God: two pillars, and the bowls and the capitals on the top of the two pillars, and the two networks to cover the two bowls of the capitals which* ***were*** *on the top of the pillars; and the four hundred pomegranates for the two networks, two rows of pomegranates for the one network, to cover the two bowls of the capitals which* ***were*** *on the face of the pillars. And the stands he made, and the lavers he made on the stands; the one sea, and the twelve oxen under it; and the pots and the shovels and the forks and all their utensils Huram-abi made for King Solomon for the house of the LORD,* ***of*** *polished bronze. In the plain of the Jordan the king cast them, in the thickness of the ground, between Succoth and Zeredah. And Solomon made all these utensils in abundance, exceedingly, for the weight of the bronze was not searched out.*

These verses sum up the bronze work of "Hiram," the same craftsman called Huram-abi in 2:13 and in verse 16. He made the pots, shovels and bowls for the altar, the two pillars with their capitals and networks, four hundred pomegranates, the stands and lavers, and the sea with its twelve oxen. All of it was "polished bronze."

"In the plain of the Jordan the king cast them, in the thickness of the ground, between Succoth and Zeredah." The Jordan valley had thick clay soil, good for making molds for huge bronze castings. It was a big project, done away from the city.

"The weight of the bronze was not searched out." There was too much of it to weigh. Much of that bronze came from David's earlier victories over Hadadezer (1 Chronicles 18:8). What David won in battle, Solomon used for worship. Work done in one generation for God often bears fruit in the next.

4:19-22 *And Solomon made all the utensils which* ***were for*** *the house of God, and the altar of the gold, and the tables, and on them the bread of the presence; and the lampstands and their lamps, to burn them according to the ordinance before the inner room,* ***of*** *refined gold; and the blossom and the lamps and the tongs* ***of*** *gold; it* ***was*** *the perfection of gold; and the snuffers and the bowls and the pans and the fire pans* ***of*** *refined gold; and the entrance of the house, its inner doors to the holy of holies, and the doors of the house, of the temple,* ***of*** *gold.*

Then come the gold things for the inside of the house. Solomon made "the altar of the gold," the altar of incense that stood before the veil (Exodus 30:1-10). The incense rising from it was a picture of the prayers of God's people (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 8:3-4). He made the tables for the bread of the presence, the lampstands "of refined gold," the blossoms, lamps and tongs, the snuffers, bowls, pans and fire pans, and the gold doors of the holy of holies and of the main house.

"It was the perfection of gold." Everything inside was pure gold. Gold does not rust or tarnish. It was a fitting metal for the presence of the God who never changes. The farther in a person went, from bronze in the courtyard to gold inside, the more precious the materials became.

The Chronicler's first readers had a much humbler temple in their day. When the second temple's foundation was laid, the older men who remembered Solomon's temple wept (Ezra 3:12). Yet God told them through the prophet Haggai that the glory of that latter house would be greater (Haggai 2:9). Many see that promise fulfilled when Jesus Himself walked in the second temple, as it was later rebuilt. God's glory is not in gold. It is in His presence.

Chapter 4 Summary

Solomon made a huge bronze altar for burnt offerings and a great cast bronze sea, resting on twelve oxen, for the priests to wash in. He made ten bronze lavers for rinsing the offerings, ten gold lampstands and ten tables for the holy place, a hundred gold bowls, and the courts with bronze-covered doors. The craftsman Huram-abi cast the pillars, the sea, the stands and all the bronze utensils in the clay ground of the Jordan plain, with so much bronze that it was never weighed. Solomon also made the gold altar of incense, the tables for the bread of the presence, the gold lampstands and lamps, the gold utensils, and the gold doors of the house.

Chapter 4 Study Questions

1. How large was the bronze altar, and what was it for? (4:1)

2. Describe the bronze sea. What was it used for? (4:2-6)

3. How do Chronicles and Kings differ on what the sea held, and what are the common explanations? (4:5; 1 Kings 7:26)

4. Why did the priests have to wash before they served? (4:6; Exodus 30:17-21)

5. How many lampstands and tables did Solomon make for the holy place? (4:7-8)

6. Where did Hiram cast the bronze, and why was the bronze never weighed? (4:17-18)

7. What was the gold altar used for, and what does incense picture in Scripture? (4:19; Psalm 141:2; Revelation 8:3-4)

8. Every worshiper had to pass the altar of sacrifice before coming nearer to God. What does that teach us about coming to God today?

9. Jesus called Himself the light of the world and the bread of life. How has He been light and bread to you?

10. The bronze David won in battle became part of God's house under Solomon. What are you doing now that might bless the next generation of believers?

Chapter 5: The Ark Comes into the Temple

Scripture

5:1-14 And all the work which Solomon did for the house of the LORD was complete. And Solomon brought in the holy things of David his father, and the silver and the gold and all the utensils he put in the treasuries of the house of God. Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers of the sons of Israel, to Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD from the city of David; it ***is*** Zion. And every man of Israel assembled to the king at the feast; it ***was*** the seventh month. And all the elders of Israel came, and the Levites lifted up the ark. And they brought up the ark and the tent of meeting and all the utensils of holiness which ***were*** in the tent; the priests, the Levites, brought them up. And King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel who were gathered to him before the ark ***were*** sacrificing sheep and cattle which could not be counted and could not be numbered for multitude. And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, to the inner room of the house, to the holy of holies, to under the wings of the cherubim. And the cherubim were spreading out wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubim covered over the ark and over its poles from above. And the poles were long, and the heads of the poles were seen from the ark on the front of the inner room, and they were not seen outside; and it has been there to this day. There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets which Moses put ***there*** at Horeb, where the LORD made ***a covenant*** with the sons of Israel when they came out from Egypt. And it was, when the priests came out from the holy place (for all the priests who were found had consecrated themselves; there was no keeping to divisions), and the Levites, the singers, all of them, Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and their brothers, clothed ***in*** fine linen, with cymbals and with harps and lyres, ***were*** standing east of the altar, and with them a hundred and twenty priests blowing on trumpets; and it was, as one, for the trumpeters and for the singers to make one voice heard, to praise and to give thanks to the LORD; and as ***they*** lifted up a voice with trumpets and with cymbals and with instruments of song, and in praising the LORD, "For ***He is*** good, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever," and the house was filled ***with*** a cloud, the house of the LORD, and the priests were not able to stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.

Chapter 5 Preview

The temple is finished. Solomon stores David's dedicated gifts in its treasuries and calls the leaders of all Israel to Jerusalem at the feast of the seventh month. The Levites carry the ark of the covenant up from the city of David, and the priests set it in the holy of holies under the wings of the great cherubim. In the ark are only the two tablets of the Law.

Then the Chronicler adds a scene Kings only touches on. The Levite singers and a hundred and twenty priests with trumpets lift their voices as one to praise the LORD with the song of Israel: "For He is good, for His steadfast love is forever." At that moment a cloud fills the house, and the glory of the LORD is so heavy that the priests cannot stand to serve. 1 Kings 8:1-11 tells the same event.

Chapter 5 Study

5:1 *And all the work which Solomon did for the house of the LORD was complete. And Solomon brought in the holy things of David his father, and the silver and the gold and all the utensils he put in the treasuries of the house of God.*

"All the work which Solomon did for the house of the LORD was complete." 1 Kings 6:38 says the building took seven years. Then Solomon "brought in the holy things of David his father," the silver, gold and utensils David had set apart for God from his victories (1 Chronicles 18:11; 26:26). David had prepared, and Solomon finished.

David never saw the temple. But his gifts were there, and his songs would be sung in it. Many of us will labor for things in God's kingdom that we will not live to see completed. That is no loss. God keeps every gift given in faith.

5:2-3 *Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers of the sons of Israel, to Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD from the city of David; it **is** Zion. And every man of Israel assembled to the king at the feast; it **was** the seventh month.*

Solomon gathered the elders and tribal heads "to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD from the city of David; it is Zion." The ark was the gold-covered chest that held the tablets of the covenant. Its lid, the mercy seat, was where the blood was spattered on the Day of Atonement, and God said He would meet with Israel there (Exodus 25:22). The city of David, also called Zion, was the older southern part of Jerusalem. The temple stood just to the north on higher ground, so the ark went "up."

They came "at the feast; it was the seventh month." This was the Feast of Booths, also called Tabernacles, in the fall, when Israel lived in shelters for a week to remember God's care in the wilderness (Leviticus 23:33-43).

5:4-6 *And all the elders of Israel came, and the Levites lifted up the ark. And they brought up the ark and the tent of meeting and all the utensils of holiness which **were** in the tent; the priests, the Levites, brought them up. And King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel who were gathered to him before the ark **were** sacrificing sheep and cattle which could not be counted and could not be numbered for multitude.*

"The Levites lifted up the ark." The Levites were the tribe set apart to serve at the sanctuary, and the priests were the family of Aaron within that tribe. Verse 7 says the priests carried it into the inner room. This time the ark was carried God's way, on the shoulders of Levites, not on a cart. David had learned that lesson the hard way when Uzzah died (1 Chronicles 13:9-10; 15:13-15).

They also brought up "the tent of meeting and all the utensils of holiness." The tabernacle from Gibeon was retired and its holy things stored in the temple. All along the way, "King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel" were "sacrificing sheep and cattle which could not be counted and could not be numbered for multitude." Joy overflowed in worship.

5:7-10 *And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, to the inner room of the house, to the holy of holies, to under the wings of the cherubim. And the cherubim were spreading out wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubim covered over the ark and over its poles from above. And the poles were long, and the heads of the poles were seen from the ark on the front of the inner room, and they were not seen outside; and it has been there to this day. There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets which Moses put* ***there*** *at Horeb, where the LORD made* ***a covenant*** *with the sons of Israel when they came out from Egypt.*

"The priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place." They set it "to under the wings of the cherubim" in the holy of holies. The long poles stayed in the rings (Exodus 25:15), and their ends could be seen from just in front of the inner room, but not from outside. "It has been there to this day," the Chronicler adds. He was copying an older record written while the temple still stood. By his own day the temple of Solomon had been burned, and the ark was gone.

"There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets which Moses put there at Horeb." Horeb is Mount Sinai. Hebrews 9:4 says the ark once held the jar of manna and Aaron's rod that budded too. Those were placed with the ark in Moses' day (Exodus 16:33-34; Numbers 17:10). By Solomon's time only the tablets were left. Scripture does not say what became of the others.

At the very center of Israel's worship lay God's Word, the covenant He made "with the sons of Israel when they came out from Egypt." God's presence and God's Word always go together.

5:11-12 *And it was, when the priests came out from the holy place (for all the priests who were found had consecrated themselves; there was no keeping to divisions), and the Levites, the singers, all of them, Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and their brothers, clothed* ***in*** *fine linen, with cymbals and with harps and lyres,* ***were*** *standing east of the altar, and with them a hundred and twenty priests blowing on trumpets;*

The Chronicler pauses before the cloud comes to tell us who was there. "All the priests who were found had consecrated themselves; there was no keeping to divisions." David had divided the priests into twenty-four groups that took turns serving (1 Chronicles 24). On this day every priest served.

Then he names the Levite singers: "Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and their brothers," dressed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps and lyres, standing east of the altar. "With them a hundred and twenty priests blowing on trumpets." David had organized this music ministry (1 Chronicles 25). The Chronicler cared about it because the returned exiles were rebuilding the same worship in their own day (Ezra 3:10-11).

5:13-14 *and it was, as one, for the trumpeters and for the singers to make one voice heard, to praise and to give thanks to the LORD; and as **they** lifted up a voice with trumpets and with cymbals and with instruments of song, and in praising the LORD, "For **He is** good, for His steadfast love **is** forever," and the house was filled **with** a cloud, the house of the LORD, and the priests were not able to stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.*

"It was, as one, for the trumpeters and for the singers to make one voice heard, to praise and to give thanks to the LORD." Hundreds of voices and instruments sounded as one. They sang the words that run all through Chronicles and the Psalms: "For He is good, for His steadfast love is forever" (Psalm 136:1). Steadfast love is hesed, God's loyal covenant love.

Then "the house was filled with a cloud." This was the cloud of the LORD's glory, the same cloud that led Israel out of Egypt and filled the tabernacle when Moses finished it (Exodus 40:34-35). "The priests were not able to stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God."

Notice when the glory came. Kings tells us it came when the priests came out of the holy place. Chronicles adds that it came as God's people praised Him with one voice for His goodness and steadfast love. God was not summoned by music, as if worship were a way to control Him. But He was pleased to come and make Himself known as His people honored Him together.

What happens when God shows up? Human work stops. The priests, whose whole job was to serve, could not even stand. Real worship is not about how well we perform. It is about God being present. Today the Holy Spirit lives in every believer and in the church as God's temple (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). Do we come to worship expecting to meet Him, or only expecting a program?

Chapter 5 Summary

When the temple was finished, Solomon stored David's dedicated treasures in it and gathered Israel's leaders at the Feast of Booths in the seventh month. The Levites carried the ark up from the city of David, along with the tabernacle and its holy things, while the king and people offered countless sacrifices. The priests set the ark in the holy of holies under the cherubim. Only the two tablets of the covenant were in it. All the priests had consecrated themselves, and the Levite singers and a hundred and twenty trumpeters praised the LORD together: "For He is good, for His steadfast love is forever." Then the cloud of God's glory filled the house so that the priests could not stand to minister.

I give my time, knowledge, resources and money to God's work, much of which I will never see finished. These free studies are part of that. David gave for a temple he never saw. That is good company to be in.

Chapter 5 Study Questions

1. What did Solomon bring into the temple treasuries, and where had those things come from? (5:1)

2. When did Israel gather, and what feast was it? (5:3)

3. Who carried the ark, and why did that matter? (5:4; 1 Chronicles 15:13-15)

4. What was in the ark, and what does that tell us about the center of Israel's worship? (5:10)

5. Who were the singers, and how many priests blew trumpets? (5:12)

6. What words did they sing, and what happened as they praised? (5:13-14)

7. Why could the priests not stand to minister? (5:14)

8. David gave for a temple he never saw. What are you giving to God's work that you may never see finished?

9. The singers and trumpeters sounded "as one." What helps a church worship with one heart?

10. When you go to worship, what are you expecting? How could you prepare your heart to meet God there?

Chapter 6: Solomon's Prayer of Dedication

Scripture

6:1-11 Then Solomon said, "The LORD has said ***that He would*** dwell in the thick darkness. And I, I have built a house of loftiness for You, and an established place for Your dwelling forever." And the king turned his face around and blessed all the assembly of Israel, and all the assembly of Israel ***was*** standing. And he said, "Blessed ***be*** the LORD, the God of Israel, who spoke with His mouth with David my father, and with His hands has fulfilled ***it***, saying, 'Since the day that I brought out My people from the land of Egypt, I have not chosen a city from all the tribes of Israel to build a house for My name to be there, and I have not chosen a man to be ruler over My people Israel. And I have chosen Jerusalem for My name to be there, and I have chosen David to be over My people Israel.' And it was with the heart of David my father to build a house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. And the LORD said to David my father, 'Because it was with your heart to build a house for My name, you did well that it was with your heart. Only you shall not build the house, but your son who comes out from your loins, he shall build the house for My name.' And the LORD has established His word which He spoke; and I have risen in place of David my father, and I sit on the throne of Israel, just as the LORD spoke, and I have built the house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. And I have put there the ark, where the covenant of the LORD ***is***, which He made with the sons of Israel."

6:12-21 And he stood before the altar of the LORD in front of all the assembly of Israel, and he spread out his palms. For Solomon had made a platform of bronze and had put it in the midst of the enclosure; its length ***was*** approximately 7.5 feet (five cubits), and its breadth approximately 7.5 feet (five cubits), and its height approximately 4.5 feet (three cubits); and he stood on it, and he knelt on his knees in front of all the assembly of Israel, and he spread out his palms toward the heavens. And he said, "O LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in the heavens and on the earth, keeping the covenant and the steadfast love for Your servants who walk before You with all their heart; who have kept for Your servant David my father what You spoke to him; and You spoke with Your mouth, and with Your hand You have fulfilled ***it***, as ***it is*** this day. And now, O LORD, the God of Israel, keep for Your servant David my father what You spoke to him, saying, 'A man shall not be cut off for you from before Me, sitting on the throne of Israel, if only your sons guard their way, to walk in My law just as you have walked before Me.' And now, O LORD, the God of Israel, let Your word be confirmed which You spoke to Your servant, to David. For will God really dwell with mankind on the earth? Look, the heavens and the heavens of the heavens do not contain You; how much less this house which I have built! And turn to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to listen to the cry and to the prayer which Your servant is praying before You, for Your eyes to be open toward this house day and night, toward the place where You have said to put Your name there, to listen to the prayer which Your servant prays toward this place. And listen to the supplications of Your servant and of Your people Israel, which they pray toward this place; and You, may You hear from the place of Your dwelling, from the heavens; and hear, and forgive.

6:22-31 If a man sins against his neighbor, and he lays an oath on him to make him swear, and he comes ***and*** swears before Your altar in this house, and You, may You hear from the heavens, and

act, and judge Your servants, to repay the wicked, to put his way on his head, and to justify the righteous, to give to him according to his righteousness. And if Your people Israel are struck down before an enemy because they sin against You, and they turn back and praise Your name, and pray and make supplication before You in this house, and You, may You hear from the heavens, and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the ground which You gave to them and to their fathers. When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they sin against You, and they pray toward this place and praise Your name, ***and*** from their sin they turn back because You afflict them, and You, may You hear ***in*** the heavens, and forgive the sin of Your servants and of Your people Israel, for You teach them the good way in which they shall walk; and give rain on Your land which You have given to Your people for an inheritance. Famine, if it is in the land, pestilence, if it is, blight and mildew, locust and grasshopper, if it is, if its enemies besiege it in the land of its gates, any plague and any sickness, any prayer, any supplication which there is from any man and from all Your people Israel, who know each his own plague and his own pain, and he spreads out his palms toward this house, and You, may You hear from the heavens, the established place of Your dwelling, and forgive, and give to the man according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You, You alone, know the heart of the sons of mankind), so that they may fear You, to walk in Your ways all the days that they live on the face of the ground which You gave to our fathers.

6:32-42 And also to the foreigner who himself ***is*** not of Your people Israel, and he comes from a distant land for the sake of Your great name and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm, and they come and pray toward this house, and You, may You hear from the heavens, from the established place of Your dwelling, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to You ***for***, so that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, and to fear You like Your people Israel, and to know that Your name has been called on this house which I have built. When Your people go out to battle against its enemies by the way that You send them, and they pray to You ***in*** the direction of this city which You have chosen and the house which I have built for Your name, and may You hear from the heavens their prayer and their supplication, and do justice for them. When they sin against You (for there is no man who does not sin), and You are angry with them and give them up before an enemy, and their captors carry them captive to a land distant or near, and they bring ***it*** back to their heart in the land where they have been carried captive, and they turn back and make supplication to You in the land of their captivity, saying, 'We have sinned, we have done perversely, and we have acted wickedly,' and they turn back to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity where they have carried them captive, and they pray ***in*** the direction of their land which You gave to their fathers, and the city which You have chosen, and toward the house which I have built for Your name, and may You hear from the heavens, from the established place of Your dwelling, their prayer and their supplications, and do justice for them, and forgive Your people who have sinned against You. Now, my God, let Your eyes be open, please, and Your ears attentive to the prayer of this place. And now arise, O LORD God, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength. May Your priests, O LORD God, be clothed ***with*** salvation, and may Your godly ones rejoice in the good. O LORD God, do not turn away the face of Your anointed; remember the steadfast loves of David Your servant."

Chapter 6 Preview

The cloud of glory has filled the temple. Solomon speaks first to God and then turns to bless the people, telling how the LORD kept His promise to David. Then he climbs onto a bronze platform in the courtyard, kneels in front of the whole nation, spreads his hands toward heaven and prays.

He begins with who God is: there is no God like Him, keeping covenant and steadfast love. He asks God to keep His promise to David's line. He marvels that God would dwell with mankind on earth, when the heavens cannot contain Him. Then he asks God to hear every prayer prayed toward that house, in seven kinds of need: a legal dispute, defeat in war, drought, plague and famine, the foreigner who comes to pray, battle, and exile after sin. Again and again he asks God to "hear from the heavens" and forgive. The Chronicler ends the prayer differently from Kings, with words from Psalm 132 calling God to arise to His resting place. 1 Kings 8:12-53 records the same prayer.

Chapter 6 Study

6:1-2 *Then Solomon said, "The LORD has said **that He would** dwell in the thick darkness. And I, I have built a house of loftiness for You, and an established place for Your dwelling forever."*

"The LORD has said that He would dwell in the thick darkness." At Sinai God came in a thick cloud (Exodus 19:9; 20:21). The holy of holies had no windows, and now the dark cloud of glory filled it. Darkness here is not evil. It speaks of God's holiness and mystery. No sinful person can look on Him and live (Exodus 33:20).

"I, I have built a house of loftiness for You, and an established place for Your dwelling forever." Solomon stood amazed. The God of the thick darkness had come to live among His people.

6:3-6 *And the king turned his face around and blessed all the assembly of Israel, and all the assembly of Israel **was** standing. And he said, "Blessed **be** the LORD, the God of Israel, who spoke with His mouth with David my father, and with His hands has fulfilled **it**, saying, 'Since the day that I brought out My people from the land of Egypt, I have not chosen a city from all the tribes of Israel to build a house for My name to be there, and I have not chosen a man to be ruler over My people Israel. And I have chosen Jerusalem for My name to be there, and I have chosen David to be over My people Israel.'*

"The king turned his face around and blessed all the assembly of Israel," while they all stood. His blessing began with praise: "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who spoke with His mouth with David my father, and with His hands has fulfilled it." God's mouth promised, and God's hands did it.

For centuries God had not chosen a city for His house or a man to rule His people. Then He chose both: "I have chosen Jerusalem for My name to be there, and I have chosen David to be over My people Israel." Chronicles stresses both choices. The returned exiles of the Chronicler's day needed to know that God's choice of Jerusalem and of David's line had not been canceled by the exile.

6:7-11 *And it was with the heart of David my father to build a house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. And the LORD said to David my father, 'Because it was with your heart to build a house for My name, you did well that it was with your heart. Only you shall not build the house, but your son who comes out from your loins, he shall build the house for My name.' And the LORD has established His word which He spoke; and I have risen in place of David my father, and I sit on the throne of Israel, just as the LORD spoke, and I have built the house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. And I have put there the ark, where the covenant of the LORD* ***is****, which He made with the sons of Israel."*

"It was with the heart of David my father to build a house for the name of the LORD." God's answer to David was kind: "you did well that it was with your heart." But David was not the one to build it. "Your son who comes out from your loins, he shall build the house for My name."

God sometimes says no to good desires. That does not mean the desire was wrong. David's longing was honored, and his son fulfilled it. Solomon could say, "the LORD has established His word which He spoke." The king was on the throne, the house was built, and the ark, "where the covenant of the LORD is," had its place.

6:12-13 *And he stood before the altar of the LORD in front of all the assembly of Israel, and he spread out his palms. For Solomon had made a platform of bronze and had put it in the midst of the enclosure; its length* ***was*** *approximately 7.5 feet (five cubits), and its breadth approximately 7.5 feet (five cubits), and its height approximately 4.5 feet (three cubits); and he stood on it, and he knelt on his knees in front of all the assembly of Israel, and he spread out his palms toward the heavens.*

"He stood before the altar of the LORD in front of all the assembly of Israel, and he spread out his palms." Only Chronicles explains how. "Solomon had made a platform of bronze," five cubits square and three cubits high, about 7.5 feet square and 4.5 feet high, in the middle of the courtyard. "He stood on it, and he knelt on his knees in front of all the assembly of Israel."

Think about that. The greatest king in the world climbed up where everyone could see him, and then knelt. He did not raise himself up to look important. He raised himself up so everyone could see him bow. A leader's highest place is on his knees before God.

6:14-15 *And he said, "O LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in the heavens and on the earth, keeping the covenant and the steadfast love for Your servants who walk before You with all their heart; who have kept for Your servant David my father what You spoke to him; and You spoke with Your mouth, and with Your hand You have fulfilled* ***it****, as* ***it is*** *this day.*

"O LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in the heavens and on the earth." Real prayer starts with God, not with our list. Solomon praised Him as the God "keeping the covenant and the steadfast love for Your servants who walk before You with all their heart." A covenant is a binding agreement God makes with His people, with promises He commits Himself to keep. God's hesed, His loyal love, is how He keeps it.

He had kept His word to David: "You spoke with Your mouth, and with Your hand You have fulfilled it, as it is this day." The finished temple was the proof standing in front of them.

6:16-17 *And now, O LORD, the God of Israel, keep for Your servant David my father what You spoke to him, saying, 'A man shall not be cut off for you from before Me, sitting on the throne of Israel, if only your sons guard their way, to walk in My law just as you have walked before Me.' And now, O LORD, the God of Israel, let Your word be confirmed which You spoke to Your servant, to David.*

Then Solomon asked God to keep the rest of His promise. God had told David, "A man shall not be cut off for you from before Me, sitting on the throne of Israel, if only your sons guard their way, to walk in My law." 1 Kings 8:25 says "walk before Me." Chronicles says "to walk in My law," which shows what walking before God means: living by His Word.

"Let Your word be confirmed which You spoke to Your servant, to David." Solomon prayed God's promise back to Him. That is one of the best ways to pray. When we pray what God has already said, we pray with confidence.

Each king's personal blessing depended on obedience. But the promise of an everlasting throne for David's house did not finally rest on them. It rests on Jesus, the Son of David, to whom God will give "the throne of David His father," with a kingdom that has no end (Luke 1:32-33).

6:18 *For will God really dwell with mankind on the earth? Look, the heavens and the heavens of the heavens do not contain You; how much less this house which I have built!*

This is the heart of the prayer. "For will God really dwell with mankind on the earth? Look, the heavens and the heavens of the heavens do not contain You; how much less this house which I have built!"

Chronicles adds "with mankind." The wonder is not only that God would come to earth, but that He would live with people. Solomon had built the most beautiful building in the world, and he said it could not hold God. God is everywhere present (Psalm 139:7-10). He did not need a house. The temple was a gift of grace, a place where the infinite God chose to meet His people.

Solomon's question has a final answer, and it is yes. God the Son "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). In Jesus Christ, God really did dwell with mankind on the earth. And one day the tabernacle of God will be with men forever (Revelation 21:3).

6:19-21 *And turn to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to listen to the cry and to the prayer which Your servant is praying before You, for Your eyes to be open toward this house day and night, toward the place where You have said to put Your name there, to listen to the prayer which Your servant prays toward this place. And listen to the supplications of Your servant and of Your people Israel, which they pray toward this place; and You, may You hear from the place of Your dwelling, from the heavens; and hear, and forgive.*

Solomon asked God to "turn to the prayer of Your servant," and to keep His eyes open "toward this house day and night." The people would pray toward the temple, but God would hear "from the place of Your dwelling, from the heavens; and hear, and forgive."

The temple was where the people looked. Heaven was where God lived. And the first thing Solomon asked God to do with their prayers was forgive. He knew Israel's deepest need was not rain or victory, but forgiveness. That is still our deepest need. Today we do not pray toward a building. We pray through a Person, Jesus our High Priest, and through Him we come boldly to God's throne (Hebrews 4:14-16).

6:22-23 *If a man sins against his neighbor, and he lays an oath on him to make him swear, and he comes **and** swears before Your altar in this house, and You, may You hear from the heavens, and act, and judge Your servants, to repay the wicked, to put his way on his head, and to justify the righteous, to give to him according to his righteousness.*

Now come seven cases. The first is a legal dispute that human judges could not settle. If a man was accused of wronging his neighbor, he would swear an oath of innocence "before Your altar in this house." Solomon asked God to "judge Your servants, to repay the wicked," and "to justify the righteous." When human courts cannot see the truth, God can. The Law had a similar oath for some cases of lost property (Exodus 22:10-11).

6:24-25 *And if Your people Israel are struck down before an enemy because they sin against You, and they turn back and praise Your name, and pray and make supplication before You in this house, and You, may You hear from the heavens, and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the ground which You gave to them and to their fathers.*

The second case is defeat in battle. "If Your people Israel are struck down before an enemy because they sin against You, and they turn back and praise Your name." Moses had warned that defeat would follow unfaithfulness (Deuteronomy 28:25).

Notice the pattern: sin, discipline, turning back, prayer, forgiveness, restoration. Solomon asked God to "bring them back to the ground which You gave to them and to their fathers." God's discipline is meant to bring His people home, not to destroy them.

6:26-27 *When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they sin against You, and they pray toward this place and praise Your name, **and** from their sin they turn back because You afflict them, and You, may You hear **in** the heavens, and forgive the sin of Your servants and of Your people Israel, for You teach them the good way in which they shall walk; and give rain on Your land which You have given to Your people for an inheritance.*

The third case is drought. "When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they sin against You." In a land that depended on rain, drought was life or death (Deuteronomy 11:16-17). Solomon asked God to forgive, to "teach them the good way in which they shall walk," and to send rain.

Real repentance includes learning. It is not only feeling sorry. It is being taught by God to walk a new way.

6:28-31 *Famine, if it is in the land, pestilence, if it is, blight and mildew, locust and grasshopper, if it is, if its enemies besiege it in the land of its gates, any plague and any sickness, any prayer, any supplication which there is from any man and from all Your people Israel, who know each his own plague and his own pain, and he spreads out his palms toward this house, and You, may You hear from the heavens, the established place of Your dwelling, and forgive, and give to the man according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You, You alone, know the heart of the sons of mankind), so that they may fear You, to walk in Your ways all the days that they live on the face of the ground which You gave to our fathers.*

The fourth case covers every disaster: famine, pestilence, blight, mildew, locusts, enemy siege, "any plague and any sickness." Solomon asked God to hear anyone "who know each his own plague and his own pain." The deepest plague is the one inside our own heart.

"You, You alone, know the heart of the sons of mankind." God answers knowing exactly who is praying and why. The goal was "so that they may fear You, to walk in Your ways." When God answers prayer, it should lead us to honor Him more, not to forget Him once the trouble is past.

6:32-33 *And also to the foreigner who himself **is** not of Your people Israel, and he comes from a distant land for the sake of Your great name and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm, and they come and pray toward this house, and You, may You hear from the heavens, from the established place of Your dwelling, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to You **for**, so that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, and to fear You like Your people Israel, and to know that Your name has been called on this house which I have built.*

The fifth case is one of the most beautiful in the Old Testament. "And also to the foreigner who himself is not of Your people Israel." Solomon pictured Gentiles hearing of God's "great name" and coming from far away to pray toward the temple. He asked God to answer them, "so that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, and to fear You like Your people Israel."

From the beginning God's plan was to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham (Genesis 12:3). The temple was never meant to be a private club. Isaiah later said God's house would be called a house of prayer for all the peoples, and Jesus quoted those words when He cleansed the temple (Isaiah 56:7; Mark 11:17). In chapter 9 the queen of Sheba will come from far away. And through Jesus the door has been thrown open to every nation (Ephesians 2:11-13).

6:34-35 *When Your people go out to battle against its enemies by the way that You send them, and they pray to You **in** the direction of this city which You have chosen and the house which I have built for Your name, and may You hear from the heavens their prayer and their supplication, and do justice for them.*

The sixth case is going out to war "by the way that You send them." That is the condition. This was a battle God sent them to fight, not one they chose for their own glory. They would pray toward "this city which You have chosen," and Solomon asked God to hear "and do justice for them." God's people were to depend on Him, not on horses and chariots (Psalm 20:7).

6:36-39 *When they sin against You (for there is no man who does not sin), and You are angry with them and give them up before an enemy, and their captors carry them captive to a land distant or near, and they bring **it** back to their heart in the land where they have been carried captive, and they turn back and make supplication to You in the land of their captivity, saying, 'We have sinned, we have done perversely, and we have acted wickedly,' and they turn back to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity where they have carried them captive, and they pray **in** the direction of their land which You gave to their fathers, and the city which You have chosen, and toward the house which I have built for Your name, and may You hear from the heavens, from the established place of Your dwelling, their prayer and their supplications, and do justice for them, and forgive Your people who have sinned against You.*

The seventh case is the hardest, and it came true. "When they sin against You (for there is no man who does not sin)." Solomon knew human nature. Paul would later say all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). If the nation kept sinning, God would let enemies carry them "captive to a land distant or near," just as Moses had warned (Leviticus 26:33; Deuteronomy 28:64).

Even then, hope was not gone. If they would "bring it back to their heart," turn and pray, saying, "We have sinned, we have done perversely, and we have acted wickedly," and turn back to God "with all their heart and with all their soul," Solomon asked God to hear and "forgive Your people who have sinned against You."

This is exactly what happened. Judah went to Babylon, and Jerusalem fell in 586 B.C. In exile, Daniel prayed almost these words (Daniel 9:5), and God moved Cyrus king of Persia to let the Jews go home in 538 B.C. (2 Chronicles 36:22-23). The Chronicler's first readers were living proof that God heard this prayer. No sin is so great that God will not hear the one who truly turns back to Him.

6:40-42 *Now, my God, let Your eyes be open, please, and Your ears attentive to the prayer of this place. And now arise, O LORD God, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength. May Your priests, O LORD God, be clothed **with** salvation, and may Your godly ones rejoice in the good. O LORD God, do not turn away the face of Your anointed; remember the steadfast loves of David Your servant."*

Here Chronicles closes the prayer in its own way. "Now, my God, let Your eyes be open, please, and Your ears attentive to the prayer of this place." Then Solomon borrows words from Psalm 132:8-10, a psalm about David bringing the ark to Zion: "And now arise, O LORD God, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength." For centuries the ark had moved from place to place. Now it had a resting place, and Solomon invited God to take His throne there.

He prayed that the priests would "be clothed with salvation," and that God's "godly ones rejoice in the good." Then he ended, "O LORD God, do not turn away the face of Your anointed; remember the steadfast loves of David Your servant."

"Your anointed" here is Solomon, the king anointed with oil. But the word anointed is mashiach in Hebrew, the word we know as Messiah. Solomon's last plea rested not on his own goodness but

on God's steadfast love promised to David. Isaiah 55:3 speaks of "the faithful acts of steadfast love of David," and Paul quotes those words of Isaiah to show they are fulfilled in the risen Jesus (Acts 13:34). Every prayer for God's mercy finally rests on the promise God made to David's greater Son.

Chapter 6 Summary

Solomon declared that he had built a house for the LORD who dwells in thick darkness. He blessed the people and told how God had chosen Jerusalem and David and kept His promise that David's son would build the temple. Standing on a bronze platform, then kneeling before all Israel with hands spread to heaven, he praised the God who keeps covenant and steadfast love, asked Him to keep His promise to David's line, and marveled that God would dwell with mankind when the heavens cannot contain Him. He asked God to hear and forgive in seven cases: a disputed oath, defeat in war, drought, plague and famine, the foreigner's prayer, battle and exile. He ended by asking God to arise to His resting place and to remember His steadfast love to David.

Chapter 6 Study Questions

1. What did Solomon say about where the LORD dwells? (6:1-2)

2. What two choices did God make, according to Solomon? (6:5-6)

3. What did God say about David's desire to build the temple? (6:8-9)

4. Where did Solomon stand and kneel to pray, and why do you think he did it there? (6:12-13)

5. How did Solomon begin his prayer, before he asked for anything? (6:14-15)

6. What question did Solomon ask in verse 18, and how is it answered in John 1:14?

7. Name some of the seven cases Solomon prayed about. What did he ask God to do in almost every one? (6:22-39)

8. Solomon prayed for foreigners who would come to pray toward the temple (6:32-33). How does that show God's heart for the nations, and what does it mean for you?

9. Solomon said, "there is no man who does not sin" (6:36). How should that truth shape the way we pray?

10. Solomon prayed God's own promises back to Him (6:17, 42). What promise of God could you pray back to Him this week?

Chapter 7: Fire from Heaven and the LORD's Answer

Scripture

7:1-11 And as Solomon finished praying, then the fire came down from the heavens, and it consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the house. And the priests were not able to go into the house of the LORD, for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD. And all the sons of Israel ***were*** seeing as the fire came down and the glory of the LORD ***was*** on the house, and they knelt ***with*** faces to the ground on the pavement, and they bowed down, and ***they*** gave thanks to the LORD: "For ***He is*** good, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever." And the king and all the people ***were*** sacrificing sacrifice before the LORD. And King Solomon sacrificed the sacrifice of the cattle, twenty-two thousand, and sheep, a hundred and twenty thousand; and the king and all the people dedicated the house of God. And the priests ***were*** standing at their duties, and the Levites with the instruments of the song of the LORD which David the king had made to give thanks to the LORD, "For His steadfast love ***is*** forever," when David praised by their hand; and the priests ***were*** blowing trumpets before them, and all Israel ***were*** standing. And Solomon consecrated the middle of the court which ***was*** before the house of the LORD, for there he offered the burnt offerings and the fat of the peace offerings; for the altar of bronze which Solomon had made was not able to contain the burnt offering and the grain offering and the fat. And Solomon held the feast at that time seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great assembly, from Lebo-hamath to the Wadi of Egypt. And on the eighth day they held a solemn assembly, for they had held the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days. And on the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people away to their tents, joyful and good of heart over the good which the LORD had done for David and for Solomon and for Israel His people. And Solomon finished the house of the LORD and the house of the king; and all that came on the heart of Solomon to do in the house of the LORD and in his own house, he made successful.

7:12-22 And the LORD appeared to Solomon in the night, and He said to him, "I have heard your prayer, and I have chosen this place for Myself for a house of sacrifice. If I shut up the heavens and there is no rain, and if I command the locust to devour the land, and if I send pestilence among My people, and My people, over whom My name is called, humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways, then I Myself will hear from the heavens, and I will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land. Now My eyes will be open, and My ears attentive, to the prayer of this place. And now I have chosen and I have consecrated this house, for My name to be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there all the days. And you, if you walk before Me just as David your father walked, and to do according to all that I have commanded you, and you keep My statutes and My judgments, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom, just as I made ***a covenant*** with David your father, saying, 'There shall not be cut off for you a man ruling over Israel.' And if you, you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then I will pluck them up from upon My ground which I have given to them; and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will throw away from before My face, and I will make it a proverb and a taunt among all the peoples. And ***as for*** this house, which was exalted, everyone

who passes by it will be appalled, and he will say, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house?' And they will say, 'Because they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who brought them out from the land of Egypt, and they took hold of other gods, and they bowed down to them and served them; therefore He has brought on them all this calamity.'"

Chapter 7 Preview

Solomon finishes praying, and God answers at once. Fire comes down from heaven and burns up the offerings, and the glory of the LORD fills the house again so that the priests cannot go in. All Israel falls on their faces and sings, "For He is good, for His steadfast love is forever." Then come a huge sacrifice and fourteen days of feasting before the people go home full of joy.

Later God appears to Solomon by night and answers his prayer in words. He has chosen this house. When He sends drought, locusts or plague, if His people humble themselves, pray, seek His face and turn from their evil ways, He will hear, forgive and heal their land. Then He sets two roads before Solomon: walk with Me as David did, and your throne will stand; turn to other gods, and this house will become a ruin. Verse 14 is one of the best-known promises in the Old Testament, and we will take time over it. 1 Kings 8:62-9:9 tells the same events.

Chapter 7 Study

7:1-3 *And as Solomon finished praying, then the fire came down from the heavens, and it consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the house. And the priests were not able to go into the house of the LORD, for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD. And all the sons of Israel* ***were*** *seeing as the fire came down and the glory of the LORD* ***was*** *on the house, and they knelt* ***with*** *faces to the ground on the pavement, and they bowed down, and* ***they*** *gave thanks to the LORD: "For* ***He is*** *good, for His steadfast love* ***is*** *forever."*

"As Solomon finished praying, then the fire came down from the heavens, and it consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the house." Kings does not mention the fire. Chronicles does, because it shows that God accepted the temple and its sacrifices. Fire from God had fallen before on the first offerings at the tabernacle (Leviticus 9:24) and on David's altar at this very place (1 Chronicles 21:26). Later it would fall on Elijah's altar on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:38).

The glory was so great that "the priests were not able to go into the house of the LORD." All the people saw it, "and they knelt with faces to the ground on the pavement, and they bowed down." Then they sang: "For He is good, for His steadfast love is forever."

What do you do when God shows Himself? The people did not clap or cheer. They fell on their faces and gave thanks. Real worship begins with seeing who God is, and it ends in humble thanks for His goodness and steadfast love.

7:4-7 *And the king and all the people **were** sacrificing sacrifice before the LORD. And King Solomon sacrificed the sacrifice of the cattle, twenty-two thousand, and sheep, a hundred and twenty thousand; and the king and all the people dedicated the house of God. And the priests **were** standing at their duties, and the Levites with the instruments of the song of the LORD which David the king had made to give thanks to the LORD, "For His steadfast love **is** forever," when David praised by their hand; and the priests **were** blowing trumpets before them, and all Israel **were** standing. And Solomon consecrated the middle of the court which **was** before the house of the LORD, for there he offered the burnt offerings and the fat of the peace offerings; for the altar of bronze which Solomon had made was not able to contain the burnt offering and the grain offering and the fat.*

"King Solomon sacrificed the sacrifice of the cattle, twenty-two thousand, and sheep, a hundred and twenty thousand." These were mostly peace offerings, sacrifices shared between God, the priests and the worshipers, eaten in a joyful meal of fellowship (Leviticus 3; 7:11-15). With all Israel present for two weeks, this was a national feast. I take the numbers as written, as 1 Kings 8:63 gives them too.

The priests stood at their posts, and the Levites played the instruments "which David the king had made to give thanks to the LORD." The great bronze altar "was not able to contain" so many offerings, so Solomon consecrated the middle of the courtyard for the overflow. Worship that day was bigger than the altar.

7:8-10 *And Solomon held the feast at that time seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great assembly, from Lebo-hamath to the Wadi of Egypt. And on the eighth day they held a solemn assembly, for they had held the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days. And on the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people away to their tents, joyful and good of heart over the good which the LORD had done for David and for Solomon and for Israel His people.*

The feast lasted "seven days," and people came "from Lebo-hamath to the Wadi of Egypt," that is, from the far north of the land to the far south. Verse 9 explains the timing: seven days for "the dedication of the altar" and then the Feast of Booths for seven days, with a solemn assembly on the eighth day (Leviticus 23:36). On the twenty-third day of the seventh month Solomon sent the people home.

They went "joyful and good of heart over the good which the LORD had done for David and for Solomon and for Israel His people." Notice whose goodness they celebrated. Not Solomon's building skill, but the LORD's goodness. When God's people truly meet Him, they leave glad.

7:11 *And Solomon finished the house of the LORD and the house of the king; and all that came on the heart of Solomon to do in the house of the LORD and in his own house, he made successful.*

"Solomon finished the house of the LORD and the house of the king." 1 Kings 9:10 says the two projects together took twenty years. Everything he planned "he made successful." The Hebrew word for success here is a favorite of the Chronicler. Again and again in this book, those who seek God prosper (26:5; 31:21). Prosper here does not mean easy riches. It means the work God gives you to do comes to its intended end.

7:12 *And the LORD appeared to Solomon in the night, and He said to him, "I have heard your prayer, and I have chosen this place for Myself for a house of sacrifice.*

Some time later, "the LORD appeared to Solomon in the night," as He had at Gibeon (1:7). 1 Kings 9:2 says this was the second time. God's answer to the long prayer of chapter 6 begins simply: "I have heard your prayer, and I have chosen this place for Myself for a house of sacrifice." God had already answered by fire. Now He answered in words.

Notice the phrase "a house of sacrifice." The temple was a house of prayer (6:21), but prayer and sacrifice went together. Sinners could come near and be heard only on the ground of a sacrifice God accepted. That points us straight to Christ, whose one sacrifice opens the way for every prayer we pray (Hebrews 10:12, 19-22).

7:13-15 *If I shut up the heavens and there is no rain, and if I command the locust to devour the land, and if I send pestilence among My people, and My people, over whom My name is called, humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways, then I Myself will hear from the heavens, and I will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land. Now My eyes will be open, and My ears attentive, to the prayer of this place.*

These verses are found only in Chronicles, and verse 14 is one of the most loved promises in the Bible. Let us read it first for what it meant then, and then think about what it means for us.

God picks up the very cases Solomon prayed about: "If I shut up the heavens and there is no rain, and if I command the locust to devour the land, and if I send pestilence among My people." Notice who sends the trouble. God says "I." These were not random disasters. In the covenant God made with Israel at Sinai, He promised rain and harvest for obedience, and He warned of drought, locusts and disease for turning away (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). The trouble was discipline, and its purpose was to bring His people back.

Then comes the promise. "And My people, over whom My name is called." This is Israel, the nation God had chosen and called by His name, the people living in the land He gave them, with the temple where He put His name. God names four things they must do.

They must "humble themselves." That means coming down from pride and admitting we are not in charge and not in the right. Humility is the first step in this book. Rehoboam (12:6-7), Hezekiah (32:26) and even wicked Manasseh (33:12-13) are all shown mercy when they humble themselves.

They must "pray." They must call out to God, as Solomon had just asked God to hear them do.

They must "seek My face." To seek God's face is to want God Himself, not only His help. It is the great word of Chronicles. Kings who sought the LORD were blessed (15:2; 26:5), and those who did not met trouble.

They must "turn from their evil ways." This is repentance. Prayer without turning from sin is not what God asks for. Humility, prayer and seeking God must lead to a changed life.

Then God makes three promises of His own: "then I Myself will hear from the heavens, and I will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land." He will hear the prayer. He will forgive the sin, which was the real problem. And He will heal the land, which here means ending the drought, the locusts and the plague, so the land of Israel would bear its crops again.

"Now My eyes will be open, and My ears attentive, to the prayer of this place." God answers Solomon's own words from 6:40 almost word for word. Solomon asked; God said yes.

So what did this promise mean for the Chronicler's first readers? They were back in the land after the exile, small, poor, without a king. The Chronicler wanted them to know that God's door was still open. The rest of this book shows it again and again. Every time a king or the people of Judah humbled themselves and sought the LORD, He heard. Every time they turned away, trouble came. Verse 14 is the key that unlocks the book.

Now, how should we as Christians apply it? We need to be careful here. This promise was given to Israel, God's covenant nation, in their land, tied to the temple and to the blessings and curses of the Law of Moses. It is not a promise to any modern nation that if enough Christians pray, God will guarantee a strong economy or good harvests. The United States, or any other country, is not "My people, over whom My name is called" in the sense this verse means. I believe God still has a future for the nation of Israel, and that this promise stands for them, as God promised through Moses that He would restore Israel when they return to Him with all their heart (Deuteronomy 30:1-10; Romans 11:25-29).

But the principle behind the verse runs all through Scripture, and it does apply to us. God has not changed. He still opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). James says, "Be humbled before the Lord, and He will exalt you" (James 4:10). John says that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us and to cleanse us (1 John 1:9). Believers in Jesus Christ are now a people called by His name (Acts 15:14). When a church, a family or one person humbles themselves, prays, seeks God's face and turns from sin, God hears, forgives and restores. He does not always remove every hardship. But He always heals the deeper wound of sin and broken fellowship.

And when God's people in any nation live this way, they become salt and light where they live (Matthew 5:13-16). Paul urges us to pray for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life (1 Timothy 2:1-2). God may well bless a nation for the sake of His people praying in it. But that is His mercy, not a contract written to us in this verse.

So read 7:14 first as God's promise to Israel in the land. Then let it search your own heart. Is there pride I need to lay down? Am I praying, or only worrying? Am I seeking God's face, or only His hand? Is there an evil way I need to turn from today? The God who answered Solomon still hears from heaven.

7:16 *And now I have chosen and I have consecrated this house, for My name to be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there all the days.*

"I have chosen and I have consecrated this house, for My name to be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there all the days." God was not only watching from heaven. His heart was there. That is love, not mere duty.

How can God say "forever" when this temple was burned in 586 B.C.? Verses 19-22 answer that the people's sin would bring the house down. But God's choice of this place did not end. The second temple was built on the same mount. Jesus walked there and called it His Father's house (John 2:16). And the prophets speak of a temple in Jerusalem in the coming kingdom (Ezekiel 40-48; Isaiah 2:2-3). God's choice of Jerusalem has not been canceled.

7:17-18 *And you, if you walk before Me just as David your father walked, and to do according to all that I have commanded you, and you keep My statutes and My judgments, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom, just as I made* ***a covenant*** *with David your father, saying, 'There shall not be cut off for you a man ruling over Israel.'*

Then God turned to Solomon himself. "If you walk before Me just as David your father walked," keeping His statutes and judgments, "then I will establish the throne of your kingdom." David was not sinless, as we know. But his heart turned back to God when he sinned, and he never bowed to idols.

"There shall not be cut off for you a man ruling over Israel." Kings has "on the throne of Israel" (1 Kings 9:5). Chronicles uses words close to Micah 5:2, where the coming Ruler from Bethlehem is promised. The covenant with David pointed beyond Solomon to the One whose rule would never end.

7:19-20 *And if you, you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then I will pluck them up from upon My ground which I have given to them; and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will throw away from before My face, and I will make it a proverb and a taunt among all the peoples.*

Now the warning. "If you, you turn away and forsake My statutes," and "go and serve other gods and bow down to them," then "I will pluck them up from upon My ground." The "you" here changes from one person to many in the Hebrew. God was speaking to Solomon and to the whole nation after him.

God would even throw away "this house which I have consecrated for My name," and make it "a proverb and a taunt among all the peoples." Privilege does not protect people who turn their backs on God. A beautiful temple could not save a people who worshiped idols. Jeremiah would later warn Judah not to trust in the words "the temple of the LORD" while they lived in sin (Jeremiah 7:4).

7:21-22 *And **as for** this house, which was exalted, everyone who passes by it will be appalled, and he will say, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house?' And they will say, 'Because they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who brought them out from the land of Egypt, and they took hold of other gods, and they bowed down to them and served them; therefore He has brought on them all this calamity.'"*

Passers-by would be appalled at the ruin and ask, "Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house?" The answer: "Because they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who brought them out from the land of Egypt, and they took hold of other gods."

The Chronicler's readers knew this came true. They had seen the ruins. Chapter 36 will tell how it happened. But they also knew verse 14 had come true, because God had brought them home. God's warnings and God's promises are both sure. Which one we meet depends on whether we turn to Him or away from Him.

Chapter 7 Summary

When Solomon finished praying, fire from heaven consumed the offerings and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. All Israel bowed with their faces to the ground and praised God for His goodness and steadfast love. Solomon and the people offered a huge number of sacrifices and held the dedication and the Feast of Booths for fourteen days, then went home joyful. Later God appeared to Solomon at night. He said He had heard the prayer and chosen the temple as a house of sacrifice. When He sent drought, locusts or plague, if His people would humble themselves, pray, seek His face and turn from their evil ways, He would hear, forgive their sin and heal their land. He promised to establish Solomon's throne if he walked as David did, and warned that turning to other gods would bring exile and ruin on the temple.

Chapter 7 Study Questions

1. What happened as soon as Solomon finished praying? (7:1)

2. How did the people respond when they saw the fire and the glory? (7:3)

3. Why did the people go home "joyful and good of heart"? (7:10)

4. What did God call the temple in verse 12, and why does that matter?

5. In 7:13-14, what four things must God's people do, and what three things does God promise?

6. Who was "My people, over whom My name is called" when God first spoke this promise, and what did "heal their land" mean for them? (7:14)

7. What warning did God give if Solomon and the people turned to other gods? (7:19-22)

8. How do James 4:6-10 and 1 John 1:9 carry the principle of 7:14 into the life of a believer today?

9. Which of the four steps in 7:14 is hardest for you right now: humbling yourself, praying, seeking God's face, or turning from a sinful way?

10. What would it look like for your church or family to seek God's face together this month?

Chapter 8: Solomon's Other Works

Scripture

8:1-18 And it was at the end of twenty years, in which Solomon built the house of the LORD and his own house, and the cities which Hiram had given to Solomon, Solomon built them, and he made the sons of Israel dwell there. And Solomon went ***to*** Hamath-zobah, and he prevailed over it. And he built Tadmor in the wilderness, and all the cities of storage which he built in Hamath. And he built Beth-horon the Upper and Beth-horon the Lower, cities of fortification, ***with*** walls, double doors, and bars, and Baalath, and all the cities of storage which belonged to Solomon, and all the cities of the chariotry, and the cities of the horsemen, and all the desire of Solomon which he desired to build in Jerusalem and in the Lebanon and in all the land of his dominion. All the people who remained of the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, who ***were*** not of Israel, of their sons who remained after them in the land, whom the sons of Israel had not destroyed, Solomon brought them up for forced labor to this day. And of the sons of Israel, whom Solomon did not make into slaves for his work, for they ***were*** men of war, and commanders of his officers, and commanders of his chariotry and of his horsemen, and these ***were*** the commanders of the overseers who ***were*** King Solomon's, two hundred and fifty, who ruled over the people. And the daughter of Pharaoh Solomon brought up from the city of David to the house which he had built for her; for he said, "A wife of mine shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, for they ***are*** holiness, to which the ark of the LORD has come." Then Solomon offered up burnt offerings to the LORD on the altar of the LORD which he had built before the porch, and by the duty of day by day, to offer up according to the commandment of Moses, for the Sabbaths and for the new moons and for the appointed times, three times in the year: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths. And he appointed, according to the ordinance of David his father, the divisions of the priests over their service, and the Levites over their duties, to praise and to minister before the priests for the duty of a day in its day, and the gatekeepers by their divisions for gate and gate; for thus ***was*** the commandment of David the man of God. And they did not turn aside ***from*** the commandment of the king concerning the priests and the Levites in any matter, and concerning the treasuries. And all the work of Solomon was prepared, until the day of the foundation of the house of the LORD and until its finishing. The house of the LORD ***was*** complete. Then Solomon went to Ezion-geber and to Eloth on the shore of the sea in the land of Edom. And Hiram sent to him, by the hand of his servants, ships and servants who knew the sea; and they came with the servants of Solomon to Ophir, and they took from there approximately 33,750 pounds (four hundred and fifty talents) of gold, and they brought ***it*** to King Solomon.

Chapter 8 Preview

After twenty years of building the temple and his palace, Solomon turns to the rest of his kingdom. He rebuilds cities, fortifies towns, and builds store cities and chariot cities from Lebanon to the edge of the desert. He puts the remaining Canaanite peoples to forced labor, while Israelites serve as soldiers and officers. He moves Pharaoh's daughter out of the city of David because the ark had been there. He sets the temple worship in order exactly as Moses

commanded and David arranged. Then he sends ships with Hiram's sailors to Ophir and brings back gold.

This is a short chapter of summaries, and I group it. The Chronicler's main interest is plain: in the middle of all the building and trade, he stops to show Solomon keeping the worship of God as the Law and David had set it. 1 Kings 9:10-28 tells the same things.

Chapter 8 Study

8:1-2 *And it was at the end of twenty years, in which Solomon built the house of the LORD and his own house, and the cities which Hiram had given to Solomon, Solomon built them, and he made the sons of Israel dwell there.*

"At the end of twenty years," seven for the temple and thirteen for the palace (1 Kings 6:38; 7:1), Solomon rebuilt "the cities which Hiram had given to Solomon" and settled Israelites in them.

1 Kings 9:11-13 says Solomon gave Hiram twenty cities in Galilee, and Hiram was not pleased with them. A common way to fit the two together is that Hiram gave the cities back, and Solomon then rebuilt them and settled his own people there. Scripture does not say this outright, but both accounts can be true.

8:3-6 *And Solomon went **to** Hamath-zobah, and he prevailed over it. And he built Tadmor in the wilderness, and all the cities of storage which he built in Hamath. And he built Beth-horon the Upper and Beth-horon the Lower, cities of fortification, **with** walls, double doors, and bars, and Baalath, and all the cities of storage which belonged to Solomon, and all the cities of the chariotry, and the cities of the horsemen, and all the desire of Solomon which he desired to build in Jerusalem and in the Lebanon and in all the land of his dominion.*

Solomon "went to Hamath-zobah, and he prevailed over it." This is the only battle in Solomon's reign that Chronicles records. Hamath and Zobah were Aramean lands to the north. He built "Tadmor in the wilderness," an oasis city on the desert trade route northeast of Damascus, later known as Palmyra. He built store cities, where grain and supplies were kept, and fortified the two Beth-horons, Upper and Lower, which guarded a main road up from the coast to Jerusalem. He built Baalath, chariot cities, cities for horsemen, and "all the desire of Solomon which he desired to build" in Jerusalem, Lebanon and his whole kingdom.

The kingdom reached its widest extent under Solomon, just as God had promised Abraham, from Egypt's border to the Euphrates (Genesis 15:18; 1 Kings 4:21). God keeps His word.

8:7-10 *All the people who remained of the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, who **were** not of Israel, of their sons who remained after them in the land, whom the sons of Israel had not destroyed, Solomon brought them up for forced labor to this day. And of the sons of Israel, whom Solomon did not make into slaves for his work, for they **were** men of war, and commanders of his officers, and commanders of his chariotry and of his horsemen, and these **were** the commanders of the overseers who **were** King Solomon's, two hundred and fifty, who ruled over the people.*

"All the people who remained of the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites," whom Israel had not driven out, Solomon put to forced labor. Joshua and the judges had failed to drive them out, as God had commanded (Judges 1:21-36). The Israelites themselves were not made slaves, but served as soldiers, officers and commanders of chariots and horsemen.

This forced labor was the common practice of the time, and it fits what the Law allowed for the conquered peoples (Deuteronomy 20:11). But we should not miss that Israel's own people still felt Solomon's heavy yoke (10:4), since 1 Kings 5:13-14 tells of Israelite workers sent to Lebanon in shifts. That burden would split the kingdom after his death.

"Two hundred and fifty" chief officers ruled over the people. As I noted in chapter 2, Kings gives 550 here and 3,300 overseers, while Chronicles gives 250 and 3,600. Both add up to 3,850.

8:11 *And the daughter of Pharaoh Solomon brought up from the city of David to the house which he had built for her; for he said, "A wife of mine shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, for they **are** holiness, to which the ark of the LORD has come."*

"The daughter of Pharaoh Solomon brought up from the city of David to the house which he had built for her." Solomon had married her early in his reign as part of a treaty with Egypt (1 Kings 3:1). He said, "A wife of mine shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, for they are holiness, to which the ark of the LORD has come."

Solomon knew the places where the ark had rested were holy. He seems to have known that a foreign wife who did not worship the LORD did not belong there. But he did not stop at one such marriage. 1 Kings 11:1-8 tells us his many foreign wives later turned his heart to their gods. The Chronicler does not tell that story, but his readers knew it, and Nehemiah used Solomon as a warning to them (Nehemiah 13:26). A wise man can see a danger and still walk toward it. Do we sometimes do the same?

8:12-15 *Then Solomon offered up burnt offerings to the LORD on the altar of the LORD which he had built before the porch, and by the duty of day by day, to offer up according to the commandment of Moses, for the Sabbaths and for the new moons and for the appointed times, three times in the year: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths. And he appointed, according to the ordinance of David his father, the divisions of the priests over their service, and the Levites over their duties, to praise and to minister before the priests for the duty of a day in its day, and the gatekeepers by their divisions for gate and gate; for thus **was** the commandment of David the man of God. And they did not turn aside **from** the commandment of the king concerning the priests and the Levites in any matter, and concerning the treasuries.*

Here is what the Chronicler most wants to show. Solomon "offered up burnt offerings to the LORD on the altar of the LORD which he had built before the porch," and he did it "according to the commandment of Moses": daily, on Sabbaths, new moons, and the three great yearly feasts, "the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths" (8:13; see Deuteronomy 16:16).

These three feasts were the times every man of Israel came to the sanctuary. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, joined with Passover, remembered the exodus. Weeks, later called Pentecost, celebrated the wheat harvest. Booths remembered the wilderness journey. All three point forward. Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7). The Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). And many see the Feast of Booths as a picture of God dwelling with His people in the coming kingdom (Zechariah 14:16).

Solomon also set the priests, Levites and gatekeepers in their divisions "according to the ordinance of David his father," because "thus was the commandment of David the man of God." And they "did not turn aside from the commandment of the king" in anything.

Why would the Chronicler care so much about this? His readers were rebuilding the same worship after the exile (Ezra 3:1-6; 6:18). He wanted them to see that worship done God's way, by His Word, was the heart of a healthy nation.

8:16 *And all the work of Solomon was prepared, until the day of the foundation of the house of the LORD and until its finishing. The house of the LORD **was** complete.*

"All the work of Solomon was prepared, until the day of the foundation of the house of the LORD and until its finishing. The house of the LORD was complete." The Chronicler closes the temple story with a simple, satisfied line. The work God gave was finished.

Jesus said to His Father on the night before the cross, "I glorified You on the earth; I finished the work which You have given Me that I should do it" (John 17:4). Will we be able to say the same about the work God gives us?

8:17-18 *Then Solomon went to Ezion-geber and to Eloth on the shore of the sea in the land of Edom. And Hiram sent to him, by the hand of his servants, ships and servants who knew the sea; and they came with the servants of Solomon to Ophir, and they took from there approximately 33,750 pounds (four hundred and fifty talents) of gold, and they brought* ***it*** *to King Solomon.*

Solomon went to "Ezion-geber and to Eloth on the shore of the sea in the land of Edom." These ports lay at the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba, on the Red Sea. Hiram sent ships and sailors, and together with Solomon's men they sailed to Ophir and brought back four hundred and fifty talents of gold. 1 Kings 9:28 says four hundred and twenty. A copying difference in the number, or a difference in counting gross and net amounts, are the usual explanations.

No one knows for sure where Ophir was. Suggestions include southern Arabia, the coast of East Africa and India. What we do know is that God was keeping His promise to make Solomon rich (1:12).

Chapter 8 Summary

After twenty years of building, Solomon rebuilt the cities Hiram had given him, conquered Hamath-zobah, and built Tadmor, store cities, fortified cities and cities for chariots and horsemen throughout his kingdom. He put the Canaanite peoples left in the land to forced labor, while Israelites served as soldiers and officers. He moved Pharaoh's daughter out of the city of David because the places where the ark had been were holy. He offered sacrifices as Moses commanded, on Sabbaths, new moons and the three yearly feasts, and arranged the priests, Levites and gatekeepers as David had ordered. With the temple complete, he sent ships with Hiram's sailors to Ophir, and they brought back a great amount of gold.

Chapter 8 Study Questions

1. How long did Solomon's building of the temple and palace take? (8:1; 1 Kings 6:38; 7:1)

2. What kinds of cities did Solomon build? (8:4-6)

3. Who was put to forced labor, and what did the Israelites do instead? (8:7-9)

4. Why did Solomon move Pharaoh's daughter out of the city of David? (8:11)

5. What were the three yearly feasts, and what did each remember? (8:13)

6. Whose commands did Solomon follow in arranging the worship? (8:13-15)

7. Where did Solomon's ships sail, and what did they bring back? (8:17-18)

8. Solomon saw that a foreign wife did not belong near the ark, yet later his wives turned his heart. Where might you be walking toward a danger you can already see?

9. The Chronicler stressed worship done according to God's Word. How do you decide whether your worship pleases God?

10. Jesus finished the work His Father gave Him (John 17:4). What work has God given you to finish?

Chapter 9: The Queen of Sheba and Solomon's Splendor

Scripture

9:1-12 And the queen of Sheba heard the report of Solomon, and she came to test Solomon with riddles in Jerusalem, with a very great retinue, and camels carrying spices and gold in abundance and precious stones; and she came to Solomon, and she spoke with him all that was with her heart. And Solomon told her all her words, and not a word was hidden from Solomon which he did not tell her. And the queen of Sheba saw the wisdom of Solomon, and the house which he had built, and the food of his table, and the seating of his servants, and the standing of his ministers and their clothing, and his cupbearers and their clothing, and his upper room ***by*** which he would go up ***to*** the house of the LORD; and there was no more breath in her. And she said to the king, "The word which I heard in my land about your words and about your wisdom ***was*** truth. And I did not believe their words until I came and my eyes saw; and look, the half of the greatness of your wisdom was not told to me; you have added to the report which I heard. How blessed ***are*** your men, and how blessed ***are*** these your servants who stand before you continually and hear your wisdom! May the LORD your God be blessed, who has delighted in you to put you on His throne as king for the LORD your God! In the love of your God for Israel, to make it stand forever, He has appointed you king over them, to do justice and righteousness." And she gave to the king approximately 9,000 pounds (a hundred and twenty talents) of gold, and spices in very great abundance, and precious stones; and there had not been ***any*** like that spice which the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. And also the servants of Hiram and the servants of Solomon, who brought gold from Ophir, brought algum wood and precious stones. And the king made the algum wood ***into*** stairways for the house of the LORD and for the house of the king, and lyres and harps for the singers; and none like them had been seen before in the land of Judah. And King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all her desire which she asked, besides what she had brought to the king. And she turned and went to her land, she and her servants.

9:13-31 And the weight of the gold which came to Solomon in one year was approximately 50,000 pounds (six hundred and sixty-six talents) of gold, apart from ***what*** the men of the merchants and the traders ***were*** bringing; and all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the land ***were*** bringing gold and silver to Solomon. And King Solomon made two hundred large shields ***of*** beaten gold; approximately 15 pounds (six hundred ***shekels***) of beaten gold he put on the one large shield; and three hundred shields ***of*** beaten gold; approximately 7.5 pounds (three hundred ***shekels***) of gold he put on the one shield; and the king put them in the House of the Forest of Lebanon. And the king made a great throne of ivory, and he overlaid it ***with*** pure gold. And six steps ***belonged*** to the throne, and a footstool in gold, attached to the throne, and arms ***were*** on this side and on this side of the place of the seat, and two lions ***were*** standing beside the arms. And twelve lions ***were*** standing there on the six steps, on this side and on this side; it had not been made thus for any kingdom. And all the drinking vessels of King Solomon ***were*** gold, and all the vessels of the House of the Forest of Lebanon ***were*** refined gold; silver was not esteemed in the days of Solomon as anything. For the king's ships ***were*** going ***to*** Tarshish with the servants of Hiram; once in three years the ships of Tarshish would come, carrying gold and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks. And King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches

and wisdom. And all the kings of the earth ***were*** seeking the face of Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart. And they ***were*** bringing, each his gift: articles of silver and articles of gold, and garments, weaponry, and spices, horses, and mules, the matter of a year in a year. And Solomon had four thousand stalls of horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen; and he placed them in the cities of the chariotry and with the king in Jerusalem. And he was ruling over all the kings from the River even to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt. And the king made the silver in Jerusalem like the stones, and the cedars he made like the sycamores which ***are*** in the Shephelah, for abundance. And ***they were*** bringing out horses from Egypt for Solomon, and from all the lands. And the rest of the matters of Solomon, the first and the last, are they not written in the words of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer concerning Jeroboam the son of Nebat? And Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years. And Solomon lay down with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David his father; and Rehoboam his son reigned in his place.

Chapter 9 Preview

The queen of Sheba hears of Solomon's fame and travels a long way to test him with hard questions. He answers every one. When she sees his wisdom, his house, his court and his worship at the temple, she is overwhelmed. The report was true, she says, and she had not heard the half of it. She praises the LORD for setting Solomon on His throne and gives rich gifts, and Solomon gives her all she asks.

The rest of the chapter describes Solomon's wealth: gold by the ton, shields of beaten gold, an ivory throne with twelve lions, ships to Tarshish, and kings from all the earth seeking his face. Then the record of his forty-year reign closes, and Rehoboam takes his place. Chronicles does not tell of Solomon's later sins, which 1 Kings 11 records, and I will say why. 1 Kings 10 tells the same story.

Chapter 9 Study

9:1-2 *And the queen of Sheba heard the report of Solomon, and she came to test Solomon with riddles in Jerusalem, with a very great retinue, and camels carrying spices and gold in abundance and precious stones; and she came to Solomon, and she spoke with him all that was with her heart. And Solomon told her all her words, and not a word was hidden from Solomon which he did not tell her.*

"The queen of Sheba heard the report of Solomon." Sheba was probably in southwest Arabia, in what is now Yemen, about 1,200 miles from Jerusalem. Some connect it with Ethiopia across the Red Sea. Either way, it was a long, hard journey by camel.

She came "to test Solomon with riddles." The word means hard questions, the kind wise people used to test one another. She brought a huge caravan "and camels carrying spices and gold in abundance and precious stones." She "spoke with him all that was with her heart." And Solomon "told her all her words," with nothing too hard for him.

Why did she come? 1 Kings 10:1 says she heard of Solomon's fame "concerning the name of the LORD." She wanted to know if the wisdom was real and where it came from.

9:3-4 *And the queen of Sheba saw the wisdom of Solomon, and the house which he had built, and the food of his table, and the seating of his servants, and the standing of his ministers and their clothing, and his cupbearers and their clothing, and his upper room **by** which he would go up **to** the house of the LORD; and there was no more breath in her.*

She "saw the wisdom of Solomon, and the house which he had built, and the food of his table," the order of his servants and their clothing, his cupbearers, and "his upper room by which he would go up to the house of the LORD." The Hebrew can also be read as the burnt offerings he offered at the temple. Either way, she saw how he went to worship.

"And there was no more breath in her." She was left breathless. What amazed her was not only gold. It was order, wisdom and worship, a whole kingdom running well under a wise king who served God.

9:5-8 *And she said to the king, "The word which I heard in my land about your words and about your wisdom **was** truth. And I did not believe their words until I came and my eyes saw; and look, the half of the greatness of your wisdom was not told to me; you have added to the report which I heard. How blessed **are** your men, and how blessed **are** these your servants who stand before you continually and hear your wisdom! May the LORD your God be blessed, who has delighted in you to put you on His throne as king for the LORD your God! In the love of your God for Israel, to make it stand forever, He has appointed you king over them, to do justice and righteousness."*

"The word which I heard in my land about your words and about your wisdom was truth." She had not believed it "until I came and my eyes saw." Then she said, "the half of the greatness of your wisdom was not told to me." She blessed his servants who stood before him and heard his wisdom.

Then she blessed the LORD: "May the LORD your God be blessed, who has delighted in you to put you on His throne as king for the LORD your God!" Kings says "the throne of Israel." Chronicles says "His throne." The throne of David's line was God's throne, and the king ruled on God's behalf. "In the love of your God for Israel," God had made Solomon king "to do justice and righteousness." A king's job was to do what is right and fair for the people.

Jesus spoke of this queen. He said "the queen of the south" would rise up at the judgment and condemn His generation, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, "and look, something greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:42). She traveled 1,200 miles to hear a wise man. Jesus, the wisdom of God in Person, came to us (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30). How far are we willing to go to hear Him?

9:9-12 *And she gave to the king approximately 9,000 pounds (a hundred and twenty talents) of gold, and spices in very great abundance, and precious stones; and there had not been **any** like that spice which the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. And also the servants of Hiram and the servants of Solomon, who brought gold from Ophir, brought algum wood and precious stones. And the king made the algum wood **into** stairways for the house of the LORD and for the house of the king, and lyres and harps for the singers; and none like them had been seen before in the land of Judah. And King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all her desire which she asked, besides what she had brought to the king. And she turned and went to her land, she and her servants.*

She gave Solomon a hundred and twenty talents of gold, about 9,000 pounds, plus precious stones and so much spice that none like it had ever been seen. Hiram's and Solomon's servants also brought algum wood and precious stones from Ophir. Solomon made the algum wood into stairways for the temple and palace, and "lyres and harps for the singers," like none ever seen in Judah.

King Solomon gave the queen "all her desire which she asked, besides what she had brought to the king." Solomon outgave her. Then she went home.

Some later legends say she and Solomon had a child, but the Bible says nothing of that, and we should not add to it. The real lesson is simpler. Those who come seeking true wisdom are never sent away empty. James 1:5 says God gives wisdom generously to all who ask.

9:13-16 *And the weight of the gold which came to Solomon in one year was approximately 50,000 pounds (six hundred and sixty-six talents) of gold, apart from **what** the men of the merchants and the traders **were** bringing; and all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the land **were** bringing gold and silver to Solomon. And King Solomon made two hundred large shields **of** beaten gold; approximately 15 pounds (six hundred **shekels**) of beaten gold he put on the one large shield; and three hundred shields **of** beaten gold; approximately 7.5 pounds (three hundred **shekels**) of gold he put on the one shield; and the king put them in the House of the Forest of Lebanon.*

"The weight of the gold which came to Solomon in one year" was six hundred and sixty-six talents, about 50,000 pounds. That did not count gold from merchants and traders and from "all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the land."

Some readers connect the number 666 with Revelation 13:18. Scripture does not make that link, and I don't think we should build anything on it. The point here is simply the enormous wealth God had given, as He promised.

Solomon made two hundred large shields and three hundred smaller shields of beaten gold and put them in "the House of the Forest of Lebanon," a great hall of his palace built with cedar pillars (1 Kings 7:2). These were shields for show, not battle. In chapter 12 we will see what happened to them.

9:17-19 *And the king made a great throne of ivory, and he overlaid it **with** pure gold. And six steps **belonged** to the throne, and a footstool in gold, attached to the throne, and arms **were** on this side and on this side of the place of the seat, and two lions **were** standing beside the arms. And twelve lions **were** standing there on the six steps, on this side and on this side; it had not been made thus for any kingdom.*

"The king made a great throne of ivory, and he overlaid it with pure gold." It had six steps and a gold footstool, with arms on each side and "two lions" beside the arms, and "twelve lions" on the steps, one on each side of every step. "It had not been made thus for any kingdom."

The lion was the symbol of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:9-10). Jacob had promised that the scepter would not depart from Judah until the One came to whom it belongs. Solomon's throne was a picture of that promise. Revelation 5:5 calls Jesus "the Lion who is of the tribe of Judah." The greatest throne of David's line points to the throne of David's greatest Son.

9:20-21 *And all the drinking vessels of King Solomon **were** gold, and all the vessels of the House of the Forest of Lebanon **were** refined gold; silver was not esteemed in the days of Solomon as anything. For the king's ships **were** going **to** Tarshish with the servants of Hiram; once in three years the ships of Tarshish would come, carrying gold and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks.*

All of Solomon's drinking cups were gold, and all the vessels of his great hall were refined gold. "Silver was not esteemed in the days of Solomon as anything." His ships went to Tarshish with Hiram's sailors and came back every three years with "gold and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks."

"Ships of Tarshish" was a phrase for large ocean-going trading ships. Kings says they sailed with Hiram's fleet (1 Kings 10:22). Tarshish itself was often placed far to the west, perhaps in Spain, though these ships sailed from the Red Sea port (8:17). Scholars are not sure of the route.

9:22-24 *And King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom. And all the kings of the earth **were** seeking the face of Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart. And they **were** bringing, each his gift: articles of silver and articles of gold, and garments, weaponry, and spices, horses, and mules, the matter of a year in a year.*

"King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom." Every promise God made at Gibeon came true (1:12). "All the kings of the earth were seeking the face of Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart." Notice the Chronicler's careful words: the wisdom was God's gift.

They brought gifts year by year: silver and gold, garments, weapons, spices, horses and mules. The nations streaming to Jerusalem with gifts is a small picture of what the prophets said would happen when the Messiah reigns. Isaiah 60:3-6 speaks of nations coming to the light of Zion, bringing gold and frankincense. Psalm 72, a psalm "of Solomon," pictures all kings bowing before the coming King. I believe that will be fulfilled when Christ reigns on earth in His kingdom.

9:25-28 *And Solomon had four thousand stalls of horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen; and he placed them in the cities of the chariotry and with the king in Jerusalem. And he was ruling over all the kings from the River even to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt. And the king made the silver in Jerusalem like the stones, and the cedars he made like the sycamores which **are** in the Shephelah, for abundance. And **they were** bringing out horses from Egypt for Solomon, and from all the lands.*

"Solomon had four thousand stalls of horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen." 1 Kings 4:26 gives forty thousand stalls. Most scholars think a copyist's error in Kings turned four thousand into forty thousand, since 1 Kings 10:26 and 2 Chronicles 1:14 give 1,400 chariots, which fits four thousand stalls much better. I take the four thousand here as right.

He ruled over all the kings "from the River," meaning the Euphrates, "even to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt." This is the land promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:18). Silver was like stones in Jerusalem and cedar like sycamore trees, and horses came from Egypt and from all the lands. These verses repeat 1:14-17, as if the Chronicler is closing a frame around Solomon's reign: God promised, and God gave.

But Deuteronomy 17:16-17 still stands in the background. The king must not multiply horses or gold or wives, or his heart would turn away. That is where Solomon's story went next.

9:29-31 *And the rest of the matters of Solomon, the first and the last, are they not written in the words of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer concerning Jeroboam the son of Nebat? And Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years. And Solomon lay down with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David his father; and Rehoboam his son reigned in his place.*

"The rest of the matters of Solomon, the first and the last," were written "in the words of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer." A seer is another word for a prophet, one to whom God showed things. The Chronicler used prophetic records, many now lost to us.

"Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years," about 970 to 930 B.C. He died and was buried in the city of David, and "Rehoboam his son reigned in his place."

Why does Chronicles leave out Solomon's many wives, his idols and God's anger at him (1 Kings 11)? It is not hiding them. Its readers had Kings and knew the story. The mention of Ahijah, the prophet who told Jeroboam that ten tribes would be torn from Solomon's son (1 Kings 11:29-39), points right at it, and the next chapter shows the result. The Chronicler's purpose was to show the returned exiles the pattern God wanted them to follow: a king who sought God, built His house and set up His worship. He holds up Solomon at his best as a model, and lets the split of the kingdom show the cost of what came later.

Even Solomon's glory was only a shadow. He was a son of David, but not the Son of David. One greater than Solomon was coming, whose kingdom would not be torn in two and whose wisdom would never fail.

Chapter 9 Summary

The queen of Sheba came from far away to test Solomon with hard questions. He answered all of them, and when she saw his wisdom, his house, his servants and his way up to the house of the LORD, she was overwhelmed. She said the report was true and she had not heard the half, blessed the LORD for putting Solomon on His throne, and gave him gold, spice and precious stones. Solomon gave her all she desired. The chapter then describes his wealth: 666 talents of gold a year, gold shields, a great ivory and gold throne with twelve lions, gold vessels, ships to Tarshish, and kings from all the earth bringing gifts to hear his wisdom. Solomon reigned forty years over all Israel, died, and Rehoboam his son reigned in his place.

Chapter 9 Study Questions

1. Why did the queen of Sheba come to Solomon, and what did she bring? (9:1)

2. What did she see that left her breathless? (9:3-4)

3. What did she say about the report she had heard? (9:5-6)

4. Whose throne did she say Solomon sat on, and what was his job as king? (9:8)

5. What did Jesus say about the queen of the south? (Matthew 12:42)

6. Describe Solomon's throne. What might the lions picture? (9:17-19; Genesis 49:9-10; Revelation 5:5)

7. How do the numbers of stalls in 9:25 and 1 Kings 4:26 differ, and what is the common explanation?

8. The queen traveled a long way to hear Solomon's wisdom. How much effort do you put into hearing the wisdom of Christ in His Word?

9. Solomon's wealth was a gift from God, but Deuteronomy 17:16-17 warned of its danger. How can God's good gifts become a snare?

10. Why do you think the Chronicler held up Solomon at his best for the returned exiles? What does a good example do for you?

Chapter 10: The Kingdom Divides

Scripture

10:1-19 And Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. And it was, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard, and he ***was*** in Egypt, where he had fled from before Solomon the king, that Jeroboam returned from Egypt. And they sent and called him, and Jeroboam and all Israel came, and they spoke to Rehoboam, saying, "Your father made our yoke hard; and now, lighten some of the hard labor of your father and some of his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you." And he said to them, "Yet three days, and return to me." And the people went. And King Rehoboam consulted with the elders who had been standing before Solomon his father while he was alive, saying, "How do you counsel to bring back word to this people?" And they spoke to him, saying, "If you will be good to this people, and are pleased with them, and speak good words to them, then they will be servants to you all the days." And he forsook the counsel of the elders which they had counseled him, and he consulted with the young men who had grown up with him, who stood before him. And he said to them, "What do you counsel, and we may bring back word to this people who have spoken to me, saying, 'Lighten some of the yoke which your father put on us'?" And the young men who had grown up with him spoke with him, saying, "Thus you shall say to the people who spoke to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, and you, lighten ***it*** from on us'; thus you shall say to them, 'My little finger is thicker than the loins of my father. And now, my father loaded on you a heavy yoke, and I, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, and I with scorpions.'" And Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, just as the king had spoken, saying, "Return to me on the third day." And the king answered them harshly; and King Rehoboam forsook the counsel of the elders. And he spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men, saying, "I will make your yoke heavy, and I, I will add to it; my father disciplined you with whips, and I with scorpions." And the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn ***of events*** from God, so that the LORD might establish His word which He had spoken by the hand of Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat. And all Israel, for the king had not listened to them, and the people brought back ***word*** to the king, saying, "What portion ***is there*** for us in David? And ***there is*** no inheritance in the son of Jesse. Each man to your tents, O Israel! Now see your own house, O David!" And all Israel went to its tents. And the sons of Israel who were dwelling in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. And King Rehoboam sent Hadoram, who ***was*** over the forced labor, and the sons of Israel stoned him ***with*** stones, and he died. And King Rehoboam exerted himself to go up into the chariot to flee ***to*** Jerusalem. And Israel rebelled against the house of David to this day.

Chapter 10 Preview

Solomon is dead, and his son Rehoboam goes to Shechem to be made king by all Israel. The people, with Jeroboam back from Egypt as their spokesman, ask him to lighten the heavy yoke his father put on them. The old men who served Solomon tell Rehoboam to be kind, and the people will serve him forever. The young men he grew up with tell him to be harsher than his father.

Rehoboam follows the young men. The northern tribes walk away, stone his labor chief, and Rehoboam flees to Jerusalem.

About 930 B.C. the one kingdom of Israel becomes two: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. From here on, Chronicles follows only Judah and the kings of David's line. Yet the Chronicler tells us plainly that this was "a turn of events from God," to keep the word He had spoken through the prophet Ahijah. 1 Kings 12:1-19 tells the same story.

Chapter 10 Study

10:1 *And Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king.*

"Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king." Shechem was an old and important city in the hill country of Ephraim, about 30 miles north of Jerusalem. Abraham built an altar there (Genesis 12:6-7), and Joshua renewed the covenant there (Joshua 24). It was the heartland of the northern tribes.

Why did Rehoboam have to go to them? Judah had already accepted him. The northern tribes wanted to make their own agreement with the new king, as they had done with David at Hebron (2 Samuel 5:1-3). The unity of the kingdom was already fragile.

10:2-5 *And it was, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard, and he **was** in Egypt, where he had fled from before Solomon the king, that Jeroboam returned from Egypt. And they sent and called him, and Jeroboam and all Israel came, and they spoke to Rehoboam, saying, "Your father made our yoke hard; and now, lighten some of the hard labor of your father and some of his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you." And he said to them, "Yet three days, and return to me." And the people went.*

"Jeroboam the son of Nebat" had fled to Egypt "from before Solomon the king." Chronicles assumes we know why. 1 Kings 11:26-40 tells how Solomon put Jeroboam in charge of forced labor from the tribes of Joseph, how the prophet Ahijah tore a new cloak into twelve pieces and gave him ten, and how Solomon then tried to kill him.

Now Jeroboam came back, and the people made him their spokesman. "Your father made our yoke hard; and now, lighten some of the hard labor of your father and some of his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you." A yoke was the wooden bar put on the necks of oxen to make them work. Solomon's building projects, taxes and forced labor had worn the people down.

It was a fair request, and they made a fair offer: ease the load, "and we will serve you." Rehoboam asked for three days to think.

10:6-7 *And King Rehoboam consulted with the elders who had been standing before Solomon his father while he was alive, saying, "How do you counsel to bring back word to this people?" And they spoke to him, saying, "If you will be good to this people, and are pleased with them, and speak good words to them, then they will be servants to you all the days."*

First "King Rehoboam consulted with the elders who had been standing before Solomon his father." These were men who had served the wisest king in the world. Their answer: "If you will be good to this people, and are pleased with them, and speak good words to them, then they will be servants to you all the days."

Kings says "you will be a servant to this people" (1 Kings 12:7). Chronicles says "be good" to them. Both say the same thing. A leader who serves and speaks kindly will be followed. Jesus taught His disciples that whoever wants to be great among them must be their servant (Mark 10:42-45). That is the oldest leadership lesson in the book, and still the hardest.

10:8-11 *And he forsook the counsel of the elders which they had counseled him, and he consulted with the young men who had grown up with him, who stood before him. And he said to them, "What do you counsel, and we may bring back word to this people who have spoken to me, saying, 'Lighten some of the yoke which your father put on us'?" And the young men who had grown up with him spoke with him, saying, "Thus you shall say to the people who spoke to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, and you, lighten **it** from on us'; thus you shall say to them, 'My little finger is thicker than the loins of my father. And now, my father loaded on you a heavy yoke, and I, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, and I with scorpions.'"*

"He forsook the counsel of the elders," and turned to "the young men who had grown up with him." 12:13 says Rehoboam was forty-one when he became king, so these were not teenagers. They were his friends from the palace, men raised in Solomon's wealth who knew nothing of hard labor.

Their advice was arrogant: "My little finger is thicker than the loins of my father." In other words, I am tougher than Solomon ever was. "My father disciplined you with whips, and I with scorpions." A scorpion here probably means a whip with sharp, stinging barbs.

Why did Rehoboam listen to them? Perhaps because they told him what he wanted to hear. Proverbs, much of it written by his father, warns about this over and over: listen to counsel, and do not be wise in your own eyes (Proverbs 12:15; 15:22). Do you seek advice from people who will tell you the truth, or only from people who agree with you?

10:12-14 *And Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, just as the king had spoken, saying, "Return to me on the third day." And the king answered them harshly; and King Rehoboam forsook the counsel of the elders. And he spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men, saying, "I will make your yoke heavy, and I, I will add to it; my father disciplined you with whips, and I with scorpions."*

On the third day the people came back. "The king answered them harshly." He gave them the young men's words almost word for word: "I will make your yoke heavy, and I, I will add to it." In one sentence he lost most of his kingdom.

Harsh words have broken more families, churches and friendships than we can count. Proverbs 15:1 says a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Rehoboam's father wrote that, and the son ignored it.

10:15 *And the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn **of events** from God, so that the LORD might establish His word which He had spoken by the hand of Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.*

"The king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of events from God, so that the LORD might establish His word which He had spoken by the hand of Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat."

This verse holds two truths together. Rehoboam was responsible for his foolish choice, and he paid for it. Yet God was ruling over it, bringing about the judgment He had announced because of Solomon's idolatry (1 Kings 11:11-13, 29-39). God does not make anyone sin. But He is so great that He can work even through people's foolish and sinful choices to carry out His purposes. The cross is the greatest example. Wicked men crucified Jesus, and yet it happened by God's set plan (Acts 2:23).

That should comfort us. No foolish leader and no wrong decision is outside God's rule.

10:16 *And all Israel, for the king had not listened to them, and the people brought back **word** to the king, saying, "What portion **is there** for us in David? And **there is** no inheritance in the son of Jesse. Each man to your tents, O Israel! Now see your own house, O David!" And all Israel went to its tents.*

"What portion is there for us in David? And there is no inheritance in the son of Jesse. Each man to your tents, O Israel! Now see your own house, O David!" This was a cry of rebellion heard once before, when Sheba son of Bichri rebelled against David (2 Samuel 20:1). "Son of Jesse" was a way of putting David down, calling him just a farmer's son.

"All Israel went to its tents." They went home and took their tribes with them. The kingdom God had built under David was torn in two.

10:17-19 *And the sons of Israel who were dwelling in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. And King Rehoboam sent Hadoram, who **was** over the forced labor, and the sons of Israel stoned him **with** stones, and he died. And King Rehoboam exerted himself to go up into the chariot to flee **to** Jerusalem. And Israel rebelled against the house of David to this day.*

Rehoboam still "reigned over" the Israelites living in the cities of Judah. Then he made one more foolish move. He sent "Hadoram, who was over the forced labor," to the angry northern tribes. Of all the men to send, he chose the one most connected with their burden. 1 Kings 12:18 calls him Adoram, and he may be the Adoniram who served Solomon (1 Kings 4:6). "The sons of Israel stoned him with stones, and he died," and Rehoboam had to jump into his chariot and race back to Jerusalem.

"Israel rebelled against the house of David to this day." The Chronicler calls it rebellion. The northern kingdom rejected the line God had chosen. Yet even here God had not abandoned the north. In the chapters ahead we will see faithful people from the northern tribes come to Jerusalem to worship (11:16; 15:9; 30:11).

One day the split will be healed. Ezekiel was told to join two sticks, one for Judah and one for Israel, into one stick in his hand, and God promised that one King, David's Son, would rule over them all (Ezekiel 37:15-25). I believe that will happen when Jesus Christ reigns as King over a reunited Israel in His coming kingdom.

Chapter 10 Summary

Rehoboam went to Shechem to be made king over all Israel. Jeroboam, back from Egypt, and the people asked him to lighten the heavy yoke Solomon had put on them. The elders advised kindness, but the young men who grew up with Rehoboam told him to be harsher than his father. Rehoboam answered the people harshly. The Chronicler says this turn of events was from God, to fulfill His word through Ahijah. The northern tribes rejected the house of David and went home. When Rehoboam sent Hadoram, the chief of forced labor, they stoned him, and Rehoboam fled to Jerusalem. Israel has been in rebellion against David's house ever since.

Chapter 10 Study Questions

1. Why did Rehoboam go to Shechem? (10:1)

2. Who was Jeroboam, and why had he been in Egypt? (10:2; 1 Kings 11:26-40)

3. What did the people ask Rehoboam, and what did they promise? (10:4)

4. What did the elders advise, and what did the young men advise? (10:7, 10-11)

5. What does verse 15 say about God's part in what happened?

6. What did the northern tribes say and do? (10:16-19)

7. What does Ezekiel 37:15-25 promise about the divided kingdom?

8. Rehoboam chose advisers who told him what he wanted to hear. Who are the honest counselors in your life, and do you listen to them?

9. Proverbs 15:1 warns about harsh words. Where have you seen a harsh answer cause damage, and how could a gentle one have helped?

10. How does knowing that God rules even over foolish decisions give you comfort in hard times?

Chapter 11: Rehoboam Strengthens Judah

Scripture

11:1-12 And Rehoboam came ***to*** Jerusalem, and he assembled the house of Judah and Benjamin, a hundred and eighty thousand chosen ***men***, makers of war, to fight with Israel, to bring back the kingdom to Rehoboam. And the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, "Say to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: You shall not go up, and you shall not fight with your brothers. Return, each man to his house, for this thing has come about from Me.'" And they listened to the words of the LORD, and they turned back from going against Jeroboam. And Rehoboam dwelt in Jerusalem, and he built cities for fortification in Judah. And he built Bethlehem and Etam and Tekoa, and Beth-zur and Soco and Adullam, and Gath and Mareshah and Ziph, and Adoraim and Lachish and Azekah, and Zorah and Aijalon and Hebron, which ***are*** in Judah and in Benjamin, cities of fortresses. And he strengthened the fortresses, and he put in them commanders, and supplies of food and oil and wine. And in every city and city ***were*** large shields and spears, and he strengthened them very greatly. And Judah and Benjamin belonged to him.

11:13-23 And the priests and the Levites who ***were*** in all Israel took their stand with him from all their territory. For the Levites forsook their pasture lands and their property, and they went to Judah and to Jerusalem; for Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them from serving as priests to the LORD. And he appointed for himself priests for the high places, and for the goats, and for the calves which he had made. And after them, from all the tribes of Israel, those who set their heart to seek the LORD, the God of Israel, came ***to*** Jerusalem to sacrifice to the LORD, the God of their fathers. And they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and they made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong for three years; for they walked in the way of David and Solomon for three years. And Rehoboam took for himself a wife, Mahalath the daughter of Jerimoth the son of David, Abihail the daughter of Eliab the son of Jesse. And she bore to him sons: Jeush and Shemariah and Zaham. And after her he took Maacah the daughter of Absalom; and she bore to him Abijah and Attai and Ziza and Shelomith. And Rehoboam loved Maacah the daughter of Absalom more than all his wives and his concubines; for he had taken eighteen wives and sixty concubines; and he fathered twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters. And Rehoboam appointed Abijah the son of Maacah as the head, as leader among his brothers, for ***he meant*** to make him king. And he acted wisely, and he distributed some of all his sons to all the lands of Judah and Benjamin, to all the cities of the fortresses; and he gave to them the food in abundance; and he asked ***for*** a multitude of wives.

Chapter 11 Preview

Rehoboam gathers a huge army to win back the northern tribes by force. God sends the prophet Shemaiah to stop him: do not fight your brothers, for this has come from Me. To his credit, Rehoboam listens. He turns instead to strengthening Judah, building a ring of fortified cities and stocking them with food, weapons and commanders.

Then the Chronicler tells something Kings leaves out. Jeroboam drives the priests and Levites out of the north and sets up his own priests for his calf idols. The Levites leave their homes and move to Judah, and faithful people from every tribe follow them to worship the LORD in Jerusalem. For three years Judah is strong, because they walk in the way of David and Solomon. The chapter closes with Rehoboam's large family and his choice of Abijah as heir. 1 Kings 12:21-24 tells part of this story.

Chapter 11 Study

11:1 *And Rehoboam came **to** Jerusalem, and he assembled the house of Judah and Benjamin, a hundred and eighty thousand chosen **men**, makers of war, to fight with Israel, to bring back the kingdom to Rehoboam.*

Rehoboam "assembled the house of Judah and Benjamin, a hundred and eighty thousand chosen men, makers of war, to fight with Israel, to bring back the kingdom to Rehoboam." Benjamin, the small tribe between Judah and the north, stayed with Judah. Jerusalem sat on the border between them.

This was Rehoboam's first instinct: take back by force what his harsh words had lost. Many of us react the same way when we have caused a problem. We try to fix it in our own strength before we ask what God is doing.

On large numbers like this one in Chronicles, I take them as written. Some scholars think the Hebrew word for "thousand" can also mean a military unit or clan, which would make the numbers smaller. The text does not tell us that, and I will not build on it.

11:2-4 *And the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, "Say to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: You shall not go up, and you shall not fight with your brothers. Return, each man to his house, for this thing has come about from Me.'" And they listened to the words of the LORD, and they turned back from going against Jeroboam.*

"The word of the LORD came to Shemaiah the man of God." A man of God is another name for a prophet, someone who spoke God's message. His message was blunt: "You shall not go up, and you shall not fight with your brothers. Return, each man to his house, for this thing has come about from Me."

Notice "your brothers." The northern tribes were still family, still Israel, still God's people. The split was God's discipline, and Rehoboam was not to fight against it.

"And they listened to the words of the LORD, and they turned back." That is the best thing we read about Rehoboam so far. A hundred and eighty thousand soldiers went home because one prophet spoke God's word. It takes humility to turn back an army. When God says no, the wise thing is to obey, even when we think we could win.

11:5-12 *And Rehoboam dwelt in Jerusalem, and he built cities for fortification in Judah. And he built Bethlehem and Etam and Tekoa, and Beth-zur and Soco and Adullam, and Gath and Mareshah and Ziph, and Adoraim and Lachish and Azekah, and Zorah and Aijalon and Hebron, which **are** in Judah and in Benjamin, cities of fortresses. And he strengthened the fortresses, and he put in them commanders, and supplies of food and oil and wine. And in every city and city **were** large shields and spears, and he strengthened them very greatly. And Judah and Benjamin belonged to him.*

"Rehoboam dwelt in Jerusalem, and he built cities for fortification in Judah." The Chronicler lists fifteen of them: Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa, Beth-zur, Soco, Adullam, Gath, Mareshah, Ziph, Adoraim, Lachish, Azekah, Zorah, Aijalon and Hebron. They formed a ring around Judah's heartland, mostly on the south and west, guarding the roads from Egypt and the Philistine coast. Interestingly, few are on the northern border. Perhaps Rehoboam still hoped to win back the north someday.

He put commanders in them and stocked them with food, oil, wine, shields and spears. "And Judah and Benjamin belonged to him."

Was this wise? Building defenses is not wrong. But chapter 12 will show that these walls could not stop Shishak of Egypt when the people forsook the LORD. Walls are no substitute for faithfulness. Psalm 127:1 says that unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake for nothing.

11:13-15 *And the priests and the Levites who **were** in all Israel took their stand with him from all their territory. For the Levites forsook their pasture lands and their property, and they went to Judah and to Jerusalem; for Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them from serving as priests to the LORD. And he appointed for himself priests for the high places, and for the goats, and for the calves which he had made.*

Now comes a part of the story only Chronicles tells. "The priests and the Levites who were in all Israel took their stand with him." Why? "For Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them from serving as priests to the LORD."

Jeroboam was afraid that if his people kept going to Jerusalem to worship, their hearts would turn back to the house of David (1 Kings 12:26-33). So he made two golden calves, put them at Bethel and Dan, and "appointed for himself priests for the high places, and for the goats, and for the calves which he had made." The "goats" were probably idols in the form of goat-demons, which the Law forbade (Leviticus 17:7). His new priests did not have to be from the tribe of Levi.

The Levites had a choice. They could stay home and go along, or leave. The Levites "forsook their pasture lands and their property, and they went to Judah and to Jerusalem." Their pasture lands were the towns God had given them in every tribe (Numbers 35:1-8). They gave up their homes and land to stay faithful to God's worship.

That still happens. In many parts of the world, believers give up homes, jobs and family to follow Christ. Jesus promised that no one who leaves house or family for His sake will fail to receive far more (Mark 10:29-30).

11:16-17 *And after them, from all the tribes of Israel, those who set their heart to seek the LORD, the God of Israel, came **to** Jerusalem to sacrifice to the LORD, the God of their fathers. And they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and they made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong for three years; for they walked in the way of David and Solomon for three years.*

"From all the tribes of Israel, those who set their heart to seek the LORD, the God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the LORD, the God of their fathers." This is one of the key verses of Chronicles. The kingdom was split by politics, but God's true people were not defined by politics. They were defined by a heart set on seeking the LORD.

These faithful northerners "strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and they made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong for three years; for they walked in the way of David and Solomon for three years." Notice why: the kingdom was strong because they walked in God's ways. Faithful worshipers are the real strength of any nation or church. The fortified cities were not Judah's main defense. The people seeking God were.

The phrase "three years" warns us that it did not last. Chapter 12 will tell us what happened in the fourth and fifth years.

11:18-21 *And Rehoboam took for himself a wife, Mahalath the daughter of Jerimoth the son of David, Abihail the daughter of Eliab the son of Jesse. And she bore to him sons: Jeush and Shemariah and Zaham. And after her he took Maacah the daughter of Absalom; and she bore to him Abijah and Attai and Ziza and Shelomith. And Rehoboam loved Maacah the daughter of Absalom more than all his wives and his concubines; for he had taken eighteen wives and sixty concubines; and he fathered twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters.*

Rehoboam's family is next. His first wife was Mahalath, a granddaughter of David through his son Jerimoth. Abihail, the daughter of Eliab, David's oldest brother, is named with her, either as Mahalath's mother or as a second wife. The Hebrew can be read both ways. Then he married "Maacah the daughter of Absalom," David's rebellious son. "Daughter" here may mean granddaughter, as often in Hebrew. 13:2 calls Abijah's mother "Micaiah the daughter of Uriel," and many think Maacah was Absalom's granddaughter through his daughter Tamar, who married Uriel (2 Samuel 14:27).

Rehoboam "loved Maacah the daughter of Absalom more than all his wives and his concubines." A concubine was a secondary wife with fewer rights. He had eighteen wives and sixty concubines, and twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters.

God's design for marriage from the beginning was one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6). The Law warned kings not to multiply wives (Deuteronomy 17:17). Rehoboam followed his father Solomon in this, not God's Word. The Bible records many such marriages honestly, but it never presents them as good, and the trouble they caused is plain to see.

11:22-23 *And Rehoboam appointed Abijah the son of Maacah as the head, as leader among his brothers, for **he meant** to make him king. And he acted wisely, and he distributed some of all his sons to all the lands of Judah and Benjamin, to all the cities of the fortresses; and he gave to them the food in abundance; and he asked **for** a multitude of wives.*

"Rehoboam appointed Abijah the son of Maacah as the head, as leader among his brothers, for he meant to make him king." He chose his favorite wife's son, even though Abijah was not his firstborn.

Then "he acted wisely, and he distributed some of all his sons to all the lands of Judah and Benjamin, to all the cities of the fortresses." He gave each son a city, plenty of supplies and wives. This kept his sons busy and spread out, so they would not fight over the throne in Jerusalem. It was shrewd. David's sons had fought each other bitterly (2 Samuel 13-18; 1 Kings 1-2), and Rehoboam may have learned from that.

Worldly wisdom can keep peace for a while. But it is not the same as seeking God. The next chapter shows Rehoboam's real weakness.

Chapter 11 Summary

Rehoboam gathered 180,000 soldiers from Judah and Benjamin to fight the northern tribes, but the prophet Shemaiah brought God's word that they must not fight their brothers, because the split was from God. They obeyed and went home. Rehoboam then fortified fifteen cities across Judah and stocked them. Jeroboam drove out the priests and Levites and appointed his own priests for the high places, goat idols and golden calves. The Levites left their lands and came to Judah, and people from every tribe who set their hearts to seek the LORD followed them to Jerusalem. For three years they made Judah strong, walking in the way of David and Solomon. Rehoboam had eighteen wives and sixty concubines, loved Maacah most, chose her son Abijah as his heir, and wisely placed his other sons in the fortified cities.

Chapter 11 Study Questions

1. What did Rehoboam plan to do about the northern tribes, and who stopped him? (11:1-4)

2. Why did God call the northern tribes Rehoboam's "brothers"? (11:4)

3. What did Rehoboam build, and what do you think was the purpose? (11:5-12)

4. Why did the priests and Levites leave the north? What did they give up? (11:13-15)

5. Who followed the Levites to Jerusalem, and what were they seeking? (11:16)

6. What made Judah strong, and for how long? (11:17)

7. What did Rehoboam do with his many sons, and why was it wise? (11:22-23)

8. Rehoboam's army turned back when God said no. When has God told you no, and how did you respond?

9. The Levites gave up their land to stay faithful. What has following Christ cost you, or what might it cost you?

10. Verse 16 says faithful people "set their heart to seek the LORD." What does it look like for you to set your heart that way?

Chapter 12: Shishak Invades and Rehoboam Humbles Himself

Scripture

12:1-16 And it was, when the kingdom of Rehoboam was established, and as he became strong, he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him. And it was in the fifth year of King Rehoboam ***that*** Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, for they had acted unfaithfully against the LORD, with one thousand two hundred chariots and with sixty thousand horsemen; and ***there was*** no number to the people who came with him from Egypt: Libyans, Sukkites, and Cushites. And he captured the cities of the fortresses which ***belonged*** to Judah, and he came to Jerusalem. And Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and the commanders of Judah, who had gathered to Jerusalem because of Shishak, and he said to them, "Thus says the LORD: You, you have forsaken Me, and also I, I have forsaken you into the hand of Shishak." And the commanders of Israel and the king humbled themselves, and they said, "The LORD ***is*** righteous." And when the LORD saw that they had humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, "They have humbled themselves; I will not destroy them, and I will give to them a little, for deliverance, and My wrath shall not pour out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. But they will become servants to him, so that they may know My service and the service of the kingdoms of the lands." And Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and he took the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the house of the king; everything he took. And he took the shields of gold which Solomon had made. And King Rehoboam made in their place shields of bronze, and he entrusted ***them*** to the hand of the commanders of the runners who guarded the entrance of the house of the king. And it was, as often as the king came ***to*** the house of the LORD, the runners came and carried them, and they brought them back to the guardroom of the runners. And when he humbled himself, the anger of the LORD turned back from him, and not to destroy to completion; and also in Judah there were good things. And King Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem, and he reigned; for Rehoboam ***was*** forty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD had chosen to put His name there out of all the tribes of Israel. And the name of his mother ***was*** Naamah the Ammonite. And he did the evil, for he did not prepare his heart to seek the LORD. And the matters of Rehoboam, the first and the last, are they not written in the words of Shemaiah the prophet and Iddo the seer, for genealogical enrollment? And the wars of Rehoboam and Jeroboam ***were*** all the days. And Rehoboam lay down with his fathers, and he was buried in the city of David; and Abijah his son reigned in his place.

Chapter 12 Preview

Once Rehoboam feels secure, he and all Israel with him forsake the law of the LORD. In his fifth year Shishak king of Egypt sweeps up with a vast army, takes Judah's fortified cities and comes to Jerusalem. The prophet Shemaiah brings God's word: you have forsaken Me, so I have forsaken you to Shishak. The king and his leaders humble themselves and say, "The LORD is righteous." God sees it and relents. He will not destroy them, but they will serve Shishak for a time, so they learn the difference between serving God and serving the kings of the earth.

Shishak strips the temple and palace of their treasures, including Solomon's gold shields, and Rehoboam replaces them with bronze. The chapter ends with a sad summary of Rehoboam's seventeen-year reign: he did evil, because he did not prepare his heart to seek the LORD. 1 Kings 14:21-31 tells the same story more briefly.

Chapter 12 Study

12:1 *And it was, when the kingdom of Rehoboam was established, and as he became strong, he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him.*

"When the kingdom of Rehoboam was established, and as he became strong, he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him." Here "all Israel" means the people of Judah and Benjamin. The Chronicler often uses the name Israel for the faithful people of God who remained with David's house.

This verse names one of the oldest dangers in the Bible. When we are weak, we cry out to God. When we become strong, we forget Him. Moses warned Israel of exactly this: when you have eaten and are full, beware that you do not forget the LORD (Deuteronomy 8:10-14). Rehoboam's three good years (11:17) ended when he felt he no longer needed God.

Notice too that the people followed their king. Leaders set the direction for others, for good or for evil. That is true of parents, pastors and bosses as much as kings.

12:2-4 *And it was in the fifth year of King Rehoboam* ***that*** *Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, for they had acted unfaithfully against the LORD, with one thousand two hundred chariots and with sixty thousand horsemen; and* ***there was*** *no number to the people who came with him from Egypt: Libyans, Sukkites, and Cushites. And he captured the cities of the fortresses which* ***belonged*** *to Judah, and he came to Jerusalem.*

"In the fifth year of King Rehoboam," about 925 B.C., "Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem." The Chronicler tells us why: "for they had acted unfaithfully against the LORD." To act unfaithfully is a strong word in Chronicles. It means to break faith with God, like a husband or wife who betrays the marriage.

Shishak came with 1,200 chariots, 60,000 horsemen and a huge army that included Libyans, Sukkites (probably foreign troops serving Egypt) and Cushites from the region south of Egypt. "He captured the cities of the fortresses which belonged to Judah." All the fortified cities Rehoboam had built in chapter 11 fell. Walls did not save a people who had forsaken God.

Shishak is known from Egyptian history as Shoshenq I, the founder of a new dynasty. On a temple wall at Karnak in Egypt he left a list of cities he conquered in this campaign, including many towns in Judah and Israel. That is one of the places where the Bible's history meets the record outside it.

12:5 *And Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and the commanders of Judah, who had gathered to Jerusalem because of Shishak, and he said to them, "Thus says the LORD: You, you have forsaken Me, and also I, I have forsaken you into the hand of Shishak."*

"Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and the commanders of Judah." This was the same prophet who had stopped Rehoboam from attacking the north (11:2-4). His message was short and hard: "You, you have forsaken Me, and also I, I have forsaken you into the hand of Shishak."

This is the principle Azariah will put into words in 15:2: if you forsake the LORD, He will forsake you. God is not fickle. He does not leave people who are faithful to Him. But when His people turn their backs on Him, He lets them feel what life is like without His protection, so that they will come back. God's discipline is an act of love (Hebrews 12:5-11).

12:6-8 *And the commanders of Israel and the king humbled themselves, and they said, "The LORD **is** righteous." And when the LORD saw that they had humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, "They have humbled themselves; I will not destroy them, and I will give to them a little, for deliverance, and My wrath shall not pour out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. But they will become servants to him, so that they may know My service and the service of the kingdoms of the lands."*

"The commanders of Israel and the king humbled themselves," and they said, "The LORD is righteous." This is the first time in Chronicles that a king humbles himself, and it shows 7:14 in action. They did not blame Shishak, or bad luck, or each other. They said God was right and they were wrong. That is what real confession sounds like.

God answered at once. "When the LORD saw that they had humbled themselves," His word came again: "I will not destroy them, and I will give to them a little, for deliverance, and My wrath shall not pour out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak."

But there would still be a cost. "They will become servants to him, so that they may know My service and the service of the kingdoms of the lands." What a lesson. God was saying, you wanted to be free of My law; now see what it is like to serve a pagan king. Serving God is freedom. Serving sin and the world is slavery. Jesus said His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:29-30). Rehoboam's people had complained of Solomon's heavy yoke. They were about to learn how heavy Egypt's yoke was.

God's forgiveness is real and full. But sometimes the consequences of sin remain for a time, so we learn. We should not mistake those consequences for God's rejection.

12:9-11 *And Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and he took the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the house of the king; everything he took. And he took the shields of gold which Solomon had made. And King Rehoboam made in their place shields of bronze, and he entrusted* ***them*** *to the hand of the commanders of the runners who guarded the entrance of the house of the king. And it was, as often as the king came* ***to*** *the house of the LORD, the runners came and carried them, and they brought them back to the guardroom of the runners.*

"Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and he took the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the house of the king; everything he took." The wealth that took Solomon forty years to gather was carried off in a single campaign, only five years after he died. "He took the shields of gold which Solomon had made" (9:15-16).

"King Rehoboam made in their place shields of bronze." Every time the king went to the temple, the guards carried out the bronze shields for the procession, and then put them back in the guardroom.

This is a sad picture. From a distance the bronze shields shone, and the parade looked much the same. But the gold was gone. Rehoboam kept up appearances. How often do we do the same? We keep the outward forms of faith, the church attendance and the right words, while the real gold of loving God has been lost. God is not fooled by polished bronze. He looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

12:12 *And when he humbled himself, the anger of the LORD turned back from him, and not to destroy to completion; and also in Judah there were good things.*

"When he humbled himself, the anger of the LORD turned back from him, and not to destroy to completion." God's anger turns away from the humble. "And also in Judah there were good things." Even in a time of judgment, God left some good in the land: faithful people, true worship, the hope of better days. God never leaves His people with nothing.

12:13-14 *And King Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem, and he reigned; for Rehoboam* ***was*** *forty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD had chosen to put His name there out of all the tribes of Israel. And the name of his mother* ***was*** *Naamah the Ammonite. And he did the evil, for he did not prepare his heart to seek the LORD.*

"King Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem, and he reigned." He was forty-one when he became king and reigned seventeen years, about 930 to 913 B.C. He reigned in "the city which the LORD had chosen to put His name there out of all the tribes of Israel." That is a reminder of how great his privilege was.

"The name of his mother was Naamah the Ammonite." Scripture mentions it three times (12:13; 1 Kings 14:21, 31). Solomon had married her in spite of God's command (1 Kings 11:1-2), and the Ammonites worshiped Milcom, also called Molech. The Bible seems to hint that her influence helped shape her son.

Then comes the verdict: "he did the evil, for he did not prepare his heart to seek the LORD." That is the key to Rehoboam's whole life. He was not always wicked. He obeyed the prophet once and humbled himself once. But he never set his heart on God. He reacted to God when trouble came, but he did not seek God when things were quiet.

Many people live that way. They turn to God in a crisis and forget Him when the crisis passes. A heart prepared to seek God is one that decides ahead of time, every day, to put Him first. Is your heart set, or does it only turn to God when you are in trouble?

12:15-16 *And the matters of Rehoboam, the first and the last, are they not written in the words of Shemaiah the prophet and Iddo the seer, for genealogical enrollment? And the wars of Rehoboam and Jeroboam **were** all the days. And Rehoboam lay down with his fathers, and he was buried in the city of David; and Abijah his son reigned in his place.*

"The matters of Rehoboam, the first and the last," were written in the records of "Shemaiah the prophet and Iddo the seer." These prophets kept the history of their time, much as Samuel, Nathan and Gad did for David (1 Chronicles 29:29).

"The wars of Rehoboam and Jeroboam were all the days." Even though God had forbidden a full war (11:4), there was constant fighting along the border. A family split by sin seldom finds peace quickly.

"Rehoboam lay down with his fathers, and he was buried in the city of David; and Abijah his son reigned in his place." God kept His promise to David. A son of David still sat on the throne in Jerusalem, and would for more than three hundred years.

Chapter 12 Summary

After Rehoboam became strong, he and the people forsook the law of the LORD. In his fifth year Shishak king of Egypt invaded with a huge army, captured Judah's fortified cities and came to Jerusalem. The prophet Shemaiah said that because they had forsaken God, He had forsaken them to Shishak. The king and leaders humbled themselves and said, "The LORD is righteous." God spared them from destruction but made them serve Shishak so they would learn the difference between His service and the service of earthly kings. Shishak carried off the treasures of the temple and palace, including Solomon's gold shields, and Rehoboam replaced them with bronze. Rehoboam reigned seventeen years. He did evil because he did not prepare his heart to seek the LORD.

Chapter 12 Study Questions

1. What happened when Rehoboam's kingdom became strong? (12:1)

2. Why did Shishak come against Judah, according to the Chronicler? (12:2)

3. What message did Shemaiah bring? (12:5)

4. How did the king and leaders respond, and what did God say then? (12:6-7)

5. Why did God let them become servants of Shishak? (12:8)

6. What did Rehoboam put in place of the gold shields? (12:9-10)

7. What is the final verdict on Rehoboam's life, and why? (12:14)

8. Deuteronomy 8:10-14 warns against forgetting God when life is good. When are you most likely to forget Him?

9. The bronze shields kept up appearances after the gold was gone. Where might you be keeping up the look of faith while the heart has grown cold?

10. What would it look like for you to prepare your heart to seek the LORD every day, not only in trouble? (12:14)

Chapter 13: Abijah's War with Jeroboam

Scripture

13:1-12 In the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam, then Abijah became king over Judah. Three years he reigned in Jerusalem; and the name of his mother ***was*** Micaiah the daughter of Uriel from Gibeah. And there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. And Abijah joined the battle with an army of mighty men of war, four hundred thousand chosen men; and Jeroboam drew up battle with him with eight hundred thousand chosen men, mighty men of strength. And Abijah stood up on Mount Zemaraim, which ***is*** in the hill country of Ephraim, and he said, "Listen to me, Jeroboam and all Israel! Is it not for you to know that the LORD, the God of Israel, gave ***the*** kingdom over Israel to David forever, to him and to his sons, a covenant of salt? And Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of David, rose up and rebelled against his lord. And empty men, sons of worthlessness, gathered to him, and they made themselves strong against Rehoboam the son of Solomon; and Rehoboam was a youth and tender of heart, and he did not strengthen himself before them. And now you, you are speaking of strengthening yourselves before the kingdom of the LORD in the hand of the sons of David; and you ***are*** a great multitude, and with you ***are*** calves of gold which Jeroboam made for you for gods. Have you not driven out the priests of the LORD, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and made for yourselves priests like the peoples of the lands? Everyone who comes to fill his hand with a bull, a son of cattle, and seven rams, and he becomes a priest to no-gods. And we, the LORD ***is*** our God, and we have not forsaken Him; and priests ministering to the LORD ***are*** the sons of Aaron, and the Levites ***are*** in the work, and ***they are*** burning to the LORD burnt offerings morning by morning and evening by evening, and incense of spices; and the row of bread ***is*** on the pure table, and the lampstand of gold and its lamps to burn evening by evening; for we are keeping the charge of the LORD our God, and you, you have forsaken Him. And look, with us at the head ***is*** God, and His priests, and the trumpets of the shout to raise a shout against you. Sons of Israel, do not fight with the LORD, the God of your fathers, for you will not succeed."

13:13-22 And Jeroboam had caused the ambush to go around to come from behind them; and they were in front of Judah, and the ambush ***was*** behind them. And Judah turned, and look, the battle ***was*** for them in front and behind; and they cried out to the LORD, and the priests ***were*** blowing on trumpets. And the men of Judah shouted; and it was, when the men of Judah shouted, that God struck Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. And the sons of Israel fled from before Judah, and God gave them into their hand. And Abijah and his people struck among them a great striking, and there fell slain of Israel five hundred thousand chosen men. And the sons of Israel were humbled at that time, and the sons of Judah were strong, for they leaned on the LORD, the God of their fathers. And Abijah pursued after Jeroboam, and he captured cities from him: Bethel and its villages, and Jeshanah and its villages, and Ephrain and its villages. And Jeroboam did not retain strength again in the days of Abijah; and the LORD struck him, and he died. And Abijah strengthened himself, and he took for himself fourteen wives, and he fathered twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. And the rest of the matters of Abijah, and his ways and his words, ***are*** written in the record of the prophet Iddo.

Chapter 13 Preview

Abijah, Rehoboam's son, becomes king of Judah and goes to war against Jeroboam of Israel. Outnumbered two to one, he stands on a mountain between the armies and gives a speech. God gave the kingdom to David's sons forever by a covenant of salt. Jeroboam rebelled, drove out the true priests and made golden calves for gods. Judah has not forsaken the LORD, and God Himself is at their head. Do not fight against the LORD, he says, for you will not succeed.

While he speaks, Jeroboam sets an ambush behind Judah. Surrounded, the men of Judah cry out to the LORD, the priests blow the trumpets, the army shouts, and God strikes Israel down. Judah wins because they relied on the LORD. Jeroboam never recovers. 1 Kings 15:1-8 gives a short account of Abijah, there called Abijam, and says his heart was not complete with the LORD. Chronicles tells the day when, at least, he trusted God.

Chapter 13 Study

13:1-2 *In the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam, then Abijah became king over Judah. Three years he reigned in Jerusalem; and the name of his mother* ***was*** *Micaiah the daughter of Uriel from Gibeah. And there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam.*

"In the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam, then Abijah became king over Judah. Three years he reigned in Jerusalem," about 913 to 910 B.C. This is the only time Chronicles dates a king of Judah by a king of Israel, perhaps because the whole chapter is about the clash between them.

"The name of his mother was Micaiah the daughter of Uriel from Gibeah." In 11:20 and 1 Kings 15:2 she is Maacah the daughter of Absalom. As I noted in chapter 11, "daughter" often means granddaughter, and many think she was Absalom's granddaughter through his daughter Tamar and her husband Uriel. Micaiah may be a different form of the name.

"There was war between Abijah and Jeroboam." The border fighting of Rehoboam's day (12:15) came to a head.

13:3 *And Abijah joined the battle with an army of mighty men of war, four hundred thousand chosen men; and Jeroboam drew up battle with him with eight hundred thousand chosen men, mighty men of strength.*

Abijah went out with "four hundred thousand chosen men," and Jeroboam came against him with "eight hundred thousand chosen men, mighty men of strength." Judah was outnumbered two to one. These are very large numbers. As I said at 11:1, I take them as written, while some scholars read the word for thousand as a unit of soldiers. Either way, the point is the same: by human reckoning, Judah should have lost.

13:4-7 *And Abijah stood up on Mount Zemaraim, which **is** in the hill country of Ephraim, and he said, "Listen to me, Jeroboam and all Israel! Is it not for you to know that the LORD, the God of Israel, gave **the** kingdom over Israel to David forever, to him and to his sons, a covenant of salt? And Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of David, rose up and rebelled against his lord. And empty men, sons of worthlessness, gathered to him, and they made themselves strong against Rehoboam the son of Solomon; and Rehoboam was a youth and tender of heart, and he did not strengthen himself before them.*

"Abijah stood up on Mount Zemaraim, which is in the hill country of Ephraim," near the border, and called out across the valley: "Listen to me, Jeroboam and all Israel!"

His first point was God's covenant. "The LORD, the God of Israel, gave the kingdom over Israel to David forever, to him and to his sons, a covenant of salt." Salt does not spoil, and in the ancient world it was used to seal agreements. A covenant of salt meant a lasting, unbreakable covenant (Numbers 18:19). The throne belonged to David's line by God's choice.

His second point was Jeroboam's rebellion. Jeroboam, "the servant of Solomon," had "rebelled against his lord." Worthless men gathered to him while Rehoboam was "a youth and tender of heart." Rehoboam was forty-one at the time (12:13), so "youth" here means inexperienced and soft, not young in years. Abijah does not mention his father's harsh words, which started the trouble. He gives Judah's side of the story. But his main point is true. God had chosen David's house.

13:8-9 *And now you, you are speaking of strengthening yourselves before the kingdom of the LORD in the hand of the sons of David; and you **are** a great multitude, and with you **are** calves of gold which Jeroboam made for you for gods. Have you not driven out the priests of the LORD, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and made for yourselves priests like the peoples of the lands? Everyone who comes to fill his hand with a bull, a son of cattle, and seven rams, and he becomes a priest to no-gods.*

"You are speaking of strengthening yourselves before the kingdom of the LORD in the hand of the sons of David." Notice how Abijah describes Judah's throne: "the kingdom of the LORD." The kingdom was God's, and David's sons held it for Him. To fight it was to fight God.

"You are a great multitude, and with you are calves of gold which Jeroboam made for you for gods." Numbers mean nothing if your gods are idols. They had driven out the true priests, "the sons of Aaron, and the Levites," and now anyone who brought "a bull, a son of cattle, and seven rams" could buy his way into the priesthood "to no-gods." Abijah's scorn is sharp. A god you can make is no god at all.

That is still true. Anything we make, buy or build and then trust in place of the living God is a "no-god." It cannot save us.

13:10-12 *And we, the LORD **is** our God, and we have not forsaken Him; and priests ministering to the LORD **are** the sons of Aaron, and the Levites **are** in the work, and **they are** burning to the LORD burnt offerings morning by morning and evening by evening, and incense of spices; and the row of bread **is** on the pure table, and the lampstand of gold and its lamps to burn evening by evening; for we are keeping the charge of the LORD our God, and you, you have forsaken Him. And look, with us at the head **is** God, and His priests, and the trumpets of the shout to raise a shout against you. Sons of Israel, do not fight with the LORD, the God of your fathers, for you will not succeed."*

"And we, the LORD is our God, and we have not forsaken Him." Abijah listed what Judah still did right: the true priests, the sons of Aaron, the Levites at their work, the burnt offerings "morning by morning and evening by evening," the incense, the bread on the pure table, and the golden lampstand lit each evening. "For we are keeping the charge of the LORD our God, and you, you have forsaken Him."

Then the climax: "Look, with us at the head is God, and His priests, and the trumpets of the shout." The Law said the priests were to blow the trumpets in battle so that God would remember His people and save them (Numbers 10:9). "Sons of Israel, do not fight with the LORD, the God of your fathers, for you will not succeed."

Was Abijah a godly man? 1 Kings 15:3 says he "walked in all the sins of his father" and his heart was not complete with God. So his life did not match all his words. But on this day he stood for the truth: God's covenant, God's priests, God's worship. God honored the truth, and He honored the trust Judah placed in Him. That should humble us. God's blessing came not because Abijah was perfect, but because Judah leaned on God in that hour.

13:13-14 *And Jeroboam had caused the ambush to go around to come from behind them; and they were in front of Judah, and the ambush **was** behind them. And Judah turned, and look, the battle **was** for them in front and behind; and they cried out to the LORD, and the priests **were** blowing on trumpets.*

While Abijah was preaching, Jeroboam was maneuvering. He "had caused the ambush to go around to come from behind them." Judah turned, "and look, the battle was for them in front and behind."

What did they do? "They cried out to the LORD, and the priests were blowing on trumpets." They did not panic and run. They prayed. When you are surrounded, there is only one direction left to look, and that is up.

13:15-18 *And the men of Judah shouted; and it was, when the men of Judah shouted, that God struck Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. And the sons of Israel fled from before Judah, and God gave them into their hand. And Abijah and his people struck among them a great striking, and there fell slain of Israel five hundred thousand chosen men. And the sons of Israel were humbled at that time, and the sons of Judah were strong, for they leaned on the LORD, the God of their fathers.*

"The men of Judah shouted; and it was, when the men of Judah shouted, that God struck Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah." Like the walls of Jericho (Joshua 6:20), the victory came from God, not from their strength. "God gave them into their hand."

The slaughter was terrible: five hundred thousand fell in Israel. This was a civil war between brothers, and the loss was a tragedy for the whole nation. We should not cheer it. The Chronicler records it to show how serious it is to fight against God and His covenant.

Then he gives the reason: "the sons of Judah were strong, for they leaned on the LORD, the God of their fathers." To lean on the LORD means to rely on Him, to put your full weight on Him. This word comes back in the life of Asa, both for good and for bad (14:11; 16:7-8). Proverbs 3:5 says to trust in the LORD with all your heart and not lean on your own understanding.

What are you leaning on today?

13:19-20 *And Abijah pursued after Jeroboam, and he captured cities from him: Bethel and its villages, and Jeshanah and its villages, and Ephrain and its villages. And Jeroboam did not retain strength again in the days of Abijah; and the LORD struck him, and he died.*

Abijah "captured cities from him: Bethel and its villages, and Jeshanah and its villages, and Ephrain and its villages." Bethel was one of the two places where Jeroboam had set up a golden calf (1 Kings 12:29). It was only about 12 miles north of Jerusalem. Taking it was a blow to Jeroboam's false worship.

"Jeroboam did not retain strength again in the days of Abijah; and the LORD struck him, and he died." Jeroboam actually outlived Abijah by a year or two (1 Kings 14:20; 15:9), so this verse sums up the rest of his life. He never regained his strength, and in the end his death came from the hand of God. The man who made Israel sin (1 Kings 14:16) met the God he had rejected.

13:21-22 *And Abijah strengthened himself, and he took for himself fourteen wives, and he fathered twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. And the rest of the matters of Abijah, and his ways and his words, **are** written in the record of the prophet Iddo.*

"Abijah strengthened himself, and he took for himself fourteen wives, and he fathered twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters." Like his father and grandfather, he gathered many wives, against the warning of Deuteronomy 17:17. The Chronicler simply records it.

"The rest of the matters of Abijah, and his ways and his words, are written in the record of the prophet Iddo." The Hebrew word for record here is midrash, which means a study or written account. The prophets were the historians of their day.

Abijah reigned only three years. His one great day was the day he leaned on God. What will people remember about your life?

Chapter 13 Summary

Abijah became king of Judah in Jeroboam's eighteenth year and reigned three years. He went to war against Jeroboam with 400,000 men against 800,000. From Mount Zemaraim he called out to Israel: God gave the kingdom to David's sons forever by a covenant of salt, Jeroboam rebelled, drove out the true priests and made golden calves, but Judah had not forsaken the LORD, who was at their head. He warned them not to fight against God. Jeroboam set an ambush, but Judah cried out to the LORD, the priests blew the trumpets, the people shouted, and God struck Israel down. Judah won because they leaned on the LORD. Abijah captured Bethel and other cities, and Jeroboam never recovered his strength.

Chapter 13 Study Questions

1. When did Abijah become king, and how long did he reign? (13:1-2)

2. How large were the two armies? (13:3)

3. What is a covenant of salt, and what did God give David by it? (13:5; Numbers 18:19)

4. What did Abijah say Jeroboam had done wrong in worship? (13:8-9)

5. What did Abijah say Judah was doing right? (13:10-11)

6. What did Judah do when they found themselves surrounded? (13:14)

7. Why did Judah win, according to verse 18?

8. 1 Kings 15:3 says Abijah's heart was not complete with God, yet God gave him victory when he trusted Him. What does that teach you about God's grace?

9. Abijah called idols "no-gods." What "no-gods" are people tempted to trust today?

10. When have you felt surrounded "in front and behind"? How did you respond, and how could you lean on the LORD next time?

Chapter 14: Asa Relies on the LORD

Scripture

14:1-15 And Abijah lay down with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David; and Asa his son reigned in his place. In his days the land was quiet ten years. And Asa did the good and the right in the eyes of the LORD his God. And he removed the altars of foreignness and the high places, and he broke the pillars, and he cut down the Asherim. And he told Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment. And he removed from all the cities of Judah the high places and the incense altars; and the kingdom was quiet before him. And he built cities of fortification in Judah, for the land was quiet, and ***there was*** no war with him in these years, for the LORD had given rest to him. And he said to Judah, "Let us build these cities, and let us surround ***them with*** wall and towers, double doors and bars; the land ***is*** still before us, for we have sought the LORD our God; we have sought ***Him***, and He has given rest to us all around." And they built and prospered. And Asa had an army bearing large shield and spear: from Judah three hundred thousand, and from Benjamin, bearers of shield and benders of bow, two hundred and eighty thousand; all these ***were*** mighty men of strength. And Zerah the Cushite came out against them with an army of a thousand thousands, and three hundred chariots; and he came as far as Mareshah. And Asa went out before him, and they drew up battle in the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. And Asa called to the LORD his God, and he said, "LORD, ***there is*** none with You to help between the great and ***the one with*** no strength. Help us, O LORD our God, for we lean on You, and in Your name we have come against this multitude. O LORD, You ***are*** our God; let not man retain ***strength*** against You." And the LORD struck the Cushites before Asa and before Judah, and the Cushites fled. And Asa and the people who ***were*** with him pursued them as far as Gerar; and of the Cushites ***men*** fell until there was no recovery for them, for they were broken before the LORD and before His camp. And they carried away very much booty. And they struck all the cities around Gerar, for the dread of the LORD was on them; and they plundered all the cities, for there was much plunder in them. And also the tents of livestock they struck, and they took captive sheep in abundance and camels; and they returned ***to*** Jerusalem.

Chapter 14 Preview

Abijah dies, and his son Asa begins a long reign. He does what is good and right in God's eyes. He tears down the foreign altars, the high places, the sacred pillars and the Asherah poles, and he tells Judah to seek the LORD and keep His law. God gives the land ten years of quiet, and Asa uses the peace to build and strengthen Judah's cities.

Then a huge army under Zerah the Cushite marches against Judah. Asa prays one of the great short prayers of the Bible: there is no one like You to help the weak against the strong; help us, for we lean on You. The LORD strikes the Cushites, and Judah wins a great victory. 1 Kings 15:9-15 gives a brief account of Asa's good beginning. Chronicles alone tells of Zerah.

Chapter 14 Study

14:1 *And Abijah lay down with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David; and Asa his son reigned in his place. In his days the land was quiet ten years.*

"Abijah lay down with his fathers," a gentle Hebrew way of saying he died. "Asa his son reigned in his place." Asa would reign forty-one years, about 910 to 869 B.C., one of the longest reigns in Judah.

"In his days the land was quiet ten years." Peace is a gift from God. Verse 6 tells us why: "the LORD had given rest to him." The Chronicler wants us to see that the peace came from God, and it came to a king who sought Him.

14:2-5 *And Asa did the good and the right in the eyes of the LORD his God. And he removed the altars of foreignness and the high places, and he broke the pillars, and he cut down the Asherim. And he told Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment. And he removed from all the cities of Judah the high places and the incense altars; and the kingdom was quiet before him.*

"Asa did the good and the right in the eyes of the LORD his God." That is the highest praise a king of Judah could receive. Notice the standard: not good in his own eyes or in the people's eyes, but in God's eyes.

His reform was thorough. "He removed the altars of foreignness," altars to foreign gods. He removed "the high places," hilltop shrines where idols were worshiped or where the LORD was worshiped in ways He had forbidden. "He broke the pillars," stone pillars set up as symbols of false gods, "and he cut down the Asherim." An Asherah was a wooden pole or carved image for the Canaanite goddess Asherah, a goddess of fertility. Her worship was tied to immoral practices. God had commanded Israel to destroy all these things when they entered the land (Deuteronomy 7:5; 12:2-3).

But Asa did more than tear down. "He told Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment." Removing idols is only half of a revival. The other half is turning toward God and His Word. An empty heart will soon fill up with new idols (Matthew 12:43-45).

15:17 will say the high places "were not removed from Israel." That may mean some of the high places where the LORD was worshiped stayed, or it may mean the northern areas Asa had captured. It may also mean the people rebuilt them later. Either way, Asa's heart was right, even if his reform was not complete in every corner.

14:6-7 *And he built cities of fortification in Judah, for the land was quiet, and **there was** no war with him in these years, for the LORD had given rest to him. And he said to Judah, "Let us build these cities, and let us surround **them with** wall and towers, double doors and bars; the land **is** still before us, for we have sought the LORD our God; we have sought **Him**, and He has given rest to us all around." And they built and prospered.*

"He built cities of fortification in Judah, for the land was quiet." Asa used the years of peace wisely. He did not wait for war to prepare for it.

Listen to what he told the people: "Let us build these cities," because "the land is still before us, for we have sought the LORD our God; we have sought Him, and He has given rest to us all around." He said "we have sought" twice. Asa knew where their peace came from, and he wanted the people to know it too. "And they built and prospered."

Seasons of quiet in our lives are not just for rest. They are for building: building our knowledge of God's Word, our habits of prayer, our relationships with other believers. When the storm comes, it is too late to lay a foundation.

14:8 *And Asa had an army bearing large shield and spear: from Judah three hundred thousand, and from Benjamin, bearers of shield and benders of bow, two hundred and eighty thousand; all these **were** mighty men of strength.*

Asa had an army of 300,000 from Judah, armed with large shields and spears, and 280,000 from Benjamin, with shields and bows. "All these were mighty men of strength." Asa was not careless. He trained and equipped his army. But as we will see, he did not trust in it.

14:9-10 *And Zerah the Cushite came out against them with an army of a thousand thousands, and three hundred chariots; and he came as far as Mareshah. And Asa went out before him, and they drew up battle in the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah.*

"Zerah the Cushite came out against them with an army of a thousand thousands, and three hundred chariots." Cush was the region south of Egypt, roughly ancient Nubia, in what is now Sudan. Zerah may have been a Cushite commander serving the king of Egypt, Shishak's successor, or a chieftain of Cushite people living in the southern desert near Gerar. History does not tell us for sure.

"A thousand thousands" is a million. It may be a way of saying a vast, countless army, or it may be a literal count. Either way, Judah's 580,000 were badly outnumbered.

They met "in the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah," one of the cities Rehoboam had fortified (11:8), in the low hills southwest of Jerusalem.

14:11 *And Asa called to the LORD his God, and he said, "LORD, **there is** none with You to help between the great and **the one with** no strength. Help us, O LORD our God, for we lean on You, and in Your name we have come against this multitude. O LORD, You **are** our God; let not man retain **strength** against You."*

Then Asa prayed. This is one of the finest prayers in Chronicles, and it is only three sentences long.

"LORD, there is none with You to help between the great and the one with no strength." In other words, it makes no difference to You whether the one You help is strong or weak. God can save by many or by few (1 Samuel 14:6). The size of the enemy is no problem for Him.

"Help us, O LORD our God, for we lean on You, and in Your name we have come against this multitude." Asa did not lean on his 580,000 soldiers. He leaned on God, and he went into battle "in Your name," meaning for God's honor and under His authority.

"O LORD, You are our God; let not man retain strength against You." Asa made the battle about God's honor. If Judah lost, it would look as though the LORD could not protect His people. So he asked God to show that no man can stand against Him.

That is a model for our prayers in hard times. Begin with who God is. Admit your weakness. Lean your full weight on Him. And ask Him to act for His own name's sake. You might ask, does God always give victory when we pray like that? Not always in the way we expect. But He always hears, and He always does what brings Him glory and His people good (Romans 8:28).

14:12-13 *And the LORD struck the Cushites before Asa and before Judah, and the Cushites fled. And Asa and the people who **were** with him pursued them as far as Gerar; and of the Cushites **men** fell until there was no recovery for them, for they were broken before the LORD and before His camp. And they carried away very much booty.*

"The LORD struck the Cushites before Asa and before Judah, and the Cushites fled." The Chronicler gives the credit to God first. Asa and his men pursued them as far as Gerar, a town in the south toward the Philistine coast. The Cushites fell "until there was no recovery for them, for they were broken before the LORD and before His camp."

"His camp." Judah's army was God's camp. When God's people fight God's battles His way, the army belongs to Him. The same truth runs through Scripture: "the battle belongs to the LORD" (1 Samuel 17:47).

14:14-15 *And they struck all the cities around Gerar, for the dread of the LORD was on them; and they plundered all the cities, for there was much plunder in them. And also the tents of livestock they struck, and they took captive sheep in abundance and camels; and they returned **to** Jerusalem.*

"They struck all the cities around Gerar, for the dread of the LORD was on them." The towns that had supported Zerah's army were overcome. Judah took much plunder, along with sheep and camels from the herdsmen's camps, "and they returned to Jerusalem."

This was a great victory, and it came from God. But victories can be dangerous too. The next chapter shows God sending a prophet right away to tell Asa how to keep walking with Him after the win. And chapter 16 shows what happened years later when Asa forgot the lesson of this day.

Chapter 14 Summary

After Abijah died, Asa became king, and the land had ten years of quiet. Asa did what was good and right in God's eyes. He removed foreign altars, high places, sacred pillars and Asherah poles, and told Judah to seek the LORD and keep His law. He used the years of peace to fortify Judah's cities, saying God had given them rest because they sought Him. When Zerah the Cushite came with a huge army, Asa prayed that there is no one like God to help the weak, and that Judah leaned on Him and came in His name. The LORD struck the Cushites, and Judah pursued them to Gerar and returned to Jerusalem with great plunder.

Chapter 14 Study Questions

1. How long was the land quiet at the start of Asa's reign, and who gave that rest? (14:1, 6)

2. What did Asa remove from Judah? (14:3, 5)

3. Besides tearing down idols, what did Asa tell the people to do? (14:4)

4. What did Asa say was the reason for Judah's peace? (14:7)

5. Who came against Judah, and how large was his army? (14:9)

6. What three things did Asa say to God in his prayer? (14:11)

7. Who does the Chronicler say struck the Cushites? (14:12-13)

8. Asa used years of peace to build. How are you using the quiet seasons of your life to grow stronger in the Lord?

9. Asa told God, "we lean on You." What are you tempted to lean on instead of God?

10. Is there a "great multitude" you are facing right now? Try praying Asa's prayer about it this week.

Chapter 15: Azariah's Message and Asa's Covenant

Scripture

15:1-19 And Azariah the son of Oded, the Spirit of God came on him. And he went out before Asa, and he said to him, "Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin: the LORD ***is*** with you while you are with Him; and if you seek Him, He will be found by you; and if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. And many days ***have been*** for Israel without the God of truth, and without a teaching priest, and without law. And in its distress it turned back to the LORD, the God of Israel, and they sought Him, and He was found by them. And in those times ***there was*** no peace for the one going out and for the one coming in, for great disturbances ***were*** on all the inhabitants of the lands. And they were crushed, nation by nation and city by city, for God troubled them with every distress. And you, be strong, and let not your hands drop, for there is a reward for your work." And when Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he strengthened himself, and he took away the detestable things from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities which he had captured from the hill country of Ephraim; and he renewed the altar of the LORD which ***was*** before the porch of the LORD. And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those sojourning with them from Ephraim and Manasseh and from Simeon; for they had deserted to him from Israel in abundance when they saw that the LORD his God ***was*** with him. And they gathered together ***at*** Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa. And they sacrificed to the LORD on that day, from the booty ***which*** they had brought, seven hundred cattle and seven thousand sheep. And they entered into the covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul; and everyone who would not seek the LORD, the God of Israel, should be put to death, from small to great, from man to woman. And they swore to the LORD with a loud voice, and with a shout, and with trumpets, and with rams' horns. And all Judah rejoiced over the oath, for with all their heart they had sworn, and with all their will they had sought Him, and He was found by them; and the LORD gave them rest all around. And also Maacah, the mother of Asa the king, he removed her from ***being*** queen mother, who had made a horrid image for Asherah; and Asa cut down her horrid image, and crushed ***it***, and burned ***it*** in the Wadi of Kidron. And the high places were not removed from Israel; only the heart of Asa was complete all his days. And he brought the holy things of his father and his own holy things ***into*** the house of God: silver and gold and utensils. And there was no war until the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa.

Chapter 15 Preview

As Asa comes home from his victory over Zerah, the Spirit of God comes on a prophet named Azariah, who goes out to meet him. His message is simple and searching: the LORD is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. He reminds them of the dark days of the judges, when Israel had no true teaching and no peace, and of how God was found whenever they turned back. Then he urges Asa to be strong and keep working, for the work will be rewarded.

Asa takes courage and carries his reform further. He removes idols from all his land, repairs the altar of the LORD, and gathers Judah, Benjamin and many people from the northern tribes to

Jerusalem. There they make a covenant to seek the LORD with all their heart and soul, and God gives them rest. Asa even removes his own grandmother from her position because of her idol. 1 Kings 15:13-15 tells part of this. The covenant and Azariah's message appear only in Chronicles.

Chapter 15 Study

15:1-2 *And Azariah the son of Oded, the Spirit of God came on him. And he went out before Asa, and he said to him, "Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin: the LORD **is** with you while you are with Him; and if you seek Him, He will be found by you; and if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.*

"Azariah the son of Oded, the Spirit of God came on him." In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit came on certain people for certain tasks, such as prophets, judges and kings. We know nothing else about Azariah. He appears once, delivers God's word, and disappears. God does not need famous people to speak through.

"He went out before Asa." The army was coming home from a great victory. That is exactly when God sent a warning. Success is when we most need to hear God's word, because success is when we are most likely to drift.

"The LORD is with you while you are with Him; and if you seek Him, He will be found by you; and if you forsake Him, He will forsake you." This is one of the key verses of the whole book. Every king in Chronicles is measured by it.

Some might ask, doesn't God promise never to leave us? He does. Hebrews 13:5 says He will never forsake His children, and Jesus promised to be with us always (Matthew 28:20). Azariah was speaking to the nation under the covenant of Moses, where blessing and protection in the land depended on faithfulness. For a believer in Christ, salvation does not come and go with our faithfulness (John 10:28-29). But the principle still speaks to us. When we turn our backs on God, we lose the sense of His nearness, His blessing and His help in our daily life, and He disciplines us to bring us back (Hebrews 12:6). James 4:8 says, "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you."

15:3-6 *And many days **have been** for Israel without the God of truth, and without a teaching priest, and without law. And in its distress it turned back to the LORD, the God of Israel, and they sought Him, and He was found by them. And in those times **there was** no peace for the one going out and for the one coming in, for great disturbances **were** on all the inhabitants of the lands. And they were crushed, nation by nation and city by city, for God troubled them with every distress.*

Azariah pointed back in history. "Many days have been for Israel without the God of truth, and without a teaching priest, and without law." This sounds like the time of the judges, when everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25). Some think he also looked ahead, since Hosea 3:4 uses similar words for Israel's long future exile.

In those days "there was no peace for the one going out and for the one coming in." Nations and cities were crushed, "for God troubled them with every distress." But whenever "in its distress it turned back to the LORD, the God of Israel, and they sought Him, and He was found by them."

That is the pattern of the book of Judges: sin, trouble, crying out, deliverance. Azariah was saying, God has always been found by those who seek Him, even after long times of turning away. It is never too late to turn back.

Notice what Azariah said Israel lacked: the true God, a teaching priest, and the law. A people without God's Word taught to them will drift into chaos. That is why faithful Bible teaching matters so much in every church and home.

15:7 *And you, be strong, and let not your hands drop, for there is a reward for your work."*

"And you, be strong, and let not your hands drop, for there is a reward for your work." Asa had started a reform. Now he needed courage to finish it.

Hands dropping is a picture of discouragement, of giving up halfway. Paul uses the same kind of encouragement: "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," knowing your labor is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). And Galatians 6:9 says not to grow weary in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not give up. God sees and rewards faithful work, even when no one else does.

15:8 *And when Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he strengthened himself, and he took away the detestable things from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities which he had captured from the hill country of Ephraim; and he renewed the altar of the LORD which **was** before the porch of the LORD.*

"When Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he strengthened himself." The prophecy is called both Azariah's and his father Oded's, perhaps because the son spoke in his father's name or a word was lost in copying. Asa took the message to heart.

He "took away the detestable things from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities which he had captured from the hill country of Ephraim." Detestable things means idols. He also "renewed the altar of the LORD which was before the porch." After years of neglect under his father and grandfather, Solomon's great bronze altar needed repair. Asa made true worship possible again.

15:9-11 *And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those sojourning with them from Ephraim and Manasseh and from Simeon; for they had deserted to him from Israel in abundance when they saw that the LORD his God **was** with him. And they gathered together **at** Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa. And they sacrificed to the LORD on that day, from the booty **which** they had brought, seven hundred cattle and seven thousand sheep.*

Asa "gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those sojourning with them from Ephraim and Manasseh and from Simeon; for they had deserted to him from Israel in abundance when they saw that the LORD his God was with him." People from the northern tribes kept coming south (11:16). They were drawn not by Asa's army or his wealth, but by the evidence that God was with him.

That is still how people are drawn to the Lord. When they see that God is truly with His people, many want to know Him.

They gathered "in the third month of the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa," about 895 B.C. The third month was the time of the Feast of Weeks, the harvest feast. They sacrificed "seven hundred cattle and seven thousand sheep" from the plunder of the victory over Zerah. What God gave them in battle, they gave back to Him in worship.

15:12-13 *And they entered into the covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul; and everyone who would not seek the LORD, the God of Israel, should be put to death, from small to great, from man to woman.*

"They entered into the covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul." This was a covenant renewal, a solemn promise before God to be His people again. The words "with all their heart and with all their soul" echo the great command of Deuteronomy 6:5, which Jesus called the first and greatest commandment (Matthew 22:37-38).

Verse 13 is hard for modern readers: "everyone who would not seek the LORD, the God of Israel, should be put to death, from small to great, from man to woman." What do we make of that?

This was not a new idea. It came from the Law of Moses, which commanded death for anyone in Israel who led others into idolatry or served other gods (Deuteronomy 13:6-10; 17:2-7). Israel was a nation under God's direct rule, a theocracy, and worship of other gods was treason against Israel's King. The covenant the people made here was a promise to enforce that law. We do not know whether or how often it was carried out.

That law was given to Israel as a nation under the covenant of Moses. It is not a pattern for the church or for any government today. Jesus told Peter to put away his sword (Matthew 26:52), and He said His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). The church never uses force to make anyone believe. We call people to Christ with the gospel, and we leave judgment to God. Faith that is forced is not faith at all.

What we can take from this verse is the seriousness of the covenant. The people of Judah saw turning from the LORD as a life-and-death matter. It is. Jesus said it profits a man nothing to gain the whole world and lose his soul (Mark 8:36).

15:14-15 *And they swore to the LORD with a loud voice, and with a shout, and with trumpets, and with rams' horns. And all Judah rejoiced over the oath, for with all their heart they had sworn, and with all their will they had sought Him, and He was found by them; and the LORD gave them rest all around.*

"They swore to the LORD with a loud voice, and with a shout, and with trumpets, and with rams' horns." This was a joyful, wholehearted oath. "All Judah rejoiced over the oath, for with all their heart they had sworn, and with all their will they had sought Him, and He was found by them."

Notice that the people were glad, not grim. Giving ourselves fully to God is not a burden. It is a joy. And God kept Azariah's word exactly: they sought Him, "and He was found by them; and the LORD gave them rest all around."

15:16 *And also Maacah, the mother of Asa the king, he removed her from **being** queen mother, who had made a horrid image for Asherah; and Asa cut down her horrid image, and crushed **it**, and burned **it** in the Wadi of Kidron.*

Asa's reform reached into his own family. "Maacah, the mother of Asa the king, he removed her from being queen mother, who had made a horrid image for Asherah." Maacah was actually Asa's grandmother, Abijah's mother (11:20-22). "Mother" can mean an ancestor in Hebrew, and the queen mother was an official title of honor and influence in Judah. Maacah had held it under two kings.

She had made an idol so shameful that the word used for it means something horrible, a thing to shudder at. Asa "cut down her horrid image, and crushed it, and burned it in the Wadi of Kidron," the valley just east of Jerusalem.

This took courage. It is one thing to tear down a stranger's idol. It is another to confront your own family. Jesus said that whoever loves father or mother more than Him is not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:37). Faithfulness to God must sometimes come before family loyalty, though always with love and respect.

15:17-18 *And the high places were not removed from Israel; only the heart of Asa was complete all his days. And he brought the holy things of his father and his own holy things **into** the house of God: silver and gold and utensils.*

"The high places were not removed from Israel; only the heart of Asa was complete all his days." Some high places remained, perhaps where the LORD was worshiped in ways the Law did not allow, or in the northern areas he controlled. His reform was not perfect. But God looked at his heart, and his heart was "complete," undivided toward God.

Chapter 16 will show Asa failing badly in his last years. So how could his heart be complete "all his days"? It most likely means that Asa never turned to idols. His sin later was a failure of trust, not a turn to other gods. 1 Kings 15:14 says the same.

"He brought the holy things of his father and his own holy things into the house of God: silver and gold and utensils." He restored to the temple some of what Shishak had stripped.

15:19 *And there was no war until the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa.*

"There was no war until the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa." Peace followed faithfulness, just as Azariah had promised.

There is a puzzle with the numbers here and in 16:1. 1 Kings 16:8 says Baasha of Israel died in Asa's twenty-sixth year, so he could not have attacked in Asa's thirty-sixth year. A common explanation is that the thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth years are counted from the division of the

kingdom, the start of the kingdom of Judah, which would place them in about Asa's fifteenth and sixteenth years. Others think a copyist changed fifteen and sixteen to thirty-five and thirty-six. 1 Kings 15:16 also says there was war between Asa and Baasha all their days, which probably means border fighting short of full war.

Chapter 15 Summary

The Spirit of God came on Azariah son of Oded, and he met Asa returning from battle. He told him the LORD is with you while you are with Him, found by those who seek Him and forsaking those who forsake Him. He reminded them how Israel, in its days without God, a teaching priest or the law, found God whenever it turned back, and he urged Asa to be strong because his work would be rewarded. Asa removed idols from all his territory and repaired the altar of the LORD. In his fifteenth year he gathered Judah, Benjamin and many from the northern tribes, who had come because they saw God was with him. They offered sacrifices and made a covenant to seek the LORD with all their heart and soul, swearing with joy, and God gave them rest. Asa removed his grandmother Maacah as queen mother and burned her idol. His heart was complete toward God, though some high places remained.

Chapter 15 Study Questions

1. Who was Azariah, and when did he come to meet Asa? (15:1-2)

2. What three-part message did Azariah give? (15:2)

3. What did Israel lack in the days Azariah described, and what happened when they sought God? (15:3-4)

4. What encouragement did Azariah give Asa in verse 7?

5. Why did people from the northern tribes come over to Asa? (15:9)

6. What covenant did the people make, and how did they feel about it? (15:12-15)

7. What did Asa do about Maacah, and why was that hard? (15:16)

8. Verse 13 shows how seriously Israel took idolatry under the Law. How should Christians show that faithfulness to God is serious without using force on anyone?

9. Azariah's warning came right after a victory. Why are we so likely to drift after success, and how can you guard against it?

10. Is there a "half-finished" work God has given you where your hands have started to drop? What would it take to be strong and finish it? (15:7)

Chapter 16: Asa's Last Years

Scripture

16:1-14 In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah, and he built Ramah, so as not to allow anyone going out or coming in to Asa king of Judah. And Asa brought out silver and gold from the treasuries of the house of the LORD and of the house of the king, and he sent ***it*** to Ben-hadad king of Syria, who dwelt in Damascus, saying, "***There is*** a covenant between me and you, and between my father and your father. Look, I have sent to you silver and gold. Go, break your covenant with Baasha king of Israel, so that he may go up from on me." And Ben-hadad listened to King Asa, and he sent the commanders of the armies which ***were*** his against the cities of Israel; and they struck Ijon and Dan and Abel-maim, and all the storage places of the cities of Naphtali. And it was, when Baasha heard, that he ceased from building Ramah, and he caused his work to cease. And Asa the king took all Judah, and they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber, which Baasha had built; and he built with them Geba and Mizpah. And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and he said to him, "Because you leaned on the king of Syria and did not lean on the LORD your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped from your hand. Were not the Cushites and the Libyans an army for multitude, for chariotry and for horsemen, in very great abundance? And because you leaned on the LORD, He gave them into your hand. For the LORD, His eyes are roving in all the earth to show Himself strong with ***those*** whose heart ***is*** complete toward Him. You have acted foolishly in this, for from now on there are wars with you." And Asa was angry with the seer, and he put him ***in*** the house of the stocks, for ***he was*** in a rage with him over this. And Asa crushed some of the people at that time. And look, the matters of Asa, the first and the last, look, they ***are*** written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. And Asa became sick in the thirty-ninth year of his reign in his feet, until his sickness ***went*** upward; and also in his sickness he did not seek the LORD, but ***sought*** among the physicians. And Asa lay down with his fathers, and he died in the forty-first year of his reign. And they buried him in his graves which he had dug for himself in the city of David, and they laid him in the bed which he had filled ***with*** spices and kinds blended as an ointment of ***skilled*** work; and they burned for him a great burning, exceedingly.

Chapter 16 Preview

This is a sad chapter about a good king. Baasha king of Israel fortifies Ramah to cut off Judah's northern road. Instead of crying out to the LORD as he did against Zerah, Asa takes silver and gold from the temple and the palace and pays Ben-hadad king of Syria to break his treaty with Baasha and attack Israel. The plan works on the surface. Baasha stops building, and Asa uses his stones to fortify his own towns.

Then God sends Hanani the seer. Because you leaned on the king of Syria and not on the LORD, he says, you have lost a greater victory. God's eyes run through the whole earth to show Himself strong for those whose hearts are complete toward Him. You acted foolishly, and from now on you will have wars. Asa does not repent. He throws the prophet in prison and oppresses some of the people. In his last years he gets a severe disease in his feet, and even then he does not seek the

LORD. He dies in his forty-first year and is buried with great honor. 1 Kings 15:16-24 tells part of this story. Verse 9 is one of the great verses of this book.

Chapter 16 Study

16:1 *In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah, and he built Ramah, so as not to allow anyone going out or coming in to Asa king of Judah.*

"In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa," as I explained at 15:19, this probably means the thirty-sixth year from the division of the kingdom, about Asa's sixteenth year. "Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah, and he built Ramah."

Ramah was a town only about five miles north of Jerusalem, on the main road. By fortifying it, Baasha could stop traffic "so as not to allow anyone going out or coming in to Asa king of Judah." He also wanted to stop the stream of northerners moving south to worship with Judah (15:9). It was a real threat, a stranglehold on Jerusalem's northern door.

16:2-3 *And Asa brought out silver and gold from the treasuries of the house of the LORD and of the house of the king, and he sent* ***it*** *to Ben-hadad king of Syria, who dwelt in Damascus, saying, "****There is*** *a covenant between me and you, and between my father and your father. Look, I have sent to you silver and gold. Go, break your covenant with Baasha king of Israel, so that he may go up from on me."*

"Asa brought out silver and gold from the treasuries of the house of the LORD and of the house of the king," and sent it to "Ben-hadad king of Syria, who dwelt in Damascus." Syria (Aram in Hebrew) was the kingdom northeast of Israel.

His message: "There is a covenant between me and you, and between my father and your father. Look, I have sent to you silver and gold. Go, break your covenant with Baasha king of Israel." Asa paid a pagan king to break his word to another king. He emptied the treasures he had dedicated to God (15:18) to buy help from a man who worshiped idols.

What a change from chapter 14. Then Asa faced a million men and prayed, "we lean on You." Now he faced a smaller threat and did not pray at all. Why? Perhaps years of peace made him rely on his own cleverness. Perhaps he thought this problem was small enough to handle himself. We often trust God with the big crises and then try to fix the smaller ones on our own.

16:4-6 *And Ben-hadad listened to King Asa, and he sent the commanders of the armies which* ***were*** *his against the cities of Israel; and they struck Ijon and Dan and Abel-maim, and all the storage places of the cities of Naphtali. And it was, when Baasha heard, that he ceased from building Ramah, and he caused his work to cease. And Asa the king took all Judah, and they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber, which Baasha had built; and he built with them Geba and Mizpah.*

"Ben-hadad listened to King Asa." He sent his army against northern Israel and struck "Ijon and Dan and Abel-maim, and all the storage places of the cities of Naphtali." Baasha had to stop building Ramah and rush north to defend his land.

Then Asa "took all Judah," and they hauled away the stones and timber of Ramah and used them to fortify "Geba and Mizpah," two towns of Benjamin that guarded his own northern border.

By every human measure, it worked. The threat was gone, and Judah's border was stronger. That is the danger of trusting in the world's methods. Sometimes they work, and so we think God approves. But a plan that works is not always a plan that pleases God.

16:7-8 *And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and he said to him, "Because you leaned on the king of Syria and did not lean on the LORD your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped from your hand. Were not the Cushites and the Libyans an army for multitude, for chariotry and for horsemen, in very great abundance? And because you leaned on the LORD, He gave them into your hand.*

"At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah." A seer was a prophet, one to whom God showed what others could not see. Hanani's son Jehu would also be a prophet (19:2; 1 Kings 16:1).

"Because you leaned on the king of Syria and did not lean on the LORD your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped from your hand." This is a surprising word. Asa had won, or so he thought. But God says he lost. If Asa had trusted God, God would have given him victory not only over Baasha but over Syria as well. By paying Ben-hadad, he made an ally of a nation that should have been defeated. Syria would trouble Israel and Judah for the next century and a half.

Then Hanani reminded him of Zerah: "Were not the Cushites and the Libyans an army for multitude," with chariots and horsemen in great abundance? "And because you leaned on the LORD, He gave them into your hand." Asa had already proved that God was enough. He forgot what he had learned.

That is a warning for every believer. Past faith is no guarantee of present faith. We must keep leaning on God every day.

16:9 *For the LORD, His eyes are roving in all the earth to show Himself strong with **those** whose heart **is** complete toward Him. You have acted foolishly in this, for from now on there are wars with you."*

"For the LORD, His eyes are roving in all the earth to show Himself strong with those whose heart is complete toward Him." This is the heart of the chapter, and one of the most encouraging verses in the Old Testament.

Look at what it says about God. His eyes rove, or run to and fro, through "all the earth." Nothing escapes His notice. He is not looking for reasons to punish. He is looking for people to strengthen. He is searching for someone whose heart is "complete toward Him," undivided, wholly His, so that He can "show Himself strong" on their behalf.

Notice what God is looking for. He is not looking for the strongest, the richest or the most talented. He is looking for a heart that trusts Him fully. Asa had once been that man (15:17). God wanted to be strong for him again. But Asa had turned to Ben-hadad instead.

What does this mean for us? God is still looking. He is looking at your city and your church and your home. When you trust Him wholeheartedly, you are exactly the kind of person He delights to strengthen. Paul learned that God's power is made perfect in weakness, and said, "when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). Is your heart complete toward Him today, or divided between God and your own plans?

"You have acted foolishly in this, for from now on there are wars with you." Asa had bought peace, but it was not God's peace. The quiet years were over.

16:10 *And Asa was angry with the seer, and he put him **in** the house of the stocks, for **he was** in a rage with him over this. And Asa crushed some of the people at that time.*

"Asa was angry with the seer, and he put him in the house of the stocks." The stocks were a wooden frame that held a prisoner's feet, hands or neck in a painful position. This is the first time in Chronicles that a king of Judah persecuted a prophet. It would not be the last (24:20-21; Jeremiah 20:2).

"Asa crushed some of the people at that time." Perhaps they had supported Hanani, or complained. The king who had once led a joyful covenant now ruled with an angry fist.

How did this happen? Asa could not stand correction. The same man who had once heard Azariah and "strengthened himself" (15:8) now raged at Hanani. Pride makes us hate the people who tell us the truth. Proverbs 12:1 says that whoever hates correction is stupid. When someone confronts us with God's Word, our response shows the condition of our heart.

16:11-12 *And look, the matters of Asa, the first and the last, look, they **are** written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. And Asa became sick in the thirty-ninth year of his reign in his feet, until his sickness **went** upward; and also in his sickness he did not seek the LORD, but **sought** among the physicians.*

"The matters of Asa, the first and the last," are written in "the book of the kings of Judah and Israel," a royal record the Chronicler used.

"Asa became sick in the thirty-ninth year of his reign in his feet, until his sickness went upward." We are not told what the disease was. Some suggest gout or a disease of the blood vessels. It became very severe.

"Also in his sickness he did not seek the LORD, but sought among the physicians." Does this mean it is wrong to see a doctor? No. The Bible does not condemn medicine. Luke was "the beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14), and Isaiah told Hezekiah to apply a poultice of figs (Isaiah 38:21). The problem was not that Asa went to doctors. The problem was that he went only to doctors and not to God. The man who once wrote the book on seeking God now refused to seek Him at all.

Some think the physicians of that time were also tied to pagan healing practices, which would make it worse. But the Chronicler's main point is plain. Asa trusted human help instead of the LORD, to the very end. When we are sick, we should pray first and also use the means God provides, like doctors and medicine, trusting Him through them.

16:13-14 *And Asa lay down with his fathers, and he died in the forty-first year of his reign. And they buried him in his graves which he had dug for himself in the city of David, and they laid him in the bed which he had filled* ***with*** *spices and kinds blended as an ointment of* ***skilled*** *work; and they burned for him a great burning, exceedingly.*

"Asa lay down with his fathers, and he died in the forty-first year of his reign," about 869 B.C. They buried him in a tomb he had cut for himself in the city of David and laid him on a bed full of spices and perfumes. "They burned for him a great burning, exceedingly." This was not cremation. It was a great fire of spices in his honor (Jeremiah 34:5). The people still honored him.

How should we remember Asa? He was a good king. He tore down idols, led a great covenant, and trusted God against a million men. But he finished poorly. He leaned on a pagan king, jailed a prophet, oppressed his people and would not seek God in his sickness.

Starting well is wonderful. Finishing well is better. Paul at the end of his life could say, "I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). Pray that God will keep your heart complete toward Him to the very end.

Chapter 16 Summary

In Asa's thirty-sixth year (probably counted from the division of the kingdom), Baasha king of Israel fortified Ramah to cut off Judah. Asa took silver and gold from the temple and palace and paid Ben-hadad king of Syria to break his treaty with Baasha. Ben-hadad attacked northern Israel, Baasha stopped building, and Asa used the materials to fortify Geba and Mizpah. Hanani the seer told Asa that because he leaned on Syria instead of the LORD, Syria's army had escaped him. He reminded him of the victory over the Cushites and said the LORD's eyes run through all the earth to show Himself strong for those whose hearts are complete toward Him. Asa had acted foolishly, and he would have wars. Asa put Hanani in the stocks and oppressed some of the people. In his thirty-ninth year he became severely diseased in his feet, but he sought only physicians and not the LORD. He died in his forty-first year and was buried with great honor.

Chapter 16 Study Questions

1. What did Baasha do at Ramah, and why was it a threat? (16:1)

2. What did Asa do to deal with Baasha? (16:2-3)

3. Did Asa's plan work? What did he gain? (16:4-6)

4. What did Hanani say Asa had lost by trusting the king of Syria? (16:7)

5. What did Hanani remind Asa of from his earlier life? (16:8)

6. What is God looking for, according to verse 9, and what does He want to do?

7. How did Asa respond to Hanani, and what did he do in his sickness? (16:10, 12)

8. Asa trusted God in a big crisis but not in a smaller one. Where are you tempted to handle "small" problems without God?

9. How do you respond when someone corrects you with God's Word? What does Asa's reaction warn you about?

10. What would it take for you to finish well, with a heart complete toward God to the end? (16:9; 2 Timothy 4:7)

Chapter 17: Jehoshaphat Teaches the Law

Scripture

17:1-19 And Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his place, and he strengthened himself against Israel. And he put an army in all the fortified cities of Judah, and he put garrisons in the land of Judah and in the cities of Ephraim which Asa his father had captured. And the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, for he walked in the former ways of David his father, and he did not seek the Baals, for he sought the God of his father, and he walked in His commandments, and not according to the deeds of Israel. And the LORD established the kingdom in his hand, and all Judah gave tribute to Jehoshaphat; and he had riches and honor in abundance. And his heart was high in the ways of the LORD; and again he removed the high places and the Asherim from Judah. And in the third year of his reign he sent for his officials, for Ben-hail, and for Obadiah, and for Zechariah, and for Nethanel, and for Micaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah. And with them ***were*** the Levites: Shemaiah, and Nethaniah, and Zebadiah, and Asahel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehonathan, and Adonijah, and Tobijah, and Tobadonijah, the Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram, the priests. And they taught in Judah, and with them ***was*** the book of the law of the LORD; and they went around in all the cities of Judah, and they taught among the people. And the dread of the LORD was on all the kingdoms of the lands which ***were*** around Judah, and they did not make war with Jehoshaphat. And some of the Philistines ***were*** bringing to Jehoshaphat tribute, and silver ***as*** a load; also the Arabs ***were*** bringing to him flocks: seven thousand seven hundred rams and seven thousand seven hundred male goats. And Jehoshaphat was going on and becoming great, to the uppermost; and he built in Judah fortresses and cities of storage. And he had much work in the cities of Judah; and men of war, mighty men of strength, ***were*** in Jerusalem. And these ***were*** their musterings by the house of their fathers: of Judah, commanders of thousands: Adnah the commander, and with him three hundred thousand mighty men of strength; and at his hand Jehohanan the commander, and with him two hundred and eighty thousand; and at his hand Amasiah the son of Zichri, who volunteered himself to the LORD, and with him two hundred thousand mighty men of strength. And from Benjamin: a mighty man of strength, Eliada, and with him two hundred thousand armed with bow and shield; and at his hand Jehozabad, and with him a hundred and eighty thousand equipped for war. These ***were*** those serving the king, besides those whom the king put in the cities of fortification in all Judah.

Chapter 17 Preview

Asa's son Jehoshaphat becomes king, and he starts well. He strengthens Judah against Israel, walks in the early ways of David, and refuses the Baals. His heart is lifted up in the ways of the LORD, and he removes high places and Asherah poles. God establishes his kingdom, and riches and honor pour in.

In his third year he does something no king before him had done. He sends a team of officials, Levites and priests through all the cities of Judah with the book of the law of the LORD, teaching the people. The fear of the LORD falls on the nations around, and no one makes war on him. Philistines and Arabs bring gifts. The chapter ends with Jehoshaphat's building projects and the

commanders of his large army. 1 Kings 22:41-50 gives a short summary of his reign. Most of chapter 17 is found only in Chronicles.

Chapter 17 Study

17:1-2 *And Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his place, and he strengthened himself against Israel. And he put an army in all the fortified cities of Judah, and he put garrisons in the land of Judah and in the cities of Ephraim which Asa his father had captured.*

"Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his place." He reigned about 872 to 848 B.C., counting a few years when he ruled alongside his sick father Asa. "He strengthened himself against Israel." The threat from the north, which had troubled Asa (16:1), was still real.

"He put an army in all the fortified cities of Judah, and he put garrisons in the land of Judah and in the cities of Ephraim which Asa his father had captured" (15:8). A garrison was a post of soldiers stationed to hold a place. Jehoshaphat began by protecting what God had given.

17:3-4 *And the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, for he walked in the former ways of David his father, and he did not seek the Baals, for he sought the God of his father, and he walked in His commandments, and not according to the deeds of Israel.*

"The LORD was with Jehoshaphat, for he walked in the former ways of David his father." Notice "former." David's early years were his best, before his sin with Bathsheba. Jehoshaphat followed David's best example. Some copies leave out the name David and read "his father," meaning Asa's good early years. Either way, he chose to follow the best in those who went before him.

"He did not seek the Baals." Baal was the chief god of the Canaanites, believed to give rain, storms and fertile fields. "The Baals" means the many local forms of his worship. In the north, King Ahab and his wife Jezebel were spreading Baal worship (1 Kings 16:31-33). Jehoshaphat refused it.

"For he sought the God of his father, and he walked in His commandments, and not according to the deeds of Israel." The word seek appears again. Jehoshaphat's life was marked by seeking God, and the LORD was with him. That is Azariah's promise from 15:2 coming true.

17:5-6 *And the LORD established the kingdom in his hand, and all Judah gave tribute to Jehoshaphat; and he had riches and honor in abundance. And his heart was high in the ways of the LORD; and again he removed the high places and the Asherim from Judah.*

"The LORD established the kingdom in his hand." All Judah brought him gifts, "and he had riches and honor in abundance." God gave Jehoshaphat what He had given Solomon (1:12). He did not ask for it. It came as he sought God.

"His heart was high in the ways of the LORD." This is a good kind of high heart. Elsewhere a lifted-up heart means pride (26:16; 32:25). Here it means courage and joy. His heart was lifted with zeal for God's ways. He was bold to do what was right.

"Again he removed the high places and the Asherim from Judah." Asa had removed many (14:3-5), but some came back or remained. Reform is never finished once and for all. Every generation must tear down its own idols. 20:33 will tell us that some high places still remained even in Jehoshaphat's day, likely the ones where the people worshiped the LORD in the wrong way.

17:7-9 *And in the third year of his reign he sent for his officials, for Ben-hail, and for Obadiah, and for Zechariah, and for Nethanel, and for Micaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah. And with them **were** the Levites: Shemaiah, and Nethaniah, and Zebadiah, and Asahel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehonathan, and Adonijah, and Tobijah, and Tobadonijah, the Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram, the priests. And they taught in Judah, and with them **was** the book of the law of the LORD; and they went around in all the cities of Judah, and they taught among the people.*

"In the third year of his reign he sent for his officials" to "teach in the cities of Judah." Five officials, nine Levites and two priests went out together. The officials gave the king's authority. The Levites and priests gave the teaching. The Law had made teaching the Law one of the main jobs of the priests and Levites (Leviticus 10:11; Deuteronomy 33:10). It had been neglected. Azariah had said Israel's dark days came when they were "without a teaching priest" (15:3). Jehoshaphat fixed that.

"With them was the book of the law of the LORD." They did not teach their own ideas. They carried God's Word with them. This was most likely the five books of Moses. "They went around in all the cities of Judah, and they taught among the people."

This was a revival built on teaching. Jehoshaphat understood that you cannot keep idols out of a land unless you fill the people's minds with God's truth. Paul told Timothy the same: "preach the word" (2 Timothy 4:2). Jesus told His disciples to make disciples, teaching them to observe all He commanded (Matthew 28:19-20).

How well do you know God's Word? A church or family that is not being taught the Bible will drift, no matter how sincere it is. And every believer can be part of this work. You do not need to be a priest to teach your children, help a new believer, or lead a small group through Scripture.

17:10-11 *And the dread of the LORD was on all the kingdoms of the lands which **were** around Judah, and they did not make war with Jehoshaphat. And some of the Philistines **were** bringing to Jehoshaphat tribute, and silver **as** a load; also the Arabs **were** bringing to him flocks: seven thousand seven hundred rams and seven thousand seven hundred male goats.*

"The dread of the LORD was on all the kingdoms of the lands which were around Judah, and they did not make war with Jehoshaphat." This is a striking connection. Jehoshaphat sent out teachers, not soldiers, and the result was peace. When God's people take His Word seriously, God Himself becomes their defense.

Old enemies became tribute payers. "Some of the Philistines were bringing to Jehoshaphat tribute," and "the Arabs were bringing to him flocks: seven thousand seven hundred rams and

seven thousand seven hundred male goats." The Arabs here were desert tribes to the south and east. God was giving Judah honor among the nations again, as in Solomon's day (9:23-24).

17:12-13 *And Jehoshaphat was going on and becoming great, to the uppermost; and he built in Judah fortresses and cities of storage. And he had much work in the cities of Judah; and men of war, mighty men of strength,* ***were*** *in Jerusalem.*

"Jehoshaphat was going on and becoming great, to the uppermost." He built fortresses and store cities and kept "men of war, mighty men of strength" in Jerusalem. Seeking God and being prepared are not opposites. Jehoshaphat did both. Nehemiah later had his workers pray and set a guard (Nehemiah 4:9). Faith is not laziness.

17:14-19 *And these* ***were*** *their musterings by the house of their fathers: of Judah, commanders of thousands: Adnah the commander, and with him three hundred thousand mighty men of strength; and at his hand Jehohanan the commander, and with him two hundred and eighty thousand; and at his hand Amasiah the son of Zichri, who volunteered himself to the LORD, and with him two hundred thousand mighty men of strength. And from Benjamin: a mighty man of strength, Eliada, and with him two hundred thousand armed with bow and shield; and at his hand Jehozabad, and with him a hundred and eighty thousand equipped for war. These* ***were*** *those serving the king, besides those whom the king put in the cities of fortification in all Judah.*

The Chronicler lists Jehoshaphat's army by the "house of their fathers," that is, by family groups. From Judah: Adnah with 300,000, Jehohanan with 280,000, and Amasiah with 200,000. From Benjamin: Eliada with 200,000 archers and shield bearers, and Jehozabad with 180,000. That totals 1,160,000, besides the troops in the fortified cities.

These are very large numbers, larger than Asa's army (14:8). As I noted at 11:1, I take them as written, while some read the Hebrew word for thousand as a military unit. The point the Chronicler makes is that God blessed Jehoshaphat with strength as he sought Him.

One name stands out. "Amasiah the son of Zichri, who volunteered himself to the LORD." We know nothing else about him. But God recorded that he offered himself willingly to the LORD. Among more than a million soldiers, one man is remembered for his willing heart. Paul urges us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1). God notices those who volunteer themselves to Him.

Chapter 17 Summary

Jehoshaphat succeeded his father Asa and strengthened Judah with troops in the fortified cities and garrisons in Ephraim. The LORD was with him because he walked in David's early ways, did not seek the Baals and followed God's commandments. God established his kingdom and gave him riches and honor. His heart was lifted up with zeal for God's ways, and he removed high places and Asherah poles. In his third year he sent officials, Levites and priests through all the cities of Judah with the book of the law of the LORD to teach the people. The fear of the LORD fell on the surrounding kingdoms so that they did not make war with him, and Philistines and Arabs

brought tribute. Jehoshaphat built fortresses and store cities and had a large army under five commanders, including Amasiah, who volunteered himself to the LORD.

Chapter 17 Study Questions

1. Why was the LORD with Jehoshaphat? (17:3-4)

2. What were the Baals, and why was it important that Jehoshaphat did not seek them? (17:3)

3. What does it mean that his "heart was high in the ways of the LORD"? (17:6)

4. Whom did Jehoshaphat send out in his third year, and what did they take with them? (17:7-9)

5. What happened among the nations around Judah? (17:10-11)

6. What is said about Amasiah the son of Zichri? (17:16)

7. Why does teaching God's Word matter for a nation or a church? (17:9; 15:3)

8. Jehoshaphat followed the "former ways" of David, the best of his example. Whose good example are you following, and whose example might someone be following in you?

9. How are you being taught God's Word right now? Is there a way you could help teach someone else?

10. Amasiah "volunteered himself to the LORD." What would it look like for you to offer yourself willingly to God this week? (Romans 12:1)

Chapter 18: Micaiah and the Death of Ahab

Scripture

18:1-17 And Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance; and he allied himself by marriage to Ahab. And at the end of ***some*** years he went down to Ahab, to Samaria; and Ahab slaughtered for him and for the people who ***were*** with him sheep and cattle in abundance; and he lured him to go up against Ramoth-gilead. And Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, "Will you go with me ***to*** Ramoth-gilead?" And he said to him, "As I ***am***, so ***are*** you, and as your people, so ***are*** my people; and ***we will be*** with you in the battle." And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Inquire, please, today ***for*** the word of the LORD." And the king of Israel gathered the prophets, four hundred men, and he said to them, "Shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I refrain?" And they said, "Go up, and God will give ***it*** into the hand of the king." And Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not here still a prophet of the LORD, that we may inquire of him?" And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "***There is*** still one man by whom to inquire of the LORD; and I, I hate him, for he is not prophesying good concerning me, but all his days evil: he ***is*** Micaiah the son of Imlah." And Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say so." And the king of Israel called a certain official, and he said, "Bring Micaiah the son of Imlah quickly." And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah ***were*** sitting, each on his throne, clothed ***in*** garments, and ***they were*** sitting at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets ***were*** prophesying before them. And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made for himself horns of iron, and he said, "Thus says the LORD: 'With these you will gore Syria until ***you*** destroy them.'" And all the prophets ***were*** prophesying thus, saying, "Go up ***to*** Ramoth-gilead and succeed, and the LORD will give ***it*** into the hand of the king." And the messenger who had gone to call Micaiah spoke to him, saying, "Look, the words of the prophets ***are*** good concerning the king ***with*** one mouth; and let your word, please, be like one of them, and speak good." And Micaiah said, "***As*** the LORD lives, surely what my God says, that I will speak." And he came to the king, and the king said to him, "Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I refrain?" And he said, "Go up and succeed, and they will be given into your hand." And the king said to him, "Up to how many times will I make you swear that you will not speak to me ***anything*** but truth in the name of the LORD?" And he said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains like the flock which has no shepherd. And the LORD said, 'These have no masters; let them return each to his house in peace.'" And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not say to you ***that*** he will not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?"

18:18-34 And he said, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of the heavens standing on His right and on His left. And the LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And ***one*** said, this ***one*** saying thus, and this ***one*** saying thus. And the spirit came out and stood before the LORD, and said, 'I, I will entice him.' And the LORD said to him, 'By what?' And he said, 'I will go out and become a spirit of falsehood in the mouth of all his prophets.' And He said, 'You will entice, and also you will prevail. Go out and do so.' And now, look, the LORD has put a spirit of falsehood in the mouth of these your prophets; and the LORD has spoken evil concerning you." And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah drew near and struck Micaiah on the cheek, and he said,

"Which way ***is*** this ***that*** the Spirit of the LORD passed from me to speak with you?" And Micaiah said, "Look, you will see on that day when you go into a room within a room to hide yourself." And the king of Israel said, "Take Micaiah and bring him back to Amon the official of the city and to Joash the son of the king, and you will say, 'Thus says the king: Put this ***one*** in the house of confinement, and feed him bread of oppression and water of oppression until I return in peace.'" And Micaiah said, "If you indeed return in peace, the LORD has not spoken by me." And he said, "Hear, O peoples, all of them!" And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah went up against Ramoth-gilead. And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself and go into the battle; and you, put on your garments." And the king of Israel disguised himself, and they went into the battle. And the king of Syria had commanded the commanders of the chariotry which ***belonged*** to him, saying, "Do not fight with the small ***or*** with the great, but with the king of Israel, him alone." And it was, when the commanders of the chariotry saw Jehoshaphat, and they said, "He ***is*** the king of Israel," and they turned against him to fight; and Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him, and God lured them away from him. And it was, when the commanders of the chariotry saw that he was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from after him. And a man drew on the bow in his innocence, and he struck the king of Israel between the joints and the body armor; and he said to the charioteer, "Turn your hand and take me out of the camp, for I am wounded." And the battle increased on that day; and the king of Israel was holding ***himself*** upright in the chariot opposite Syria until the evening; and he died at the time of the setting of the sun.

Chapter 18 Preview

Jehoshaphat, rich and honored, makes a marriage alliance with Ahab king of Israel, the worst king the north had yet known. On a visit to Samaria, Ahab feasts him and talks him into joining a war to take Ramoth-gilead from Syria. Jehoshaphat wants to hear from the LORD first. Four hundred prophets say go. One prophet, Micaiah, whom Ahab hates, tells the truth: Israel will be scattered like sheep without a shepherd, and a lying spirit has been allowed into the mouths of Ahab's prophets. Micaiah is struck and jailed. The two kings go to battle anyway. Ahab disguises himself, Jehoshaphat nearly dies and cries out to God, and a random arrow kills Ahab at sunset.

This chapter repeats 1 Kings 22:1-35 almost word for word, and you can read it there too. I keep my notes shorter here and focus on what the Chronicler wants us to see: the danger of a godly man joining himself to an ungodly one, and God's mercy when Jehoshaphat cries out.

Chapter 18 Study

18:1 *And Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance; and he allied himself by marriage to Ahab.*

"Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance; and he allied himself by marriage to Ahab." The Chronicler sets these side by side for a reason. Jehoshaphat did not need Ahab. God had already given him everything. Yet he made an alliance anyway. His son Jehoram married Ahab's daughter Athaliah (21:6; 22:2). That marriage would nearly wipe out the line of David a few years later (22:10).

Ahab was the king who married Jezebel and served Baal (1 Kings 16:30-33). Why would a good king tie his family to him? Perhaps for peace between the two kingdoms, or hope of reuniting them. It may have looked wise. It was a disaster. Paul warns believers not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14). The closest partnerships of our lives, especially marriage, shape us and our children for generations.

18:2-3 *And at the end of **some** years he went down to Ahab, to Samaria; and Ahab slaughtered for him and for the people who **were** with him sheep and cattle in abundance; and he lured him to go up against Ramoth-gilead. And Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, "Will you go with me **to** Ramoth-gilead?" And he said to him, "As I **am**, so **are** you, and as your people, so **are** my people; and **we will be** with you in the battle."*

Years later Jehoshaphat "went down to Ahab, to Samaria." Ahab threw a great feast, slaughtering "sheep and cattle in abundance," and "he lured him to go up against Ramoth-gilead." The same word lured is used later when God drew the enemy away from Jehoshaphat (18:31). And Ahab, who enticed his ally into battle, would himself be enticed by a spirit of falsehood (18:19-21). The tempter became the tempted.

Ramoth-gilead was a city east of the Jordan that Syria had taken. Ahab wanted it back. Jehoshaphat answered, "As I am, so are you, and as your people, so are my people." He made himself one with Ahab before he had asked God anything. How often do we commit ourselves first and ask God's blessing afterward?

18:4-7 *And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Inquire, please, today **for** the word of the LORD." And the king of Israel gathered the prophets, four hundred men, and he said to them, "Shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I refrain?" And they said, "Go up, and God will give **it** into the hand of the king." And Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not here still a prophet of the LORD, that we may inquire of him?" And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "**There is** still one man by whom to inquire of the LORD; and I, I hate him, for he is not prophesying good concerning me, but all his days evil: he **is** Micaiah the son of Imlah." And Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say so."*

To his credit, Jehoshaphat said, "Inquire, please, today for the word of the LORD." Ahab gathered four hundred prophets, who said with one voice, "Go up, and God will give it into the hand of the king." These were court prophets who told the king what he wanted to hear.

Jehoshaphat was not satisfied. "Is there not here still a prophet of the LORD, that we may inquire of him?" He sensed something was wrong. Ahab admitted there was one more, "Micaiah the son of Imlah," but said, "I, I hate him, for he is not prophesying good concerning me, but all his days evil."

Think about that. Ahab hated Micaiah because he told the truth. Many people still reject God's Word for the same reason. Paul warned of a time when people would not endure sound teaching but would gather teachers to suit their own desires (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

18:8-11 *And the king of Israel called a certain official, and he said, "Bring Micaiah the son of Imlah quickly." And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah **were** sitting, each on his throne, clothed **in** garments, and **they were** sitting at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets **were** prophesying before them. And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made for himself horns of iron, and he said, "Thus says the LORD: 'With these you will gore Syria until **you** destroy them.'" And all the prophets **were** prophesying thus, saying, "Go up **to** Ramoth-gilead and succeed, and the LORD will give **it** into the hand of the king."*

The two kings sat on thrones in their royal robes at the threshing floor by the gate of Samaria. The prophets put on a show. "Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made for himself horns of iron," and he claimed, "Thus says the LORD." All the prophets agreed: "Go up to Ramoth-gilead and succeed."

A crowd agreeing does not make something true. Four hundred voices in the name of the LORD were all wrong. Truth is not decided by a vote.

18:12-13 *And the messenger who had gone to call Micaiah spoke to him, saying, "Look, the words of the prophets **are** good concerning the king **with** one mouth; and let your word, please, be like one of them, and speak good." And Micaiah said, "**As** the LORD lives, surely what my God says, that I will speak."*

The messenger tried to coach Micaiah: "let your word, please, be like one of them, and speak good." Micaiah's answer is one every preacher and every believer should make his own: "As the LORD lives, surely what my God says, that I will speak."

18:14-17 *And he came to the king, and the king said to him, "Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I refrain?" And he said, "Go up and succeed, and they will be given into your hand." And the king said to him, "Up to how many times will I make you swear that you will not speak to me **anything** but truth in the name of the LORD?" And he said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains like the flock which has no shepherd. And the LORD said, 'These have no masters; let them return each to his house in peace.'" And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not say to you **that** he will not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?"*

When the king asked him, Micaiah first answered with the same words as the others: "Go up and succeed." His tone must have been mocking, because Ahab knew at once it was not the real answer. "Up to how many times will I make you swear that you will not speak to me anything but truth in the name of the LORD?"

So Micaiah gave the real word: "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains like the flock which has no shepherd." The shepherd was the king. Ahab would die, and his army would go home leaderless. Jesus used the same picture when He saw the crowds "like sheep not having a shepherd" (Mark 6:34). Ahab turned to Jehoshaphat: "Did I not say to you that he will not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?"

18:18-22 *And he said, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of the heavens standing on His right and on His left. And the LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And* ***one*** *said, this* ***one*** *saying thus, and this* ***one*** *saying thus. And the spirit came out and stood before the LORD, and said, 'I, I will entice him.' And the LORD said to him, 'By what?' And he said, 'I will go out and become a spirit of falsehood in the mouth of all his prophets.' And He said, 'You will entice, and also you will prevail. Go out and do so.' And now, look, the LORD has put a spirit of falsehood in the mouth of these your prophets; and the LORD has spoken evil concerning you."*

Then Micaiah described a vision. "I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of the heavens standing on His right and on His left." The host of heaven here means the angels. The LORD asked, "Who will entice Ahab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?" A spirit came forward and said, "I will go out and become a spirit of falsehood in the mouth of all his prophets." And the LORD said, "You will entice, and also you will prevail. Go out and do so."

Micaiah explained: "the LORD has put a spirit of falsehood in the mouth of these your prophets; and the LORD has spoken evil concerning you."

This is a hard passage, and I take it slowly. Does God lie? No. Scripture says plainly that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18), and that He tempts no one to sin (James 1:13). So what is happening?

First, Ahab had already chosen the lie. He had rejected Elijah, hated Micaiah and filled his court with prophets who flattered him. God's judgment was to give him over to what he loved. Paul describes the same kind of judgment on people who refuse "the love of the truth," whom God gives over to believe the falsehood (2 Thessalonians 2:10-11).

Second, God did not do the lying. A spirit offered to deceive, and God permitted it and used it to carry out His just sentence on Ahab, much as He allowed Satan to test Job within limits (Job 1:6-12). God rules even over evil spirits, without Himself doing evil.

Third, God told Ahab exactly what was happening. In the same breath, through Micaiah, He exposed the false prophets and warned Ahab of disaster. Ahab was not tricked without warning. He was told the truth and chose the lie anyway. Even in judgment, God gave him a last chance.

Bible teachers read the vision in different ways. Many take it as a real look into God's throne room, with a real spirit, perhaps an evil spirit, permitted to deceive. Some think the spirit was Satan. Others take it as a vision in the form of a heavenly council, showing that God was sovereignly using the false prophets' lies to bring judgment. All agree on the lesson. God rules over all, God does not lie, and those who refuse the truth are finally given over to the lie they love. 1 Kings 22:19-23 records the same vision.

18:23-27 *And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah drew near and struck Micaiah on the cheek, and he said, "Which way **is** this **that** the Spirit of the LORD passed from me to speak with you?" And Micaiah said, "Look, you will see on that day when you go into a room within a room to hide yourself." And the king of Israel said, "Take Micaiah and bring him back to Amon the official of the city and to Joash the son of the king, and you will say, 'Thus says the king: Put this **one** in the house of confinement, and feed him bread of oppression and water of oppression until I return in peace.'" And Micaiah said, "If you indeed return in peace, the LORD has not spoken by me." And he said, "Hear, O peoples, all of them!"*

"Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah drew near and struck Micaiah on the cheek." Then he mocked: "Which way is this that the Spirit of the LORD passed from me to speak with you?" Micaiah answered that Zedekiah would find out on the day he would go "into a room within a room," hiding from the coming disaster.

Ahab had Micaiah thrown in prison, fed on "bread of oppression and water of oppression until I return in peace." Micaiah's last words staked everything on God's word: "If you indeed return in peace, the LORD has not spoken by me." Then he called out, "Hear, O peoples, all of them!" That was a call for everyone to remember and see who was right.

Faithful people often suffer for telling the truth. Jesus was struck in the face before the high priest (John 18:22-23), and He said those persecuted for righteousness are blessed (Matthew 5:10-12).

18:28-32 *And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah went up against Ramoth-gilead. And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself and go into the battle; and you, put on your garments." And the king of Israel disguised himself, and they went into the battle. And the king of Syria had commanded the commanders of the chariotry which **belonged** to him, saying, "Do not fight with the small **or** with the great, but with the king of Israel, him alone." And it was, when the commanders of the chariotry saw Jehoshaphat, and they said, "He **is** the king of Israel," and they turned against him to fight; and Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him, and God lured them away from him. And it was, when the commanders of the chariotry saw that he was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from after him.*

So "the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah went up against Ramoth-gilead." Jehoshaphat had heard God's word plainly and went anyway. That is the saddest line in his story.

Ahab said, "I will disguise myself and go into the battle; and you, put on your garments." Ahab dressed like a common soldier and let Jehoshaphat wear his royal robes. The king of Syria had ordered his chariot commanders to fight only "the king of Israel, him alone." When they saw Jehoshaphat in his robes, they thought he was Ahab and charged at him.

"Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him, and God lured them away from him." Kings says only that he cried out. Chronicles adds that the LORD helped him. Even when Jehoshaphat was where he never should have been, God heard his cry and saved him. The same word lured is used again, but now for God drawing the enemy away. God is merciful to His own, even when they walk into trouble by their own foolishness. That does not make the foolishness right, as 19:2 will

show. But it should make us grateful. Have you ever cried out to God from a mess you made yourself, and found Him there?

18:33-34 *And a man drew on the bow in his innocence, and he struck the king of Israel between the joints and the body armor; and he said to the charioteer, "Turn your hand and take me out of the camp, for I am wounded." And the battle increased on that day; and the king of Israel was holding* ***himself*** *upright in the chariot opposite Syria until the evening; and he died at the time of the setting of the sun.*

"A man drew on the bow in his innocence," meaning at random, without aiming at anyone in particular. "And he struck the king of Israel between the joints and the body armor." Ahab's disguise could fool the Syrians, but it could not hide him from God. An arrow shot at no one found the one man God had sentenced.

Ahab had himself held up in his chariot all day, and "he died at the time of the setting of the sun," about 853 B.C. Micaiah's word came true exactly. The four hundred prophets were wrong. The one prophet who spoke for God was right.

God's word always comes true. No disguise, no alliance and no crowd of flattering voices can stand against it.

Chapter 18 Summary

Jehoshaphat, already rich and honored, made a marriage alliance with Ahab. Visiting Samaria, he was persuaded to join Ahab against Ramoth-gilead, but he asked first to hear the LORD's word. Four hundred prophets promised victory. Jehoshaphat asked for a prophet of the LORD, and Micaiah, whom Ahab hated, was brought. He vowed to speak only what God said, and he saw Israel scattered like sheep without a shepherd. He described a vision of the LORD on His throne permitting a spirit of falsehood to deceive Ahab's prophets. Zedekiah struck him and Ahab jailed him. The two kings went to battle. Ahab disguised himself while Jehoshaphat wore his robes, and when the Syrian chariots attacked Jehoshaphat, he cried out and the LORD helped him. A random arrow struck Ahab, and he died at sunset, as Micaiah had said.

Chapter 18 Study Questions

1. What did Jehoshaphat already have before he allied himself with Ahab? (18:1)

2. What did Jehoshaphat ask before going to war, and what did the four hundred prophets say? (18:4-5)

3. Why did Ahab hate Micaiah? (18:7)

4. What did Micaiah promise the messenger he would do? (18:13)

5. What did Micaiah see in his first vision, and what did it mean? (18:16)

6. How does Scripture show that God did not lie, even though He permitted a spirit of falsehood? (18:18-22; Titus 1:2; James 1:13)

7. What happened to Jehoshaphat in battle, and how did God help him? (18:31)

8. Jehoshaphat committed himself to Ahab before he asked God. Where are you tempted to decide first and pray later?

9. Paul warns about being unequally yoked (2 Corinthians 6:14). What close partnerships in your life are shaping you, for good or bad?

10. Ahab hated the one voice that told him the truth. Who tells you the truth even when you don't want to hear it, and how do you treat them?

Chapter 19: Jehoshaphat Appoints Judges

Scripture

19:1-11 And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace, to Jerusalem. And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to face him, and he said to King Jehoshaphat, "Should ***you*** help the wicked, and will you love those who hate the LORD? And because of this, wrath ***is*** on you from before the LORD. But good things have been found with you, for you have removed the Asherahs from the land, and you have set your heart to seek God." And Jehoshaphat dwelt in Jerusalem. And he again went out among the people from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim, and he turned them back to the LORD, the God of their fathers. And he appointed judges in the land, in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city. And he said to the judges, "Consider what you are doing, for you do not judge for man, but for the LORD, and ***He is*** with you in the matter of judgment. And now, let the dread of the LORD be on you. Take care and act, for there is no injustice with the LORD our God, and ***no*** lifting up of faces, and ***no*** taking of a bribe." And also in Jerusalem Jehoshaphat appointed some of the Levites and the priests and some of the heads of the fathers of Israel, for the judgment of the LORD and for disputes. And they returned ***to*** Jerusalem. And he commanded them, saying, "Thus you shall do in the fear of the LORD, in faithfulness and with a complete heart. And every dispute that comes to you from your brothers who dwell in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and judgments, you shall warn them, so that they will not be guilty before the LORD and wrath ***not*** be on you and on your brothers. Thus you shall do, and you will not be guilty. And look, Amariah the head priest ***is*** over you in every matter of the LORD, and Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the leader of the house of Judah, in every matter of the king, and the Levites ***are*** officials before you. Be strong and act, and may the LORD be with the good."

Chapter 19 Preview

Jehoshaphat comes home safely from the battle where Ahab died. Before he can settle in, the prophet Jehu son of Hanani meets him with a hard question: should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? The rebuke is real, but so is the comfort. God has seen the good in Jehoshaphat's heart.

Jehoshaphat takes the rebuke well. He goes out among the people himself to turn them back to the LORD, and he sets up judges in every fortified city and a high court in Jerusalem. His charge to the judges is one of the clearest teachings on justice in the Old Testament: judge for the LORD, not for man, because with Him there is no injustice, no favoritism and no bribe. This chapter has no parallel in Kings.

Chapter 19 Study

19:1 *And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace, to Jerusalem.*

"Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace, to Jerusalem." The words "in peace" are worth noticing. Micaiah had said that Ahab would not return in peace (18:27), and he

did not. Jehoshaphat did. He came home alive only because he cried out and the LORD helped him (18:31). He went to Ramoth-gilead against God's word, and God brought him home anyway. That is mercy, not a reward.

19:2-3 *And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to face him, and he said to King Jehoshaphat, "Should **you** help the wicked, and will you love those who hate the LORD? And because of this, wrath **is** on you from before the LORD. But good things have been found with you, for you have removed the Asherahs from the land, and you have set your heart to seek God."*

"Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to face him." A seer is another name for a prophet, one who sees what God shows him. Jehu's father Hanani had rebuked Jehoshaphat's father Asa and was put in prison for it (16:7-10). Now the son does the same hard job with the next king.

His question goes straight to the point: "Should you help the wicked, and will you love those who hate the LORD?" Jehoshaphat had made himself one with Ahab (18:3). Jehu says plainly that this was sin, and "wrath is on you from before the LORD." We will see some of that wrath in the next chapter, when enemies come against Judah, and later in the ruin Ahab's daughter brings on Jehoshaphat's family (chapters 21 and 22).

But Jehu does not stop there. "But good things have been found with you, for you have removed the Asherahs from the land, and you have set your heart to seek God." An Asherah was a wooden pole or image set up for the Canaanite goddess Asherah, often beside an altar to Baal. Jehoshaphat had torn them down (17:6). God did not forget that.

This is how God deals with His people. He does not ignore our sin, and He does not forget our faithfulness. Have you ever thought that one failure cancelled everything God saw in you? Jehu's words say otherwise. God rebukes because He loves (Hebrews 12:6), and the same God who names the sin also names the good.

19:4 *And Jehoshaphat dwelt in Jerusalem. And he again went out among the people from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim, and he turned them back to the LORD, the God of their fathers.*

Unlike his father Asa, who raged at the prophet, Jehoshaphat accepted the rebuke. He "again went out among the people from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim, and he turned them back to the LORD, the God of their fathers." Beersheba was the southern edge of Judah, and the hill country of Ephraim was the northern border with Israel. He covered the whole kingdom.

The word "again" points back to his first teaching tour, when he sent officials, Levites and priests with the book of the law (17:7-9). This time he went himself. The best answer to a rebuke is not an excuse but a changed life. When God corrects us, the right response is to get up and do what is right, and often to help others turn back too.

19:5-7 *And he appointed judges in the land, in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city. And he said to the judges, "Consider what you are doing, for you do not judge for man, but for the LORD, and **He is** with you in the matter of judgment. And now, let the dread of the LORD be on you. Take care and act, for there is no injustice with the LORD our God, and **no** lifting up of faces, and **no** taking of a bribe."*

"He appointed judges in the land, in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city." The Law of Moses had commanded this long before (Deuteronomy 16:18-20). Jehoshaphat's own name means the LORD judges, and he made sure his kingdom had judges who knew whom they answered to.

His charge was simple and searching: "Consider what you are doing, for you do not judge for man, but for the LORD." A judge in Israel was not just a government worker. He stood in God's place to settle disputes among God's people. "Let the dread of the LORD be on you." The dread or fear of the LORD here means deep respect for God, knowing He sees every decision.

Then he gave the reason: "there is no injustice with the LORD our God." There is no "lifting up of faces," which means showing favoritism to someone because of who he is, and no "taking of a bribe." Moses said the same (Deuteronomy 10:17; 16:19). A judge was to be like the God he served.

Most of us are not judges, but we all make judgments: as parents, employers, church leaders, neighbors. Do we treat the rich and the poor the same? Do we let gifts or friendships tilt our decisions? James warns believers against showing partiality in the church (James 2:1-9). Every judgment we make is made before the LORD.

19:8-10 *And also in Jerusalem Jehoshaphat appointed some of the Levites and the priests and some of the heads of the fathers of Israel, for the judgment of the LORD and for disputes. And they returned **to** Jerusalem. And he commanded them, saying, "Thus you shall do in the fear of the LORD, in faithfulness and with a complete heart. And every dispute that comes to you from your brothers who dwell in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and judgments, you shall warn them, so that they will not be guilty before the LORD and wrath **not** be on you and on your brothers. Thus you shall do, and you will not be guilty.*

In Jerusalem Jehoshaphat set up a higher court made of "some of the Levites and the priests and some of the heads of the fathers of Israel." The Levites were the members of the tribe of Levi set apart to serve at God's house. The priests were the Levites descended from Aaron who offered the sacrifices. The heads of the fathers were the leading men of the family clans. Together they handled "the judgment of the LORD," cases about God's law and worship, and "disputes" between people. This matches the higher court Moses described for hard cases (Deuteronomy 17:8-12).

His charge to them was to serve "in the fear of the LORD, in faithfulness and with a complete heart." A complete heart means an undivided one, wholly given to God.

The cases they would hear came from all the cities: "between blood and blood," which means cases of killing, whether murder or accident (Numbers 35), and questions of "law and commandment, statutes and judgments." Their job was not only to decide cases but to "warn them, so that they will not be guilty before the LORD." A good judge also teaches. He helps people

see what God requires so they will not sin again. If the judges failed, wrath would fall on them as well as on the people.

19:11 *And look, Amariah the head priest **is** over you in every matter of the LORD, and Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the leader of the house of Judah, in every matter of the king, and the Levites **are** officials before you. Be strong and act, and may the LORD be with the good."*

Jehoshaphat finished by setting the lines of authority. "Amariah the head priest" was over "every matter of the LORD," and "Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the leader of the house of Judah," was over "every matter of the king." The Levites served as officials, a kind of court staff. Religious questions went to the priest and civil questions to the king's man. Each knew his area.

His last words were a blessing and a charge: "Be strong and act, and may the LORD be with the good." Doing justice takes courage. A judge who knows the right answer but is afraid to give it has failed. Jehoshaphat asked God to stand with those who do good.

This picture of fair judges points to the perfect Judge. Isaiah says the coming Son of David will not judge by what His eyes see but with righteousness for the poor (Isaiah 11:3-4), and the Father has given all judgment to the Son (John 5:22). One day every case will be settled perfectly, with no favoritism and no bribe.

Chapter 19 Summary

Jehoshaphat came home safely from the battle where Ahab died, but the prophet Jehu son of Hanani rebuked him for helping the wicked and loving those who hate the LORD. He also told him that God had seen the good in him, for he had removed the Asherahs and set his heart to seek God. Jehoshaphat answered the rebuke by going out himself through the whole land to turn the people back to the LORD. He appointed judges in every fortified city and charged them to judge for the LORD, without injustice, favoritism or bribes. In Jerusalem he set up a court of Levites, priests and family heads, charged them to serve in the fear of the LORD and to warn the people, and set the high priest over the LORD's matters and a leader of Judah over the king's matters.

Chapter 19 Study Questions

1. How did Jehoshaphat come home from Ramoth-gilead, and why is that surprising after chapter 18? (19:1; 18:31)

2. What question did Jehu ask Jehoshaphat, and what did he say was coming because of it? (19:2)

3. What good things did God see in Jehoshaphat? (19:3)

4. How did Jehoshaphat respond to the prophet's rebuke? (19:4)

5. What reason did Jehoshaphat give the judges for judging fairly? (19:6-7)

6. Besides deciding cases, what were the judges in Jerusalem to do for the people? (19:10)

7. How did Jehoshaphat divide the matters of the LORD and the matters of the king? (19:11)

8. When God corrects you, do you tend to react like Asa (16:10) or like Jehoshaphat (19:4)? Why?

9. Where in your life do you make judgments about other people, and how would it change things to remember you judge "for the LORD"?

10. Jehu named both Jehoshaphat's sin and his good. How can that help you when you need to correct someone you love?

Chapter 20: The Battle Is the LORD's

Scripture

20:1-19 And it was after this ***that*** the sons of Moab and the sons of Ammon, and with them some of the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat for battle. And ***some*** came and told Jehoshaphat, saying, "A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea, from Syria; and look, they ***are*** in Hazazon-tamar, that ***is*** Engedi." And Jehoshaphat was afraid, and he set his face to seek the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast over all Judah. And Judah gathered together to seek ***help*** from the LORD; also from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD. And Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new courtyard. And he said, "O LORD, God of our fathers, are You not He, God in the heavens? And You are ruling over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand ***are*** power and might, and there is no one ***able*** to take a stand against You. Are You not our God, ***who*** dispossessed the inhabitants of this land from before Your people Israel, and You gave it to the seed of Abraham Your friend forever? And they have dwelt in it, and they have built for You in it a sanctuary for Your name, saying, 'If calamity comes on us, sword, judgment, and pestilence, and famine, we will stand before this house and before You, for Your name ***is*** in this house, and we will cry out to You from our distress, and You will hear and save.' And now, look, the sons of Ammon and Moab and the mountain of Seir, whom You did not allow Israel to go into when they came from the land of Egypt, for they turned aside from them and did not destroy them, and look, they are repaying us by coming to drive us out from Your possession which You caused us to possess. O our God, will You not judge them? For there is no strength in us before this great multitude that is coming against us, and we, we do not know what we should do; but our eyes ***are*** on You." And all Judah ***was*** standing before the LORD, also their little ones, their wives, and their sons. And Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah the Levite, of the sons of Asaph: the Spirit of the LORD was on him in the midst of the assembly. And he said, "Pay attention, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat! Thus says the LORD to you: 'You, do not be afraid, and do not be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle ***is*** not yours, but God's. Tomorrow go down against them. Look, they are coming up by the ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the wadi, in front of the wilderness of Jeruel. ***It is*** not for you to fight in this ***battle***. Take your stand, stand, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid, and do not be dismayed. Tomorrow go out before them, and the LORD ***will be*** with you.'" And Jehoshaphat bowed ***with his*** face to the earth, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, to bow down to the LORD. And the Levites, of the sons of the Kohathites and of the sons of the Korahites, rose up to praise the LORD, the God of Israel, with a great voice, upward.

20:20-37 And they rose early in the morning, and they went out to the wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Hear me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the LORD your God, and you will be established; believe in His prophets, and succeed." And he consulted with the people, and he appointed those who sang to the LORD and those who praised ***Him*** in the splendor of holiness as they went out before the armed ***men***, and ***they were*** saying, "Give thanks to the LORD, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever." And at the time ***when*** they

began with a ringing cry and praise, the LORD set ambushers against the sons of Ammon, Moab, and the mountain of Seir who were coming against Judah, and they were struck down. And the sons of Ammon and Moab rose up against the inhabitants of the mountain of Seir to devote ***them*** to destruction and to destroy ***them***; and when they had finished with the inhabitants of Seir, they helped, each man against his neighbor, to destruction. And Judah came to the watchtower of the wilderness, and they turned toward the multitude, and look, they ***were*** corpses fallen to the earth, and there was no escapee. And Jehoshaphat and his people came to plunder their spoil, and they found among them in abundance both goods and corpses and precious articles, and they stripped ***them*** for themselves until there was no carrying ***more***. And they were three days plundering the spoil, for it was much. And on the fourth day they assembled at the Valley of Beracah, for there they blessed the LORD. Therefore they have called the name of that place "the Valley of Beracah" until this day. And every man of Judah and Jerusalem returned, and Jehoshaphat at their head, to return to Jerusalem with joy, for the LORD had made them rejoice over their enemies. And they came ***to*** Jerusalem with harps and with lyres and with trumpets, to the house of the LORD. And the dread of God was on all the kingdoms of the lands when they heard that the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel. And the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was quiet, and his God gave him rest all around. And Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah. ***He was*** a son of thirty-five years when he became king, and he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother ***was*** Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. And he walked in the way of his father Asa, and he did not turn aside from it, doing what ***was*** right in the eyes of the LORD. Only, the high places were not removed, and the people still had not set their heart to the God of their fathers. And the rest of the matters of Jehoshaphat, the first and the last, look, they are written in the words of Jehu the son of Hanani, which was recorded in the book of the kings of Israel. And after this Jehoshaphat king of Judah allied himself with Ahaziah king of Israel; he acted wickedly in doing ***so***. And he allied himself with him to make ships to go ***to*** Tarshish, and they made ships in Ezion-geber. And Eliezer the son of Dodavahu of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, "Because you have allied yourself with Ahaziah, the LORD has broken down your works." And the ships were broken, and they were not able to go to Tarshish.

Chapter 20 Preview

This is one of the best-loved chapters in 2 Chronicles. A huge army from Moab, Ammon and Mount Seir comes against Judah. Jehoshaphat is afraid, and he does the right thing with his fear: he sets his face to seek the LORD and calls a fast. The whole nation gathers at the temple, and the king prays one of the great prayers of the Bible. It ends with words every believer can pray: "we do not know what we should do; but our eyes are on You."

God answers through a Levite named Jahaziel: do not be afraid, for the battle is not yours but God's. The next morning the army marches out with singers in front, praising the LORD's steadfast love, and God sets the enemy armies against each other. Judah does not lift a sword. The chapter closes with a summary of Jehoshaphat's reign and one more unwise alliance with the king of Israel. Kings tells none of this battle; it gives a short summary of Jehoshaphat's reign in 1 Kings 22:41-50.

Chapter 20 Study

20:1-2 *And it was after this **that** the sons of Moab and the sons of Ammon, and with them some of the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat for battle. And **some** came and told Jehoshaphat, saying, "A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea, from Syria; and look, they **are** in Hazazon-tamar, that **is** Engedi."*

"The sons of Moab and the sons of Ammon, and with them some of the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat for battle." Moab and Ammon lay east of the Dead Sea and were descended from Lot (Genesis 19:36-38). The Hebrew text names the Ammonites twice here. The old Greek translation reads Meunites instead, a desert people who lived near Edom (compare 26:7), and that fits what follows, since verse 10 calls the whole group the people of "the mountain of Seir," which is Edom's mountain country.

The report said, "A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea." The sea is the Dead Sea. They had come around its south end and were already at "Engedi," an oasis on the western shore, only about twenty-five miles from Jerusalem. This was a surprise attack, and it was already close.

20:3-4 *And Jehoshaphat was afraid, and he set his face to seek the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast over all Judah. And Judah gathered together to seek **help** from the LORD; also from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD.*

"Jehoshaphat was afraid, and he set his face to seek the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast over all Judah." Notice that the Bible does not hide the king's fear. Being afraid is not a sin. What matters is what we do with it. Jehoshaphat turned his fear into prayer.

A fast means going without food for a time to give oneself to prayer, a sign of humbling oneself before God. "Judah gathered together to seek help from the LORD; also from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD." The word seek appears again and again in Chronicles. Here the whole nation does it together.

This is what God promised in 7:14: if His people humble themselves, pray and seek His face, He will hear. Jehoshaphat is about to find out that God keeps that promise.

20:5-9 *And Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new courtyard. And he said, "O LORD, God of our fathers, are You not He, God in the heavens? And You are ruling over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand **are** power and might, and there is no one **able** to take a stand against You. Are You not our God, **who** dispossessed the inhabitants of this land from before Your people Israel, and You gave it to the seed of Abraham Your friend forever? And they have dwelt in it, and they have built for You in it a sanctuary for Your name, saying, 'If calamity comes on us, sword, judgment, and pestilence, and famine, we will stand before this house and before You, for Your name **is** in this house, and we will cry out to You from our distress, and You will hear and save.'*

The king "stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new courtyard," and he led the people in prayer. His prayer is a model for us, and it begins not with the problem but with God.

First, he speaks of who God is: "O LORD, God of our fathers, are You not He, God in the heavens?" God is "ruling over all the kingdoms of the nations," and "there is no one able to take a stand against You." Before he mentions the enemy, he reminds himself how big God is.

Second, he remembers what God has done. God drove out the nations before Israel and gave the land "to the seed of Abraham Your friend forever." Abraham is called God's friend here, and again in Isaiah 41:8 and James 2:23. The land was a gift, sworn by covenant.

Third, he holds God to His promise. Solomon had prayed at the dedication of the temple that when calamity came, the people would stand before this house and cry out, and God would hear (6:28-30). Jehoshaphat quotes the heart of it: "we will cry out to You from our distress, and You will hear and save." He is not bargaining with God. He is praying God's own words back to Him. That is a good way for us to pray too.

20:10-11 *And now, look, the sons of Ammon and Moab and the mountain of Seir, whom You did not allow Israel to go into when they came from the land of Egypt, for they turned aside from them and did not destroy them, and look, they are repaying us by coming to drive us out from Your possession which You caused us to possess.*

Now he names the problem. These are the very nations God told Israel not to attack when they came out of Egypt (Deuteronomy 2:4-9, 19). Israel had spared them, and now "they are repaying us by coming to drive us out from Your possession which You caused us to possess." Notice whose land it is: "Your possession." Jehoshaphat sees the attack not only as an attack on Judah but as an attack on what belongs to God.

20:12 *O our God, will You not judge them? For there is no strength in us before this great multitude that is coming against us, and we, we do not know what we should do; but our eyes **are** on You."*

This is the heart of the prayer, and one of the most honest verses in the Bible. Let us take it a phrase at a time.

"O our God, will You not judge them?" Jehoshaphat asks God to act as Judge. In the last chapter he appointed judges for Judah. Now he brings the case to the highest Judge of all. He does not ask God to bless his battle plan. He asks God to decide the matter.

"For there is no strength in us before this great multitude that is coming against us." This is a confession of weakness. Jehoshaphat had a large army (17:14-19), yet he says there is no strength in us. He is not being modest. He is telling the truth. Next to this army, and without God, Judah had nothing. Many of us find this the hardest part of prayer. We want to come to God with a plan and ask Him to sign it. But God's power is shown most clearly when we stop pretending we are strong. Paul learned the same thing: the Lord told him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

"And we, we do not know what we should do." The king of Judah, with his advisers and generals, admits he has no answer. There is no shame in telling God you don't know what to do. The shame is in pretending we do and charging ahead without God, which is exactly what Jehoshaphat did at Ramoth-gilead (18:3).

"But our eyes are on You." This is the turn of the whole prayer. Not knowing what to do does not leave them helpless, because they know where to look. The psalmist says the same: "I lift up my eyes to the mountains; from where will my help come? My help is from the LORD, Maker of heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1-2). For us the call is to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

Are you facing something right now where you honestly do not know what to do? A diagnosis, a broken relationship, a money crisis, a child who has walked away? You can pray this prayer just as it stands. Tell God who He is. Remember what He has done. Hold on to His promises. Admit your weakness. And then put your eyes on Him.

20:13 *And all Judah **was** standing before the LORD, also their little ones, their wives, and their sons.*

"All Judah was standing before the LORD, also their little ones, their wives, and their sons." The whole nation stood there together, families and children too. It is a moving picture: thousands of people standing quietly before God, waiting. Sometimes the right thing after praying is to stand still and wait for God to speak.

20:14 *And Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah the Levite, of the sons of Asaph: the Spirit of the LORD was on him in the midst of the assembly.*

God's answer came through an unexpected man. "Jahaziel the son of Zechariah," with his family line traced back five generations, was "the Levite, of the sons of Asaph." The sons of Asaph were temple singers and musicians (1 Chronicles 25:1-2). He was not a king or a famous prophet. But "the Spirit of the LORD was on him in the midst of the assembly." God can speak through anyone He chooses. The long family line shows he was a real, known man, and his word could be tested.

20:15 *And he said, "Pay attention, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat! Thus says the LORD to you: 'You, do not be afraid, and do not be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle* ***is*** *not yours, but God's.*

"Pay attention, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat!" Everyone needed to hear this, from the king to the youngest child.

"Thus says the LORD to you." Then God's word: "You, do not be afraid, and do not be dismayed because of this great multitude." God does not scold them for being afraid. He speaks to their fear directly. To be dismayed means to be broken down or shattered by fear. God is telling them not to let it crush them.

Then the reason: "for the battle is not yours, but God's." This is the heart of the chapter, and its title. David said almost the same words to Goliath: "the battle belongs to the LORD" (1 Samuel 17:47). It does not mean that God's people have nothing to do. It means that the outcome rests with God, not with us. The army was not Judah's to defeat. It was God's.

What battles are you fighting as though everything depended on you? Some of the heaviest burdens we carry are battles God never asked us to fight alone. When we belong to Him, our battles become His concern. Paul asks, "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Romans 8:31).

20:16 *Tomorrow go down against them. Look, they are coming up by the ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the wadi, in front of the wilderness of Jeruel.*

God gave them exact directions. "Tomorrow go down against them. Look, they are coming up by the ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the wadi, in front of the wilderness of Jeruel." The ascent of Ziz was a pass climbing up from the Dead Sea toward Tekoa. God told them where the enemy would be before they got there.

Faith does not mean doing nothing. They still had to get up early and march. God's promise to fight for them did not cancel His command to go out. Trusting God and obeying God always go together.

20:17 ***It is*** *not for you to fight in this* ***battle****. Take your stand, stand, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid, and do not be dismayed. Tomorrow go out before them, and the LORD* ***will be*** *with you.'"*

"It is not for you to fight in this battle. Take your stand, stand, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem." These words echo what Moses said at the Red Sea: "Do not be afraid; station yourselves, and see the salvation of the LORD" (Exodus 14:13). The same God who split the sea for Israel was about to rescue Judah.

To take your stand means to hold your position and not run. They were to stand there and watch God work. Salvation here means rescue or deliverance from danger. God would do the saving, and Judah would see it.

"Do not be afraid, and do not be dismayed. Tomorrow go out before them, and the LORD will be with you." God repeats the words of verse 15, because frightened people need to hear comfort more than once. And He ends with the best promise of all: "the LORD will be with you." The presence of God is the answer to fear. Jesus ends His Great Commission the same way: He is with us always, to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

I believe this chapter is written for every believer who has ever felt outnumbered. Our battles are often not with armies but with sin, sorrow, temptation and the enemy of our souls. Paul says our struggle is not against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12). And the greatest battle of all, against sin and death, has already been won by Jesus at the cross, without any help from us (Colossians 2:15). We stand and see the salvation of the LORD.

20:18-19 *And Jehoshaphat bowed **with his** face to the earth, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, to bow down to the LORD. And the Levites, of the sons of the Kohathites and of the sons of the Korahites, rose up to praise the LORD, the God of Israel, with a great voice, upward.*

Before a single enemy had fallen, "Jehoshaphat bowed with his face to the earth, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD." They worshiped on the strength of God's word alone. That is faith. They had nothing yet but a promise, and they thanked Him as though it were done.

"The Levites, of the sons of the Kohathites and of the sons of the Korahites, rose up to praise the LORD, the God of Israel, with a great voice." The sons of Korah wrote several of the Psalms (for example Psalms 42 and 44 to 49). Their voices rang out "upward," loud and high. Praise was their first answer to God's promise.

20:20 *And they rose early in the morning, and they went out to the wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Hear me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the LORD your God, and you will be established; believe in His prophets, and succeed."*

Early the next morning they marched out to "the wilderness of Tekoa," the rough country south of Bethlehem where the prophet Amos would later live (Amos 1:1). As they went, Jehoshaphat stood and called out: "Believe in the LORD your God, and you will be established; believe in His prophets, and succeed."

In Hebrew there is a play on words here. The word for believe and the word for established come from the same root, aman, which gives us our word amen. Trust in God makes you firm. Isaiah later said the same to King Ahaz in the negative: "If you do not believe, surely you will not be established" (Isaiah 7:9). To believe His prophets means to trust and obey the word God had just spoken through Jahaziel.

20:21 *And he consulted with the people, and he appointed those who sang to the LORD and those who praised **Him** in the splendor of holiness as they went out before the armed **men**, and **they were** saying, "Give thanks to the LORD, for His steadfast love **is** forever."*

Then Jehoshaphat did something no general would ever do. "He appointed those who sang to the LORD and those who praised Him in the splendor of holiness as they went out before the armed men." The choir went in front of the army. The "splendor of holiness" may mean holy clothing, or the beauty of God's holiness, the reason for their praise.

Their song was simple: "Give thanks to the LORD, for His steadfast love is forever." The Hebrew word for steadfast love is hesed: God's loyal, covenant love that does not quit. This line was sung when the ark came to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 16:34) and when fire fell at the temple's dedication (7:3). It runs all through the Psalms (Psalm 136 repeats it in every verse). They sang it before the battle, not after. Praise is not only the response to victory; it is a weapon of faith.

20:22-23 *And at the time **when** they began with a ringing cry and praise, the LORD set ambushers against the sons of Ammon, Moab, and the mountain of Seir who were coming against Judah, and they were struck down. And the sons of Ammon and Moab rose up against the inhabitants of the mountain of Seir to devote **them** to destruction and to destroy **them**; and when they had finished with the inhabitants of Seir, they helped, each man against his neighbor, to destruction.*

"At the time when they began with a ringing cry and praise, the LORD set ambushers against" the armies of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir. The moment the singing started, God acted. Scripture does not tell us who the ambushers were. They may have been angels, or God may have stirred up some of the enemy against the rest. Either way, the result was confusion.

The armies of Ammon and Moab turned on the men of Seir and wiped them out. Then "they helped, each man against his neighbor, to destruction." God had done the same in Gideon's day (Judges 7:22) and for Jonathan and Saul (1 Samuel 14:20). The enemy destroyed itself. Judah only had to stand and watch, just as God had said.

20:24-25 *And Judah came to the watchtower of the wilderness, and they turned toward the multitude, and look, they **were** corpses fallen to the earth, and there was no escapee. And Jehoshaphat and his people came to plunder their spoil, and they found among them in abundance both goods and corpses and precious articles, and they stripped **them** for themselves until there was no carrying **more**. And they were three days plundering the spoil, for it was much.*

"Judah came to the watchtower of the wilderness," a lookout point over the desert, "and look, they were corpses fallen to the earth, and there was no escapee." The great army that had terrified the nation was gone.

The spoil was so great that "they were three days plundering the spoil, for it was much." God not only saved them; He made them rich. They had gone out expecting a fight and came home carrying more than they could hold. God often gives far more than we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20).

20:26 *And on the fourth day they assembled at the Valley of Beracah, for there they blessed the LORD. Therefore they have called the name of that place "the Valley of Beracah" until this day.*

"On the fourth day they assembled at the Valley of Beracah, for there they blessed the LORD." Beracah means blessing. They named the valley for what they did there, and the name stuck for centuries. They began this story with a fast and they end it with a praise meeting. It is good to mark the places where God has rescued us, so we and our children remember.

20:27-28 *And every man of Judah and Jerusalem returned, and Jehoshaphat at their head, to return to Jerusalem with joy, for the LORD had made them rejoice over their enemies. And they came **to** Jerusalem with harps and with lyres and with trumpets, to the house of the LORD.*

"Every man of Judah and Jerusalem returned, and Jehoshaphat at their head, to return to Jerusalem with joy, for the LORD had made them rejoice over their enemies." They came "to the house of the LORD" with harps, lyres and trumpets. The story that began with the king praying at the temple ends with the king leading the people back to the temple to give thanks. Many of us remember to pray when trouble comes. Do we remember to come back and thank Him when He answers?

20:29-30 *And the dread of God was on all the kingdoms of the lands when they heard that the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel. And the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was quiet, and his God gave him rest all around.*

"The dread of God was on all the kingdoms of the lands when they heard that the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel." The nations did not fear Judah's army. They feared Judah's God. And "the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was quiet, and his God gave him rest all around." This is the rest God promised to those who seek Him (14:6-7; 15:15). It is a small picture of the rest God gives in Christ (Matthew 11:28; Hebrews 4:9-10).

20:31-34 *And Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah. **He was** a son of thirty-five years when he became king, and he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother **was** Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. And he walked in the way of his father Asa, and he did not turn aside from it, doing what **was** right in the eyes of the LORD. Only, the high places were not removed, and the people still had not set their heart to the God of their fathers. And the rest of the matters of Jehoshaphat, the first and the last, look, they are written in the words of Jehu the son of Hanani, which was recorded in the book of the kings of Israel.*

Now the Chronicler sums up Jehoshaphat's reign. He became king at thirty-five and reigned twenty-five years, about 872 to 848 B.C., counting a few years when he ruled alongside his father Asa. "He walked in the way of his father Asa, and he did not turn aside from it." He was one of Judah's good kings.

"Only, the high places were not removed, and the people still had not set their heart to the God of their fathers." A high place was a hilltop shrine or altar. Some were for false gods and some were used to worship the LORD in places He had not chosen (Deuteronomy 12:13-14). Jehoshaphat removed many of the pagan ones (17:6), but the people kept going to the others. A king can tear

down shrines, but he cannot change hearts. The reform was real, but it did not go deep in the people.

His story was written "in the words of Jehu the son of Hanani," the same prophet who rebuked him in 19:2.

20:35-37 *And after this Jehoshaphat king of Judah allied himself with Ahaziah king of Israel; he acted wickedly in doing **so**. And he allied himself with him to make ships to go **to** Tarshish, and they made ships in Ezion-geber. And Eliezer the son of Dodavahu of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, "Because you have allied yourself with Ahaziah, the LORD has broken down your works." And the ships were broken, and they were not able to go to Tarshish.*

Sadly, the chapter does not end on the high note. "After this Jehoshaphat king of Judah allied himself with Ahaziah king of Israel; he acted wickedly in doing so." Ahaziah was Ahab's son, and he followed his father's ways (1 Kings 22:51-53). Jehoshaphat had been rebuked for this very thing (19:2), and he did it again.

They built ships at Ezion-geber, a port on the Gulf of Aqaba, to go to Tarshish, a name used for a distant land and for large trading ships. A prophet named Eliezer said, "Because you have allied yourself with Ahaziah, the LORD has broken down your works." And the ships were wrecked before they ever sailed. 1 Kings 22:48-49 adds that afterward Ahaziah asked to send his men with Jehoshaphat's, and Jehoshaphat refused. It seems he finally learned.

Here is a sobering lesson. The same man who prayed so beautifully in this chapter kept making the same mistake with his partnerships. Great spiritual moments do not make us immune to old weaknesses. Paul warns, "let the one who thinks he stands watch, lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Chapter 20 Summary

A great army of Moab, Ammon and the people of Mount Seir came against Judah from beyond the Dead Sea. Jehoshaphat was afraid, but he set his face to seek the LORD and called a fast, and all Judah gathered at the temple. He prayed, praising God's power, remembering His gift of the land, and holding Him to the promise made at the temple's dedication. He confessed that Judah had no strength and did not know what to do, but that their eyes were on God. The Spirit of the LORD came on Jahaziel the Levite, who told them not to be afraid, for the battle was not theirs but God's. They were to go out, stand and see the LORD's salvation. The people worshiped. The next morning singers went before the army praising God's steadfast love, and the LORD set the enemy armies against each other until none survived. Judah took spoil for three days, blessed the LORD in the Valley of Beracah and returned to the temple with joy. The nations feared God, and Jehoshaphat had rest. He reigned twenty-five years and did right, though the high places remained. Late in his reign he allied with Ahaziah of Israel to build ships, and the LORD broke them.

Chapter 20 Study Questions

1. What did Jehoshaphat do when he heard that a great army was coming? (20:3-4)

2. What did Jehoshaphat say about God before he named the problem? (20:6-9)

3. What three things did Jehoshaphat confess in verse 12? (20:12)

4. Through whom did God answer, and what did He say about the battle? (20:14-15)

5. What did God tell the people to do, and what did He promise? (20:16-17)

6. What did the people do before the battle was won? (20:18-19, 21)

7. How did God defeat the enemy armies? (20:22-24)

8. What did Jehoshaphat do late in his reign that God did not bless, and why? (20:35-37)

9. Is there a situation in your life right now where you honestly do not know what to do? What would it look like to pray, "our eyes are on You"?

10. The people praised God before they saw the victory. What promise of God can you thank Him for today, even before you see the answer?

Chapter 21: Jehoram's Evil Reign

Scripture

21:1-11 And Jehoshaphat lay down with his fathers, and he was buried with his fathers in the city of David, and Jehoram his son reigned in his place. And he had brothers, the sons of Jehoshaphat: Azariah and Jehiel and Zechariah and Azariah and Michael and Shephatiah; all these ***were*** the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel. And their father gave them many gifts of silver and of gold and of precious things, with fortified cities in Judah; and the kingdom he gave to Jehoram, for he ***was*** the firstborn. And Jehoram rose up over the kingdom of his father, and he strengthened himself, and he killed all his brothers with the sword, and also some of the leaders of Israel. Jehoram ***was*** a son of thirty-two years when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab did, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife; and he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD. And the LORD was not willing to destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that He had made with David, and since He had said to give a lamp to him and to his sons all the days. In his days Edom rebelled from under the hand of Judah, and they made a king reign over them. And Jehoram crossed over with his commanders, and all the chariots with him. And it was ***that*** he rose up by night, and he struck down Edom which was surrounding him, and the commanders of the chariots. And Edom has rebelled from under the hand of Judah until this day. Then Libnah rebelled at that time from under his hand, because he had forsaken the LORD, the God of his fathers. Also he made high places in the mountains of Judah, and he caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to prostitute themselves, and he drove Judah astray.

21:12-20 And a writing came to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: 'Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father and in the ways of Asa king of Judah, and you have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and you have caused Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to prostitute themselves, like the prostituting of the house of Ahab, and also you have killed your brothers, the house of your father, who ***were*** better than you, look, the LORD is striking a great plague among your people and among your sons and among your wives and among all your property; and you ***will be*** in many sicknesses, in sickness of your bowels, until your bowels come out because of the sickness, days upon days.'" And the LORD stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines and the Arabs who ***were*** beside the Cushites. And they came up against Judah, and they broke into it, and they took captive all the property that was found belonging to the house of the king, and also his sons and his wives; and no son was left to him except Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons. And after all this the LORD struck him in his bowels with a sickness for which there was no healing. And it was, from days to days, and about the time of the going out of the end of two years, his bowels came out with his sickness, and he died in severe sicknesses. And his people did not make a burning for him like the burning of his fathers. He was a son of thirty-two ***ɣears*** when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he went without ***anɣone's*** longing, and they buried him in the city of David, and not in the graves of the kings.

Chapter 21 Preview

Jehoshaphat dies, and his firstborn son Jehoram takes the throne. The first thing Jehoram does is murder all six of his brothers. He is married to Ahab's daughter, and he walks in the ways of Ahab's house. Edom and Libnah break away, and Jehoram builds high places and leads Judah into idolatry. Yet God does not wipe out the house of David, because of His covenant.

A letter comes from Elijah the prophet announcing judgment. The Philistines and Arabs raid Judah and carry off Jehoram's wives and all his sons but the youngest, and Jehoram dies of a terrible disease of the bowels. No one is sorry to see him go. This is one of the darkest chapters in the book, and I handle it with care. Kings tells his reign more briefly in 2 Kings 8:16-24.

Chapter 21 Study

21:1 *And Jehoshaphat lay down with his fathers, and he was buried with his fathers in the city of David, and Jehoram his son reigned in his place.*

"Jehoshaphat lay down with his fathers," a gentle way of saying he died and joined his ancestors who had gone before him. He was buried in the city of David, and "Jehoram his son reigned in his place." Jehoram had already shared the throne with his father for some years. On the dates used in this study, he reigned about 853 to 841 B.C., alone from about 848 B.C.

21:2-3 *And he had brothers, the sons of Jehoshaphat: Azariah and Jehiel and Zechariah and Azariah and Michael and Shephatiah; all these **were** the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel. And their father gave them many gifts of silver and of gold and of precious things, with fortified cities in Judah; and the kingdom he gave to Jehoram, for he **was** the firstborn.*

Jehoshaphat had seven sons. The six younger brothers are named, two of them called Azariah. The Chronicler calls Jehoshaphat "king of Israel" here because Judah was the true Israel in his eyes, the people of God under David's line.

"Their father gave them many gifts of silver and of gold and of precious things, with fortified cities in Judah; and the kingdom he gave to Jehoram, for he was the firstborn." Rehoboam had done the same thing, giving his sons cities to keep them busy and content (11:23). It was a wise plan meant to keep peace in the family. Jehoshaphat could not know how his eldest would repay it.

21:4 *And Jehoram rose up over the kingdom of his father, and he strengthened himself, and he killed all his brothers with the sword, and also some of the leaders of Israel.*

"Jehoram rose up over the kingdom of his father, and he strengthened himself, and he killed all his brothers with the sword, and also some of the leaders of Israel."

This is a terrible verse. As soon as Jehoram felt secure, he murdered his own brothers and some of the leading men. Why? The text does not tell us directly. Most likely he feared that they or the leaders might turn against him, especially if they were faithful men who disliked his marriage to

Ahab's daughter and her influence. Verse 13 says his brothers were "better than you." Their goodness may have been the very thing that made him see them as a threat.

This is the same sin as Cain's, who killed his brother because his brother's deeds were righteous and his own were evil (Genesis 4:8; 1 John 3:12). It shows where unchecked fear and the hunger for power lead. I do not want to dwell on the details, and the Bible does not either. But we should not look away from the truth that power without God becomes cruel.

God saw it all. Elijah's letter would name this sin directly (21:13), and God would answer it. If you have been hurt by someone in your own family, know that God sees and does not forget, and He is near to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18).

21:5-7 *Jehoram **was** a son of thirty-two years when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab did, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife; and he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD. And the LORD was not willing to destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that He had made with David, and since He had said to give a lamp to him and to his sons all the days.*

Jehoram was thirty-two when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. "He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab did, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife." Her name was Athaliah (22:2). Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab (18:1) now bore its bitter fruit. One marriage brought the worship of Baal right into the palace of David's line.

"And the LORD was not willing to destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that He had made with David." A covenant is a solemn agreement in which God binds Himself by promise. God had promised David that his house and his throne would last (1 Chronicles 17:11-14), and He had said He would "give a lamp to him and to his sons all the days." A lamp is a picture of life continuing, a flame not put out. A family with a burning lamp still had an heir.

This verse is a ray of light in a dark chapter. Jehoram deserved to lose everything, and his line almost did. But God's promise did not depend on Jehoram. It depended on God. That promise would one day be fulfilled in Jesus, the Son of David who reigns forever (Luke 1:32-33). God keeps His word even when people break theirs. "If we are faithless, He remains faithful" (2 Timothy 2:13).

21:8-10 *In his days Edom rebelled from under the hand of Judah, and they made a king reign over them. And Jehoram crossed over with his commanders, and all the chariots with him. And it was **that** he rose up by night, and he struck down Edom which was surrounding him, and the commanders of the chariots. And Edom has rebelled from under the hand of Judah until this day. Then Libnah rebelled at that time from under his hand, because he had forsaken the LORD, the God of his fathers.*

"In his days Edom rebelled from under the hand of Judah, and they made a king reign over them." Edom, south and east of the Dead Sea, had been under Judah's control since David. Jehoram marched out with his chariots and found himself surrounded. He broke out by night, but he could not bring Edom back. "Edom has rebelled from under the hand of Judah until this day."

"Then Libnah rebelled at that time from under his hand." Libnah was a town on Judah's western side, near the Philistines. Kings records the same two revolts (2 Kings 8:20-22). The Chronicler adds the reason: "because he had forsaken the LORD, the God of his fathers." Jehoram's kingdom started to come apart at the edges. When a leader forsakes God, the things he worked to hold together begin to slip out of his hands.

21:11 *Also he made high places in the mountains of Judah, and he caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to prostitute themselves, and he drove Judah astray.*

"He made high places in the mountains of Judah, and he caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to prostitute themselves, and he drove Judah astray." In the Old Testament, God often describes idolatry as prostitution, because Israel was bound to Him like a wife to a husband, and running after other gods was unfaithfulness. Jehoram did not only sin himself. He pushed his people into it. Leaders carry a heavy responsibility. Jesus warned of the judgment on those who cause others to stumble (Matthew 18:6).

21:12-15 *And a writing came to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: 'Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father and in the ways of Asa king of Judah, and you have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and you have caused Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to prostitute themselves, like the prostituting of the house of Ahab, and also you have killed your brothers, the house of your father, who **were** better than you, look, the LORD is striking a great plague among your people and among your sons and among your wives and among all your property; and you **will be** in many sicknesses, in sickness of your bowels, until your bowels come out because of the sickness, days upon days.'"*

"A writing came to him from Elijah the prophet." This is the only time Chronicles mentions Elijah, the great prophet of the northern kingdom who stood against Ahab and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18). It is a little surprising, since 2 Kings 2 tells of Elijah being taken up to heaven, and it seems to be placed before Jehoram reigned alone. Bible teachers explain it in two main ways. Some think Elijah was still alive early in Jehoram's reign, since the stories of Kings are not always in strict order. Others think Elijah wrote the letter before he was taken up, knowing by God what Jehoram would do, and it was delivered later. Either way, the letter was God's word to the king.

The letter has two parts. First the charge: Jehoram had not walked in the ways of his father Jehoshaphat or of Asa. He had walked "in the way of the kings of Israel." He had led his people into idolatry, "like the prostituting of the house of Ahab," and "also you have killed your brothers, the house of your father, who were better than you."

Then the sentence: "the LORD is striking a great plague among your people and among your sons and among your wives and among all your property." And Jehoram himself would suffer "sickness of your bowels" for "days upon days." The judgment matched the sin. He had destroyed his father's house, and his own house would be struck. Paul writes, "God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

Elijah had once confronted Ahab and Jezebel to their faces. Now, even from a distance, his word confronted their son-in-law. The house of Ahab could not escape God's word by moving its influence south.

21:16-17 *And the LORD stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines and the Arabs who **were** beside the Cushites. And they came up against Judah, and they broke into it, and they took captive all the property that was found belonging to the house of the king, and also his sons and his wives; and no son was left to him except Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons.*

"The LORD stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines and the Arabs who were beside the Cushites." The Cushites here seem to be people living in Arabia near the Red Sea. God used these raiders as His instrument of judgment, as He would later use Assyria and Babylon.

They broke into Judah and took "all the property that was found belonging to the house of the king, and also his sons and his wives; and no son was left to him except Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons." Jehoahaz is another form of the name Ahaziah (22:1). The man who murdered his brothers to make his throne secure lost all his sons but one. And yet, even here, God left a lamp. One son survived, and the line of David continued, just as God promised in verse 7.

21:18-19 *And after all this the LORD struck him in his bowels with a sickness for which there was no healing. And it was, from days to days, and about the time of the going out of the end of two years, his bowels came out with his sickness, and he died in severe sicknesses. And his people did not make a burning for him like the burning of his fathers.*

"After all this the LORD struck him in his bowels with a sickness for which there was no healing." For two years he suffered, and then "he died in severe sicknesses," just as Elijah had written. The Bible does not tell us what disease it was, and we do not need to know. What matters is that God's word came true exactly.

"His people did not make a burning for him like the burning of his fathers." This was not cremation. At the funeral of an honored king, the people would burn spices and fires in his honor (16:14). No one did this for Jehoram. Even his death showed what his people thought of him.

21:20 *He was a son of thirty-two **years** when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he went without **anyone's** longing, and they buried him in the city of David, and not in the graves of the kings.*

The verse repeats his age and the length of his reign, and then gives one of the saddest epitaphs in the Bible: "he went without anyone's longing." No one missed him. No one wept. "They buried him in the city of David, and not in the graves of the kings."

What will people say about us when we are gone? Jehoram had a throne, wealth and power, and he died unloved. Compare him with Jehoiada the priest, whom the people buried among the kings "for he had done good in Israel" (24:16). A life spent for self ends empty. A life spent for God and others leaves something behind.

Chapter 21 Summary

After Jehoshaphat died, his firstborn Jehoram became king and murdered all his brothers and some of Judah's leaders. Married to Ahab's daughter, he walked in the ways of Ahab's house and did evil, yet the LORD would not destroy the house of David because of His covenant and His promise of a lamp. Edom and Libnah revolted because Jehoram had forsaken the LORD, and he built high places and led Judah into idolatry. A letter from Elijah charged him with his sins, including the murder of brothers better than he, and announced a plague on his household and a disease of the bowels for him. The Philistines and Arabs raided Judah and took his property, his wives and all his sons except the youngest. Jehoram died after two years of terrible sickness. No one honored him at his death or missed him, and he was not buried in the graves of the kings.

Chapter 21 Study Questions

1. What did Jehoshaphat give his younger sons, and what did Jehoram do to them? (21:3-4)

2. Why did Jehoram walk in the ways of Ahab's house? (21:6)

3. Why did the LORD not destroy the house of David, even with such a king? (21:7)

4. What reason does the Chronicler give for the revolt of Edom and Libnah? (21:10)

5. What did Elijah's letter say Jehoram had done, and what would happen to him? (21:12-15)

6. How did God keep His promise of a lamp for David's house in this chapter? (21:7, 17)

7. What does "he went without anyone's longing" tell us about Jehoram's life? (21:20)

8. Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab bore fruit in his son's life. What choices you make now might shape the next generation?

9. God's faithfulness to David did not depend on Jehoram. How does it encourage you that God keeps His promises even when people fail? (2 Timothy 2:13)

10. If your life ended today, what would people remember? What would you like them to remember?

Chapter 22: Ahaziah and Athaliah

Scripture

22:1-12 And the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his place, for the raiding band that came with the Arabs to the camp had killed all the elder ***sons***. And Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah reigned. Ahaziah ***was*** a son of forty-two years when he became king, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother ***was*** Athaliah the daughter of Omri. He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counselor to act wickedly. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD like the house of Ahab, for they were counselors to him after the death of his father, for his destruction. Also he walked in their counsel, and he went with Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel to the war against Hazael king of Syria at Ramoth-gilead; and the Arameans wounded Joram. And he returned to get himself healed in Jezreel because of the wounds with which they had wounded him at Ramah, when he fought with Hazael king of Syria. And Azariah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, for he ***was*** sick. And the downfall of Ahaziah was from God, by coming to Joram. And when he came, he went out with Joram to Jehu the son of Nimshi, whom the LORD had anointed to cut off the house of Ahab. And it was, when Jehu was executing judgment with the house of Ahab, that he found the officials of Judah and the sons of the brothers of Ahaziah, ministering to Ahaziah, and he killed them. And he sought Ahaziah, and they captured him, and he ***was*** hiding himself in Samaria; and they brought him to Jehu, and they put him to death, and they buried him, for they said, "He ***is*** the son of Jehoshaphat, who sought the LORD with all his heart." And there was no one in the house of Ahaziah to retain strength for the kingdom. And Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, and she arose and destroyed all the seed of the kingdom of the house of Judah. And Jehoshabeath the daughter of the king took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and she stole him from the midst of the sons of the king who were being put to death, and she put him and his nurse in the chamber of the beds. And Jehoshabeath the daughter of King Jehoram, the wife of Jehoiada the priest (for she was the sister of Ahaziah), hid him from before Athaliah, and she did not put him to death. And he was with them in the house of God, hiding himself six years, and Athaliah ***was*** reigning over the land.

Chapter 22 Preview

Jehoram's youngest son Ahaziah becomes king, and he reigns only one year. His mother Athaliah, Ahab's daughter, is his counselor, and he follows the house of Ahab into evil and into an alliance with his uncle Joram of Israel. While visiting Joram, he is caught up in God's judgment on Ahab's house through Jehu, and he is killed.

Then Athaliah does something almost unthinkable. She sets out to destroy the whole royal family of Judah so she can rule herself. One baby, Joash, is rescued by his aunt and hidden in the house of God for six years. The line of David, and the promise of the Messiah, hangs by a single thread. Kings tells the same story in 2 Kings 8:25-29, 9:27-29 and 11:1-3.

Chapter 22 Study

22:1 *And the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his place, for the raiding band that came with the Arabs to the camp had killed all the elder **sons**. And Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah reigned.*

"The inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his place." The other sons had been killed by the raiders who came with the Arabs (21:16-17). Ahaziah was the one son left, the "lamp" God had promised to keep burning for David (21:7). He reigned in 841 B.C.

22:2 *Ahaziah **was** a son of forty-two years when he became king, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother **was** Athaliah the daughter of Omri.*

"Ahaziah was a son of forty-two years when he became king, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem." Here Chronicles and Kings give different numbers. 2 Kings 8:26 says he was twenty-two. Forty-two cannot be right as it stands, since his father Jehoram died at forty (21:20), and a son cannot be two years older than his father. Most Bible scholars believe a number was miscopied somewhere in the long history of copying the Hebrew text by hand. Hebrew letters were sometimes used as numbers, and some looked very much alike. Some old Greek and Syriac copies of Chronicles read twenty or twenty-two. I take twenty-two as his true age. A copying slip like this does not touch any teaching of the faith.

"The name of his mother was Athaliah the daughter of Omri." Omri was Ahab's father, so "daughter" here means granddaughter or female descendant, as the word often does in Hebrew. She was Ahab's daughter (21:6).

22:3-4 *He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counselor to act wickedly. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD like the house of Ahab, for they were counselors to him after the death of his father, for his destruction.*

"He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counselor to act wickedly." A counselor is an adviser. A mother has great influence over her son, for good or for evil. Timothy had a godly mother and grandmother whose faith shaped him (2 Timothy 1:5). Ahaziah had Athaliah.

After his father died, the house of Ahab "were counselors to him after the death of his father, for his destruction." The young king listened to the wrong people, and it destroyed him. Whose advice do we listen to? The first psalm says the blessed man does not walk in the counsel of the wicked (Psalm 1:1). Bad counsel may sound friendly, but it leads to ruin.

22:5-6 *Also he walked in their counsel, and he went with Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel to the war against Hazael king of Syria at Ramoth-gilead; and the Arameans wounded Joram. And he returned to get himself healed in Jezreel because of the wounds with which they had wounded him at Ramah, when he fought with Hazael king of Syria. And Azariah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, for he **was** sick.*

"He walked in their counsel, and he went with Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel to the war against Hazael king of Syria at Ramoth-gilead." It is the same city where Ahab died (18:34), and the same mistake his grandfather Jehoshaphat made. Hazael had become king of Syria (2 Kings 8:15). Joram was wounded in the battle, and he went to Jezreel, Ahab's second capital, to recover.

The SLB says "Azariah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Joram" Most Hebrew copies have Azariah here, but some Hebrew copies and the old Greek and Syriac read Ahaziah, and the story makes clear it is the same king. Azariah and Ahaziah are close in Hebrew, and Azariah may be a slip in copying or another name he went by. Ahaziah went to visit his sick uncle. It was a family visit that cost him his life.

22:7 *And the downfall of Ahaziah was from God, by coming to Joram. And when he came, he went out with Joram to Jehu the son of Nimshi, whom the LORD had anointed to cut off the house of Ahab.*

"The downfall of Ahaziah was from God, by coming to Joram." The Chronicler wants us to see that this was not bad luck. God was at work. Ahaziah went to Jezreel just as God's judgment was falling on Ahab's house, and he was caught in it.

"He went out with Joram to Jehu the son of Nimshi, whom the LORD had anointed to cut off the house of Ahab." Jehu was the army commander whom Elisha's servant anointed as king over Israel, with a command to bring God's judgment on Ahab and Jezebel for their idolatry and their murders (2 Kings 9:1-10). Elijah had foretold it long before (1 Kings 21:21-24). When we join ourselves to those under God's judgment, we share in what falls on them.

22:8-9 *And it was, when Jehu was executing judgment with the house of Ahab, that he found the officials of Judah and the sons of the brothers of Ahaziah, ministering to Ahaziah, and he killed them. And he sought Ahaziah, and they captured him, and he **was** hiding himself in Samaria; and they brought him to Jehu, and they put him to death, and they buried him, for they said, "He **is** the son of Jehoshaphat, who sought the LORD with all his heart." And there was no one in the house of Ahaziah to retain strength for the kingdom.*

"When Jehu was executing judgment with the house of Ahab, that he found the officials of Judah and the sons of the brothers of Ahaziah, ministering to Ahaziah, and he killed them." These nephews and officials had come with the king. They too were caught in the judgment.

Ahaziah fled and hid "in Samaria," and was captured and brought to Jehu and put to death. Kings gives more detail: he was wounded in his chariot near Ibleam, fled to Megiddo and died there, and his servants carried him to Jerusalem to be buried (2 Kings 9:27-28). The two accounts can be

fitted together: he may have hidden in the region of Samaria, been found, wounded as he fled, and died at Megiddo. Each writer tells it briefly from his own angle.

"They buried him, for they said, He is the son of Jehoshaphat, who sought the LORD with all his heart." Ahaziah got a decent burial only because of his godly grandfather. Here "son" means grandson. A faithful life can bring blessing to a family long after it ends.

"There was no one in the house of Ahaziah to retain strength for the kingdom." His sons were still very young. No grown man of David's line was left to take the throne. That opened the door for what came next.

22:10 *And Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, and she arose and destroyed all the seed of the kingdom of the house of Judah.*

"Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, and she arose and destroyed all the seed of the kingdom of the house of Judah."

This is one of the darkest moments in the whole Old Testament. Athaliah, a grandmother, set out to kill her own grandchildren and every other heir of the royal family so that she could rule herself. The text says it in one plain sentence, and I will leave it plain. She was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, and she had learned from them how to seize power by blood.

But we need to see what was really at stake. God had promised David that his line would never be cut off, and that from his descendants would come the King who would reign forever, the Messiah. The word Messiah means anointed one, the promised King and Savior God would send. If every son of David had died that day, the promise would have failed. Behind Athaliah's cruelty stood the old enemy who had hated the promised Seed since the garden (Genesis 3:15). Many Bible teachers see the same attack again when Herod killed the boys of Bethlehem to destroy the newborn King (Matthew 2:16).

Satan cannot defeat God's plan. He could not do it through Athaliah, and he could not do it through Herod. The next verse shows how God kept His promise.

If you have suffered at the hands of someone in your own family who should have protected you, this verse may be painful to read. God saw what Athaliah did, and He did not let her have the last word. He sees you too.

22:11 *And Jehoshabeath the daughter of the king took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and she stole him from the midst of the sons of the king who were being put to death, and she put him and his nurse in the chamber of the beds. And Jehoshabeath the daughter of King Jehoram, the wife of Jehoiada the priest (for she was the sister of Ahaziah), hid him from before Athaliah, and she did not put him to death.*

"Jehoshabeath the daughter of the king took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and she stole him from the midst of the sons of the king who were being put to death." Jehoshabeath was King Jehoram's daughter and Ahaziah's sister (or half-sister), so she was the baby's aunt. Kings calls her Jehosheba (2 Kings 11:2). She was also "the wife of Jehoiada the priest."

In the middle of the killing, she took the baby and his nurse and hid them "in the chamber of the beds," a storeroom where bedding was kept. One woman's courage saved the line of David. She risked her own life to do it.

Think of how God used women like her to protect His promise. Jochebed hid baby Moses (Exodus 2:2-3). Rahab hid the spies (Joshua 2). Now Jehoshabeath hid the last son of David. God often works through people who simply do the right thing at great cost when no one else will.

22:12 *And he was with them in the house of God, hiding himself six years, and Athaliah **was** reigning over the land.*

"He was with them in the house of God, hiding himself six years." For six years the rightful king of Judah grew up in hiding in the temple, cared for by his aunt and the priest Jehoiada. Meanwhile Athaliah reigned over the land, about 841 to 835 B.C. She was the only queen who ruled Judah in her own right, and the only ruler of Judah who was not of David's line.

It must have looked as if David's house was finished. A queen from the house of Ahab who served Baal sat on the throne. But in the house of God, out of sight, the promise was alive. God's plans are often hidden for a while. When it seems that evil has won, God may be quietly keeping His promise where no one can see.

Chapter 22 Summary

After Jehoram's death the people made his youngest son Ahaziah king. His age is given as forty-two, where Kings says twenty-two, likely a copying error. His mother Athaliah, Ahab's daughter, and Ahab's family counseled him to do evil, and he went with his uncle Joram of Israel to fight Syria at Ramoth-gilead. When he visited the wounded Joram at Jezreel, God brought about his downfall: Jehu, anointed to cut off Ahab's house, killed the princes of Judah with Ahaziah and then Ahaziah himself, who was buried because he was Jehoshaphat's grandson. With no grown heir left, Athaliah destroyed the royal family of Judah and took the throne. But Jehoshabeath, Ahaziah's sister and the wife of Jehoiada the priest, rescued the infant Joash and hid him in the house of God for six years while Athaliah reigned.

Chapter 22 Study Questions

1. Why was Ahaziah, the youngest son, made king? (22:1; 21:17)

2. How do Chronicles and Kings differ on Ahaziah's age, and what is the likely reason? (22:2; 2 Kings 8:26)

3. Who were Ahaziah's counselors, and where did their counsel lead him? (22:3-5)

4. What does the Chronicler say was behind Ahaziah's downfall? (22:7)

5. Why was Ahaziah given a proper burial? (22:9)

6. What did Athaliah do when her son died, and what promise of God was in danger? (22:10; 21:7)

7. Who saved Joash, and where was he hidden? (22:11-12)

8. Ahaziah's mother was his counselor to do evil. Whose counsel shapes your decisions most, and is it leading you toward God?

9. Jehoshabeath acted with great courage when no one else did. Is there a place where God may be asking you to do the right thing at a cost?

10. For six years it looked as if David's line was finished. When have you had to trust God when His promise seemed hidden?

Chapter 23: Jehoiada Crowns Joash

Scripture

23:1-11 And in the seventh year Jehoiada strengthened himself, and he took the commanders of the hundreds, Azariah the son of Jeroham, and Ishmael the son of Jehohanan, and Azariah the son of Obed, and Maaseiah the son of Adaiah, and Elishaphat the son of Zichri, with him into the covenant. And they went around in Judah, and they gathered the Levites from all the cities of Judah, and the heads of the fathers of Israel, and they came to Jerusalem. And all the assembly made a covenant in the house of God with the king. And he said to them, "Look, the son of the king shall reign, just as the LORD spoke concerning the sons of David. This ***is*** the thing that you shall do: the third of you who come in ***on*** the Sabbath, of the priests and of the Levites, ***shall be*** gatekeepers of the thresholds; and the third ***shall be*** at the house of the king, and the third at the Gate of the Foundation; and all the people ***shall be*** in the courts of the house of the LORD. And let no one come ***into*** the house of the LORD except the priests and those of the Levites who minister; they shall come in, for they ***are*** holy; and all the people shall keep the charge of the LORD. And the Levites shall surround the king all around, each man ***with*** his weapons in his hand; and whoever comes into the house shall be put to death. And be with the king when he comes in and when he goes out." And the Levites and all Judah did according to all that Jehoiada the priest had commanded, and they took each man his men who were coming in ***on*** the Sabbath, with those going out ***on*** the Sabbath, for Jehoiada the priest had not dismissed the divisions. And Jehoiada the priest gave to the commanders of the hundreds the spears and the shields and the small shields which ***had belonged*** to King David, which ***were in*** the house of God. And he stationed all the people, each man ***with*** his weapon in his hand, from the right side of the house to the left side of the house, by the altar and by the house, around the king. And they brought out the son of the king, and they put on him the crown and the testimony, and they made him king; and Jehoiada and his sons anointed him, and they said, "Let the king live!"

23:12-21 And Athaliah heard the sound of the people running and praising the king, and she came to the people ***at*** the house of the LORD. And she looked, and look, the king ***was*** standing by his pillar at the entrance, and the officials and the trumpets ***were*** beside the king, and all the people of the land ***were*** rejoicing and blowing on trumpets, and the singers with the instruments of song ***were*** leading in praise. And Athaliah tore her clothes, and she said, "Conspiracy! Conspiracy!" And Jehoiada the priest brought out the commanders of the hundreds, those appointed over the army, and he said to them, "Bring her out from between the ranks, and whoever goes after her shall be put to death with the sword." For the priest had said, "You shall not put her to death ***in*** the house of the LORD." And they put hands on her, and she went to the entrance of the Gate of the Horses of the house of the king, and they put her to death there. And Jehoiada made a covenant between himself and all the people and the king, to be a people of the LORD. And all the people went ***to*** the house of the Baal, and they tore it down, and its altars and its images they broke, and Mattan the priest of the Baal they killed before the altars. And Jehoiada put the oversight of the house of the LORD in the hand of the priests the Levites, whom David had divided over the house of the LORD, to offer up the burnt offerings of the LORD as ***it is*** written in the law of Moses, with joy and with song, by the hands of David. And he stationed the gatekeepers

at the gates of the house of the LORD, and no one unclean in any matter would come in. And he took the commanders of the hundreds and the nobles and those ruling over the people and all the people of the land, and he brought the king down from the house of the LORD; and they came through the midst of the upper gate ***to*** the house of the king, and they seated the king on the throne of the kingdom. And all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet; and Athaliah they had put to death with the sword.

Chapter 23 Preview

After six years of Athaliah's rule, Jehoiada the priest acts. He makes a covenant with the army commanders, gathers the Levites and family heads from all Judah, and sets a careful plan for a Sabbath day at the temple. The boy Joash, now seven, is brought out, crowned, given the testimony and anointed, and the people shout, "Let the king live!"

Athaliah rushes in crying treason and is taken out and put to death. Jehoiada leads the people in a covenant to be the LORD's people. They tear down the temple of Baal, the priests and Levites are set back in their places to worship as David ordered, and Joash is seated on the throne. Kings tells the same story in 2 Kings 11:4-20. Chronicles adds more about the Levites and the care taken to keep the temple holy.

Chapter 23 Study

23:1 *And in the seventh year Jehoiada strengthened himself, and he took the commanders of the hundreds, Azariah the son of Jeroham, and Ishmael the son of Jehohanan, and Azariah the son of Obed, and Maaseiah the son of Adaiah, and Elishaphat the son of Zichri, with him into the covenant.*

"In the seventh year Jehoiada strengthened himself." For six years he had protected the hidden prince. Now was the time to act. He "strengthened himself," meaning he took courage and made himself ready. He brought five "commanders of the hundreds" into "the covenant," a sworn agreement to restore the rightful king. Their names are listed because they were real men who risked their lives for David's line.

Jehoiada was a priest, and he had waited for God's time. There is a time to wait and a time to act (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Godly courage is not reckless. It prays, waits and plans, and then it moves.

23:2-3 *And they went around in Judah, and they gathered the Levites from all the cities of Judah, and the heads of the fathers of Israel, and they came to Jerusalem. And all the assembly made a covenant in the house of God with the king. And he said to them, "Look, the son of the king shall reign, just as the LORD spoke concerning the sons of David.*

The commanders "went around in Judah, and they gathered the Levites from all the cities of Judah, and the heads of the fathers of Israel." This was not a palace plot by a few men. It was the faithful people of the nation coming together.

"All the assembly made a covenant in the house of God with the king." Then Jehoiada showed them the boy and said, "Look, the son of the king shall reign, just as the LORD spoke concerning the sons of David." This is the reason for everything that follows. Jehoiada was not acting from ambition. He was acting on God's promise. God had said a son of David would sit on the throne, and Jehoiada believed it.

23:4-7 *This **is** the thing that you shall do: the third of you who come in **on** the Sabbath, of the priests and of the Levites, **shall be** gatekeepers of the thresholds; and the third **shall be** at the house of the king, and the third at the Gate of the Foundation; and all the people **shall be** in the courts of the house of the LORD. And let no one come **into** the house of the LORD except the priests and those of the Levites who minister; they shall come in, for they **are** holy; and all the people shall keep the charge of the LORD. And the Levites shall surround the king all around, each man **with** his weapons in his hand; and whoever comes into the house shall be put to death. And be with the king when he comes in and when he goes out."*

The plan was set for the Sabbath, the seventh day of rest and worship, when the priests and Levites changed shifts at the temple. That meant twice the usual number of men would be there without drawing attention. Jehoiada divided them into thirds: one third at the thresholds of the temple, one third at the king's house, one third "at the Gate of the Foundation," and the people in the courts.

He gave a careful command: "let no one come into the house of the LORD except the priests and those of the Levites who minister; they shall come in, for they are holy." Even in a crisis, Jehoiada would not break God's law about who could enter the holy place. Kings tells us that the guards helped (2 Kings 11:4-8). Chronicles stresses that the Levites stood closest to the king and that the temple stayed holy.

"The Levites shall surround the king all around, each man with his weapons in his hand." The boy's life was the life of David's line. They would guard him with their own.

23:8-10 *And the Levites and all Judah did according to all that Jehoiada the priest had commanded, and they took each man his men who were coming in **on** the Sabbath, with those going out **on** the Sabbath, for Jehoiada the priest had not dismissed the divisions. And Jehoiada the priest gave to the commanders of the hundreds the spears and the shields and the small shields which **had belonged** to King David, which **were in** the house of God. And he stationed all the people, each man **with** his weapon in his hand, from the right side of the house to the left side of the house, by the altar and by the house, around the king.*

"The Levites and all Judah did according to all that Jehoiada the priest had commanded." Every man took his place, and Jehoiada kept both the incoming and outgoing shifts on duty, "for Jehoiada the priest had not dismissed the divisions."

Then he gave the commanders "the spears and the shields and the small shields which had belonged to King David, which were in the house of God." There is something fitting in this. King David's own weapons were used to protect David's son. The men stood in a line from one side of the temple to the other, around the altar and the house, with the boy king in the middle.

23:11 *And they brought out the son of the king, and they put on him the crown and the testimony, and they made him king; and Jehoiada and his sons anointed him, and they said, "Let the king live!"*

"They brought out the son of the king, and they put on him the crown and the testimony, and they made him king." The testimony was most likely a copy of God's law, or part of it. Moses commanded that every king should have a copy of the law and read it all his life (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). Joash was given both a crown and God's Word. A king needs both: authority, and the law that tells him how to use it.

"Jehoiada and his sons anointed him," pouring oil on his head as a sign that God had set him apart as king. The word Messiah comes from this Hebrew word for anoint. Then the people shouted, "Let the king live!"

A seven-year-old boy, hidden in God's house, came out to take the throne of David. It is a small picture of the greater Son of David, who was also hidden for a time and then revealed as King. One day every knee will bow to Him (Philippians 2:9-11).

23:12-13 *And Athaliah heard the sound of the people running and praising the king, and she came to the people **at** the house of the LORD. And she looked, and look, the king **was** standing by his pillar at the entrance, and the officials and the trumpets **were** beside the king, and all the people of the land **were** rejoicing and blowing on trumpets, and the singers with the instruments of song **were** leading in praise. And Athaliah tore her clothes, and she said, "Conspiracy! Conspiracy!"*

"Athaliah heard the sound of the people running and praising the king, and she came to the people at the house of the LORD." She came without guards, perhaps thinking she could stop it by her own authority.

What she saw stopped her. "The king was standing by his pillar at the entrance," the place where kings stood on public occasions. The officials and trumpeters were beside him, "all the people of the land were rejoicing and blowing on trumpets, and the singers with the instruments of song were leading in praise."

"Athaliah tore her clothes, and she said, Conspiracy! Conspiracy!" She who had seized the throne by murder now cried treason. The irony is plain. The real conspiracy had been hers six years before.

23:14-15 *And Jehoiada the priest brought out the commanders of the hundreds, those appointed over the army, and he said to them, "Bring her out from between the ranks, and whoever goes after her shall be put to death with the sword." For the priest had said, "You shall not put her to death **in** the house of the LORD." And they put hands on her, and she went to the entrance of the Gate of the Horses of the house of the king, and they put her to death there.*

Jehoiada gave the order to the commanders: "Bring her out from between the ranks, and whoever goes after her shall be put to death with the sword." He also said, "You shall not put her to death in the house of the LORD." Even now he would not have blood shed in God's house.

"They put hands on her, and she went to the entrance of the Gate of the Horses of the house of the king, and they put her to death there." This was justice under Israel's law for a murderer and usurper (Genesis 9:6; Numbers 35:31). She had killed the royal heirs, and she worshiped Baal and led the nation into it. I do not take her death as a pattern for anyone to act on today. It was the lawful sentence of a nation under God's law, carried out on a ruler who had shed innocent blood. Scripture tells it in a sentence, without delight, and so should we.

23:16 *And Jehoiada made a covenant between himself and all the people and the king, to be a people of the LORD.*

"Jehoiada made a covenant between himself and all the people and the king, to be a people of the LORD." This covenant was the heart of the whole event. Putting the right king on the throne was not enough. The people had to recommit themselves to God. Kings mentions a covenant between the LORD and the king and people (2 Kings 11:17). Chronicles makes the point that they bound themselves to be the LORD's people.

Real renewal always comes back to this. It is not only about putting the right leaders in place. It is about God's people giving themselves to Him again.

23:17 *And all the people went **to** the house of the Baal, and they tore it down, and its altars and its images they broke, and Mattan the priest of the Baal they killed before the altars.*

"All the people went to the house of the Baal, and they tore it down." Baal was the Canaanite storm and fertility god whom Ahab and Jezebel had promoted, and Athaliah had brought his worship to Jerusalem, even taking holy things from the LORD's house for it (24:7). The people broke its altars and images, "and Mattan the priest of the Baal they killed before the altars." Under the Law of Moses, a man who led God's people to worship other gods was to die (Deuteronomy 13:6-10). This was Israel's national law under the covenant, not a pattern for the church, whose weapons are not of the flesh (2 Corinthians 10:4).

23:18-19 *And Jehoiada put the oversight of the house of the LORD in the hand of the priests the Levites, whom David had divided over the house of the LORD, to offer up the burnt offerings of the LORD as **it is** written in the law of Moses, with joy and with song, by the hands of David. And he stationed the gatekeepers at the gates of the house of the LORD, and no one unclean in any matter would come in.*

Jehoiada put "the oversight of the house of the LORD in the hand of the priests the Levites, whom David had divided over the house of the LORD." David had organized the priests and Levites into divisions (1 Chronicles 23-26). Now that order was restored. They offered "the burnt offerings of the LORD as it is written in the law of Moses, with joy and with song." A burnt offering was a sacrifice wholly burned on the altar as a gift to God, a picture of full surrender and of atonement. Atonement means the covering of sin so a sinner can be made right with God.

Worship was put back on the foundation of God's Word: the law of Moses for the sacrifices and the order of David for the music. Jehoiada did not invent a new kind of worship. He restored what God had given.

He also set gatekeepers so that "no one unclean in any matter would come in." To be unclean meant being in a state, by contact with death, disease or other things, that kept a person from approaching God's house until cleansed. God's house was to be kept holy.

23:20-21 *And he took the commanders of the hundreds and the nobles and those ruling over the people and all the people of the land, and he brought the king down from the house of the LORD; and they came through the midst of the upper gate* ***to*** *the house of the king, and they seated the king on the throne of the kingdom. And all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet; and Athaliah they had put to death with the sword.*

Then the procession went from the temple to the palace "through the midst of the upper gate," and "they seated the king on the throne of the kingdom." The son of David sat on David's throne again.

"All the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet." The word quiet means peaceful, at rest. Six years of fear were over. "And Athaliah they had put to death with the sword."

When God's rightful King takes His throne, there is joy and peace. That will be true in a far greater way when Jesus, the Son of David, takes His throne in Jerusalem and reigns over all the earth (Isaiah 9:6-7; Revelation 20:4-6).

Chapter 23 Summary

In the seventh year Jehoiada the priest made a covenant with five army commanders, who gathered the Levites and family heads from all Judah to Jerusalem. The whole assembly made a covenant with the boy king, and Jehoiada declared that the son of the king would reign as the LORD had promised David's sons. He set the priests and Levites in three groups on the Sabbath, kept everyone but the holy ministers out of the temple, armed the commanders with King David's weapons, and surrounded the king. Joash was brought out, crowned, given the testimony and anointed, and the people shouted, "Let the king live!" Athaliah came crying treason and was taken out of the temple and put to death at the Horse Gate. Jehoiada led the people in a covenant to be the LORD's people, and they tore down the temple of Baal and killed its priest. He restored the priests and Levites to their work according to the law of Moses and the order of David, set gatekeepers to keep the temple clean, and seated Joash on the throne. The people rejoiced, and the city was quiet.

Chapter 23 Study Questions

1. What did Jehoiada do in the seventh year, and whom did he bring into the covenant? (23:1-2)

2. On what promise did Jehoiada base the crowning of Joash? (23:3)

3. Why did Jehoiada insist that only priests and Levites enter the house of the LORD? (23:6)

4. What two things were put on Joash when he was made king, and why are both important? (23:11; Deuteronomy 17:18-20)

5. What did Athaliah say when she saw the new king, and why is it ironic? (23:13)

6. What covenant did Jehoiada make, and what did the people do right after? (23:16-17)

7. On what foundations did Jehoiada restore the temple worship? (23:18)

8. Jehoiada waited six years, then acted with courage. Is there something you are waiting on God for? How do you know when to wait and when to act?

9. Joash received both a crown and the testimony. How are you letting God's Word guide the authority or influence He has given you?

10. The people renewed their covenant to be the LORD's people. What would it look like for you to give yourself to God again this week?

Chapter 24: Joash Repairs the Temple and Turns Away

Scripture

24:1-14 Joash ***was*** a son of seven years when he became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother ***was*** Zibiah from Beersheba. And Joash did what ***was*** right in the eyes of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest. And Jehoiada took for him two wives, and he fathered sons and daughters. And it was after this ***that*** it was in the heart of Joash to renew the house of the LORD. And he gathered the priests and the Levites, and he said to them, "Go out to the cities of Judah, and gather money from all Israel to strengthen the house of your God, as is enough year by year; and you, you shall hurry in the matter." And the Levites did not hurry. And the king called for Jehoiada the head, and he said to him, "Why have you not required of the Levites to bring from Judah and from Jerusalem the levy of Moses the servant of the LORD and of the assembly of Israel, for the tent of the testimony? For Athaliah, the wicked ***woman***, her sons had broken into the house of God, and also all the holy things of the house of the LORD they had used for the Baals." And the king spoke, and they made one chest, and they put it at the gate of the house of the LORD, outside. And they gave a proclamation in Judah and in Jerusalem to bring to the LORD the levy of Moses the servant of God ***laid*** on Israel in the wilderness. And all the officials and all the people rejoiced, and they brought ***it*** and threw ***it*** into the chest until ***it was*** finished. And it was, at the time ***when*** one brought the chest to the oversight of the king by the hand of the Levites, and when they saw that the money was much, then the scribe of the king and the officer of the head priest came, and they emptied the chest, and they took it and returned it to its place. Thus they did day by day, and they gathered money in abundance. And the king and Jehoiada gave it to the doer of the work of the service of the house of the LORD, and they were hiring stonecutters and craftsmen to renew the house of the LORD, and also craftsmen of iron and bronze to strengthen the house of the LORD. And the doers of the work worked, and the restoration went up for the work by their hand, and they set up the house of God according to its measurement, and they strengthened it. And when they had finished, they brought the rest of the money before the king and Jehoiada, and he made it ***into*** articles for the house of the LORD, articles of service and of offering up, and pans, and articles of gold and silver. And they were offering up burnt offerings in the house of the LORD continually all the days of Jehoiada.

24:15-27 And Jehoiada grew old and was satisfied ***with*** days, and he died; ***he was*** a son of a hundred and thirty years at his death. And they buried him in the city of David with the kings, for he had done good in Israel, and toward God and His house. And after the death of Jehoiada the officials of Judah came, and they bowed down to the king; then the king listened to them. And they forsook the house of the LORD, the God of their fathers, and they served the Asherim and the idols; and wrath came on Judah and Jerusalem for this guilt of theirs. And He sent prophets among them to bring them back to the LORD, and they testified against them, and they did not give ear. And the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people, and he said to them, "Thus says God: 'Why are you transgressing the commandments of the LORD? And you will not prosper. For you have forsaken the LORD, and He has forsaken you.'" And they conspired against him, and they stoned him ***with*** stones at the command of the king in the courtyard of the house of the LORD. And Joash the king did not remember the

steadfast love which Jehoiada his father had done with him, and he killed his son. And when he was dying he said, "May the LORD see and require ***it***!" And it was at the turn of the year ***that*** the army of Syria came up against him, and they came to Judah and Jerusalem, and they destroyed all the officials of the people from among the people, and all their spoil they sent to the king of Damascus. For with few men the army of Syria came, and the LORD gave into their hand a very great army, because they had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers. And with Joash they executed judgments. And when they went from him (for they left him in great sicknesses), his servants conspired against him for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest, and they killed him on his bed, and he died. And they buried him in the city of David, and they did not bury him in the graves of the kings. And these ***are*** those who conspired against him: Zabad the son of Shimeath the Ammonite ***woman***, and Jehozabad the son of Shimrith the Moabite ***woman***. And ***as for*** his sons, ***and how*** great the oracle against him became, and the founding of the house of God, look, they are written in the commentary of the book of the kings. And Amaziah his son reigned in his place.

Chapter 24 Preview

Joash becomes king at seven and reigns forty years. As long as Jehoiada the priest lives, Joash does what is right. He sets his heart on repairing the temple that Athaliah's sons had broken into, and when the Levites are slow, he sets a chest at the temple gate. The people give gladly, and the house of God is restored.

Then Jehoiada dies at a great age and is buried among the kings. Almost at once the officials of Judah turn the king toward idols. God sends prophets, and finally Jehoiada's own son Zechariah stands up and warns them. At the king's command, they stone him in the temple courtyard. Jesus would later speak of this murder. Within a year the Syrians invade, and Joash is killed by his own servants. Kings tells his reign in 2 Kings 11:21 to 12:21, without the story of Zechariah.

Chapter 24 Study

24:1-3 *Joash **was** a son of seven years when he became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother **was** Zibiah from Beersheba. And Joash did what **was** right in the eyes of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest. And Jehoiada took for him two wives, and he fathered sons and daughters.*

"Joash was a son of seven years when he became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem." That is about 835 to 796 B.C. His mother "Zibiah" came from Beersheba in the far south of Judah.

"Joash did what was right in the eyes of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest." Those last words are a warning sign from the start. Joash's goodness lasted as long as Jehoiada lived. Kings says the same: he did right all his days in which Jehoiada instructed him (2 Kings 12:2).

"Jehoiada took for him two wives, and he fathered sons and daughters." The royal family had almost been wiped out (22:10). Now the line of David would grow again. Jehoiada acted as a father to the young king, even arranging his marriages.

24:4-7 *And it was after this **that** it was in the heart of Joash to renew the house of the LORD. And he gathered the priests and the Levites, and he said to them, "Go out to the cities of Judah, and gather money from all Israel to strengthen the house of your God, as is enough year by year; and you, you shall hurry in the matter." And the Levites did not hurry. And the king called for Jehoiada the head, and he said to him, "Why have you not required of the Levites to bring from Judah and from Jerusalem the levy of Moses the servant of the LORD and of the assembly of Israel, for the tent of the testimony? For Athaliah, the wicked **woman**, her sons had broken into the house of God, and also all the holy things of the house of the LORD they had used for the Baals."*

"It was in the heart of Joash to renew the house of the LORD." This was a good desire. The king sent the priests and Levites out to gather money "from all Israel to strengthen the house of your God," and told them to hurry. "And the Levites did not hurry." Scripture does not say why. Perhaps they doubted the plan, or perhaps they were used to the money going to their own needs.

The king called Jehoiada to account. Why had the Levites not collected "the levy of Moses the servant of the LORD"? This was the tax Moses set for the tabernacle, half a shekel for every man counted (Exodus 30:12-16). The tabernacle was the tent where God met with Israel in the wilderness, before the temple was built, and here it is called "the tent of the testimony."

The repair was badly needed. "Athaliah, the wicked woman, her sons had broken into the house of God, and also all the holy things of the house of the LORD they had used for the Baals." Her followers had looted God's house to furnish Baal's. The young king was undoing the damage of the wicked queen.

24:8-11 *And the king spoke, and they made one chest, and they put it at the gate of the house of the LORD, outside. And they gave a proclamation in Judah and in Jerusalem to bring to the LORD the levy of Moses the servant of God **laid** on Israel in the wilderness. And all the officials and all the people rejoiced, and they brought **it** and threw **it** into the chest until **it was** finished. And it was, at the time **when** one brought the chest to the oversight of the king by the hand of the Levites, and when they saw that the money was much, then the scribe of the king and the officer of the head priest came, and they emptied the chest, and they took it and returned it to its place. Thus they did day by day, and they gathered money in abundance.*

So the king had "one chest" made and put "at the gate of the house of the LORD, outside." A proclamation went out to bring the levy of Moses. And the response was wonderful: "all the officials and all the people rejoiced, and they brought it and threw it into the chest until it was finished."

When the people saw what the money was for and that it went straight to the work, they gave with joy. It is a good lesson for God's people about giving and about handling money. Paul says God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). The system was also honest and open. When the chest was full, "the scribe of the king and the officer of the head priest came, and they emptied the chest." Two men from two offices counted it together. Paul took the same care with the gifts for Jerusalem, so that no one could blame him (2 Corinthians 8:20-21). "Thus they did day by day, and they gathered money in abundance."

24:12-14 *And the king and Jehoiada gave it to the doer of the work of the service of the house of the LORD, and they were hiring stonecutters and craftsmen to renew the house of the LORD, and also craftsmen of iron and bronze to strengthen the house of the LORD. And the doers of the work worked, and the restoration went up for the work by their hand, and they set up the house of God according to its measurement, and they strengthened it. And when they had finished, they brought the rest of the money before the king and Jehoiada, and he made it* ***into*** *articles for the house of the LORD, articles of service and of offering up, and pans, and articles of gold and silver. And they were offering up burnt offerings in the house of the LORD continually all the days of Jehoiada.*

The king and Jehoiada paid "stonecutters and craftsmen to renew the house of the LORD," along with workers in iron and bronze. The work went well, "and they set up the house of God according to its measurement, and they strengthened it." They restored it to its first design.

There was even money left over, and it was used to make new vessels of gold and silver for the temple. And "they were offering up burnt offerings in the house of the LORD continually all the days of Jehoiada." Again we read those words, "all the days of Jehoiada." The worship was faithful while the faithful priest lived.

24:15-16 *And Jehoiada grew old and was satisfied* ***with*** *days, and he died;* ***he was*** *a son of a hundred and thirty years at his death. And they buried him in the city of David with the kings, for he had done good in Israel, and toward God and His house.*

"Jehoiada grew old and was satisfied with days, and he died; he was a son of a hundred and thirty years at his death." He lived a long, full life. He had seen Jehoshaphat's reign, the evil of Jehoram and Athaliah, and the restoration of David's line.

"They buried him in the city of David with the kings, for he had done good in Israel, and toward God and His house." He was a priest, not a king, but he was given a king's burial. Compare this with Jehoram, who was not buried among the kings (21:20), and with Joash himself (24:25). God honors those who honor Him (1 Samuel 2:30). What a thing to have said of you: he did good toward God and His house.

24:17-19 *And after the death of Jehoiada the officials of Judah came, and they bowed down to the king; then the king listened to them. And they forsook the house of the LORD, the God of their fathers, and they served the Asherim and the idols; and wrath came on Judah and Jerusalem for this guilt of theirs. And He sent prophets among them to bring them back to the LORD, and they testified against them, and they did not give ear.*

"After the death of Jehoiada the officials of Judah came, and they bowed down to the king; then the king listened to them." It seems they flattered him, and he liked it. With his mentor gone, Joash listened to new voices.

"They forsook the house of the LORD, the God of their fathers, and they served the Asherim and the idols;" The same king who had repaired God's house now led the way out of it. "Wrath came on Judah and Jerusalem for this guilt of theirs."

Joash's faith seems to have been borrowed. It leaned on Jehoiada instead of being rooted in the LORD Himself. When the support was gone, it fell over. Many people grow up in the faith of a parent or pastor. That is a good gift, but at some point each of us must know God for ourselves. Is your faith your own?

Yet God did not give up on them. "He sent prophets among them to bring them back to the LORD, and they testified against them, and they did not give ear." God warned them again and again before judgment came. He is patient, not wishing any to perish (2 Peter 3:9).

24:20-22 *And the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people, and he said to them, "Thus says God: 'Why are you transgressing the commandments of the LORD? And you will not prosper. For you have forsaken the LORD, and He has forsaken you.'" And they conspired against him, and they stoned him* ***with*** *stones at the command of the king in the courtyard of the house of the LORD. And Joash the king did not remember the steadfast love which Jehoiada his father had done with him, and he killed his son. And when he was dying he said, "May the LORD see and require* ***it****!"*

"The Spirit of God clothed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest." The Spirit came on him like a garment, filling him to speak. "He stood above the people," probably on a raised place in the temple court, and he said, "Thus says God." Then came God's question: "Why are you transgressing the commandments of the LORD? And you will not prosper. For you have forsaken the LORD, and He has forsaken you."

These were the same words Azariah spoke to Asa (15:2). It was not a new message. It was the covenant God had always set before His people.

"They conspired against him, and they stoned him with stones at the command of the king in the courtyard of the house of the LORD."

This is one of the saddest verses in the book. The temple Joash had repaired became the place where he had a prophet killed. The man he had stoned was the son of the priest who had saved his life as a baby, hidden him for six years and put him on the throne. "Joash the king did not remember the steadfast love which Jehoiada his father had done with him, and he killed his son." The word steadfast love here is hesed, loyal covenant kindness. Jehoiada had shown it to Joash, and Joash repaid it with murder.

As Zechariah was dying he said, "May the LORD see and require it!" He was asking God to see this injustice and call the murderers to account. That is not a personal curse. It is a prayer that God, the Judge, would do what is right, the same cry as Abel's blood crying out from the ground (Genesis 4:10). Some readers set it beside the words of Stephen, who as he was stoned prayed, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60), and beside Jesus' prayer from the cross (Luke 23:34). Zechariah's prayer was right under the old covenant: he left vengeance to God. In Christ we are shown more still, the way of praying even for those who harm us (Matthew 5:44). Both leave judgment in God's hands.

Jesus remembered Zechariah. Speaking to the religious leaders of His day, He said that the blood of all the prophets would be required of that generation, "from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the house" (Luke 11:51). Abel was the first murder in Genesis, and Chronicles was the last book in the Hebrew Bible, so Jesus was saying, in effect, from the first page of Scripture to the last. Matthew 23:35 calls him "Zechariah, son of Berekiah." Many Bible teachers believe this is the same Zechariah, with Berekiah perhaps being an earlier ancestor or a second family name, or a reference that also brings to mind the later prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah (Zechariah 1:1). Scripture does not settle it, but the place, between the altar and the house, points clearly to this courtyard murder.

Jesus Himself was rejected by the leaders of God's people and put to death at their insistence. His blood, Hebrews tells us, "speaks better things than that of Abel" (Hebrews 12:24), because it cries not for vengeance but for forgiveness for all who will come to Him.

If you have been punished for doing what was right, or betrayed by someone you helped, God sees, and He will make it right.

24:23-24 *And it was at the turn of the year **that** the army of Syria came up against him, and they came to Judah and Jerusalem, and they destroyed all the officials of the people from among the people, and all their spoil they sent to the king of Damascus. For with few men the army of Syria came, and the LORD gave into their hand a very great army, because they had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers. And with Joash they executed judgments.*

"At the turn of the year," which means in the spring when kings went out to war, "the army of Syria came up against him." They destroyed "all the officials of the people," the very leaders who had led Joash into idolatry. Kings tells us that Joash bought the Syrians off with the temple treasures (2 Kings 12:17-18).

"For with few men the army of Syria came, and the LORD gave into their hand a very great army, because they had forsaken the LORD." Aram is the Hebrew name for Syria. When Asa and Jehoshaphat trusted God, small armies beat huge ones (14:9-12; 20:12, 22). Now it was reversed. Judah's great army fell to a small one, because God was no longer with them. "With Joash they executed judgments." Zechariah's prayer was answered.

24:25-27 *And when they went from him (for they left him in great sicknesses), his servants conspired against him for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest, and they killed him on his bed, and he died. And they buried him in the city of David, and they did not bury him in the graves of the kings. And these **are** those who conspired against him: Zabad the son of Shimeath the Ammonite **woman**, and Jehozabad the son of Shimrith the Moabite **woman**. And **as for** his sons, **and how** great the oracle against him became, and the founding of the house of God, look, they are written in the commentary of the book of the kings. And Amaziah his son reigned in his place.*

The Syrians left Joash "in great sicknesses," badly wounded. Then "his servants conspired against him for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest, and they killed him on his bed." The word sons may mean Zechariah alone, spoken of in the plural, or there may have been other sons of Jehoiada killed as well. Either way, it was Zechariah's blood that brought Joash down.

"They buried him in the city of David, and they did not bury him in the graves of the kings." The priest Jehoiada was buried with the kings. The king Joash was not.

The two conspirators are named, both sons of foreign women, one Ammonite and one Moabite. Joash's reign was written up "in the commentary of the book of the kings." Then "Amaziah his son reigned in his place."

Joash's life is a warning. He began well and ended badly. What we start with matters, but it is how we finish that tells whether our faith was our own. Paul wanted to finish his course (2 Timothy 4:7). Let us aim to do the same.

Chapter 24 Summary

Joash became king at seven and reigned forty years. He did right all the days of Jehoiada the priest, who chose wives for him. Joash set out to repair the temple that Athaliah's sons had broken into, and when the Levites were slow, he placed a chest at the temple gate for the levy of Moses. The people gave with joy, the money was counted honestly, and the temple was restored, with gold and silver vessels made from what was left. Jehoiada died at 130 and was buried with the kings. Then the officials of Judah won the king over, and they forsook the temple to serve idols. God sent prophets, and Zechariah son of Jehoiada warned them by the Spirit of God. At the king's command they stoned him in the temple court, and he prayed that the LORD would see and require it. Jesus later spoke of his blood. Within a year a small Syrian army defeated Judah's great army, and Joash, badly wounded, was killed in his bed by his servants for the blood of Jehoiada's son. He was not buried in the graves of the kings.

Chapter 24 Study Questions

1. How long did Joash do what was right, and what does that phrase hint about his faith? (24:2)

2. Why did the temple need repair, and how did Joash raise the money? (24:7-9)

3. How did the people respond to the chest, and how was the money handled? (24:10-11)

4. Why was Jehoiada buried among the kings? (24:16)

5. What happened after Jehoiada died? (24:17-18)

6. What did Zechariah say, and how did Joash repay Jehoiada's kindness? (24:20-22)

7. How did Jesus refer to Zechariah's death? (Luke 11:51)

8. Joash's faith seems to have leaned on Jehoiada. Is your faith your own, or is it leaning on someone else?

9. The officials flattered the king and led him astray. Whose voices have the most influence on you right now?

10. Joash started well and finished badly. What can you do now to help yourself finish well? (2 Timothy 4:7)

Chapter 25: Amaziah's Divided Heart

Scripture

25:1-13 Amaziah became king ***as*** a son of twenty-five years, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother ***was*** Jehoaddan from Jerusalem. And he did what ***was*** right in the eyes of the LORD, only not with a complete heart. And it was, when the kingdom was strong on him, ***that*** he killed his servants who had struck down the king his father. And their sons he did not put to death, for ***he did*** according to what is written in the law, in the book of Moses, which the LORD commanded, saying, "Fathers shall not die for sons, and sons shall not die for fathers; but each man shall die for his own sin." And Amaziah gathered Judah, and he appointed them by the house of fathers, as commanders of the thousands and as commanders of the hundreds, for all Judah and Benjamin. And he counted them from a son of twenty years and upward, and he found them ***to be*** three hundred thousand chosen ***men***, going out to war, handling spear and large shield. And he hired from Israel a hundred thousand mighty men of valor for approximately 7,500 pounds (a hundred talents) of silver. And a man of God came to him, saying, "O king, do not let the army of Israel go with you, for the LORD ***is*** not with Israel, ***with*** all the sons of Ephraim. But ***if*** you go, act, be strong for the battle, God will make you stumble before the enemy; for there is strength in God to help and to make stumble." And Amaziah said to the man of God, "And what ***is there*** to do about the approximately 7,500 pounds (the hundred talents) which I have given to the troop of Israel?" And the man of God said, "The LORD has ***the means*** to give you much more than this." And Amaziah separated them, the troop which had come to him from Ephraim, to go to their place. And their anger burned exceedingly against Judah, and they returned to their place in the heat of anger. And Amaziah strengthened himself, and he led out his people, and he went ***to*** the Valley of Salt, and he struck down the sons of Seir, ten thousand. And ten thousand alive the sons of Judah took captive, and they brought them to the top of the cliff, and they threw them from the top of the cliff, and all of them were split open. And the sons of the troop whom Amaziah had sent back from going with him to the battle made a raid on the cities of Judah, from Samaria as far as Beth-horon, and they struck down of them three thousand, and they plundered much plunder.

25:14-28 And it was after Amaziah came from striking down the Edomites ***that*** he brought the gods of the sons of Seir, and he set them up for himself as gods, and before them he bowed down, and to them he burned incense. And the anger of the LORD burned against Amaziah, and He sent to him a prophet, and he said to him, "Why have you sought the gods of the people, who did not deliver their ***own*** people from your hand?" And it was, as he was speaking to him, ***that*** he said to him, "Have we made you a counselor to the king? Stop! Why should they strike you down?" And the prophet stopped, and he said, "I know that God has counseled to destroy you, because you have done this and have not listened to my counsel." And Amaziah king of Judah took counsel, and he sent to Joash the son of Jehoahaz the son of Jehu king of Israel, saying, "Come, let us look one another in the face." And Joash king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, "The thornbush that ***was*** in the Lebanon sent to the cedar that ***was*** in the Lebanon, saying, 'Give your daughter to my son as a wife.' And the living thing of the field that ***was*** in the Lebanon passed by, and it trampled the thornbush. You have said, 'Look, you have struck down Edom,' and your heart

has lifted you up to glorify ***yourself***. Now stay in your house. Why should you stir up calamity, and fall, you and Judah with you?" And Amaziah did not listen, for it ***was*** from God, in order to give them into ***the*** hand ***of their enemies***, because they had sought the gods of Edom. And Joash king of Israel went up, and they looked one another in the face, he and Amaziah king of Judah, at Beth-shemesh, which ***belongs*** to Judah. And Judah was struck down before Israel, and they fled, each man to his tents. And Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Joash, the son of Jehoahaz, Joash king of Israel captured at Beth-shemesh, and he brought him ***to*** Jerusalem, and he broke down the wall of Jerusalem from the Gate of Ephraim to the Gate of the Corner, approximately 600 feet (four hundred cubits). And ***he took*** all the gold and the silver and all the articles that were found in the house of God with Obed-edom, and the treasures of the house of the king, and the hostages, and he returned ***to*** Samaria. And Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah lived after the death of Joash the son of Jehoahaz king of Israel fifteen years. And the rest of the matters of Amaziah, the first and the last, look, are they not written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel? And from the time that Amaziah turned aside from after the LORD, they conspired a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish; and they sent after him to Lachish, and they put him to death there. And they carried him on the horses, and they buried him with his fathers in the city of Judah.

Chapter 25 Preview

Amaziah son of Joash does what is right, "only not with a complete heart." That one phrase explains his whole life. He punishes his father's murderers but obeys the Law by sparing their children. He hires an army from Israel, and when a man of God warns him, he sends them home and loses his money, trusting God to make it up. God gives him victory over Edom.

Then, unbelievably, he brings home the gods of the people he has just defeated and bows down to them. He silences the prophet who rebukes him, picks a needless fight with Joash king of Israel, and is crushed. Jerusalem's wall is broken and the temple robbed, and in the end Amaziah is killed by conspirators. Kings tells his reign in 2 Kings 14:1-20.

Chapter 25 Study

25:1-2 *Amaziah became king **as** a son of twenty-five years, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother **was** Jehoaddan from Jerusalem. And he did what **was** right in the eyes of the LORD, only not with a complete heart.*

"Amaziah became king as a son of twenty-five years, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem." On the dates used in this study, that is about 796 to 767 B.C.

"He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, only not with a complete heart." A complete heart is a whole heart, undivided, wholly given to God. Amaziah's heart was split. He did many right things, but part of him held back. Kings says he did right, "only not like David his father" (2 Kings 14:3).

Jesus said no one can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24), and James says a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways (James 1:8). Amaziah's story shows what that looks like in real life. A divided heart can do right for a while, but sooner or later it will turn.

25:3-4 *And it was, when the kingdom was strong on him, **that** he killed his servants who had struck down the king his father. And their sons he did not put to death, for **he did** according to what is written in the law, in the book of Moses, which the LORD commanded, saying, "Fathers shall not die for sons, and sons shall not die for fathers; but each man shall die for his own sin."*

"When the kingdom was strong on him, that he killed his servants who had struck down the king his father." The men who murdered Joash (24:25-26) were brought to justice.

"And their sons he did not put to death." In the ancient world, a king would often wipe out a traitor's whole family. Amaziah did not, because he followed "the law, in the book of Moses," which said, "Fathers shall not die for sons, and sons shall not die for fathers; but each man shall die for his own sin" (25:4, quoting Deuteronomy 24:16). Ezekiel teaches the same truth (Ezekiel 18:20). Each person answers to God for his own sin. This was a good moment for Amaziah. He let God's Word limit his anger.

25:5-6 *And Amaziah gathered Judah, and he appointed them by the house of fathers, as commanders of the thousands and as commanders of the hundreds, for all Judah and Benjamin. And he counted them from a son of twenty years and upward, and he found them **to be** three hundred thousand chosen **men**, going out to war, handling spear and large shield. And he hired from Israel a hundred thousand mighty men of valor for approximately 7,500 pounds (a hundred talents) of silver.*

Amaziah counted the men of Judah and Benjamin twenty years old and up, and found 300,000 "chosen men, going out to war." That was far fewer than Jehoshaphat's army (17:14-19). Judah had been weakened by the years of Jehoram, Athaliah and Joash. These army numbers are large, and I take them as written. Some scholars think the Hebrew word for thousand can also mean a military unit.

So Amaziah hired "from Israel a hundred thousand mighty men of valor" for a hundred talents of silver. A talent was a large weight, about 75 pounds, so this was nearly four tons of silver. He was planning a war on Edom and wanted more men.

25:7-8 *And a man of God came to him, saying, "O king, do not let the army of Israel go with you, for the LORD **is** not with Israel, **with** all the sons of Ephraim. But **if** you go, act, be strong for the battle, God will make you stumble before the enemy; for there is strength in God to help and to make stumble."*

"A man of God came to him, saying, O king, do not let the army of Israel go with you, for the LORD is not with Israel." Israel in the north had turned away from God and worshiped Jeroboam's golden calves. To join with them was to lean on an army God was not with. Jehoshaphat had learned this the hard way (19:2; 20:37).

The man of God added, "there is strength in God to help and to make stumble." Victory does not depend on numbers. It depends on God. If Amaziah went with Israel's army, even if he were brave and strong, God would make him fall.

25:9-10 *And Amaziah said to the man of God, "And what **is there** to do about the approximately 7,500 pounds (the hundred talents) which I have given to the troop of Israel?" And the man of God said, "The LORD has **the means** to give you much more than this." And Amaziah separated them, the troop which had come to him from Ephraim, to go to their place. And their anger burned exceedingly against Judah, and they returned to their place in the heat of anger.*

Amaziah's first question was about money: "And what is there to do about the approximately 7,500 pounds (the hundred talents) which I have given to the troop of Israel?" It is an honest, human question. He had already paid.

The man of God's answer is one to remember: "The LORD has the means to give you much more than this." God is never in debt to anyone. What we give up to obey Him, He can repay many times over. Jesus promised the same to those who leave things behind for His sake (Mark 10:29-30). Have you ever held back from obeying God because of what it would cost you? This verse is for you.

To his credit, Amaziah obeyed. He sent the hired soldiers home. They were furious and went home "in the heat of anger." They had lost their chance at plunder, and they took it as an insult.

25:11-12 *And Amaziah strengthened himself, and he led out his people, and he went **to** the Valley of Salt, and he struck down the sons of Seir, ten thousand. And ten thousand alive the sons of Judah took captive, and they brought them to the top of the cliff, and they threw them from the top of the cliff, and all of them were split open.*

"Amaziah strengthened himself, and he led out his people, and he went to the Valley of Salt." This valley was south of the Dead Sea, where David had once defeated Edom (1 Chronicles 18:12). God gave Amaziah a great victory. Ten thousand Edomites died in battle.

Then comes a terrible verse. "Ten thousand alive the sons of Judah took captive, and they brought them to the top of the cliff, and they threw them from the top of the cliff, and all of them were split open."

This was a brutal act of war. The text does not say God commanded it, and it does not praise it. It simply records it. Some think the cliff was at Sela, the rock city of Edom (2 Kings 14:7). The Chronicler places it as part of what went wrong in Amaziah's divided heart. Victory from God was followed by cruelty from man, and then, in the very next verses, by idolatry. Amos later condemned Edom for its cruelty toward its brother Israel (Amos 1:11), and God judged cruelty in every nation, including His own (Amos 2:4-6). Scripture records many things it does not approve. This is one of them.

For us, the lesson is simple. Even when God gives us a victory, our own hearts can turn it into something ugly. Success can make us hard. We need to guard against cruelty, especially toward those who are beaten and helpless.

25:13 *And the sons of the troop whom Amaziah had sent back from going with him to the battle made a raid on the cities of Judah, from Samaria as far as Beth-horon, and they struck down of them three thousand, and they plundered much plunder.*

Meanwhile, the hired soldiers from Israel took out their anger on Judah. They "made a raid on the cities of Judah, from Samaria as far as Beth-horon, and they struck down of them three thousand." Beth-horon was on the northern edge of Judah's land. Amaziah's obedience in sending them home had a cost. Obedience to God does not always mean that everything goes smoothly. But the first mistake was hiring them in the first place.

25:14 *And it was after Amaziah came from striking down the Edomites **that** he brought the gods of the sons of Seir, and he set them up for himself as gods, and before them he bowed down, and to them he burned incense.*

"It was after Amaziah came from striking down the Edomites that he brought" home the gods of the Edomites, "and he set them up for himself as gods, and before them he bowed down, and to them he burned incense."

This makes no sense at all, and that is the point. The gods of Edom had just failed to protect Edom against him. Why would anyone worship gods that had just lost? Some think it was a custom of the time to honor the gods of a defeated land, or that Amaziah hoped to gain their favor. Whatever the reason, it shows the foolishness of idolatry. Sin rarely makes sense. Isaiah mocks the man who cuts down a tree, burns half for a fire and bows down to the other half (Isaiah 44:14-20).

25:15-16 *And the anger of the LORD burned against Amaziah, and He sent to him a prophet, and he said to him, "Why have you sought the gods of the people, who did not deliver their **own** people from your hand?" And it was, as he was speaking to him, **that** he said to him, "Have we made you a counselor to the king? Stop! Why should they strike you down?" And the prophet stopped, and he said, "I know that God has counseled to destroy you, because you have done this and have not listened to my counsel."*

"The anger of the LORD burned against Amaziah, and He sent to him a prophet." God did not strike first. He warned first. The prophet asked the obvious question: "Why have you sought the gods of the people, who did not deliver their own people from your hand?"

Amaziah cut him off. "Have we made you a counselor to the king? Stop! Why should they strike you down?" It was a threat. The king who had once listened to a man of God now refused to hear one.

The prophet stopped, but his last words were heavy: "I know that God has counseled to destroy you, because you have done this and have not listened to my counsel." There is a play on the word counsel. Amaziah wanted no counsel from the prophet, so he would receive God's counsel, which was judgment. When we refuse to hear God's correction, we are not escaping it. We are choosing a harder way to learn.

25:17-19 *And Amaziah king of Judah took counsel, and he sent to Joash the son of Jehoahaz the son of Jehu king of Israel, saying, "Come, let us look one another in the face." And Joash king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, "The thornbush that **was** in the Lebanon sent to the cedar that **was** in the Lebanon, saying, 'Give your daughter to my son as a wife.' And the living thing of the field that **was** in the Lebanon passed by, and it trampled the thornbush. You have said, 'Look, you have struck down Edom,' and your heart has lifted you up to glorify **yourself**. Now stay in your house. Why should you stir up calamity, and fall, you and Judah with you?"*

"Amaziah king of Judah took counsel," but not with God. Proud after his victory over Edom, he sent a challenge to Joash king of Israel: "Come, let us look one another in the face." It was a call to battle. Perhaps he was angry about the raid in verse 13.

Joash answered with a story. A thornbush in Lebanon asked a great cedar for its daughter in marriage, as if they were equals. Then a wild animal passed by and trampled the thornbush. Amaziah was the thornbush, a small thing that thought it was big. Joash was the cedar.

Then Joash spoke plainly: "your heart has lifted you up to glorify yourself. Now stay in your house. Why should you stir up calamity, and fall, you and Judah with you?" Strangely, a king of Israel who did not follow the LORD gave Amaziah better advice than he gave himself. Pride had blinded him. "Before breaking is pride, and before stumbling, haughtiness of spirit" (Proverbs 16:18).

25:20-22 *And Amaziah did not listen, for it **was** from God, in order to give them into **the** hand **of their enemies**, because they had sought the gods of Edom. And Joash king of Israel went up, and they looked one another in the face, he and Amaziah king of Judah, at Beth-shemesh, which **belongs** to Judah. And Judah was struck down before Israel, and they fled, each man to his tents.*

"Amaziah did not listen, for it was from God, in order to give them into the hand of their enemies, because they had sought the gods of Edom." This is what the prophet said in verse 16. God was letting Amaziah's pride carry him to the judgment he had chosen. Amaziah still made his own choice. God used that choice to bring about His judgment.

The two kings met at "Beth-shemesh, which belongs to Judah," a town west of Jerusalem. "Judah was struck down before Israel, and they fled, each man to his tents."

25:23-24 *And Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Joash, the son of Jehoahaz, Joash king of Israel captured at Beth-shemesh, and he brought him **to** Jerusalem, and he broke down the wall of Jerusalem from the Gate of Ephraim to the Gate of the Corner, approximately 600 feet (four hundred cubits). And **he took** all the gold and the silver and all the articles that were found in the house of God with Obed-edom, and the treasures of the house of the king, and the hostages, and he returned **to** Samaria.*

Joash captured Amaziah and brought him to Jerusalem. He "broke down the wall of Jerusalem" for about six hundred feet, from the Ephraim Gate on the north side to the Corner Gate. That left the city open on the side facing Israel.

He took "all the gold and the silver and all the articles that were found in the house of God with Obed-edom." Obed-edom's family were gatekeepers in charge of the storehouses (1 Chronicles 26:15). He also took the palace treasures and hostages, and went home to Samaria. The man who bowed to Edom's gods saw God's house robbed.

25:25-28 *And Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah lived after the death of Joash the son of Jehoahaz king of Israel fifteen years. And the rest of the matters of Amaziah, the first and the last, look, are they not written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel? And from the time that Amaziah turned aside from after the LORD, they conspired a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish; and they sent after him to Lachish, and they put him to death there. And they carried him on the horses, and they buried him with his fathers in the city of Judah.*

Amaziah lived fifteen years after Joash of Israel died. On the dates used here, Joash died about 782 B.C. and Amaziah about 767 B.C. His son Uzziah seems to have ruled with him for many of those years.

"From the time that Amaziah turned aside from after the LORD, they conspired a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem." The Chronicler links the plot to the day he turned from God. He fled to Lachish, a fortified city southwest of Jerusalem, "and they put him to death there." They brought his body back on horses and buried him "with his fathers in the city of Judah," that is, the city of David (2 Kings 14:20).

Amaziah's life began with a divided heart and ended in ruin. He obeyed God when it cost him money, and he refused God when it cost him his pride. Which is harder for you to give up?

Chapter 25 Summary

Amaziah reigned twenty-nine years and did right, but not with a complete heart. He executed his father's murderers but spared their sons as the Law of Moses commanded. He counted 300,000 men of Judah and hired 100,000 from Israel for a hundred talents, but when a man of God warned him that the LORD was not with Israel, he sent them home, trusting God to give him more than he lost. He defeated Edom in the Valley of Salt, and ten thousand captives were thrown from a cliff. The dismissed soldiers raided Judah. Then Amaziah set up the gods of Edom and worshiped them, and when a prophet rebuked him, he silenced him. Proud, he challenged Joash of Israel, who warned him with the parable of the thornbush and the cedar. Amaziah would not listen, because God had determined to judge him. Judah was defeated at Beth-shemesh, Amaziah was captured, Jerusalem's wall was broken and the temple and palace robbed. Fifteen years later, conspirators killed him at Lachish.

Chapter 25 Study Questions

1. What phrase describes Amaziah's heart, and what does it mean? (25:2)

2. Why did Amaziah spare the sons of his father's murderers? (25:4; Deuteronomy 24:16)

3. Why did the man of God tell Amaziah to send the army of Israel home? (25:7-8)

4. What was Amaziah worried about, and how did the man of God answer? (25:9)

5. What did Amaziah do after defeating Edom that made no sense? (25:14)

6. How did Amaziah answer the prophet who rebuked him, and what did the prophet say would happen? (25:16)

7. What did Joash's parable of the thornbush and the cedar mean? (25:18-19)

8. Is your heart "complete" toward God, or are there parts of your life you are holding back from Him?

9. "The LORD has the means to give you much more than this." Is there something you are hesitating to obey God about because of what it might cost?

10. Amaziah obeyed God when it cost money but not when it cost pride. Which is harder for you to give up, and why?

Chapter 26: Uzziah's Strength and Pride

Scripture

26:1-15 And all the people of Judah took Uzziah, and he ***was*** a son of sixteen years, and they made him king in place of his father Amaziah. He built Eloth and restored it to Judah after the king lay down with his fathers. Uzziah ***was*** a son of sixteen years when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother ***was*** Jecoliah from Jerusalem. And he did what ***was*** right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Amaziah his father had done. And he was seeking God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the seeing of God; and in the days ***that*** he sought the LORD, God made him prosper. And he went out and fought against the Philistines, and he broke down the wall of Gath and the wall of Jabneh and the wall of Ashdod; and he built cities in ***the region of*** Ashdod and among the Philistines. And God helped him against the Philistines and against the Arabs who were dwelling in Gurbaal, and the Meunites. And the Ammonites gave tribute to Uzziah, and his name went as far as the entrance of Egypt, for he displayed strength to the highest ***degree***. And Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the Gate of the Corner and at the Gate of the Valley and at the Angle, and he strengthened them. And he built towers in the wilderness, and he hewed many cisterns, for he had much livestock, both in the Shephelah and in the plain, ***and*** farmers and vinedressers in the mountains and in the fruitful fields, for he was a lover of the ground. And Uzziah had a force doing battle, going out ***to*** war by troops, by the number of their muster by the hand of Jeiel the scribe and Maaseiah the officer, under the hand of Hananiah, one of the officials of the king. The whole number of the heads of the fathers, of the mighty men of valor, ***was*** two thousand six hundred. And under their hand ***was*** a force of war, three hundred and seven thousand five hundred, doing battle with strength of valor, to help the king against the enemy. And Uzziah prepared for them, for all the army, shields and spears and helmets and coats of armor and bows, and stones for slinging. And he made in Jerusalem devices, the invention of an inventor, to be on the towers and on the corners, to shoot with arrows and with great stones. And his name went out far, for he was marvelously helped until he was strong.

26:16-23 And when he was strong, his heart was lifted up until ***he*** acted corruptly, and he acted unfaithfully against the LORD his God, and he went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him eighty priests of the LORD, sons of valor. And they stood against Uzziah the king, and they said to him, "***It is*** not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Go out from the sanctuary, for you have acted unfaithfully, and ***it will*** not ***be*** for glory to you from the LORD God." And Uzziah was enraged, and in his hand ***was*** a censer to burn incense; and while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy rose up on his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the altar of incense. And Azariah the head priest and all the priests turned to him, and look, he ***was*** leprous on his forehead; and they hurried him from there, and also he himself hurried to go out, for the LORD had struck him. And Uzziah the king was leprous until the day of his death, and he dwelt ***in*** the house of separateness, leprous, for he was cut off from the house of the LORD. And Jotham his son ***was*** over the house of the king, judging the people of the land. And the rest of the matters of Uzziah, the first and the

last, Isaiah the son of Amoz the prophet has written. And Uzziah lay down with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the field of the burial ground which ***belonged*** to the kings, for they said, "He ***is*** leprous." And Jotham his son reigned in his place.

Chapter 26 Preview

Uzziah becomes king at sixteen and reigns fifty-two years, one of the longest and most successful reigns in Judah's history. As long as he seeks the LORD, God makes him prosper. He wins wars against the Philistines and Arabs, builds towers and cisterns, loves farming, organizes a strong army and invents new weapons for Jerusalem's walls. His fame spreads all the way to Egypt.

Then comes the turning point: "when he was strong, his heart was lifted up." Uzziah walks into the temple to burn incense, a work God gave only to the priests. Eighty brave priests stand in his way. He rages at them, and leprosy breaks out on his forehead right there by the altar. He lives the rest of his life cut off, leprous and alone. Kings tells his reign briefly in 2 Kings 14:21-22 and 15:1-7, where he is called Azariah.

Chapter 26 Study

26:1-3 *And all the people of Judah took Uzziah, and he **was** a son of sixteen years, and they made him king in place of his father Amaziah. He built Eloth and restored it to Judah after the king lay down with his fathers. Uzziah **was** a son of sixteen years when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother **was** Jecoliah from Jerusalem.*

"All the people of Judah took Uzziah, and he was a son of sixteen years, and they made him king in place of his father Amaziah." Kings calls him Azariah, which means the LORD has helped. Uzziah means the LORD is my strength. Both names fit his story, and verse 15 will use that very word, helped.

"He built Eloth and restored it to Judah." Eloth, also called Elath, was a port on the Gulf of Aqaba at the southern tip of the land. Owning it opened the trade routes to the south again. He reigned fifty-two years, about 792 to 740 B.C., counting a long time when he ruled alongside his father and later when his son Jotham ruled with him.

26:4-5 *And he did what **was** right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Amaziah his father had done. And he was seeking God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the seeing of God; and in the days **that** he sought the LORD, God made him prosper.*

"He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Amaziah his father had done." Sadly, that includes the pattern of starting well and ending badly.

"He was seeking God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the seeing of God." This Zechariah is not the priest of chapter 24 or the later prophet. He was a teacher who helped the young king understand God's ways, much as Jehoiada had for Joash. Godly mentors matter.

"In the days that he sought the LORD, God made him prosper." This is the key sentence of the first half of the chapter. Uzziah's success was not his own doing. It came from God, and it lasted as long

as he sought God. Jesus said, "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

26:6-8 *And he went out and fought against the Philistines, and he broke down the wall of Gath and the wall of Jabneh and the wall of Ashdod; and he built cities in* ***the region of*** *Ashdod and among the Philistines. And God helped him against the Philistines and against the Arabs who were dwelling in Gurbaal, and the Meunites. And the Ammonites gave tribute to Uzziah, and his name went as far as the entrance of Egypt, for he displayed strength to the highest* ***degree****.*

Uzziah made war on the Philistines on Judah's western coast and broke down the walls of "Gath," "Jabneh" and "Ashdod," three of their cities. "God helped him against the Philistines and against the Arabs," and against the Meunites. The Ammonites east of the Jordan paid him tribute, which means regular payments of money and goods as a sign they were under his rule.

"His name went as far as the entrance of Egypt, for he displayed strength to the highest degree." Under Uzziah, Judah reached a size and strength it had not known since Solomon.

26:9-10 *And Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the Gate of the Corner and at the Gate of the Valley and at the Angle, and he strengthened them. And he built towers in the wilderness, and he hewed many cisterns, for he had much livestock, both in the Shephelah and in the plain,* ***and*** *farmers and vinedressers in the mountains and in the fruitful fields, for he was a lover of the ground.*

He built strong towers on Jerusalem's walls, repairing the damage done when Joash of Israel broke the wall in Amaziah's day (25:23).

He also "built towers in the wilderness, and he hewed many cisterns, for he had much livestock." Cisterns were pits cut into rock to store rainwater, vital in dry country. He had farmers and vinedressers "in the mountains and in the fruitful fields, for he was a lover of the ground." I like this detail. A king who loved working the land and caring for animals. God gave Adam the job of working and keeping the garden (Genesis 2:15). Good, honest work with the land is a gift from God.

26:11-15 *And Uzziah had a force doing battle, going out* ***to*** *war by troops, by the number of their muster by the hand of Jeiel the scribe and Maaseiah the officer, under the hand of Hananiah, one of the officials of the king. The whole number of the heads of the fathers, of the mighty men of valor,* ***was*** *two thousand six hundred. And under their hand* ***was*** *a force of war, three hundred and seven thousand five hundred, doing battle with strength of valor, to help the king against the enemy. And Uzziah prepared for them, for all the army, shields and spears and helmets and coats of armor and bows, and stones for slinging. And he made in Jerusalem devices, the invention of an inventor, to be on the towers and on the corners, to shoot with arrows and with great stones. And his name went out far, for he was marvelously helped until he was strong.*

Uzziah organized his army well. There were 2,600 family heads as officers over an army of 307,500 men, "doing battle with strength of valor." As with other large army numbers in Chronicles, I take them as written, while noting that some read the Hebrew word for thousand as a unit.

He gave the whole army "shields and spears and helmets and coats of armor and bows, and stones for slinging." In earlier times soldiers often had to bring their own weapons. Uzziah equipped them all.

"He made in Jerusalem devices, the invention of an inventor, to be on the towers and on the corners, to shoot with arrows and with great stones." These were war machines for defending the walls. Uzziah was clever and practical.

"His name went out far, for he was marvelously helped until he was strong." Read that phrase again. He "was marvelously helped," by God, "until he was strong." The danger was not in being weak. It was in becoming strong. As long as Uzziah knew he needed help, God helped him. When he felt strong, the trouble began.

26:16 *And when he was strong, his heart was lifted up until **he** acted corruptly, and he acted unfaithfully against the LORD his God, and he went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.*

"And when he was strong, his heart was lifted up until he acted corruptly, and he acted unfaithfully against the LORD his God, and he went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense."

This is the turning point of Uzziah's life. Pride is when the heart is lifted up, thinking oneself higher than one is. Moses had warned Israel that when they were full and prospering, their hearts might be lifted up and they would forget the LORD (Deuteronomy 8:11-14). That is exactly what happened.

Success is a harder test than trouble. In trouble we cry out to God. In success we are tempted to think we don't need Him. Uzziah could handle enemies, droughts and building projects. He could not handle his own success.

What did he do? He went into the holy place, the main room of the temple where only priests could go, to burn incense on the golden altar. Incense was a sweet-smelling offering burned morning and evening before the LORD (Exodus 30:7-8). It was a picture of prayer rising to God (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 5:8). God gave this job only to the priests, the sons of Aaron (Numbers 16:40; 18:7).

Why would Uzziah want to do it? Perhaps he looked at the kings of the nations around him, who often served as priests of their gods. Perhaps he thought a king as great as he was should be able to approach God however he pleased. Scripture tells us only that his heart was lifted up. Pride wants to be the exception to God's rules.

26:17-18 *And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him eighty priests of the LORD, sons of valor. And they stood against Uzziah the king, and they said to him, "**It is** not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Go out from the sanctuary, for you have acted unfaithfully, and **it will** not **be** for glory to you from the LORD God."*

"Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him eighty priests of the LORD, sons of valor." These were brave men. Standing up to a powerful king who had a large army and a hot temper could cost them their lives.

"They stood against Uzziah the king, and they said to him, It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense." To be consecrated means to be set apart for God's service. They spoke respectfully but plainly. The issue was not whether Uzziah was a good king. It was whether he would obey God's Word.

"Go out from the sanctuary, for you have acted unfaithfully, and it will not be for glory to you from the LORD God." They gave him a way out. If he had left at once and humbled himself, things might have ended differently.

There is a lesson here for all of us who speak for God. These priests did not flatter the king or look the other way. They spoke the truth with courage. Sometimes loving someone means standing in his way when he is about to do wrong.

26:19 *And Uzziah was enraged, and in his hand **was** a censer to burn incense; and while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy rose up on his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the altar of incense.*

"Uzziah was enraged, and in his hand was a censer to burn incense." A censer was a pan or holder for carrying burning coals and incense. He stood there with it in his hand, angry at being told no.

"And while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy rose up on his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the altar of incense."

Leprosy in the Bible is the Hebrew word tsara'at, a term for several serious skin diseases, not only what doctors today call leprosy. Under the Law, a person with it was unclean and had to live apart from others (Leviticus 13:45-46). It broke out on his forehead, the most visible place on his body, right in front of everyone, while he was still angry. God answered the king's pride in a way no one could miss.

God had done something like this before. When Miriam spoke against Moses, she was struck with leprosy (Numbers 12:10). When Korah and his followers tried to take the priesthood for themselves, they were judged (Numbers 16). God takes His holiness seriously.

26:20 *And Azariah the head priest and all the priests turned to him, and look, he **was** leprous on his forehead; and they hurried him from there, and also he himself hurried to go out, for the LORD had struck him.*

"Azariah the head priest and all the priests turned to him, and look, he was leprous on his forehead; and they hurried him from there, and also he himself hurried to go out, for the LORD had struck him."

Now Uzziah hurried out. He had refused to leave when the priests asked him. Now he could not get out fast enough. He knew that God Himself had struck him. Pride had brought him into God's house to exalt himself, and he left it humbled.

26:21 *And Uzziah the king was leprous until the day of his death, and he dwelt **in** the house of separateness, leprous, for he was cut off from the house of the LORD. And Jotham his son **was** over the house of the king, judging the people of the land.*

"Uzziah the king was leprous until the day of his death, and he dwelt in the house of separateness, leprous, for he was cut off from the house of the LORD."

The house of separateness was a separate house where he lived apart from others. The man who had tried to push his way into the holy place could now never enter the temple at all. He had wanted more access to God than God allowed. He ended up with less.

"Jotham his son was over the house of the king, judging the people of the land." For the rest of his life, Uzziah's son ruled for him. A great king finished his days in isolation, unclean and alone.

This is one of the clearest warnings in Scripture about pride. "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). Uzziah had everything, and he threw away the end of his life in a moment of pride. If success has come to you, guard your heart. Remember where the help came from.

There is also something here that points to Jesus. In Israel the kings came from Judah and the priests from Levi, and God kept the two offices apart. No king of Judah was allowed to be a priest. But Scripture promised that one day a King would also be a Priest. Zechariah says of the coming Branch, "he will be a priest on his throne" (Zechariah 6:13). Jesus is that King-Priest, a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, who was both king and priest (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 7:1-3). What Uzziah grabbed for in pride, God gave to His Son by His own appointment. "No one takes the honor for himself, but the one being called by God, just as also Aaron was" (Hebrews 5:4). And because of Jesus, our great High Priest, we can now draw near to God with confidence (Hebrews 4:14-16), not by pushing our way in, but through His blood.

26:22-23 *And the rest of the matters of Uzziah, the first and the last, Isaiah the son of Amoz the prophet has written. And Uzziah lay down with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the field of the burial ground which* ***belonged*** *to the kings, for they said, "He* ***is*** *leprous." And Jotham his son reigned in his place.*

"The rest of the matters of Uzziah, the first and the last, Isaiah the son of Amoz the prophet has written." Isaiah began his ministry in Uzziah's day (Isaiah 1:1). His great vision of the LORD on His throne came "In the year of the death of King Uzziah" (Isaiah 6:1), about 740 B.C. When the earthly king who had tried to grab holiness died, Isaiah saw the true King, high and lifted up, and heard the seraphim cry, "Holy, holy, holy."

Uzziah was buried "in the field of the burial ground which belonged to the kings," near them but not with them, "for they said, He is leprous." Even in death, his pride marked him. "And Jotham his son reigned in his place."

Chapter 26 Summary

Uzziah became king at sixteen and reigned fifty-two years. He did right and sought God in the days of Zechariah, who taught him, and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper. He rebuilt Eloth, defeated the Philistines, Arabs and Meunites, received tribute from Ammon, and became famous as far as Egypt. He built towers and cisterns, loved farming, organized and equipped an army of 307,500, and built war machines for Jerusalem's walls. He was marvelously helped until he was strong. Then his heart was lifted up, and he went into the temple to burn incense, which only the priests could do. Azariah and eighty brave priests confronted him. While he raged at them, leprosy broke out on his forehead beside the altar, and he hurried out. He lived as a leper in a separate house until his death, cut off from the house of the LORD, while his son Jotham ruled. Isaiah wrote of his reign, and he was buried near the kings because he was leprous.

Chapter 26 Study Questions

1. What was the key to Uzziah's success in the first part of his reign? (26:5)

2. List some of the things Uzziah accomplished. Who does the text say helped him? (26:6-15)

3. What phrase in verse 15 shows when the danger began? (26:15)

4. What did Uzziah's pride lead him to do, and why was it wrong? (26:16; Numbers 18:7)

5. What did the priests say to him, and how did he respond? (26:17-19)

6. How did God judge Uzziah, and how did it affect the rest of his life? (26:19-21)

7. How does Jesus fulfill what Uzziah tried to take for himself? (Zechariah 6:13; Hebrews 5:4; 7:1-3)

8. Uzziah was "marvelously helped until he was strong." Where in your life are you most tempted to think you don't need God's help?

9. The eighty priests showed courage in confronting the king. Is there someone you love who needs you to tell them the truth, gently and plainly?

10. Isaiah saw the LORD high and lifted up in the year Uzziah died. How does seeing God's holiness help cure our pride?

Chapter 27: Jotham Walks Before the LORD

Scripture

27:1-9 Jotham ***was*** a son of twenty-five years when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother ***was*** Jerusha the daughter of Zadok. And he did what ***was*** right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Uzziah his father had done; only he did not go into the temple of the LORD. And the people were still acting corruptly. He built the upper gate of the house of the LORD, and on the wall of the Ophel he built much. And cities he built in the hill country of Judah, and in the forests he built fortresses and towers. And he fought with the king of the sons of Ammon, and he prevailed over them. And the sons of Ammon gave him in that year approximately 7,500 pounds (a hundred talents) of silver, and approximately 60,000 bushels (ten thousand kors) of wheat, and of barley ten thousand. This the sons of Ammon brought back to him also in the second year and the third. And Jotham strengthened himself, for he had set his ways before the LORD his God. And the rest of the matters of Jotham, and all his wars and his ways, look, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. He was a son of twenty-five years when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And Jotham lay down with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David, and Ahaz his son reigned in his place.

Chapter 27 Preview

This is a short chapter about a good king. Jotham does what is right like his father Uzziah, but he learns from his father's sin and does not go into the temple. He builds the upper gate of the temple, strengthens Jerusalem's walls, builds cities and fortresses, and defeats the Ammonites, who pay him tribute for three years. The secret of his strength is given in one line: he "set his ways before the LORD his God."

There is one shadow. While Jotham is faithful, "the people were still acting corruptly." A king's faith cannot be passed to a nation by order. Kings tells his reign in 2 Kings 15:32-38.

Chapter 27 Study

27:1 *Jotham **was** a son of twenty-five years when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother **was** Jerusha the daughter of Zadok.*

"Jotham was a son of twenty-five years when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem." He had already ruled for his father during Uzziah's years as a leper (26:21). On the dates used in this study, he reigned about 750 to 732 B.C., counting the years with his father and the last years, when his son Ahaz shared the rule.

His mother was "Jerusha the daughter of Zadok." Zadok was a common priestly name, and many think she came from a priestly family, though Scripture does not say.

27:2 *And he did what **was** right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Uzziah his father had done; only he did not go into the temple of the LORD. And the people were still acting corruptly.*

"He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Uzziah his father had done; only he did not go into the temple of the LORD."

The word "only" points back to Uzziah's great sin (26:16). Jotham followed his father's good example and avoided his bad one. He had watched his father's pride destroy the end of his life, and he did not repeat it. It is a wise child who can sort out what to copy from a parent and what to leave behind. Every one of us has inherited both good and bad from our families. By God's grace, we can keep the good and let the bad stop with us.

"And the people were still acting corruptly." This is a sad note. Kings says the high places were not removed (2 Kings 15:35). The prophets of these years, Isaiah and Micah, describe a nation where the rich oppressed the poor and worship had become empty ritual (Isaiah 1:10-17; Micah 2:1-2). Jotham was faithful, but the people's hearts were not. A good leader is a blessing, but he cannot make other people love God. Each heart must turn to God for itself.

27:3-4 *He built the upper gate of the house of the LORD, and on the wall of the Ophel he built much. And cities he built in the hill country of Judah, and in the forests he built fortresses and towers.*

"He built the upper gate of the house of the LORD." Kings mentions this too (2 Kings 15:35). Jotham did not go into the temple as his father had, but he served God's house the right way, by building and caring for it.

"On the wall of the Ophel he built much." The Ophel was the hill on the south side of the temple mount, between the temple and the old city of David. He also built cities in the hill country of Judah and "fortresses and towers" in the forests. These were for defense against enemies, and for watching over the land.

Jotham kept building on what his father had begun. Not every generation is called to do something new. Sometimes faithfulness means carrying on good work that others started.

27:5 *And he fought with the king of the sons of Ammon, and he prevailed over them. And the sons of Ammon gave him in that year approximately 7,500 pounds (a hundred talents) of silver, and approximately 60,000 bushels (ten thousand kors) of wheat, and of barley ten thousand. This the sons of Ammon brought back to him also in the second year and the third.*

"He fought with the king of the sons of Ammon, and he prevailed over them." The Ammonites lived east of the Jordan. They had paid tribute to Uzziah (26:8), and perhaps they had stopped when he became sick. Jotham brought them back under Judah's rule.

They paid him a hundred talents of silver, about 7,500 pounds, along with ten thousand kors of wheat and ten thousand of barley. A kor was a large dry measure, roughly six bushels, so this was a great deal of grain. They paid it "also in the second year and the third." After that the tribute seems to have stopped, perhaps because of the rising threat of Syria and Israel (2 Kings 15:37).

27:6 *And Jotham strengthened himself, for he had set his ways before the LORD his God.*

"Jotham strengthened himself, for he had set his ways before the LORD his God."

This is the heart of the chapter. To set your ways before the LORD means to live your life as if it were always in front of God's eyes, because it is. It means making decisions with God in view, not only in religious matters but in building, fighting, governing and ordinary life.

His father became strong and then proud (26:16). Jotham became strong because he walked before God. The difference is where the heart is pointed. Strength that comes from walking with God does not lead to pride, because the person knows where it came from. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and on your own understanding do not lean. In all your ways know Him, and He will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

What would it look like for you to set your ways before the LORD this week? Not just your Sunday ways, but your work, your money, your words and your home.

27:7-9 *And the rest of the matters of Jotham, and all his wars and his ways, look, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. He was a son of twenty-five years when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And Jotham lay down with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David, and Ahaz his son reigned in his place.*

"The rest of the matters of Jotham, and all his wars and his ways, look, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah." The Chronicler repeats his age and the length of his reign, perhaps to round off his short account.

"Jotham lay down with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David." Unlike his father, he was buried in the city of David without any shadow on his name. Jotham is one of the few kings of Judah of whom nothing bad is said.

"And Ahaz his son reigned in his place." The next chapter will show how quickly things can change. A godly father does not guarantee a godly son. Jotham did right, but his son would become one of the worst kings Judah ever had.

Chapter 27 Summary

Jotham became king at twenty-five and reigned sixteen years. He did right like his father Uzziah, but he did not go into the temple as Uzziah had, though the people still acted corruptly. He built the upper gate of the temple, did much building on the wall of the Ophel, and built cities, fortresses and towers. He defeated the Ammonites, who paid him silver, wheat and barley for three years. He grew strong because he set his ways before the LORD his God. He was buried in the city of David, and his son Ahaz reigned in his place.

Chapter 27 Study Questions

1. In what way was Jotham like his father, and in what way was he different? (27:2)

2. What does it tell us that "the people were still acting corruptly" under a good king? (27:2)

3. What did Jotham build? (27:3-4)

4. What did the Ammonites pay Jotham, and for how long? (27:5)

5. Why did Jotham become strong? (27:6)

6. How was Jotham's strength different from Uzziah's? (27:6; 26:16)

7. Who reigned after Jotham? (27:9)

8. What good things from your family do you want to keep, and what would you like to stop with you?

9. What does it mean in your daily life to set your ways before the LORD? Which area is hardest to bring before Him?

10. Jotham was faithful even when the people around him were not. How can you stay faithful when those around you are not?

Chapter 28: Ahaz's Unfaithfulness

Scripture

28:1-15 Ahaz ***was*** a son of twenty years when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what ***was*** right in the eyes of the LORD, like David his father. And he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and also molten images he made for the Baals. And he burned incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and he burned his sons in the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD dispossessed from before the sons of Israel. And he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places and on the hills and under every luxuriant tree. And the LORD his God gave him into the hand of the king of Syria, and they struck him, and they took captive from him a great ***number of*** captives, and they brought ***them to*** Damascus. And also into the hand of the king of Israel he was given, and he struck him ***with*** a great blow. And Pekah the son of Remaliah killed in Judah a hundred and twenty thousand in one day, all ***of them*** sons of valor, because they had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers. And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, killed Maaseiah the son of the king, and Azrikam the leader of the house, and Elkanah the second to the king. And the sons of Israel took captive of their brothers two hundred thousand, women, sons, and daughters; and also much spoil they plundered from them, and they brought the spoil to Samaria. And there was there a prophet of the LORD; his name ***was*** Oded. And he went out before the army that was coming to Samaria, and he said to them, "Look, because of the wrath of the LORD, the God of your fathers, against Judah, He gave them into your hand, and you have killed among them in a rage ***that*** has reached to the heavens. And now the sons of Judah and Jerusalem you are saying ***you will*** subjugate as male slaves and female slaves for yourselves. Are there not, indeed, with you, you yourselves, guilts against the LORD your God? And now hear me, and send back the captives whom you have taken captive from your brothers, for the burning of the anger of the LORD ***is*** on you." And men of the heads of the sons of Ephraim rose up, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, and Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, against those who were coming from the war, and they said to them, "You shall not bring the captives here; for ***to bring*** guilt against the LORD on us, you are saying ***you will*** add to our sins and to our guilt. For great ***is*** the guilt that ***belongs*** to us, and burning of anger ***is*** on Israel." And the armed ***men*** left the captives and the plunder before the commanders and all the assembly. And the men who had been designated by names rose up, and they took hold of the captives, and all their naked ones they clothed from the spoil; and they clothed them, and put sandals on them, and fed them, and gave them drink, and anointed them, and led them on donkeys, every one who was stumbling; and they brought them ***to*** Jericho, the city of the palm trees, beside their brothers. And they returned ***to*** Samaria.

28:16-27 At that time King Ahaz sent to the kings of Assyria to help him. And again the Edomites had come, and they had struck in Judah, and they had taken captives. And the Philistines had made a raid on the cities of the Shephelah and the Negeb of Judah, and they had captured Beth-shemesh and Aijalon and the Gederoth, and Soco and its towns, and Timnah and its towns, and Gimzo and its towns; and they dwelt there. For the LORD had humbled Judah because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had cast off restraint in Judah, and he had acted with unfaithfulness against the LORD. And Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came against him, and he distressed him, and he

did not strengthen him. For Ahaz had taken a portion of the house of the LORD and of the house of the king and of the officials, and he gave ***it*** to the king of Assyria; and ***it was*** not for help to him. And in the time ***that he*** was distressing him, he increased to act unfaithfully against the LORD, that same King Ahaz. And he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had struck him, and he said, "Because the gods of the kings of Syria are helping them, to them I will sacrifice, and they will help me." And they became for him ***a cause*** to make him stumble, and to all Israel. And Ahaz gathered the articles of the house of God, and he cut up the articles of the house of God, and he shut the doors of the house of the LORD, and he made for himself altars in every corner in Jerusalem. And in every city of Judah, city by city, he made high places to burn incense to other gods, and he provoked the LORD, the God of his fathers. And the rest of his matters and all his ways, the first and the last, look, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. And Ahaz lay down with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, in Jerusalem, for they did not bring him into the graves of the kings of Israel. And Hezekiah his son reigned in his place.

Chapter 28 Preview

Ahaz son of Jotham is one of the worst kings in Judah's history. He makes images for the Baals, burns incense in the valley of Hinnom and burns his own sons in the fire. God hands him over to Syria and to Israel, and Judah suffers a terrible defeat. Israel carries off two hundred thousand women and children as captives.

In the middle of the darkness comes a surprising light. A prophet in Samaria named Oded tells Israel's army to send the captives home, and some leaders of Ephraim stand up and do it. They clothe, feed and care for the captives and bring them back to Jericho. Meanwhile Ahaz turns to the king of Assyria for help, which only brings more trouble. In his distress he sins even more, worshiping the gods of Damascus and shutting the doors of the LORD's house. Kings tells his reign in 2 Kings 16, and Isaiah 7 tells of God's offer of a sign to Ahaz.

Chapter 28 Study

28:1-2 *Ahaz **was** a son of twenty years when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what **was** right in the eyes of the LORD, like David his father. And he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and also molten images he made for the Baals.*

"Ahaz was a son of twenty years when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem." On the dates used in this study, about 735 to 715 B.C., counting some years with his father.

"He did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD, like David his father." The Chronicler measures each king by David. Ahaz failed the test. "He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and also molten images he made for the Baals." Molten images were idols made by pouring melted metal into a mold. The Baals were the many local forms of the Canaanite god Baal.

28:3-4 *And he burned incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and he burned his sons in the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD dispossessed from before the sons of Israel. And he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places and on the hills and under every luxuriant tree.*

"He burned incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and he burned his sons in the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD dispossessed from before the sons of Israel."

This is one of the hardest verses in the book. The valley of the son of Hinnom ran along the south side of Jerusalem. There, people offered children as sacrifices to false gods such as Molech. God had forbidden this in the strongest words (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:10). Through Jeremiah He said it was something "which I did not command, and it did not come up on My heart" (Jeremiah 7:31). Kings says Ahaz made his son "pass through the fire" (2 Kings 16:3). Most Bible scholars take this to mean child sacrifice, as Chronicles' plain words show. A few think it could sometimes mean a ritual of passing children through fire to dedicate them, but here the meaning seems clear.

I will not describe it more than the Bible does. But we should feel the weight of it. A king of David's line, who should have protected the weak, offered his own children to a false god. This is what idolatry finally does. False gods always demand more and give nothing back.

The valley of Hinnom became so connected with evil and death that its name, Gehenna in the Greek form, became the word Jesus used for hell (Mark 9:43).

Set this beside the gospel. Ahaz gave his sons to a false god to try to buy its help. The true God gave His own Son for us, not because we paid Him, but because He loves us. "He who indeed did not spare His own Son, but handed Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

If this verse stirs up pain because of a child you have lost, or harm done to children you know, bring that pain to the Lord who welcomed children into His arms (Mark 10:14-16).

Ahaz also "sacrificed and burned incense at the high places and on the hills and under every luxuriant tree." He worshiped everywhere except where God had said to.

28:5-7 *And the LORD his God gave him into the hand of the king of Syria, and they struck him, and they took captive from him a great* ***number of*** *captives, and they brought* ***them to*** *Damascus. And also into the hand of the king of Israel he was given, and he struck him* ***with*** *a great blow. And Pekah the son of Remaliah killed in Judah a hundred and twenty thousand in one day, all* ***of them*** *sons of valor, because they had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers. And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, killed Maaseiah the son of the king, and Azrikam the leader of the house, and Elkanah the second to the king.*

"The LORD his God gave him into the hand of the king of Syria." This was Rezin of Damascus. The Syrians took many captives to Damascus. "Also into the hand of the king of Israel he was given."

This was Pekah son of Remaliah. Syria and Israel had joined together, probably to force Judah into an alliance against Assyria (2 Kings 16:5; Isaiah 7:1-6).

"Pekah the son of Remaliah killed in Judah a hundred and twenty thousand in one day, all of them sons of valor, because they had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers." Notice the reason again. Judah's defeat was not just bad military planning. They had forsaken God. As elsewhere, I take the number as written.

An Ephraimite warrior named Zichri killed "Maaseiah the son of the king," along with the palace manager and Ahaz's second in command. The king's own family and leaders fell.

28:8 *And the sons of Israel took captive of their brothers two hundred thousand, women, sons, and daughters; and also much spoil they plundered from them, and they brought the spoil to Samaria.*

"The sons of Israel took captive of their brothers two hundred thousand, women, sons, and daughters." Notice the word "brothers." Israel and Judah were one family, descended from Jacob. Now one part of the family was carrying the other off as slaves. They also took "much spoil" to Samaria, Israel's capital.

28:9-11 *And there was there a prophet of the LORD; his name **was** Oded. And he went out before the army that was coming to Samaria, and he said to them, "Look, because of the wrath of the LORD, the God of your fathers, against Judah, He gave them into your hand, and you have killed among them in a rage **that** has reached to the heavens. And now the sons of Judah and Jerusalem you are saying **you will** subjugate as male slaves and female slaves for yourselves. Are there not, indeed, with you, you yourselves, guilts against the LORD your God? And now hear me, and send back the captives whom you have taken captive from your brothers, for the burning of the anger of the LORD **is** on you."*

"There was there a prophet of the LORD; his name was Oded." He went out to meet the army as it came home to Samaria, and he spoke boldly.

First, he told them why they had won: "because of the wrath of the LORD, the God of your fathers, against Judah, He gave them into your hand." Their victory was not because they were better. God was using them to discipline Judah.

Second, he said they had gone too far. "You have killed among them in a rage that has reached to the heavens." God can use a nation to judge another, and still hold it guilty for its cruelty. Isaiah says the same of Assyria (Isaiah 10:5-12).

Third, he warned them about their plan to make slaves of their brothers. Then he asked a searching question: "Are there not, indeed, with you, you yourselves, guilts against the LORD your God?" In other words, you are not innocent either. Israel was worshiping Jeroboam's calves and Baal. They had no right to act as though they were better than Judah. Jesus warned against looking at the speck in a brother's eye while ignoring the log in our own (Matthew 7:3-5).

"Now hear me, and send back the captives whom you have taken captive from your brothers, for the burning of the anger of the LORD is on you."

28:12-13 *And men of the heads of the sons of Ephraim rose up, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, and Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, against those who were coming from the war, and they said to them, "You shall not bring the captives here; for* ***to bring*** *guilt against the LORD on us, you are saying* ***you will*** *add to our sins and to our guilt. For great* ***is*** *the guilt that* ***belongs*** *to us, and burning of anger* ***is*** *on Israel."*

Amazingly, some of Israel's leaders listened. Four "men of the heads of the sons of Ephraim" are named: Azariah, Berechiah, Jehizkiah and Amasa. They stood up to the returning army: "You shall not bring the captives here." They knew their own guilt was already great: "For great is the guilt that belongs to us, and burning of anger is on Israel."

These men are not famous. We know nothing else about them. But they did the right thing when it was hard. It took courage to stand in front of a victorious army and say, "Not this." God remembers people like that.

28:14-15 *And the armed* ***men*** *left the captives and the plunder before the commanders and all the assembly. And the men who had been designated by names rose up, and they took hold of the captives, and all their naked ones they clothed from the spoil; and they clothed them, and put sandals on them, and fed them, and gave them drink, and anointed them, and led them on donkeys, every one who was stumbling; and they brought them* ***to*** *Jericho, the city of the palm trees, beside their brothers. And they returned* ***to*** *Samaria.*

"The armed men left the captives and the plunder before the commanders and all the assembly." The soldiers gave up what they had taken.

Then comes one of the most beautiful verses in the book. The men "took hold of the captives, and all their naked ones they clothed from the spoil; and they clothed them, and put sandals on them, and fed them, and gave them drink, and anointed them, and led them on donkeys, every one who was stumbling." Anointing here means putting oil on their wounds and dry skin to soothe them. They brought them all the way to "Jericho, the city of the palm trees," and handed them back to their families.

Many Bible readers have noticed how much this sounds like Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan, in which a man of Samaria helps a wounded Jew on the road to Jericho, bandaging his wounds, pouring on oil, putting him on his own animal and caring for him (Luke 10:30-37). The New Testament does not tie the two stories together directly, but the picture is the same: mercy shown to an enemy, by people no one expected to show it.

In a chapter full of cruelty and idolatry, God shows that mercy is still possible. Even in the northern kingdom, among people who were far from God, a prophet spoke and some leaders listened. Our God can work in the most unlikely places. Paul says, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink" (Romans 12:20). Who is the "enemy" God may be asking you to show mercy to?

28:16-19 *At that time King Ahaz sent to the kings of Assyria to help him. And again the Edomites had come, and they had struck in Judah, and they had taken captives. And the Philistines had made a raid on the cities of the Shephelah and the Negeb of Judah, and they had captured Beth-shemesh and Aijalon and the Gederoth, and Soco and its towns, and Timnah and its towns, and Gimzo and its towns; and they dwelt there. For the LORD had humbled Judah because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had cast off restraint in Judah, and he had acted with unfaithfulness against the LORD.*

"At that time King Ahaz sent to the kings of Assyria to help him." Assyria was the great power of the day, under Tiglath-pileser. Isaiah had begged Ahaz to trust the LORD and not be afraid of Syria and Israel, and God had even offered him a sign. Ahaz refused (Isaiah 7:3-12). Instead God gave the sign anyway: "Look, the virgin is pregnant and bearing a son, and she will call His name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). Matthew tells us this was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:22-23). The faithless king who would not ask for a sign was given the greatest sign of all.

Meanwhile, trouble came from every side. The Edomites raided Judah and took captives. The Philistines took towns in the low hills, "Beth-shemesh and Aijalon and the Gederoth, and Soco," along with Timnah and Gimzo.

"For the LORD had humbled Judah because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had cast off restraint in Judah." Ahaz is called "king of Israel" here, perhaps because he acted like Israel's kings, or because the Chronicler often uses Israel for all God's people. To "cast off restraint" means to let the people run wild, throwing off God's law.

28:20-21 *And Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came against him, and he distressed him, and he did not strengthen him. For Ahaz had taken a portion of the house of the LORD and of the house of the king and of the officials, and he gave **it** to the king of Assyria; and **it was** not for help to him.*

"Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came against him, and he distressed him, and he did not strengthen him." Ahaz paid Assyria with treasure from the temple, the palace and the officials, "and it was not for help to him." Kings tells us Assyria did attack Damascus (2 Kings 16:9), but Chronicles shows the bigger picture. In the long run, Assyria became Judah's master, not its helper. Judah became a vassal, a nation that paid tribute and took orders.

This is what happens when we look for help anywhere but God. "Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his arm, and from the LORD his heart turns aside" (Jeremiah 17:5). The help we buy from the world often ends up owning us.

28:22-23 *And in the time **that he** was distressing him, he increased to act unfaithfully against the LORD, that same King Ahaz. And he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had struck him, and he said, "Because the gods of the kings of Syria are helping them, to them I will sacrifice, and they will help me." And they became for him **a cause** to make him stumble, and to all Israel.*

"In the time that he was distressing him, he increased to act unfaithfully against the LORD, that same King Ahaz." The words "that same King Ahaz" are like the writer pointing his finger: this is the man. Trouble did not drive him to God. It drove him further away.

Trouble can do either. It drove Manasseh to his knees (33:12). It drove Ahaz deeper into sin. What decides the difference? The heart.

"He sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had struck him." His reasoning was, "Because the gods of the kings of Syria are helping them, to them I will sacrifice, and they will help me." But they had not helped Syria; Damascus fell to Assyria (2 Kings 16:9). "And they became for him a cause to make him stumble, and to all Israel." His false gods did not lift him up. They brought him down.

28:24-25 *And Ahaz gathered the articles of the house of God, and he cut up the articles of the house of God, and he shut the doors of the house of the LORD, and he made for himself altars in every corner in Jerusalem. And in every city of Judah, city by city, he made high places to burn incense to other gods, and he provoked the LORD, the God of his fathers.*

Then Ahaz did his worst. He "cut up the articles of the house of God, and he shut the doors of the house of the LORD." For the first time, a king of David's line closed God's house. The lamps went out and the offerings stopped (29:7). In their place, "he made for himself altars in every corner in Jerusalem," and high places "in every city of Judah, city by city." He "provoked the LORD, the God of his fathers."

Kings tells us that Ahaz also copied an altar he saw in Damascus and put it in the temple (2 Kings 16:10-16). Chronicles goes further. He shut God's house altogether.

It is a dark picture: the house of God locked, and an idol on every corner. But the next king's first act will be to open those doors (29:3).

28:26-27 *And the rest of his matters and all his ways, the first and the last, look, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. And Ahaz lay down with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, in Jerusalem, for they did not bring him into the graves of the kings of Israel. And Hezekiah his son reigned in his place.*

"Ahaz lay down with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, in Jerusalem, for they did not bring him into the graves of the kings of Israel." Like Jehoram and Joash before him, Ahaz was denied a place with the kings.

"And Hezekiah his son reigned in his place." After one of the worst kings comes one of the best. God's grace is not limited by a bad father. Hezekiah grew up in the house of a king who burned his

own sons in the fire and closed the temple, and yet he became the king who opened its doors. No family history is too dark for God to break.

Chapter 28 Summary

Ahaz reigned sixteen years and did not do right like David. He made images for the Baals, burned incense in the valley of Hinnom, burned his sons in the fire and worshiped at the high places. The LORD gave him into the hand of Syria and of Israel. Pekah killed 120,000 men of Judah in one day, and Israel took 200,000 women and children captive to Samaria. The prophet Oded warned Israel's army that they had gone too far and had their own guilt, and told them to send the captives back. Four leaders of Ephraim stood with him, and the captives were clothed, fed, anointed and brought back to Jericho. Ahaz turned to the king of Assyria for help, while Edom and the Philistines attacked Judah, for the LORD had humbled Judah because of Ahaz. Tiglath-pileser distressed him instead of helping him, though Ahaz paid him with treasures. In his distress Ahaz sinned more, sacrificing to the gods of Damascus, cutting up the temple vessels, shutting the doors of the LORD's house and building altars and high places everywhere. He was not buried in the graves of the kings, and Hezekiah his son reigned in his place.

Chapter 28 Study Questions

1. What did Ahaz do in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and what does God say about it? (28:3; Jeremiah 7:31)

2. Why did the LORD give Ahaz into the hand of Syria and Israel? (28:5-6)

3. What three things did Oded say to the army of Israel? (28:9-11)

4. How did the leaders of Ephraim treat the captives? (28:15)

5. To whom did Ahaz turn for help, and what came of it? (28:16, 20-21)

6. What did Ahaz do "in the time that he was distressing him"? (28:22-25)

7. What sign did God give through Isaiah in Ahaz's day, and how was it fulfilled? (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:22-23)

8. Trouble drove Ahaz further from God. When trouble comes to you, does it tend to drive you toward God or away from Him?

9. The men of Ephraim showed mercy to their enemies. Who is someone you find hard to show mercy to, and what would one act of kindness look like?

10. Ahaz looked for help from Assyria instead of God. Where are you tempted to look for security apart from God?

Chapter 29: Hezekiah Cleanses the Temple

Scripture

29:1-19 Hezekiah became king ***as*** a son of twenty-five years, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother ***was*** Abijah the daughter of Zechariah. And he did what ***was*** right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done. He, in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the LORD, and he strengthened them. And he brought in the priests and the Levites, and he gathered them to the open square of the east. And he said to them, "Hear me, O Levites! Now consecrate yourselves, and consecrate the house of the LORD, the God of your fathers, and bring out the impurity from the holy place. For our fathers acted unfaithfully, and they did the evil in the eyes of the LORD our God, and they forsook Him, and they turned their faces away from the tabernacle of the LORD, and they gave ***Him their*** back. Also they shut the doors of the porch, and they put out the lamps, and incense they did not burn, and burnt offering they did not offer up in the holy place to the God of Israel. And the wrath of the LORD came on Judah and Jerusalem, and He has made them into a terror, into a horror, and into a hissing, just as you are seeing with your eyes. And look, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives ***are*** in captivity because of this. Now ***it is*** in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD, the God of Israel, that the burning of His anger may turn back from us. My sons, do not now be negligent, for the LORD has chosen you to stand before Him, to minister to Him, and to be His ministers and burners of incense." And the Levites arose: Mahath the son of Amasai and Joel the son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites; and of the sons of Merari, Kish the son of Abdi and Azariah the son of Jehallelel; and of the Gershonites, Joah the son of Zimmah and Eden the son of Joah; and of the sons of Elizaphan, Shimri and Jeiel; and of the sons of Asaph, Zechariah and Mattaniah; and of the sons of Heman, Jehiel and Shimei; and of the sons of Jeduthun, Shemaiah and Uzziel. And they gathered their brothers, and they consecrated themselves, and they came according to the command of the king, by the words of the LORD, to cleanse the house of the LORD. And the priests went into the inside of the house of the LORD to cleanse ***it***, and they brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the LORD to the courtyard of the house of the LORD; and the Levites received ***it*** to bring ***it*** out to the Wadi of Kidron, outside. And they began on the first ***day*** of the first month to consecrate, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the porch of the LORD; and they consecrated the house of the LORD in eight days, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished. And they went in to Hezekiah the king, and they said, "We have cleansed all the house of the LORD, the altar of the burnt offering and all its utensils, and the table of the arrangement and all its utensils. And all the utensils which King Ahaz cast off in his reign, in his unfaithfulness, we have prepared and consecrated; and look, they ***are*** before the altar of the LORD."

29:20-36 And Hezekiah the king rose early, and he gathered the officials of the city, and he went up ***to*** the house of the LORD. And they brought seven bulls and seven rams and seven lambs and seven male goats for a sin offering for the kingdom and for the sanctuary and for Judah. And he said to the sons of Aaron, the priests, to offer ***them*** up on the altar of the LORD. And they slaughtered the cattle, and the priests received the blood, and they sprinkled ***it*** on the altar; and

they slaughtered the rams, and they sprinkled the blood on the altar; and they slaughtered the lambs, and they sprinkled the blood on the altar. And they brought near the goats of the sin offering before the king and the assembly, and they laid their hands on them. And the priests slaughtered them, and they made a sin offering with their blood on the altar, to make atonement for all Israel; for the king had said ***that*** the burnt offering and the sin offering ***were*** for all Israel. And he stationed the Levites ***in*** the house of the LORD with cymbals, with harps, and with lyres, according to the command of David and of Gad the seer of the king and of Nathan the prophet; for the commandment ***was*** by the hand of the LORD, by the hand of His prophets. And the Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. And Hezekiah said to offer up the burnt offering on the altar. And at the time ***when*** the burnt offering began, the song of the LORD began, and the trumpets, and by the hands of the instruments of David king of Israel. And all the assembly ***was*** bowing down, and the singers ***were*** singing, and the trumpets ***were*** sounding; all ***of this continued*** until the burnt offering was finished. And when they finished offering up, the king and all who were found with him knelt, and they bowed down. And Hezekiah the king and the officials said to the Levites to praise the LORD with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. And they praised to ***the point of*** joy, and they bowed low, and they bowed down. And Hezekiah answered and said, "Now you have filled your hand for the LORD. Draw near, and bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the house of the LORD." And the assembly brought sacrifices and thank offerings, and every willing ***one of*** heart ***brought*** burnt offerings. And the number of the burnt offerings which the assembly brought was seventy cattle, a hundred rams, two hundred lambs; all these ***were*** for a burnt offering to the LORD. And the holy offerings ***were*** six hundred cattle and three thousand sheep. Only the priests were too few, and they were not able to skin all the burnt offerings; and their brothers the Levites strengthened them until the work was finished and until the priests had consecrated themselves, for the Levites ***were*** more upright of heart to consecrate themselves than the priests. And also burnt offerings ***were*** in abundance, with the fat of the peace offerings and with the drink offerings for the burnt offering. And the service of the house of the LORD was established. And Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced over what God had prepared for the people, for the thing had come about suddenly.

Chapter 29 Preview

Hezekiah son of Ahaz is one of the best kings Judah ever had, and the Chronicler gives him four full chapters. He does not wait. In the first month of his first year, he opens the doors of the temple that his father had shut. He calls the priests and Levites together, tells them plainly that Judah's troubles came from forsaking God, and asks them to cleanse the house of the LORD. In sixteen days they carry out all the filth and restore the vessels.

Then Hezekiah and the leaders go up to the temple with sin offerings for the kingdom, the sanctuary and all Israel. The blood is sprinkled on the altar to make atonement. As the burnt offering begins, the Levites' song begins, and the whole assembly bows in worship. The people bring so many offerings that the priests cannot keep up. The chapter ends with joy, because God had done it so quickly. Kings tells of Hezekiah's reform much more briefly in 2 Kings 18:1-7.

Chapter 29 Study

29:1-2 *Hezekiah became king **as** a son of twenty-five years, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother **was** Abijah the daughter of Zechariah. And he did what **was** right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done.*

"Hezekiah became king as a son of twenty-five years, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem." On the dates used in this study, he reigned about 715 to 686 B.C. His mother was "Abijah the daughter of Zechariah."

"He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done." This is the highest praise the Chronicler gives. Only a few kings are compared to David without any "only" after it. Kings says that no king of Judah before or after him trusted the LORD as he did (2 Kings 18:5).

Think about where Hezekiah came from. His father Ahaz was one of the worst kings in Judah's history (chapter 28). Hezekiah grew up in a home of idols, with brothers sacrificed in the fire. Yet he turned out completely differently. Our family background shapes us, but it does not have to decide who we become. God can raise up a faithful son from an unfaithful father.

29:3 *He, in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the LORD, and he strengthened them.*

"He, in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the LORD, and he strengthened them." His father had shut those doors (28:24). The very first thing Hezekiah did was open them again.

He did not wait until he had settled into the palace or dealt with the army or the treasury. The first priority of his reign was the worship of God. What comes first in our lives shows what matters most to us. Jesus said, "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

29:4-9 *And he brought in the priests and the Levites, and he gathered them to the open square of the east. And he said to them, "Hear me, O Levites! Now consecrate yourselves, and consecrate the house of the LORD, the God of your fathers, and bring out the impurity from the holy place. For our fathers acted unfaithfully, and they did the evil in the eyes of the LORD our God, and they forsook Him, and they turned their faces away from the tabernacle of the LORD, and they gave **Him their** back. Also they shut the doors of the porch, and they put out the lamps, and incense they did not burn, and burnt offering they did not offer up in the holy place to the God of Israel. And the wrath of the LORD came on Judah and Jerusalem, and He has made them into a terror, into a horror, and into a hissing, just as you are seeing with your eyes. And look, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives **are** in captivity because of this.*

He gathered the priests and Levites "to the open square of the east," and spoke to them. "Hear me, O Levites! Now consecrate yourselves, and consecrate the house of the LORD." To consecrate means to set apart as holy for God. They first had to make themselves ready, and then make the house ready. Those who serve God must first be right with Him.

"Bring out the impurity from the holy place." Years of idolatry had filled the temple with things that did not belong there.

Then Hezekiah gave an honest account of what had gone wrong. "For our fathers acted unfaithfully, and they did the evil in the eyes of the LORD our God, and they forsook Him." Notice he said "our fathers," not "my father." He did not single out Ahaz by name. But he did not pretend either. They had "turned their faces away from the tabernacle of the LORD," they had "shut the doors of the porch," "put out the lamps," and stopped the incense and the burnt offerings.

Hezekiah connected Judah's suffering to their sin. "The wrath of the LORD came on Judah and Jerusalem." Their fathers had fallen by the sword, and their families were in captivity (28:5-8, 17). He did not blame bad luck or powerful enemies. He saw God's hand of discipline. Seeing the true cause of our troubles is the first step toward healing.

29:10-11 *Now **it is** in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD, the God of Israel, that the burning of His anger may turn back from us. My sons, do not now be negligent, for the LORD has chosen you to stand before Him, to minister to Him, and to be His ministers and burners of incense."*

"Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD, the God of Israel, that the burning of His anger may turn back from us." Hezekiah wanted to renew the nation's commitment to God, so that God's anger would turn away.

Then he spoke tenderly to the Levites: "My sons, do not now be negligent, for the LORD has chosen you to stand before Him, to minister to Him." The king called these men "my sons." He reminded them of their high calling. God had chosen them to serve Him. Being negligent means being careless or lazy about a duty. Hezekiah was telling them that this was no time to hold back.

Every believer has a calling from God. Peter tells us we are "a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9). Are we careless with it, or eager to serve?

29:12-14 *And the Levites arose: Mahath the son of Amasai and Joel the son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites; and of the sons of Merari, Kish the son of Abdi and Azariah the son of Jehallelel; and of the Gershonites, Joah the son of Zimmah and Eden the son of Joah; and of the sons of Elizaphan, Shimri and Jeiel; and of the sons of Asaph, Zechariah and Mattaniah; and of the sons of Heman, Jehiel and Shimei; and of the sons of Jeduthun, Shemaiah and Uzziel.*

The Levites rose up, and fourteen of them are named, two from each of the great Levite families: the Kohathites, the sons of Merari, the Gershonites and the sons of Elizaphan, and two each from the families of the three temple musicians, Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun. This list is there to honor real men who answered the king's call. God knows the names of those who serve Him. It also shows that every part of the tribe took part. No family held back.

29:15-17 *And they gathered their brothers, and they consecrated themselves, and they came according to the command of the king, by the words of the LORD, to cleanse the house of the LORD. And the priests went into the inside of the house of the LORD to cleanse **it**, and they brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the LORD to the courtyard of the house of the LORD; and the Levites received **it** to bring **it** out to the Wadi of Kidron, outside. And they began on the first **day** of the first month to consecrate, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the porch of the LORD; and they consecrated the house of the LORD in eight days, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished.*

"They gathered their brothers, and they consecrated themselves, and they came according to the command of the king, by the words of the LORD, to cleanse the house of the LORD." Notice the order: the command of the king, by the words of the LORD. Hezekiah's command was simply to do what God's Word said.

The priests went "into the inside of the house of the LORD," the parts only priests could enter, and brought out "all the uncleanness that they found." The Levites carried it out "to the Wadi of Kidron," the valley east of Jerusalem. A wadi is a stream bed that runs with water only in the rainy season. Asa had burned his grandmother's idol there (15:16), and Josiah would do the same with the idols of his day (2 Kings 23:4-6).

They began on the first day of the first month. In eight days they reached the porch, and in eight more days they finished the house. Sixteen days of hard, dirty work.

Cleaning out what does not belong is often the first step in spiritual renewal. Is there anything in your life, a habit, a relationship, something you watch or read, that needs to be carried out to the Kidron? Paul urges us to cleanse ourselves "from every defilement of flesh and spirit" (2 Corinthians 7:1). Jesus Himself cleansed the temple in His day, saying God's house should be a house of prayer (Matthew 21:12-13).

29:18-19 *And they went in to Hezekiah the king, and they said, "We have cleansed all the house of the LORD, the altar of the burnt offering and all its utensils, and the table of the arrangement and all its utensils. And all the utensils which King Ahaz cast off in his reign, in his unfaithfulness, we have prepared and consecrated; and look, they **are** before the altar of the LORD."*

The priests reported to Hezekiah: "We have cleansed all the house of the LORD, the altar of the burnt offering and all its utensils, and the table of the arrangement and all its utensils." The table of the arrangement was the table for the bread set out before the LORD each Sabbath.

"And all the utensils which King Ahaz cast off in his reign, in his unfaithfulness, we have prepared and consecrated." What Ahaz had thrown away, they restored. God can take what has been neglected and broken and make it fit for His use again.

29:20-24 *And Hezekiah the king rose early, and he gathered the officials of the city, and he went up **to** the house of the LORD. And they brought seven bulls and seven rams and seven lambs and seven male goats for a sin offering for the kingdom and for the sanctuary and for Judah. And he said to the sons of Aaron, the priests, to offer **them** up on the altar of the LORD. And they slaughtered the cattle, and the priests received the blood, and they sprinkled **it** on the altar; and they slaughtered the rams, and they sprinkled the blood on the altar; and they slaughtered the lambs, and they sprinkled the blood on the altar. And they brought near the goats of the sin offering before the king and the assembly, and they laid their hands on them. And the priests slaughtered them, and they made a sin offering with their blood on the altar, to make atonement for all Israel; for the king had said **that** the burnt offering and the sin offering **were** for all Israel.*

"Hezekiah the king rose early, and he gathered the officials of the city, and he went up to the house of the LORD." He did not waste a day.

They brought "seven bulls and seven rams and seven lambs and seven male goats for a sin offering for the kingdom and for the sanctuary and for Judah." Seven was the number of completeness. A sin offering was a sacrifice for sin, so that the guilty person or people could be forgiven and made clean (Leviticus 4). They needed cleansing for the kingdom, for the temple and for the people.

The priests slaughtered the animals and sprinkled the blood on the altar. The king and the assembly "laid their hands on them," on the goats. Laying hands on the head of the animal showed that the sin of the people was being placed on the sacrifice, which died in their place (Leviticus 4:15; 16:21).

"The priests slaughtered them, and they made a sin offering with their blood on the altar, to make atonement for all Israel." Atonement means covering sin so that sinners can be made right with God. Note the words "for all Israel." Hezekiah included the northern tribes too. The northern kingdom had fallen to Assyria in 722 B.C., and Hezekiah's heart was for all God's people.

These sacrifices point to Jesus. "Apart from shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22). The blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin forever (Hebrews 10:4). They were pictures of what was coming. When Jesus died, He was the true sin offering, "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Our sins were laid on Him (Isaiah 53:6), and His one sacrifice made atonement once for all (Hebrews 10:10).

29:25-28 *And he stationed the Levites **in** the house of the LORD with cymbals, with harps, and with lyres, according to the command of David and of Gad the seer of the king and of Nathan the prophet; for the commandment **was** by the hand of the LORD, by the hand of His prophets. And the Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. And Hezekiah said to offer up the burnt offering on the altar. And at the time **when** the burnt offering began, the song of the LORD began, and the trumpets, and by the hands of the instruments of David king of Israel. And all the assembly **was** bowing down, and the singers **were** singing, and the trumpets **were** sounding; all **of this continued** until the burnt offering was finished.*

Hezekiah "stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with harps, and with lyres, according to the command of David and of Gad the seer of the king and of Nathan the prophet." David had organized the music of worship (1 Chronicles 25). The Chronicler adds that this was not just David's idea: "the commandment was by the hand of the LORD, by the hand of His prophets."

"At the time when the burnt offering began, the song of the LORD began." As the sacrifice was being offered, the music began. "All the assembly was bowing down, and the singers were singing, and the trumpets were sounding," until the burnt offering was finished.

What a picture: sacrifice and song together. Worship begins with atonement. Because the sin has been dealt with, God's people can sing. We sing because of the cross.

29:29-30 *And when they finished offering up, the king and all who were found with him knelt, and they bowed down. And Hezekiah the king and the officials said to the Levites to praise the LORD with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. And they praised to **the point of** joy, and they bowed low, and they bowed down.*

"When they finished offering up, the king and all who were found with him knelt, and they bowed down." Then Hezekiah told the Levites to praise the LORD "with the words of David and of Asaph the seer." These were the psalms written by David and Asaph. "They praised to the point of joy, and they bowed low, and they bowed down."

They sang the Psalms, God's own words, back to Him. The worship was full of joy, and it was also humble. The singers bowed even as they rejoiced.

29:31-33 *And Hezekiah answered and said, "Now you have filled your hand for the LORD. Draw near, and bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the house of the LORD." And the assembly brought sacrifices and thank offerings, and every willing **one of** heart **brought** burnt offerings. And the number of the burnt offerings which the assembly brought was seventy cattle, a hundred rams, two hundred lambs; all these **were** for a burnt offering to the LORD. And the holy offerings **were** six hundred cattle and three thousand sheep.*

"Now you have filled your hand for the LORD." This phrase was used of priests being ordained, but here it means they had given themselves fully to God again. Hezekiah invited the whole assembly: "Draw near, and bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the house of the LORD." A thank offering was a peace offering brought to give thanks, and the worshiper shared in eating it.

The people came, and "every willing one of heart brought burnt offerings." No one was forced. Their hearts were willing. Seventy bulls, a hundred rams and two hundred lambs were offered as burnt offerings, and six hundred cattle and three thousand sheep as holy offerings.

29:34-35 *Only the priests were too few, and they were not able to skin all the burnt offerings; and their brothers the Levites strengthened them until the work was finished and until the priests had consecrated themselves, for the Levites **were** more upright of heart to consecrate themselves than the priests. And also burnt offerings **were** in abundance, with the fat of the peace offerings and with the drink offerings for the burnt offering. And the service of the house of the LORD was established.*

"Only the priests were too few, and they were not able to skin all the burnt offerings." So the Levites helped, "for the Levites were more upright of heart to consecrate themselves than the priests." The priests had been slow to get ready. The Levites had been quicker.

God's work sometimes moves faster than His workers expect. Some who should have been ready were not. Others stepped up. Being in a high position does not mean being the most faithful. "The service of the house of the LORD was established."

29:36 *And Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced over what God had prepared for the people, for the thing had come about suddenly.*

"Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced over what God had prepared for the people, for the thing had come about suddenly." The change came fast, and they knew why. It was God who had prepared it. Hezekiah opened the doors, but God had prepared the hearts.

Revival is always God's work. We can open the doors, clean out the house and obey His Word, but only God can change hearts. When He does, it can happen suddenly. If you have been praying for a change in your own heart, your family or your church, do not lose hope. God can do in days what we could not do in years.

Chapter 29 Summary

Hezekiah became king at twenty-five and did right like David. In the first month of his first year he opened and repaired the doors of the temple his father had shut. He gathered the priests and Levites, confessed that their fathers had forsaken God and that this was why wrath had come, and told them to consecrate themselves and the house. He planned to make a covenant with the LORD so His anger would turn away. Fourteen Levites led the work, and in sixteen days the priests and Levites cleansed the temple, carried the filth to the Kidron and restored the vessels Ahaz had cast off. Hezekiah and the officials brought sin offerings for the kingdom, the sanctuary and Judah, laid hands on the goats and made atonement for all Israel. The Levites played and sang with the instruments of David as the burnt offering was made, and all the assembly bowed. The people brought many willing offerings, and the Levites helped the priests, who were too few. Hezekiah and the people rejoiced at what God had done so suddenly.

Chapter 29 Study Questions

1. What did Hezekiah do in the first month of his reign, and why is it significant? (29:3; 28:24)

2. What did Hezekiah say was the cause of Judah's troubles? (29:6-9)

3. How did Hezekiah encourage the Levites? (29:11)

4. How long did it take to cleanse the temple, and where did the uncleanness go? (29:16-17)

5. What offerings were brought, and for whom was atonement made? (29:21-24)

6. What happened when the burnt offering began? (29:27-28)

7. Why did the Levites help the priests? (29:34)

8. Hezekiah opened the doors of God's house before anything else. What would it look like for God to come first in your schedule this week?

9. Is there anything in your life that needs to be carried out to the "Kidron" so you can worship God with a clean heart?

10. Hezekiah's people rejoiced that God had done it suddenly. What are you praying for that only God can do?

Chapter 30: Hezekiah's Great Passover

Scripture

30:1-14 And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and also letters he wrote to Ephraim and Manasseh, to come to the house of the LORD in Jerusalem to keep a Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel. And the king and his officials and all the assembly in Jerusalem took counsel to keep the Passover in the second month, for they had not been able to keep it at that time, for the priests had not consecrated themselves sufficiently, and the people had not been gathered to Jerusalem. And the thing was right in the eyes of the king and in the eyes of all the assembly. And they established a word, to make a proclamation pass through all Israel, from Beersheba and to Dan, to come to keep a Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel, in Jerusalem; for they had not kept ***it*** in multitude as ***it is*** written. And the runners went with the letters from the hand of the king and his officials into all Israel and Judah, and according to the command of the king, saying, "Sons of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that He may return to the escaped remnant that is left to you from the hand of the kings of Assyria. And do not be like your fathers and like your brothers, who acted unfaithfully against the LORD, the God of their fathers, and He made them a horror, as you are seeing. Now do not harden your neck like your fathers. Give a hand to the LORD, and come to His sanctuary, which He has consecrated forever, and serve the LORD your God, that the burning of His anger may turn back from you. For in your returning to the LORD, your brothers and your sons ***will find*** compassion before their captors, and ***will*** return to this land; for gracious and compassionate ***is*** the LORD your God, and He will not turn aside ***His*** face from you if you return to Him." And the runners were passing from city to city in the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun; and they were laughing at them and mocking them. Only, men from Asher and Manasseh and from Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. Also on Judah was the hand of God, to give them one heart to do the command of the king and the officials by the word of the LORD. And many people were gathered ***at*** Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month, an assembly very ***great*** in multitude. And they arose and removed the altars that ***were*** in Jerusalem, and all the incense altars they removed, and they threw ***them*** into the Wadi of Kidron.

30:15-27 And they slaughtered the Passover on the fourteenth of the second month. And the priests and the Levites were ashamed, and they consecrated themselves, and they brought burnt offerings ***to*** the house of the LORD. And they stood at their place according to their ordinance, according to the law of Moses the man of God; the priests ***were*** sprinkling the blood ***received*** from the hand of the Levites. For many ***were*** in the assembly who had not consecrated themselves, and the Levites ***were*** over the slaughter of the Passover ***offerings*** for everyone ***who was*** not clean, to consecrate ***them*** to the LORD. For a multitude of the people, many from Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not purified themselves, for they ate the Passover not as ***it is*** written. For Hezekiah had prayed for them, saying, "May the good LORD make atonement for everyone ***who*** has prepared his heart to seek God, the LORD, the God of his fathers, though not according to the purification of the holy place." And the LORD listened to Hezekiah and healed the people. And the sons of Israel who were found in Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great joy, and the Levites and the priests ***were***

praising the LORD day by day with instruments of strength to the LORD. And Hezekiah spoke to the heart of all the Levites who showed good insight toward the LORD. And they ate the appointed feast ***for*** the seven days, sacrificing sacrifices of peace offerings and giving thanks to the LORD, the God of their fathers. And all the assembly took counsel to keep another seven days, and they kept seven days ***with*** joy. For Hezekiah the king of Judah contributed to the assembly a thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep, and the officials contributed to the assembly a thousand bulls and ten thousand sheep; and priests consecrated themselves in multitude. And all the assembly of Judah rejoiced, and the priests and the Levites, and all the assembly that came from Israel, and the sojourners who came from the land of Israel and who dwelt in Judah. And there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the days of Solomon the son of David, the king of Israel, ***there was*** not ***anything*** like this in Jerusalem. And the priests, the Levites, arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard, and their prayer came to the dwelling of His holiness, to the heavens.

Chapter 30 Preview

With the temple cleansed, Hezekiah wants the whole nation to keep the Passover together. He sends runners with letters, not only through Judah but through what is left of the northern kingdom, calling all Israel to return to the LORD. Many in the north laugh at the messengers, but some humble themselves and come.

Because the priests were not ready in time, they keep the Passover in the second month, as the Law allowed. Many who come are not ceremonially clean, and Hezekiah prays a remarkable prayer: may the good LORD pardon everyone who has set his heart to seek God, even if he is not clean by the rules of the sanctuary. The LORD hears and heals the people. The feast is so joyful that they keep it a second week, and there is nothing like it in Jerusalem since Solomon. Kings does not tell of this Passover.

Chapter 30 Study

30:1 *And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and also letters he wrote to Ephraim and Manasseh, to come to the house of the LORD in Jerusalem to keep a Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel.*

"Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and also letters he wrote to Ephraim and Manasseh, to come to the house of the LORD in Jerusalem to keep a Passover to the LORD." Ephraim and Manasseh were the leading tribes of the old northern kingdom. Since the kingdom split about 930 B.C., the northern tribes had worshiped at Jeroboam's shrines at Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12:26-33). Now Hezekiah invited them home to the one place God had chosen.

The Passover was the feast that remembered the night God brought Israel out of Egypt. Each family killed a lamb and put its blood on the doorposts, and the LORD passed over the houses marked by the blood when He struck the firstborn of Egypt (Exodus 12). Paul tells us that this lamb pointed to Jesus: "For also our Passover was sacrificed for us: Christ" (1 Corinthians 5:7). The Passover was the great reminder that God saves His people by the blood of a lamb.

30:2-5 *And the king and his officials and all the assembly in Jerusalem took counsel to keep the Passover in the second month, for they had not been able to keep it at that time, for the priests had not consecrated themselves sufficiently, and the people had not been gathered to Jerusalem. And the thing was right in the eyes of the king and in the eyes of all the assembly. And they established a word, to make a proclamation pass through all Israel, from Beersheba and to Dan, to come to keep a Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel, in Jerusalem; for they had not kept* ***it*** *in multitude as* ***it is*** *written.*

The king, the officials and the assembly "took counsel to keep the Passover in the second month." The Passover was normally kept on the fourteenth day of the first month. But "the priests had not consecrated themselves sufficiently, and the people had not been gathered to Jerusalem." The cleansing of the temple had taken until the sixteenth day of the first month (29:17).

Was it right to move the date? Yes. God's Law already made room for this. Anyone who was unclean or far away at Passover could keep it on the fourteenth day of the second month (Numbers 9:9-11). Hezekiah did not ignore God's Word. He used the provision God had given.

"The thing was right in the eyes of the king and in the eyes of all the assembly." So they sent a proclamation "through all Israel, from Beersheba and to Dan," from the far south to the far north, "for they had not kept it in multitude as it is written." The nation had not kept Passover together, as one people, in a very long time.

30:6-9 *And the runners went with the letters from the hand of the king and his officials into all Israel and Judah, and according to the command of the king, saying, "Sons of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that He may return to the escaped remnant that is left to you from the hand of the kings of Assyria. And do not be like your fathers and like your brothers, who acted unfaithfully against the LORD, the God of their fathers, and He made them a horror, as you are seeing. Now do not harden your neck like your fathers. Give a hand to the LORD, and come to His sanctuary, which He has consecrated forever, and serve the LORD your God, that the burning of His anger may turn back from you. For in your returning to the LORD, your brothers and your sons* ***will find*** *compassion before their captors, and* ***will*** *return to this land; for gracious and compassionate* ***is*** *the LORD your God, and He will not turn aside* ***His*** *face from you if you return to Him."*

The runners carried letters from the king, and the message was a tender call to come home. "Sons of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that He may return to the escaped remnant that is left to you from the hand of the kings of Assyria." A remnant is the part of a people left after a disaster. Assyria had carried many of the northern tribes into exile (2 Kings 17:6). Those who were left were invited to return.

The word "return" runs through the whole letter. Return to the LORD, and He will return to you. It is the heart of repentance, which means turning back to God from sin.

"Do not be like your fathers and like your brothers, who acted unfaithfully." "Now do not harden your neck like your fathers." A hard neck is the picture of a stubborn ox that will not bend to the

yoke. "Give a hand to the LORD," which means yield to Him, put your hand in His as a sign of surrender and commitment.

Then comes the great promise. "For in your returning to the LORD, your brothers and your sons will find compassion before their captors, and will return to this land; for gracious and compassionate is the LORD your God, and He will not turn aside His face from you if you return to Him."

"Gracious and compassionate" are the very words God used when He showed Moses His glory (Exodus 34:6). This is who God is. He does not turn His face away from those who come back to Him. Jesus told of the father who saw his son coming home "while he was still far distant," and ran to meet him (Luke 15:20). That is our God. Are you far from Him? He will not turn His face from you if you return.

30:10-12 *And the runners were passing from city to city in the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun; and they were laughing at them and mocking them. Only, men from Asher and Manasseh and from Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. Also on Judah was the hand of God, to give them one heart to do the command of the king and the officials by the word of the LORD.*

"The runners were passing from city to city in the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun; and they were laughing at them and mocking them." Many in the north thought the invitation was a joke. Even after Assyria had crushed them, they would not humble themselves.

The gospel invitation still meets the same response. Some laugh. Jesus told of a king who invited guests to a wedding feast, and they made light of it and went their own way (Matthew 22:1-5).

"Only, men from Asher and Manasseh and from Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem." Not many, but some. And they came because they humbled themselves. Pride laughs at God's invitation. Humility accepts it.

"Also on Judah was the hand of God, to give them one heart to do the command of the king and the officials by the word of the LORD." The unity of Judah was God's work. God gave them one heart. When God's people come together in unity to obey His Word, it is a gift from Him.

30:13-14 *And many people were gathered **at** Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month, an assembly very **great** in multitude. And they arose and removed the altars that **were** in Jerusalem, and all the incense altars they removed, and they threw **them** into the Wadi of Kidron.*

"Many people were gathered at Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month, an assembly very great in multitude." The Feast of Unleavened Bread followed the Passover and lasted seven days. During that week, no yeast was eaten, remembering the haste of leaving Egypt and picturing a life cleansed of sin (Exodus 12:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:8).

Before they kept the feast, the people "removed the altars that were in Jerusalem," the altars Ahaz had built on every corner (28:24), "and they threw them into the Wadi of Kidron." They cleared away the old idols before they celebrated. True worship involves turning from what is false.

30:15-17 *And they slaughtered the Passover on the fourteenth of the second month. And the priests and the Levites were ashamed, and they consecrated themselves, and they brought burnt offerings* ***to*** *the house of the LORD. And they stood at their place according to their ordinance, according to the law of Moses the man of God; the priests* ***were*** *sprinkling the blood* ***received*** *from the hand of the Levites. For many* ***were*** *in the assembly who had not consecrated themselves, and the Levites* ***were*** *over the slaughter of the Passover* ***offerings*** *for everyone* ***who was*** *not clean, to consecrate* ***them*** *to the LORD.*

"They slaughtered the Passover on the fourteenth of the second month." The priests and Levites "were ashamed." They had been slow to consecrate themselves (29:34), and now seeing the zeal of ordinary people, they were embarrassed. So "they consecrated themselves." Sometimes the faith of new believers puts the rest of us to shame and wakes us up.

They stood "according to the law of Moses the man of God," and the priests sprinkled the blood the Levites handed them.

Normally the head of each household killed his own Passover lamb. But "many were in the assembly who had not consecrated themselves," so the Levites did the slaughtering for everyone who was not clean, so the sacrifice would be acceptable.

30:18-20 *For a multitude of the people, many from Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not purified themselves, for they ate the Passover not as* ***it is*** *written. For Hezekiah had prayed for them, saying, "May the good LORD make atonement for everyone* ***who*** *has prepared his heart to seek God, the LORD, the God of his fathers, though not according to the purification of the holy place." And the LORD listened to Hezekiah and healed the people.*

"For a multitude of the people, many from Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not purified themselves, for they ate the Passover not as it is written." The people from the north had come a long way. They had grown up far from the temple and did not know the rules for being ceremonially clean. They ate the Passover anyway.

What would Hezekiah do? He could have sent them away. Instead, he prayed. "May the good LORD make atonement for everyone who has prepared his heart to seek God, the LORD, the God of his fathers, though not according to the purification of the holy place."

This is a beautiful prayer, and it shows us something deep about God. Hezekiah did not say the rules did not matter. He knew the people had not done it "as it is written." But he asked God to look at their hearts. They had "prepared" their hearts "to seek God." He asked God, who is good, to cover what they lacked.

"And the LORD listened to Hezekiah and healed the people." Healed may mean God spared them from sickness that might have come as judgment (Leviticus 15:31), or it may mean God restored

them spiritually. Either way, God answered the prayer. This is the promise of 7:14 at work: when His people humble themselves, pray and seek His face, He will hear and heal.

God looks at the heart. "Man sees according to the eyes, and the LORD sees according to the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). That does not mean God does not care about obedience. It means outward rituals were never the point by themselves. Jesus quoted Hosea: "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13). God wants a heart that seeks Him.

This is good news for every sinner. None of us comes to God perfectly clean. We come with hearts that want Him and hands that are not clean. And because of Jesus, our great High Priest who always lives to intercede for us (Hebrews 7:25), God receives us. Hezekiah prayed for the unclean. Jesus does far more: He makes us clean by His own blood (1 John 1:7).

30:21-22 *And the sons of Israel who were found in Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great joy, and the Levites and the priests **were** praising the LORD day by day with instruments of strength to the LORD. And Hezekiah spoke to the heart of all the Levites who showed good insight toward the LORD. And they ate the appointed feast **for** the seven days, sacrificing sacrifices of peace offerings and giving thanks to the LORD, the God of their fathers.*

They "kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great joy." The Levites and priests praised the LORD every day "with instruments of strength," loud instruments for praise.

"Hezekiah spoke to the heart of all the Levites who showed good insight toward the LORD." To speak to the heart means to encourage, to speak kindly. A good leader thanks and encourages those who serve. They ate the feast seven days, "sacrificing sacrifices of peace offerings and giving thanks." A peace offering was a sacrifice shared in a meal, a sign of fellowship with God and with one another.

30:23-24 *And all the assembly took counsel to keep another seven days, and they kept seven days **with** joy. For Hezekiah the king of Judah contributed to the assembly a thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep, and the officials contributed to the assembly a thousand bulls and ten thousand sheep; and priests consecrated themselves in multitude.*

"All the assembly took counsel to keep another seven days, and they kept seven days with joy." One week was not enough! When God's people taste real joy in His presence, they don't want it to end.

Hezekiah gave "a thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep," and the officials gave "a thousand bulls and ten thousand sheep." The leaders paid for the extra week out of their own pockets, so the people could keep feasting. Generosity spreads. When leaders give freely, people rejoice. Meanwhile more "priests consecrated themselves in multitude." The slow priests had caught up.

30:25-26 *And all the assembly of Judah rejoiced, and the priests and the Levites, and all the assembly that came from Israel, and the sojourners who came from the land of Israel and who dwelt in Judah. And there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the days of Solomon the son of David, the king of Israel,* ***there was*** *not* ***anything*** *like this in Jerusalem.*

"All the assembly of Judah rejoiced," with the priests and Levites, everyone who came from Israel, and even "the sojourners," foreigners living among God's people. The feast was open to all who would come. It is a small picture of the gospel feast, where people from every nation are welcomed (Revelation 7:9).

"There was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the days of Solomon the son of David, the king of Israel, there was not anything like this in Jerusalem." For more than two hundred years, there had been no gathering like this. North and south, Judah and Israel, worshiping together again in God's house. It was a taste of the day when God will make His people one again (Ezekiel 37:21-22).

30:27 *And the priests, the Levites, arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard, and their prayer came to the dwelling of His holiness, to the heavens.*

"The priests, the Levites, arose and blessed the people." They likely pronounced the blessing God gave to Aaron: "May the LORD bless you, and may He keep you" (Numbers 6:24-26). "And their voice was heard, and their prayer came to the dwelling of His holiness, to the heavens."

This is the answer to Solomon's prayer in chapter 6, where he asked again and again that God would hear from heaven, His dwelling place (6:21). God heard. Prayer offered from a humble, seeking heart reaches the very throne of God. Hebrews invites us to come boldly to that throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16).

Chapter 30 Summary

Hezekiah sent letters to all Israel and Judah, including Ephraim and Manasseh, inviting everyone to keep the Passover in Jerusalem. Because the priests were not ready and the people were not gathered, they kept it in the second month, as the Law allowed. Runners went from Beersheba to Dan calling the people to return to the LORD, who is gracious and compassionate and will not turn His face from those who return. Many in the north mocked, but some from Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun humbled themselves and came, and God gave Judah one heart. The people removed Ahaz's altars, and the ashamed priests and Levites consecrated themselves. Many from the north had not purified themselves, and Hezekiah prayed that the good LORD would pardon all who had set their hearts to seek Him. The LORD heard and healed the people. They kept the feast seven days with great joy, then another seven days, with the king and officials giving thousands of animals. There had been nothing like it since Solomon, and the priests' prayer reached God's holy dwelling in heaven.

Chapter 30 Study Questions

1. Whom did Hezekiah invite to the Passover, and why was that unusual? (30:1, 5)

2. Why was the Passover kept in the second month, and how did the Law allow for it? (30:2-3; Numbers 9:10-11)

3. What did the letter promise to those who would return to the LORD? (30:6-9)

4. How did the people of the north respond? (30:10-11)

5. What did Hezekiah pray for those who were not ceremonially clean, and how did God answer? (30:18-20)

6. Why did the assembly keep the feast a second week? (30:23-26)

7. How does the Passover point to Jesus? (1 Corinthians 5:7)

8. "He will not turn aside His face from you if you return to Him." Is there an area where you need to return to God? What is holding you back?

9. Some laughed at the invitation and some humbled themselves. How do you respond when God calls you to something?

10. Hezekiah prayed for people who came to God imperfectly. How does that encourage you in your own walk with God?

Chapter 31: Hezekiah Restores the Offerings

Scripture

31:1-21 And when all this was finished, all Israel who were found ***there*** went out to the cities of Judah, and they broke the pillars, and they cut down the Asherim, and they tore down the high places and the altars from all Judah and Benjamin, and in Ephraim and Manasseh, until ***they had*** finished. And all the sons of Israel returned, each to his possession, to their cities. And Hezekiah appointed the divisions of the priests and the Levites according to their divisions, each according to his service, the priests and the Levites, for burnt offering and for peace offerings, to minister and to give thanks and to praise in the gates of the camps of the LORD. And the portion of the king from his property ***was*** for the burnt offerings: for the burnt offerings of the morning and the evening, and the burnt offerings for the Sabbaths and for the new moons and for the appointed times, as ***it is*** written in the law of the LORD. And he told the people, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to give the portion of the priests and the Levites, so that they might be strong in the law of the LORD. And as the word spread, the sons of Israel multiplied the first of grain, new wine, and fresh oil, and honey, and all the produce of the field; and the tithe of everything they brought in abundance. And the sons of Israel and Judah who dwelt in the cities of Judah, they also brought a tithe of herd and flock, and a tithe of holy things that were consecrated to the LORD their God, and they made heaps ***upon*** heaps. In the third month they began to found the heaps, and in the seventh month they finished. And Hezekiah and the officials came, and they saw the heaps, and they blessed the LORD and His people Israel. And Hezekiah inquired of the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps. And Azariah the priest, the head, of the house of Zadok, spoke to him, and he said, "Since ***they*** began to bring the contribution ***into*** the house of the LORD, we have eaten and been satisfied and have had left over, even in abundance, for the LORD has blessed His people; and what is left ***is*** this great store." And Hezekiah said to prepare chambers in the house of the LORD, and they prepared ***them***. And they brought the contribution and the tithe and the holy things in faithfulness. And over them ***was*** Conaniah the Levite ***as*** leader, and Shimei his brother ***was*** second. And Jehiel and Azaziah and Nahath and Asahel and Jerimoth and Jozabad and Eliel and Ismachiah and Mahath and Benaiah ***were*** overseers at the hand of Conaniah and Shimei his brother, by the appointment of Hezekiah the king and Azariah the leader of the house of God. And Kore the son of Imnah the Levite, the gatekeeper toward the east, ***was*** over the freewill offerings of God, to distribute the contribution of the LORD and the most holy things. And at his hand ***were*** Eden and Miniamin and Jeshua and Shemaiah, Amariah and Shecaniah, in the cities of the priests, in faithfulness, to distribute to their brothers by divisions, the great as the small, besides their genealogical enrollment of males from a son of three years and upward: to everyone who came to the house of the LORD for the matter of a day in its day, for their service by their duties according to their divisions; and the genealogical enrollment of the priests by the house of their fathers, and the Levites from a son of twenty years and upward, by their duties, by their divisions; and ***they were*** to be enrolled with all their little ones, their wives and their sons and their daughters, for all the assembly; for in their faithfulness they consecrated themselves ***in*** holiness. And for the sons of Aaron, the priests, in the fields of the pasture land of their cities, in every city and city ***there were*** men who had been designated by names to distribute portions to every male among the priests and to everyone enrolled by genealogy among the Levites. And

Hezekiah did like this in all Judah, and he did what ***was*** good and what ***was*** right and what ***was*** true before the LORD his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, with all his heart he did ***it***, and he prospered.

Chapter 31 Preview

The great Passover sends the people home on fire for God. They break the pillars, cut down the Asherim and tear down the high places all through Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim and Manasseh. Then Hezekiah sets the priests and Levites back in their divisions and gives from his own property for the daily and festival offerings. He asks the people of Jerusalem to give the portion owed to the priests and Levites, so they can give themselves to the Law of the LORD.

The people respond with such generosity that the gifts pile up in heaps for four months. When Hezekiah asks about the heaps, the high priest tells him that they have eaten their fill and have plenty left over. Storerooms are built, faithful Levites are put in charge, and a careful system is set up to share the gifts fairly with every priestly family. The chapter ends with one of the finest tributes to any king: whatever Hezekiah did, he did with all his heart, and he prospered. Kings mentions the reform in a verse (2 Kings 18:4) but not the offerings.

Chapter 31 Study

31:1 *And when all this was finished, all Israel who were found **there** went out to the cities of Judah, and they broke the pillars, and they cut down the Asherim, and they tore down the high places and the altars from all Judah and Benjamin, and in Ephraim and Manasseh, until **they had** finished. And all the sons of Israel returned, each to his possession, to their cities.*

"When all this was finished, all Israel who were found there went out to the cities of Judah, and they broke the pillars, and they cut down the Asherim, and they tore down the high places and the altars." The pillars were standing stones set up for pagan worship. The Asherim (the plural of Asherah) were the wooden poles or images for the goddess Asherah.

Notice who did it. Not only the king's officials, but the people themselves. They went out and did it themselves, "from all Judah and Benjamin, and in Ephraim and Manasseh," even in the northern territory. Kings tells us that Hezekiah also broke the bronze serpent Moses had made, because people had been burning incense to it (2 Kings 18:4). Even a good thing from God's past can become an idol if we worship it instead of Him.

True worship leads to a clean break with idols. The Thessalonians "turned to God from the idols to serve a living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). When we meet God, we want the old idols gone. What has taken God's place in your heart?

31:2-3 *And Hezekiah appointed the divisions of the priests and the Levites according to their divisions, each according to his service, the priests and the Levites, for burnt offering and for peace offerings, to minister and to give thanks and to praise in the gates of the camps of the LORD. And the portion of the king from his property* ***was*** *for the burnt offerings: for the burnt offerings of the morning and the evening, and the burnt offerings for the Sabbaths and for the new moons and for the appointed times, as* ***it is*** *written in the law of the LORD.*

"Hezekiah appointed the divisions of the priests and the Levites according to their divisions, each according to his service." David had first set up these divisions so the work of worship could run in an orderly way (1 Chronicles 23-24). Hezekiah restored the order so the worship would not just be a one-time event, but something that went on week after week. Revival needs structure to last.

The king led the way in giving: "the portion of the king from his property was for the burnt offerings." He paid for "the burnt offerings of the morning and the evening, and the burnt offerings for the Sabbaths and for the new moons and for the appointed times." These were the regular offerings commanded in the Law (Numbers 28-29). The new moons were the first days of each month, and the appointed times were the yearly feasts. A leader cannot ask others to give generously if he does not give himself.

31:4 *And he told the people, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to give the portion of the priests and the Levites, so that they might be strong in the law of the LORD.*

Then Hezekiah "told the people, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to give the portion of the priests and the Levites, so that they might be strong in the law of the LORD." The tribe of Levi had no land of its own. God had told Israel to support them with the tithes and firstfruits (Numbers 18:21-24). When the people stopped giving, the Levites had to leave the temple and farm to survive (Nehemiah 13:10).

The reason Hezekiah gives is worth noticing: "so that they might be strong in the law of the LORD." The priests and Levites needed time to study, teach and serve. They could not do that if they were scrambling to feed their families. Paul says the same principle holds for those who preach the gospel: they should be supported by it (1 Corinthians 9:13-14; Galatians 6:6).

31:5-7 *And as the word spread, the sons of Israel multiplied the first of grain, new wine, and fresh oil, and honey, and all the produce of the field; and the tithe of everything they brought in abundance. And the sons of Israel and Judah who dwelt in the cities of Judah, they also brought a tithe of herd and flock, and a tithe of holy things that were consecrated to the LORD their God, and they made heaps* ***upon*** *heaps. In the third month they began to found the heaps, and in the seventh month they finished.*

"As the word spread, the sons of Israel multiplied the first of grain, new wine, and fresh oil, and honey, and all the produce of the field; and the tithe of everything they brought in abundance." The firstfruits were the first part of the harvest, given to God as a sign that the whole harvest came from Him (Exodus 23:19). The tithe was a tenth (Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 18:21).

The people of Judah in the towns also brought tithes of their herds and flocks and holy gifts, "and they made heaps upon heaps." They began piling them up "in the third month," at the wheat harvest around the Feast of Weeks, and finished "in the seventh month," at the end of the fruit harvest around the Feast of Booths. For four months the gifts kept coming.

Notice that the people gave "in abundance." They were not grudging. Their hearts had been changed at the Passover, and generous giving followed. When God gets our hearts, He gets our wallets too. "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

31:8-10 *And Hezekiah and the officials came, and they saw the heaps, and they blessed the LORD and His people Israel. And Hezekiah inquired of the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps. And Azariah the priest, the head, of the house of Zadok, spoke to him, and he said, "Since **they** began to bring the contribution **into** the house of the LORD, we have eaten and been satisfied and have had left over, even in abundance, for the LORD has blessed His people; and what is left **is** this great store."*

"Hezekiah and the officials came, and they saw the heaps, and they blessed the LORD and His people Israel." What a sight that must have been. They praised God, and they thanked the people.

Hezekiah asked the priests and Levites about the heaps. "Azariah the priest, the head, of the house of Zadok," answered: "Since they began to bring the contribution into the house of the LORD, we have eaten and been satisfied and have had left over, even in abundance, for the LORD has blessed His people; and what is left is this great store."

The priest gave God the credit: "the LORD has blessed His people." The people gave, and God supplied more than enough. This is what God promised through Malachi when He said to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse and see if He would not open the windows of heaven (Malachi 3:10). Jesus said, "Give, and it will be given to you" (Luke 6:38). God is no man's debtor.

31:11-13 *And Hezekiah said to prepare chambers in the house of the LORD, and they prepared **them**. And they brought the contribution and the tithe and the holy things in faithfulness. And over them **was** Conaniah the Levite **as** leader, and Shimei his brother **was** second. And Jehiel and Azaziah and Nahath and Asahel and Jerimoth and Jozabad and Eliel and Ismachiah and Mahath and Benaiah **were** overseers at the hand of Conaniah and Shimei his brother, by the appointment of Hezekiah the king and Azariah the leader of the house of God.*

"Hezekiah said to prepare chambers in the house of the LORD." These were storerooms in the temple buildings. "They brought the contribution and the tithe and the holy things in faithfulness."

"Conaniah the Levite" was put in charge, with "Shimei his brother" second, and ten more Levites as overseers under them, all "by the appointment of Hezekiah the king and Azariah the leader of the house of God."

Why list all these names? Because handling God's money and gifts is a sacred trust. The people who managed it were known by name and accountable to both the king and the high priest. The word "faithfulness" appears again and again in these verses (31:12, 15, 18). Faithful giving

deserves faithful management. Churches today should handle gifts with the same care and openness.

31:14-19 *And Kore the son of Imnah the Levite, the gatekeeper toward the east,* ***was*** *over the freewill offerings of God, to distribute the contribution of the LORD and the most holy things. And at his hand* ***were*** *Eden and Miniamin and Jeshua and Shemaiah, Amariah and Shecaniah, in the cities of the priests, in faithfulness, to distribute to their brothers by divisions, the great as the small, besides their genealogical enrollment of males from a son of three years and upward: to everyone who came to the house of the LORD for the matter of a day in its day, for their service by their duties according to their divisions; and the genealogical enrollment of the priests by the house of their fathers, and the Levites from a son of twenty years and upward, by their duties, by their divisions; and* ***they were*** *to be enrolled with all their little ones, their wives and their sons and their daughters, for all the assembly; for in their faithfulness they consecrated themselves* ***in*** *holiness. And for the sons of Aaron, the priests, in the fields of the pasture land of their cities, in every city and city* ***there were*** *men who had been designated by names to distribute portions to every male among the priests and to everyone enrolled by genealogy among the Levites.*

"Kore the son of Imnah the Levite, the gatekeeper toward the east, was over the freewill offerings of God." Freewill offerings were gifts given beyond what was required, simply out of love for God. He and his helpers distributed the gifts "in the cities of the priests, in faithfulness, to distribute to their brothers by divisions, the great as the small."

These verses describe a careful system. Not every priest served at the temple at the same time. Many lived in the priestly towns around the land (Joshua 21). The gifts went both to those on duty at the temple and to the families back home. They kept a record of every family, males from three years old, priests by their fathers' houses, Levites from twenty years old, "with all their little ones, their wives and their sons and their daughters." No one was left out, "the great as the small." Even the children were counted and fed.

The reason given: "for in their faithfulness they consecrated themselves in holiness." These families had given their lives to God's service, and God's people took care of them.

In the pasture lands around the priests' towns, men "designated by names" made sure "every male among the priests" and every Levite on the rolls got his portion. The point of these verses is simple: fairness. God's provision was shared so that everyone had enough. Paul describes the same goal in the early church's giving, that "He who gathered much did not have excess, and he who gathered little did not lack" (2 Corinthians 8:13-15).

This list may seem dry, but it shows how much God cares for those who serve Him, and for their families. It also reminds us to care for those who serve us in the church.

31:20-21 *And Hezekiah did like this in all Judah, and he did what **was** good and what **was** right and what **was** true before the LORD his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, with all his heart he did **it**, and he prospered.*

"Hezekiah did like this in all Judah, and he did what was good and what was right and what was true before the LORD his God." Good, right and true: what a description of a life!

"In every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, with all his heart he did it, and he prospered."

This is the secret of Hezekiah's life. Three things stand out. What he did was for God: "in the service of the house of God." How he did it was by God's Word: "in the law and in the commandment." Why he did it was "to seek his God." And the manner: "with all his heart." Not halfway. Not with a divided heart like Amaziah (25:2).

"And he prospered." That does not mean every believer who works hard will become rich. It means God blessed his work and gave him success in what he set out to do. When we seek God with all our heart, we will find Him (Jeremiah 29:13), and that is the greatest prosperity of all. Paul says, "whatever you do, work from the soul, as to the Lord" (Colossians 3:23).

Chapter 31 Summary

After the Passover, the people went out through Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim and Manasseh, breaking down the pillars, Asherim, high places and altars. Hezekiah restored the divisions of the priests and Levites and gave from his own property for the regular burnt offerings commanded in the Law. He told the people of Jerusalem to give the portion owed to the priests and Levites so they could devote themselves to the Law. The people gave firstfruits and tithes in abundance, piling up heaps from the third month to the seventh. When Hezekiah asked about them, the high priest Azariah said they had eaten their fill and had a great store left over because the LORD had blessed His people. Storerooms were prepared, Conaniah and Shimei and their helpers were put in charge, and Kore and his helpers faithfully distributed the gifts to the priests and Levites and their families in the priestly towns, great and small. Hezekiah did what was good, right and true, and in all he did he sought God with all his heart and prospered.

Chapter 31 Study Questions

1. What did the people do after the Passover? (31:1)

2. How did Hezekiah himself give to the offerings? (31:3)

3. Why did Hezekiah ask the people to give the portion of the priests and Levites? (31:4)

4. How did the people respond, and for how long? (31:5-7)

5. What did Azariah the high priest say about the heaps? (31:10)

6. How were the gifts managed and shared? (31:11-19)

7. How does the Chronicler sum up Hezekiah's work? (31:20-21)

8. The people gave "in abundance" after their hearts were changed. How does your giving reflect your heart toward God?

9. Hezekiah made sure those who served God were cared for. How can you help care for those who serve in your church?

10. "With all his heart he did it." What is one area of your life where you are serving God halfway? What would whole-hearted service look like there?

Chapter 32: Sennacherib's Invasion and Hezekiah's Last Years

Scripture

32:1-19 After these things and this faithfulness, Sennacherib the king of Assyria came, and he came into Judah, and he encamped against the fortified cities, and he said to break them open for himself. And Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come and ***that*** his face ***was*** for war against Jerusalem, and he took counsel with his officials and his mighty men to stop up the waters of the springs that ***were*** outside the city; and they helped him. And many people were gathered, and they stopped up all the springs and the wadi that flowed through the midst of the land, saying, "Why should the kings of Assyria come and find much water?" And he strengthened himself, and he built all the wall that was broken down, and he raised ***it*** up on the towers, and outside another wall; and he strengthened the Millo ***in*** the city of David, and he made weapons in abundance, and shields. And he set commanders of wars over the people, and he gathered them to himself at the open place of the gate of the city, and he spoke to their heart, saying, "Be strong and be courageous; do not be afraid and do not be dismayed because of the king of Assyria and before all the multitude that ***is*** with him, for with us ***is*** a greater ***one*** than with him. With him ***is*** an arm of flesh, and with us ***is*** the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles." And the people leaned on the words of Hezekiah the king of Judah. After this Sennacherib the king of Assyria sent his servants to Jerusalem (and he ***was*** at Lachish, and all his dominion with him) to Hezekiah the king of Judah and to all Judah who ***were*** in Jerusalem, saying, "Thus says Sennacherib the king of Assyria: 'On what are you trusting, that you remain under siege in Jerusalem? Is not Hezekiah misleading you, to give you ***over*** to die by hunger and by thirst, saying, "The LORD our God will deliver us from the hand of the king of Assyria"? Has not Hezekiah himself removed His high places and His altars, and said to Judah and to Jerusalem, saying, "Before one altar you shall bow down, and on it you shall burn incense"? Do you not know what I and my fathers have done to all the peoples of the lands? Were the gods of the nations of the lands at all able to deliver their land from my hand? Who ***was there*** among all the gods of these nations which my fathers devoted to destruction that was able to deliver his people from my hand, that your God should be able to deliver you from my hand? And now, do not let Hezekiah deceive you, and do not let him mislead you like this, and do not believe him; for no god of any nation and kingdom has been able to deliver his people from my hand and from the hand of my fathers. How much less will your gods deliver you from my hand!'" And his servants spoke still more against the LORD God and against Hezekiah His servant. And he wrote letters to taunt the LORD, the God of Israel, and to speak against Him, saying, "Like the gods of the nations of the lands, who have not delivered their people from my hand, so the God of Hezekiah will not deliver His people from my hand." And they called out with a great voice ***in*** Judean to the people of Jerusalem who ***were*** on the wall, to make them afraid and to terrify them, so that they might capture the city. And they spoke concerning the God of Jerusalem as concerning the gods of the peoples of the earth, the work of the hands of mankind.

32:20-33 And Hezekiah the king and Isaiah the son of Amoz, the prophet, prayed because of this, and they cried out ***to*** the heavens. And the LORD sent an angel, and he cut off every mighty man

of valor and leader and commander in the camp of the king of Assyria. And he returned with shame of face to his land, and he came ***into*** the house of his god, and some of those who came out of his own body, there they made him fall by the sword. And the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria and from the hand of all, and He guided them on every side. And many ***were*** bringing an offering to the LORD to Jerusalem, and choice gifts to Hezekiah the king of Judah; and he was lifted up in the eyes of all the nations from then on. In those days Hezekiah was sick to ***the point of*** dying, and he prayed to the LORD; and He spoke to him, and He gave him a sign. And Hezekiah did not repay according to the benefit ***done*** to him, for his heart was haughty; and there was wrath on him and on Judah and Jerusalem. And Hezekiah humbled himself for the haughtiness of his heart, he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the wrath of the LORD did not come on them in the days of Hezekiah. And Hezekiah had very great riches and honor; and he made for himself treasuries for silver and for gold and for precious stones and for spices and for shields and for all ***kinds of*** desirable articles, and storehouses for the produce of grain and new wine and fresh oil, and stalls for each and every ***kind of*** livestock, and flocks for the stalls. And cities he made for himself, and livestock of flock and herd in abundance, for God had given him very much property. And he, Hezekiah, stopped up the upper outlet of the waters of Gihon and directed them down to the west of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all his work. And so in ***the matter of*** the envoys of the officials of Babylon, who sent to him to inquire ***about*** the sign that had happened in the land, God left him, to test him, to know all ***that was*** in his heart. And the rest of the matters of Hezekiah, and his ***deeds of*** steadfast love, look, they ***are*** written in the vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, the prophet, in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. And Hezekiah lay down with his fathers, and they buried him in the ascent of the graves of the sons of David; and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honor at his death. And Manasseh his son reigned in his place.

Chapter 32 Preview

"After these things and this faithfulness," Sennacherib king of Assyria invades Judah. Faithfulness does not keep trouble away. Hezekiah prepares wisely: he stops up the springs outside the city, rebuilds the walls and arms the people. Then he speaks words of faith to his commanders: with Assyria is an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God.

Sennacherib's servants mock the God of Israel and try to frighten the people on the wall. Hezekiah and Isaiah pray, and the LORD sends an angel who cuts down the Assyrian army. Sennacherib goes home in shame and is killed in the temple of his own god. Then the chapter turns to Hezekiah's illness and the sign God gave him, the pride that followed, his humbling, his great wealth, his water tunnel and the test of the envoys from Babylon. Kings tells all of this at much greater length in 2 Kings 18-20, and Isaiah 36-39 tells it again.

Chapter 32 Study

32:1 *After these things and this faithfulness, Sennacherib the king of Assyria came, and he came into Judah, and he encamped against the fortified cities, and he said to break them open for himself.*

"After these things and this faithfulness, Sennacherib the king of Assyria came." Notice the order. Hezekiah had just cleansed the temple, kept the Passover and restored the offerings. He had done everything right. And then the greatest army in the world came against him.

Some people think that if we serve God faithfully, nothing bad will happen to us. Scripture does not teach that. Faithful people face hard trials. Jesus told His followers plainly, "In the world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33). The question is not whether trouble will come, but whom we will trust when it does.

Sennacherib "encamped against the fortified cities, and he said to break them open for himself." This was in Hezekiah's fourteenth year, 701 B.C. (2 Kings 18:13). Sennacherib's own records, found by archaeologists, boast that he captured many of Judah's walled towns and shut Hezekiah up in Jerusalem, and they do not claim that he took the city.

32:2-4 *And Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come and **that** his face **was** for war against Jerusalem, and he took counsel with his officials and his mighty men to stop up the waters of the springs that **were** outside the city; and they helped him. And many people were gathered, and they stopped up all the springs and the wadi that flowed through the midst of the land, saying, "Why should the kings of Assyria come and find much water?"*

"Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come and that his face was for war against Jerusalem." So "he took counsel with his officials and his mighty men to stop up the waters of the springs that were outside the city."

This was smart. An army besieging a city needs water. Jerusalem's main spring, the Gihon, was outside the walls. Many people worked together and "stopped up all the springs and the wadi that flowed through the midst of the land," asking, "Why should the kings of Assyria come and find much water?"

Faith and wise planning are not enemies. Hezekiah prayed, and he also worked. Nehemiah did the same: "we prayed to our God, and we stationed a guard" (Nehemiah 4:9). Trusting God does not mean sitting still when God has given us the means to act.

32:5-6 *And he strengthened himself, and he built all the wall that was broken down, and he raised **it** up on the towers, and outside another wall; and he strengthened the Millo **in** the city of David, and he made weapons in abundance, and shields. And he set commanders of wars over the people, and he gathered them to himself at the open place of the gate of the city, and he spoke to their heart, saying,*

"He strengthened himself, and he built all the wall that was broken down, and he raised it up on the towers, and outside another wall." Archaeologists have found a thick wall from this time in

Jerusalem that many connect with Hezekiah's work. He also "strengthened the Millo in the city of David," a terraced structure that supported buildings on the hill, and "made weapons in abundance, and shields."

He organized the people under commanders and gathered them "at the open place of the gate of the city, and he spoke to their heart." A good leader does not only prepare walls. He prepares people's hearts.

32:7-8 *"Be strong and be courageous; do not be afraid and do not be dismayed because of the king of Assyria and before all the multitude that **is** with him, for with us **is** a greater **one** than with him. With him **is** an arm of flesh, and with us **is** the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles." And the people leaned on the words of Hezekiah the king of Judah.*

"Be strong and be courageous; do not be afraid and do not be dismayed because of the king of Assyria and before all the multitude that is with him, for with us is a greater one than with him."

These words echo what Moses told Joshua (Deuteronomy 31:6-8) and what God told Joshua (Joshua 1:9). Elisha said something similar to his frightened servant when an army surrounded them: "more are those who are with us than those who are with them" (2 Kings 6:16). John writes, "greater is the One in you than the one in the world" (1 John 4:4).

"With him is an arm of flesh, and with us is the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles." An arm of flesh means human strength, which looks powerful but is weak and temporary. The greatest army in the world was just flesh. Judah had the LORD.

"And the people leaned on the words of Hezekiah the king of Judah." His faith gave them courage. Our faith can strengthen others too. When we speak God's truth to frightened people, they can lean on it.

32:9-12 *After this Sennacherib the king of Assyria sent his servants to Jerusalem (and he **was** at Lachish, and all his dominion with him) to Hezekiah the king of Judah and to all Judah who **were** in Jerusalem, saying, "Thus says Sennacherib the king of Assyria: 'On what are you trusting, that you remain under siege in Jerusalem? Is not Hezekiah misleading you, to give you **over** to die by hunger and by thirst, saying, "The LORD our God will deliver us from the hand of the king of Assyria"? Has not Hezekiah himself removed His high places and His altars, and said to Judah and to Jerusalem, saying, "Before one altar you shall bow down, and on it you shall burn incense"?*

Sennacherib was besieging Lachish, a strong city southwest of Jerusalem, and he sent servants to Jerusalem with a message. Pictures of the siege of Lachish were carved on the walls of his palace in Nineveh and have been found by archaeologists.

"On what are you trusting, that you remain under siege in Jerusalem?" That was the real question. Sennacherib's men tried to shake the people's trust in God.

First they said Hezekiah was lying to them, leading them to die "by hunger and by thirst." Then they twisted Hezekiah's reform against him: "Has not Hezekiah himself removed His high places and His altars?" They thought tearing down the high places was an insult to Judah's God. They did

not understand that Hezekiah had removed altars God never wanted, so that the people would worship at the one altar God had chosen (Deuteronomy 12:13-14). The enemy often twists our obedience and tries to make it look like foolishness.

32:13-15 *Do you not know what I and my fathers have done to all the peoples of the lands? Were the gods of the nations of the lands at all able to deliver their land from my hand? Who **was there** among all the gods of these nations which my fathers devoted to destruction that was able to deliver his people from my hand, that your God should be able to deliver you from my hand? And now, do not let Hezekiah deceive you, and do not let him mislead you like this, and do not believe him; for no god of any nation and kingdom has been able to deliver his people from my hand and from the hand of my fathers. How much less will your gods deliver you from my hand!'"*

Then came the boasting. "Do you not know what I and my fathers have done to all the peoples of the lands? Were the gods of the nations of the lands at all able to deliver their land from my hand?" Assyria had conquered nation after nation, and none of their gods had stopped them.

"How much less will your gods deliver you from my hand!" Here was Sennacherib's great mistake. He put the LORD on the same level as the idols of the nations. He could see no difference between the living God and a statue. He was about to learn the difference.

32:16-19 *And his servants spoke still more against the LORD God and against Hezekiah His servant. And he wrote letters to taunt the LORD, the God of Israel, and to speak against Him, saying, "Like the gods of the nations of the lands, who have not delivered their people from my hand, so the God of Hezekiah will not deliver His people from my hand." And they called out with a great voice **in** Judean to the people of Jerusalem who **were** on the wall, to make them afraid and to terrify them, so that they might capture the city. And they spoke concerning the God of Jerusalem as concerning the gods of the peoples of the earth, the work of the hands of mankind.*

"His servants spoke still more against the LORD God and against Hezekiah His servant." Sennacherib even "wrote letters to taunt the LORD, the God of Israel." To taunt means to mock or insult.

They shouted "in Judean," the language of the common people, so that the people on the wall would understand and be afraid. Kings tells how Hezekiah's officials begged them to speak Aramaic, the diplomats' language, and they refused (2 Kings 18:26-28). Fear was their weapon.

"They spoke concerning the God of Jerusalem as concerning the gods of the peoples of the earth, the work of the hands of mankind." This was the root of their sin. They spoke of the Creator as though He were something made by human hands. When people mock God, they are not hurting God. They are showing that they do not know Him.

32:20 *And Hezekiah the king and Isaiah the son of Amoz, the prophet, prayed because of this, and they cried out **to** the heavens.*

"Hezekiah the king and Isaiah the son of Amoz, the prophet, prayed because of this, and they cried out to the heavens."

This is the turning point. The king and the prophet did not argue with the Assyrians. They did not shout back from the wall. They prayed. Kings records Hezekiah's prayer: he spread Sennacherib's letter before the LORD in the temple and asked God to save them so that all the kingdoms of the earth would know that He alone is God (2 Kings 19:14-19; Isaiah 37:14-20).

When the enemy mocks God, the best answer is not our own anger. It is prayer. Take the letter, the threat, the diagnosis, the bill, and spread it out before the Lord. "Call to Me in a day of trouble; I will rescue you, and you will glorify Me" (Psalm 50:15).

32:21-22 *And the LORD sent an angel, and he cut off every mighty man of valor and leader and commander in the camp of the king of Assyria. And he returned with shame of face to his land, and he came **into** the house of his god, and some of those who came out of his own body, there they made him fall by the sword. And the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria and from the hand of all, and He guided them on every side.*

"The LORD sent an angel, and he cut off every mighty man of valor and leader and commander in the camp of the king of Assyria." Kings and Isaiah say that the angel of the LORD struck down 185,000 in the Assyrian camp in one night (2 Kings 19:35; Isaiah 37:36). Chronicles tells it briefly, focusing on the leaders who fell. Some suggest God may have used a plague, but Scripture simply says the LORD sent His angel. I take it as written: God Himself fought for Jerusalem.

Sennacherib "returned with shame of face to his land, and he came into the house of his god, and some of those who came out of his own body, there they made him fall by the sword." His own sons killed him while he worshiped (2 Kings 19:37). This happened about twenty years later, in 681 B.C., but the Chronicler sets it right here to show the end of the man who mocked God. The king who said no god could deliver from his hand found that his own god could not deliver him from his own sons.

"The LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib." The battle was the LORD's, just as it had been in Jehoshaphat's day (20:15).

32:23 *And many **were** bringing an offering to the LORD to Jerusalem, and choice gifts to Hezekiah the king of Judah; and he was lifted up in the eyes of all the nations from then on.*

"Many were bringing an offering to the LORD to Jerusalem, and choice gifts to Hezekiah the king of Judah; and he was lifted up in the eyes of all the nations from then on." The nations saw what God had done. They honored Judah's God, and they honored His king. When God acts, His name is lifted up among the nations.

32:24-26 *In those days Hezekiah was sick to* ***the point of*** *dying, and he prayed to the LORD; and He spoke to him, and He gave him a sign. And Hezekiah did not repay according to the benefit* ***done*** *to him, for his heart was haughty; and there was wrath on him and on Judah and Jerusalem. And Hezekiah humbled himself for the haughtiness of his heart, he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the wrath of the LORD did not come on them in the days of Hezekiah.*

"In those days Hezekiah was sick to the point of dying, and he prayed to the LORD; and He spoke to him, and He gave him a sign." Kings and Isaiah tell this story in full. Isaiah told Hezekiah he would die. Hezekiah wept and prayed, and God added fifteen years to his life and gave him the sign of the shadow going backward on the steps of Ahaz (2 Kings 20:1-11; Isaiah 38).

"And Hezekiah did not repay according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was haughty." After God healed him, Hezekiah became proud. Kings shows how: he showed the envoys from Babylon all his treasures (2 Kings 20:12-19). "There was wrath on him and on Judah and Jerusalem."

Even the best of us can fall into pride after a great blessing. Uzziah did (26:16). Hezekiah did too. Great answers to prayer should make us more humble, not less.

"Hezekiah humbled himself for the haughtiness of his heart, he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the wrath of the LORD did not come on them in the days of Hezekiah." Here is the difference between Hezekiah and Uzziah. Uzziah raged when he was corrected. Hezekiah humbled himself. God's judgment was delayed, though it would come later. Humility does not always erase consequences, but God gives grace to the humble (James 4:6).

32:27-29 *And Hezekiah had very great riches and honor; and he made for himself treasuries for silver and for gold and for precious stones and for spices and for shields and for all* ***kinds of*** *desirable articles, and storehouses for the produce of grain and new wine and fresh oil, and stalls for each and every* ***kind of*** *livestock, and flocks for the stalls. And cities he made for himself, and livestock of flock and herd in abundance, for God had given him very much property.*

"Hezekiah had very great riches and honor." He built treasuries for silver, gold, precious stones, spices and shields, storehouses for grain, wine and oil, stalls for livestock, and cities. "For God had given him very much property." The Chronicler is careful to say where it came from. God gave it.

32:30 *And he, Hezekiah, stopped up the upper outlet of the waters of Gihon and directed them down to the west of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all his work.*

"He, Hezekiah, stopped up the upper outlet of the waters of Gihon and directed them down to the west of the city of David." This is one of the most famous building works of the Old Testament. Hezekiah's workers cut a tunnel through solid rock, about a third of a mile long, to bring the water of the Gihon spring inside the city walls. It still exists today, and visitors can walk through it. An old inscription found inside the tunnel tells how two crews dug from opposite ends and met in the middle. Kings mentions it too (2 Kings 20:20).

"And Hezekiah prospered in all his work."

32:31 *And so in **the matter of** the envoys of the officials of Babylon, who sent to him to inquire **about** the sign that had happened in the land, God left him, to test him, to know all **that was** in his heart.*

"And so in the matter of the envoys of the officials of Babylon, who sent to him to inquire about the sign that had happened in the land, God left him, to test him, to know all that was in his heart."

The envoys came from Babylon, which was then a smaller power under Assyria. They had heard of the sign, and they also hoped to find an ally against Assyria (2 Kings 20:12). This verse gives us something Kings does not: the reason God allowed it. "God left him, to test him, to know all that was in his heart."

God did not leave Hezekiah because He stopped loving him. He stepped back for a time to let Hezekiah see what was in his own heart. God already knew. Hezekiah needed to find out. Sometimes God lets us face a test without feeling His help, so that we can see our own weakness and learn to depend on Him. Moses said God tested Israel in the wilderness "to know what was in your heart" (Deuteronomy 8:2).

Hezekiah did not pass this test well. He showed off his wealth to Babylon. Isaiah told him that one day Babylon would carry all of it away (2 Kings 20:16-18). In 586 B.C., that is just what happened (36:18).

32:32-33 *And the rest of the matters of Hezekiah, and his **deeds of** steadfast love, look, they **are** written in the vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, the prophet, in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. And Hezekiah lay down with his fathers, and they buried him in the ascent of the graves of the sons of David; and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honor at his death. And Manasseh his son reigned in his place.*

"The rest of the matters of Hezekiah, and his deeds of steadfast love, look, they are written in the vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, the prophet." His good deeds are called deeds of hesed, loyal love.

"They buried him in the ascent of the graves of the sons of David; and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honor at his death." Compare this with Jehoram, who died with no one missing him (21:20). Hezekiah was honored and loved. He died about 686 B.C.

"And Manasseh his son reigned in his place." The best of fathers was followed by the worst of sons. But as we will see, even Manasseh's story is not without hope.

Chapter 32 Summary

After all Hezekiah's faithfulness, Sennacherib king of Assyria invaded Judah and attacked its fortified cities. Hezekiah and his leaders stopped up the springs outside Jerusalem, rebuilt the walls, made weapons and organized the people. He encouraged them not to fear, for with Assyria was an arm of flesh, but with them was the LORD. Sennacherib's servants mocked Hezekiah and the LORD, twisted the reform against him, boasted that no god had saved any nation from Assyria, wrote taunting letters and shouted in Judean to frighten the people. Hezekiah and Isaiah prayed, and the LORD sent an angel who cut down the Assyrian army's leaders. Sennacherib went

home in shame and was killed by his sons in his god's temple. The nations honored Hezekiah. When he was sick to the point of death, he prayed, and God gave him a sign, but his heart became proud. He humbled himself, and the wrath did not come in his days. God gave him great wealth, and he brought the waters of Gihon into the city. When envoys came from Babylon, God left him to test him and show what was in his heart. He died honored by all and was buried among the sons of David, and Manasseh his son reigned in his place.

Chapter 32 Study Questions

1. When did Sennacherib invade, according to verse 1, and why is that worth noticing? (32:1)

2. What practical steps did Hezekiah take to prepare for the siege? (32:3-6)

3. What did Hezekiah tell the people about the king of Assyria and about the LORD? (32:7-8)

4. What was Sennacherib's great mistake about the LORD? (32:13-15, 19)

5. What did Hezekiah and Isaiah do, and how did God answer? (32:20-21)

6. What happened after God healed Hezekiah, and how did Hezekiah respond? (32:24-26)

7. Why did God leave Hezekiah when the envoys came from Babylon? (32:31)

8. Hezekiah faced his greatest trouble right after a season of faithfulness. How does that shape what you expect from following God?

9. "With him is an arm of flesh, and with us is the LORD our God." What "arm of flesh" seems powerful against you right now? How does this verse help?

10. God tested Hezekiah "to know all that was in his heart." What has a recent test shown you about your own heart?

Chapter 33: Manasseh's Sin and Repentance, and Amon

Scripture

33:1-13 Manasseh ***was*** a son of twelve years when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD dispossessed from before the sons of Israel. And he again built the high places which Hezekiah his father had torn down, and he raised up altars for the Baals, and he made Asherahs, and he bowed down to all the host of the heavens and served them. And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem My name shall be forever." And he built altars for all the host of the heavens in the two courts of the house of the LORD. And he made his sons pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and he practiced soothsaying and practiced omens and practiced sorcery, and dealt with a medium and a spiritist. He multiplied doing the evil in the eyes of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger. And he put the carved image of the idol which he had made in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever. And I will not again remove the foot of Israel from the ground which I appointed for your fathers, only if they take care to do all that I have commanded them, according to all the law and the statutes and the judgments by the hand of Moses." And Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray to do evil more than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed from before the sons of Israel. And the LORD spoke to Manasseh and to his people, and they did not pay attention. And the LORD brought on them the commanders of the army that ***belonged*** to the king of Assyria, and they captured Manasseh with the hooks, and they bound him with the bronze fetters, and they brought him to Babylon. And when he was in distress, he entreated the face of the LORD his God, and he humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. And he prayed to Him, and He was entreated by him, and He heard his supplication, and He brought him back to Jerusalem to his kingdom. And Manasseh knew that the LORD, He ***is*** God.

33:14-25 And after this he built an outer wall for the city of David, west of Gihon, in the wadi, and as far as the entrance at the Fish Gate, and he went around the Ophel and made it very high; and he put commanders of the army in all the fortified cities in Judah. And he removed the gods of foreignness and the idol from the house of the LORD, and all the altars which he had built on the mountain of the house of the LORD and in Jerusalem, and he threw ***them*** outside the city. And he built the altar of the LORD, and he sacrificed on it sacrifices of peace offerings and thanksgiving, and he said to Judah to serve the LORD, the God of Israel. But still the people ***were*** sacrificing at the high places, only to the LORD their God. And the rest of the matters of Manasseh, and his prayer to his God, and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of the LORD, the God of Israel, look, they ***are*** in the matters of the kings of Israel. And his prayer, and ***how He*** was entreated by him, and all his sin and his unfaithfulness, and the places in which he built high places and set up the Asherim and the carved images before he humbled himself, look, they ***are*** written in the words of Hozai. And Manasseh lay down with his fathers, and they buried him ***in*** his house; and Amon his son reigned in his place. Amon ***was*** a son of twenty-two years when he became king, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD,

just as Manasseh his father had done; and to all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made Amon sacrificed, and he served them. And he did not humble himself before the LORD, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; for he, Amon, multiplied guilt. And his servants conspired against him, and they killed him in his house. And the people of the land struck down all who had conspired against King Amon, and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his place.

Chapter 33 Preview

Manasseh, son of the good King Hezekiah, becomes king at twelve and reigns fifty-five years, longer than any other king of Judah. He is also the worst. He rebuilds the high places his father tore down, builds altars to the stars in the temple courts, burns his sons in the fire, practices sorcery and consults mediums, and sets up an idol in the house of God. He leads Judah to do more evil than the nations the LORD had driven out.

God speaks, and Manasseh will not listen. So God sends the Assyrians, who take him with hooks and bronze chains to Babylon. And there, in distress, the worst king in Judah's history humbles himself greatly and prays. God hears him and brings him home. Manasseh knows at last that the LORD is God. He spends his remaining years trying to undo the damage. His son Amon, who does not humble himself, is murdered after two years. This chapter holds one of the greatest pictures of grace in the Old Testament. Kings tells Manasseh's sins in 2 Kings 21 but not his repentance.

Chapter 33 Study

33:1 *Manasseh **was** a son of twelve years when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem.*

"Manasseh was a son of twelve years when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem." On the dates used in this study, about 697 to 642 B.C., counting about ten years when he ruled alongside his father Hezekiah. He had the longest reign of any king of Judah, and he used much of it to do evil.

33:2-5 *And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD dispossessed from before the sons of Israel. And he again built the high places which Hezekiah his father had torn down, and he raised up altars for the Baals, and he made Asherahs, and he bowed down to all the host of the heavens and served them. And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem My name shall be forever." And he built altars for all the host of the heavens in the two courts of the house of the LORD.*

"He did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD dispossessed from before the sons of Israel." An abomination is something God finds detestable. God had driven out the Canaanites because of these very practices (Deuteronomy 18:9-12). Now a king of David's line brought them back.

"He again built the high places which Hezekiah his father had torn down." Everything his father had done, Manasseh undid. "He raised up altars for the Baals, and he made Asherahs, and he

bowed down to all the host of the heavens and served them." The host of the heavens here means the sun, moon and stars, worshiped as gods, a practice common in Assyria and Babylon. Moses had warned against it (Deuteronomy 4:19).

Worst of all, "he built altars in the house of the LORD," the very place where God had said, "In Jerusalem My name shall be forever." He built star-worship altars "in the two courts of the house of the LORD." He brought idolatry into God's own house.

How could the son of Hezekiah do this? Scripture does not explain it. Perhaps the officials who had resented Hezekiah's reforms gathered around the young king. Perhaps he wanted to please Assyria, whose gods he copied. What we do know is that a godly father cannot give his faith to his son by inheritance. Each generation must choose.

33:6 *And he made his sons pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and he practiced soothsaying and practiced omens and practiced sorcery, and dealt with a medium and a spiritist. He multiplied doing the evil in the eyes of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger.*

"He made his sons pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and he practiced soothsaying and practiced omens and practiced sorcery, and dealt with a medium and a spiritist."

This verse lists the darkest practices of the pagan world. Like his grandfather Ahaz (28:3), Manasseh offered his own sons in the fire to false gods. Soothsaying and omens were ways of trying to read the future from signs. Sorcery was the use of spells and magic. A medium claimed to speak with the dead, and a spiritist claimed special knowledge from spirits. God had forbidden every one of these (Leviticus 19:26, 31; Deuteronomy 18:10-12). They are attempts to get power, knowledge or guidance apart from God, and they open the door to the demonic.

I will not dwell on the details. The Bible gives them in a single sentence, and that is enough. But we should be clear: these things are not harmless games. Fortune-telling, seances, spells and the like are still around today, sometimes dressed up as entertainment. God forbids them because He loves us and knows where they lead. The answer is not fear but Christ, who has disarmed the powers of darkness at the cross (Colossians 2:15).

"He multiplied doing the evil in the eyes of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger." Kings adds that he "shed very much innocent blood, until he had filled Jerusalem" (2 Kings 21:16). Manasseh was cruel as well as idolatrous.

33:7-9 *And he put the carved image of the idol which he had made in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever. And I will not again remove the foot of Israel from the ground which I appointed for your fathers, only if they take care to do all that I have commanded them, according to all the law and the statutes and the judgments by the hand of Moses." And Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray to do evil more than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed from before the sons of Israel.*

"He put the carved image of the idol which he had made in the house of God." Kings calls it an image of Asherah (2 Kings 21:7). He set it in the very house where God had promised to put His name forever.

The Chronicler reminds us what God had said to David and Solomon: if Israel would keep His law, He would "not again remove the foot of Israel from the ground." Manasseh broke that condition in the worst possible way.

"Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray to do evil more than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed from before the sons of Israel." This is a staggering statement. God's own people became worse than the Canaanites. If anyone in the Old Testament seemed beyond hope, it was Manasseh.

33:10 *And the LORD spoke to Manasseh and to his people, and they did not pay attention.*

"The LORD spoke to Manasseh and to his people, and they did not pay attention."

Before God judged, He spoke. Kings tells us He sent His prophets, warning that He would wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish (2 Kings 21:10-15). Even to the worst king, God sent warnings. God does not delight in judgment. He would rather His people turn and live (Ezekiel 33:11).

But Manasseh and his people "did not pay attention." They heard and ignored it. That is the most dangerous place a person can be. Hebrews warns, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:15). When God speaks gently and we will not listen, He may speak in a way we cannot ignore.

33:11 *And the LORD brought on them the commanders of the army that **belonged** to the king of Assyria, and they captured Manasseh with the hooks, and they bound him with the bronze fetters, and they brought him to Babylon.*

"The LORD brought on them the commanders of the army that belonged to the king of Assyria, and they captured Manasseh with the hooks, and they bound him with the bronze fetters, and they brought him to Babylon."

The hooks may be literal hooks or rings. Assyrian kings boasted of leading captive kings with hooks through their noses or lips, like animals. Or it may mean he was caught like a fish on a hook. Either way, the great king of Judah, who had ruled for decades and filled Jerusalem with idols, was dragged away in chains, shamed and helpless.

Why Babylon, if it was the king of Assyria? At this time Assyria ruled Babylon, and Assyrian kings sometimes held court there. Scripture does not give the year. Many think it was about 650 to 648 B.C., when Babylon had rebelled against Assyria and the Assyrian king may have suspected Manasseh of joining the revolt. But this is a suggestion, not something the text says.

This was not only punishment. It was God's mercy in a hard form. God took away everything Manasseh trusted in, his throne, his power, his idols, his freedom, so that he would finally see the truth. Sometimes the kindest thing God can do is let us hit bottom. The prodigal son only came to himself when he was starving in the pig pen (Luke 15:17).

33:12 *And when he was in distress, he entreated the face of the LORD his God, and he humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.*

"And when he was in distress, he entreated the face of the LORD his God, and he humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers."

Here is the turning point of Manasseh's life, and one of the most hopeful verses in the Old Testament.

"When he was in distress." Distress did for Manasseh what it never did for Ahaz. Ahaz, in his distress, sinned even more (28:22). Manasseh, in his distress, turned to God. The same trouble can harden one heart and soften another. What makes the difference is whether we will humble ourselves.

"He entreated the face of the LORD his God." To entreat the face of someone means to plead with him, to seek his favor. Notice the words "the LORD his God." After all he had done, Manasseh still called on the God of his fathers as his own God. He did not go to the gods of Assyria or the stars he had worshiped. In his darkest hour he knew where the only real help was.

"He humbled himself greatly." Not a little, but greatly. He did not make excuses. He did not bargain. He did not point to his father's goodness. He came as a sinner with nothing to offer. This is exactly what God called for in 7:14: "humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways."

Have you ever wondered whether you have gone too far for God to take you back? Think of Manasseh. He worshiped idols in God's house. He sacrificed his own children. He practiced sorcery. He filled Jerusalem with innocent blood. And still, when he humbled himself greatly, God heard him. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and crushed heart, God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:17).

33:13 *And he prayed to Him, and He was entreated by him, and He heard his supplication, and He brought him back to Jerusalem to his kingdom. And Manasseh knew that the LORD, He **is** God.*

"He prayed to Him, and He was entreated by him, and He heard his supplication, and He brought him back to Jerusalem to his kingdom. And Manasseh knew that the LORD, He is God."

Read it slowly. "He prayed to Him." "He was entreated by him." "He heard his supplication." A supplication is a humble, earnest request. "He brought him back." Every one of those phrases is grace. God did not just forgive Manasseh in his heart. He brought him home. He gave him back his kingdom.

Grace is God's kindness given to those who do not deserve it. Manasseh deserved nothing but judgment. God gave him mercy, forgiveness and a second chance. That is grace. Paul wrote, "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5:20).

"And Manasseh knew that the LORD, He is God." After fifty years of chasing false gods, he finally knew the true one. It took chains in Babylon to bring him there, but he got there. This is the deepest result of grace: not just being rescued, but knowing God.

Paul called himself the foremost of sinners, "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost" (1 Timothy 1:15). He said God saved him "that in me, the foremost, Jesus Christ might display all His patience as a pattern for those who were going to believe on Him" (1 Timothy 1:16). Manasseh is the Old Testament's great pattern of the same truth. If God would hear Manasseh, He will hear anyone.

This does not mean sin does not matter. Manasseh's sins left deep scars on Judah that his repentance could not undo (2 Kings 23:26; 24:3-4). Forgiveness does not always remove the consequences of sin in this life. But it does restore the sinner to God.

I believe this is why the Chronicler included this story, which Kings does not tell. He was writing to Jews who had come back from exile in Babylon. Like Manasseh, their nation had been carried to Babylon in chains because of its sin. And like Manasseh, God had heard them and brought them home. Manasseh's story was their story. It is our story too. God took away the debt of our sin through the death of His Son on the cross, and He welcomes every sinner who comes to Him humbly. Jesus said, "the one coming to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37).

If you are carrying a past you think is too dark for God, bring it to Him today. You are not beyond His reach.

33:14 *And after this he built an outer wall for the city of David, west of Gihon, in the wadi, and as far as the entrance at the Fish Gate, and he went around the Ophel and made it very high; and he put commanders of the army in all the fortified cities in Judah.*

"After this he built an outer wall for the city of David, west of Gihon, in the wadi, and as far as the entrance at the Fish Gate." He made the wall around the Ophel "very high," and put commanders in all the fortified cities. Like Hezekiah before him, he strengthened Jerusalem against its enemies. A restored life often shows itself in rebuilding what was broken.

33:15-16 *And he removed the gods of foreignness and the idol from the house of the LORD, and all the altars which he had built on the mountain of the house of the LORD and in Jerusalem, and he threw **them** outside the city. And he built the altar of the LORD, and he sacrificed on it sacrifices of peace offerings and thanksgiving, and he said to Judah to serve the LORD, the God of Israel.*

"He removed the gods of foreignness and the idol from the house of the LORD." The idol he had set up himself, he now removed himself. He tore down the altars he had built "on the mountain of the house of the LORD and in Jerusalem, and he threw them outside the city."

"He built the altar of the LORD, and he sacrificed on it sacrifices of peace offerings and thanksgiving." Thanksgiving offerings were brought to thank God for His goodness. Manasseh had much to thank Him for. "And he said to Judah to serve the LORD, the God of Israel." He used his authority, the same authority he once used to lead Judah astray, to call them back to God.

True repentance is more than feeling sorry. It shows itself in changed actions. John the Baptist told people to "produce fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8). Manasseh did.

33:17 *But still the people **were** sacrificing at the high places, only to the LORD their God.*

"But still the people were sacrificing at the high places, only to the LORD their God." They had stopped worshiping idols, at least openly, but they still worshiped in the wrong places. It was easier for Manasseh to lead the people into sin than to lead them out of it. The damage of fifty years could not be undone in a few. This is a sobering lesson. Our sin affects others, and sometimes they do not follow us back when we repent.

33:18-20 *And the rest of the matters of Manasseh, and his prayer to his God, and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of the LORD, the God of Israel, look, they **are** in the matters of the kings of Israel. And his prayer, and **how He** was entreated by him, and all his sin and his unfaithfulness, and the places in which he built high places and set up the Asherim and the carved images before he humbled himself, look, they **are** written in the words of Hozai. And Manasseh lay down with his fathers, and they buried him **in** his house; and Amon his son reigned in his place.*

"His prayer to his God, and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of the LORD," were written in the records of the kings of Israel. "His prayer, and how He was entreated by him, and all his sin and his unfaithfulness," and the places where he had set up idols "before he humbled himself," were written in "the words of Hozai." Hozai may be the name of a prophet, or the word may mean "the seers." The Chronicler mentions his prayer twice. He wants us to remember that Manasseh prayed and that God heard.

Notice that his sins were written down too. Grace does not pretend sin did not happen. But God's record of Manasseh does not end with his sin. It ends with his prayer.

"Manasseh lay down with his fathers, and they buried him in his house." He was buried in the garden of his own palace (2 Kings 21:18), not with the kings. "And Amon his son reigned in his place."

33:21-23 *Amon **was** a son of twenty-two years when he became king, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as Manasseh his father had done; and to all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made Amon sacrificed, and he served them. And he did not humble himself before the LORD, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; for he, Amon, multiplied guilt.*

"Amon was a son of twenty-two years when he became king, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem," about 642 to 640 B.C. He "did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as Manasseh his father had done." He sacrificed to the carved images Manasseh had made.

This is the tragedy of Manasseh's life. His son copied his sin but not his repentance. "He did not humble himself before the LORD, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; for he, Amon, multiplied guilt." Amon had seen his father return from Babylon a changed man, and he chose the father's old path instead of his new one. He was probably born while Manasseh was still in his wicked years, and perhaps the early example went deeper than the later one.

Parents, our children watch the whole of our lives. If you have repented of things in your past, live your new life so plainly that your children see the change. And pray for them, because they must each make their own choice.

33:24-25 *And his servants conspired against him, and they killed him in his house. And the people of the land struck down all who had conspired against King Amon, and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his place.*

"His servants conspired against him, and they killed him in his house." Scripture does not tell us why. Then "the people of the land struck down all who had conspired against King Amon." The people of the land were the ordinary landowners of Judah, who seem to have been loyal to David's line. They "made Josiah his son king in his place."

Josiah was only eight years old. But from the grandson of Manasseh and the son of Amon, God would raise up one of the most faithful kings Judah ever had.

Chapter 33 Summary

Manasseh became king at twelve and reigned fifty-five years. He did evil like the nations God had driven out, rebuilding the high places, making altars for the Baals and the stars even in the temple courts, burning his sons in the fire in the valley of Hinnom, practicing sorcery and consulting mediums, and setting an idol in the house of God. He led Judah to do more evil than the Canaanites. The LORD spoke to him and his people, but they did not listen, so the LORD brought the Assyrian commanders, who captured Manasseh with hooks and bronze chains and took him to Babylon. In his distress he humbled himself greatly and prayed, and God heard him and brought him back to Jerusalem, and Manasseh knew that the LORD is God. He rebuilt the outer wall, removed the foreign gods and the idol from the temple, restored the altar of the LORD and told Judah to serve Him, though the people still sacrificed at the high places. His prayer and his sins were recorded, and he was buried in his house. His son Amon did evil like his father but did

not humble himself, and after two years his servants killed him. The people of the land killed the conspirators and made Josiah king.

There are things in my past that once made me wonder whether God could forgive me. I know now that He has. Manasseh did more evil than any king of Judah, and God still heard him when he humbled himself. No one is too far gone for that kind of grace.

Chapter 33 Study Questions

1. List some of the evil things Manasseh did. How did his evil compare with the nations God had driven out? (33:2-9)

2. What did the LORD do before He judged Manasseh, and how did Manasseh respond? (33:10)

3. What happened to Manasseh, and where was he taken? (33:11)

4. What did Manasseh do in his distress? (33:12)

5. How did God respond to Manasseh's prayer, and what did Manasseh come to know? (33:13)

6. What did Manasseh do after he came back to Jerusalem? (33:14-16)

7. How was Amon different from his father? (33:22-23)

8. Is there anything in your past that makes you wonder whether God could forgive you? What does Manasseh's story say to you? (33:12-13; 1 Timothy 1:15-16)

9. Distress drove Manasseh to God but drove Ahaz further away (28:22). What has trouble done in your heart?

10. Manasseh's son copied his sin but not his repentance. How can you make the change God has worked in you plain to the people closest to you?

Chapter 34: Josiah Finds the Book of the Law

Scripture

34:1-18 Josiah ***was*** a son of eight years when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. And he did what ***was*** right in the eyes of the LORD, and he walked in the ways of David his father, and he did not turn aside ***to the*** right or ***to the*** left. And in the eighth year of his reign, and he ***was*** still a youth, he began to seek the God of David his father; and in the twelfth year he began to cleanse Judah and Jerusalem from the high places and the Asherim and the carved images and the molten images. And they tore down the altars of the Baals before him, and the incense altars that ***were*** high above them he cut down; and the Asherim and the carved images and the molten images he broke in pieces and pulverized ***them***, and he scattered ***them*** on the face of the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. And the bones of priests he burned on their altars, and he cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. And in the cities of Manasseh and Ephraim and Simeon, and as far as Naphtali, with their swords all around, and he tore down the altars and the Asherim, and the carved images he crushed, to pulverize ***them***, and all the incense altars he cut down in all the land of Israel; and he returned to Jerusalem. And in the eighteenth year of his reign, to cleanse the land and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the official of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz, the recorder, to repair the house of the LORD his God. And they came to Hilkiah the high priest, and they gave the money that was brought ***into*** the house of God, which the Levites, the keepers of the threshold, had gathered from the hand of Manasseh and Ephraim and from all the remnant of Israel and from all Judah and Benjamin; and they returned ***to*** Jerusalem. And they gave ***it*** into the hand of the doers of the work who were appointed in the house of the LORD; and they gave it to the doers of the work who were working in the house of the LORD, to mend and to repair the house. And they gave ***it*** to the craftsmen and to the builders, to buy hewn stones and timbers for the couplings, and to make beams for the houses which the kings of Judah had ruined. And the men ***were*** working in faithfulness in the work; and over them ***were*** appointed Jahath and Obadiah, the Levites, of the sons of Merari, and Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to oversee; and the Levites, everyone skilled in instruments of song, and ***were*** over the burden bearers, and ***were*** overseeing every doer of work for each and every service; and of the Levites ***were*** scribes and officers and gatekeepers. And when they brought out the money that was brought ***into*** the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law of the LORD ***given*** by the hand of Moses. And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, "The book of the law I have found in the house of the LORD." And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan. And Shaphan brought the book to the king, and he further brought back word to the king, saying, "All that was given into the hand of your servants they are doing. And they have poured out the money that was found in the house of the LORD, and they have put it into the hand of those appointed and into the hand of the doers of the work." And Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, "A book Hilkiah the priest has given to me." And Shaphan read in it before the king.

34:19-33 And it was, when the king heard the words of the law, and he tore his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the servant of the king, saying, "Go, inquire of the LORD for me

and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah concerning the words of the book that has been found; for great ***is*** the wrath of the LORD that has been poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do according to all that is written in this book." And Hilkiah and ***those*** whom the king ***had sent*** went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the garments; and she ***was*** dwelling in Jerusalem in the Second ***Quarter***; and they spoke to her like this. And she said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'Say to the man who sent you to me, "Thus says the LORD: Look, I ***am*** bringing calamity on this place and on its inhabitants, all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah, because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods, so as to provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands; and My wrath will be poured out on this place, and it will not be quenched."' And to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus you shall say to him: 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: "***As for*** the words which you have heard, because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place and against its inhabitants, and you humbled yourself before Me, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard, declares the LORD. Look, I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your graves in peace, and your eyes will not look on all the calamity which I ***am*** bringing on this place and on its inhabitants."'" And they brought back word to the king. And the king sent and gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up ***to*** the house of the LORD, and every man of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the Levites and all the people, from great even to small; and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found ***in*** the house of the LORD. And the king stood in his place, and he made the covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and with all his soul, to do the words of the covenant that are written in this book. And he made everyone who was found in Jerusalem and Benjamin stand ***to it***. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. And Josiah removed all the abominations from all the lands that ***belonged*** to the sons of Israel, and he made everyone who was found in Israel serve, to serve the LORD their God. All his days they did not turn aside from after the LORD, the God of their fathers.

Chapter 34 Preview

Josiah becomes king at eight. At sixteen he begins to seek the God of David, and at twenty he begins to clean the land of idols, from Jerusalem all the way into the old northern territories. At twenty-six he sets workers to repair the temple, and in the middle of the work Hilkiah the high priest finds the book of the law of the LORD.

When it is read to him, Josiah tears his clothes. He sends to Huldah the prophetess, who says that the disaster written in the book will surely come, but because Josiah's heart was tender and he humbled himself, he will not see it. Josiah gathers all the people, reads them the book of the covenant, and leads them in a covenant to keep God's commands with all their heart. All his days they do not turn from the LORD. Kings tells the same story in 2 Kings 22:1 to 23:20, in a slightly different order.

Chapter 34 Study

34:1-2 *Josiah **was** a son of eight years when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. And he did what **was** right in the eyes of the LORD, and he walked in the ways of David his father, and he did not turn aside **to the** right or **to the** left.*

"Josiah was a son of eight years when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem." On the dates used in this study, about 640 to 609 B.C. His father Amon had been murdered (33:24), and the boy was put on the throne by the people of the land.

"He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and he walked in the ways of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left." He kept to the straight path God had set, as Moses told Israel to do (Deuteronomy 5:32). Kings says no king before or after him turned to the LORD "with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might" as Josiah did (2 Kings 23:25).

Think about Josiah's family. His grandfather Manasseh had been the worst king of Judah, though he repented late in life. His father Amon was wicked. Yet Josiah became one of the godliest kings Judah ever had. God's grace is not limited by our family tree.

34:3 *And in the eighth year of his reign, and he **was** still a youth, he began to seek the God of David his father; and in the twelfth year he began to cleanse Judah and Jerusalem from the high places and the Asherim and the carved images and the molten images.*

"In the eighth year of his reign, and he was still a youth, he began to seek the God of David his father." He was sixteen, about 632 B.C. We are not told what moved him. Perhaps someone in the palace taught him, or perhaps God simply drew his young heart. Either way, he began to seek God as a teenager. It is never too early to seek God. Solomon wrote, "remember your Creator in the days of your young manhood" (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

"In the twelfth year he began to cleanse Judah and Jerusalem from the high places and the Asherim and the carved images and the molten images." He was twenty, about 628 B.C. Seeking God came first, and the cleansing followed. A heart that has found God wants to get rid of what offends Him.

The prophet Jeremiah began to preach in Josiah's thirteenth year (Jeremiah 1:2), and the prophet Zephaniah also preached in Josiah's days (Zephaniah 1:1). God raised up young prophets to stand beside a young king.

34:4-5 *And they tore down the altars of the Baals before him, and the incense altars that **were** high above them he cut down; and the Asherim and the carved images and the molten images he broke in pieces and pulverized **them**, and he scattered **them** on the face of the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. And the bones of priests he burned on their altars, and he cleansed Judah and Jerusalem.*

"They tore down the altars of the Baals before him." Josiah oversaw the work himself. They cut down the incense altars, broke the images in pieces and "pulverized them," grinding them into dust, and "scattered them on the face of the graves of those who had sacrificed to them." The

graves of idol worshipers were unclean, and so the dust of the idols was scattered there as a sign of shame.

"The bones of priests he burned on their altars." Burning human bones on an altar made it unclean forever, so it could never be used again. This fulfilled a prophecy given about three hundred years before. A man of God from Judah had told Jeroboam at the altar in Bethel that a son of David named Josiah would burn the bones of the priests on it (1 Kings 13:2). God had named him centuries before he was born. Kings tells how Josiah fulfilled it at Bethel (2 Kings 23:15-16). God's Word always comes true, even if it takes three hundred years.

34:6-7 *And in the cities of Manasseh and Ephraim and Simeon, and as far as Naphtali, with their swords all around, and he tore down the altars and the Asherim, and the carved images he crushed, to pulverize **them**, and all the incense altars he cut down in all the land of Israel; and he returned to Jerusalem.*

The cleansing reached far beyond Judah. "In the cities of Manasseh and Ephraim and Simeon, and as far as Naphtali." These were the lands of the old northern kingdom, now under Assyria. But Assyria was growing weak, and Josiah was able to reach into the north. He "tore down the altars and the Asherim," crushed the carved images, cut down the incense altars "in all the land of Israel," and then "returned to Jerusalem."

Josiah wanted all of God's land clean, not just his own corner. His heart, like Hezekiah's, was for all Israel.

34:8-13 *And in the eighteenth year of his reign, to cleanse the land and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the official of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz, the recorder, to repair the house of the LORD his God. And they came to Hilkiah the high priest, and they gave the money that was brought **into** the house of God, which the Levites, the keepers of the threshold, had gathered from the hand of Manasseh and Ephraim and from all the remnant of Israel and from all Judah and Benjamin; and they returned **to** Jerusalem. And they gave **it** into the hand of the doers of the work who were appointed in the house of the LORD; and they gave it to the doers of the work who were working in the house of the LORD, to mend and to repair the house. And they gave **it** to the craftsmen and to the builders, to buy hewn stones and timbers for the couplings, and to make beams for the houses which the kings of Judah had ruined. And the men **were** working in faithfulness in the work; and over them **were** appointed Jahath and Obadiah, the Levites, of the sons of Merari, and Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to oversee; and the Levites, everyone skilled in instruments of song, and **were** over the burden bearers, and **were** overseeing every doer of work for each and every service; and of the Levites **were** scribes and officers and gatekeepers.*

"In the eighteenth year of his reign," about 622 B.C., when Josiah was twenty-six, he sent three officials, Shaphan the scribe, Maaseiah the governor of the city and Joah the recorder, "to repair the house of the LORD his God." The temple had been neglected and damaged under Manasseh and Amon.

The money had been gathered by the Levites "from the hand of Manasseh and Ephraim and from all the remnant of Israel and from all Judah and Benjamin." Even people from the north gave. They brought it to "Hilkiah the high priest," who gave it to the workers. The workers bought "hewn stones and timbers" to repair what "the kings of Judah had ruined."

"The men were working in faithfulness in the work." Levites from the families of Merari and Kohath oversaw the work. Levites skilled in music were there too, and Levites served as "scribes and officers and gatekeepers." Everyone had a part.

As with Joash's repairs (24:11-14), the work was honest. Kings adds that no accounting was asked of them, "for they are working in faithfulness" (2 Kings 22:7). When people are faithful, they can be trusted.

34:14-15 *And when they brought out the money that was brought **into** the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law of the LORD **given** by the hand of Moses. And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, "The book of the law I have found in the house of the LORD." And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan.*

"When they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law of the LORD given by the hand of Moses."

What was this book? It was the Law that God gave through Moses. Many think it was Deuteronomy, because Josiah's reforms and the curses that frightened him (34:24) match that book closely. Others think it was the whole Law of Moses, the first five books of the Bible, which includes Deuteronomy. Either way, it was God's Word.

How could the book of the law be lost in the temple? Under Manasseh and Amon, about fifty-seven years of idolatry, God's Word had been neglected, perhaps even hidden to protect it, or lost among the rubbish. Some modern scholars think the book was written at this time and presented as old. I do not accept that. The text says plainly it was "given by the hand of Moses," and I take it at its word.

"Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, The book of the law I have found in the house of the LORD." What a discovery! It is possible to have a temple, priests and worship, and still lose God's Word. It is possible today too. A church can be busy and still have lost the Bible. And many homes have a Bible that is lost on a shelf. Where is yours?

34:16-18 *And Shaphan brought the book to the king, and he further brought back word to the king, saying, "All that was given into the hand of your servants they are doing. And they have poured out the money that was found in the house of the LORD, and they have put it into the hand of those appointed and into the hand of the doers of the work." And Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, "A book Hilkiah the priest has given to me." And Shaphan read in it before the king.*

Shaphan took the book to the king. First he gave his report on the repair work: "All that was given into the hand of your servants they are doing." The money had been paid to the workers.

Then, almost as an afterthought, he said, "A book Hilkiah the priest has given to me." And "Shaphan read in it before the king."

Notice how Shaphan mentions the book after the business report. He did not seem to understand yet how important it was. He was about to find out.

34:19 *And it was, when the king heard the words of the law, and he tore his clothes.*

"When the king heard the words of the law, and he tore his clothes."

Tearing one's clothes was a sign of deep grief and horror. Josiah heard God's Word, and it broke his heart. He saw at once how far his people had fallen from what God required, and he knew what the law said would happen to a people who forsook God (Deuteronomy 28-29).

This is what God's Word does when we truly hear it. It shows us ourselves. "The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12). Compare Josiah's son Jehoiakim, who years later heard Jeremiah's scroll read and cut it up and burned it piece by piece, and no one tore his garments (Jeremiah 36:23-24). The same Word. Two very different hearts.

How do you respond when God's Word shows you your sin?

34:20-21 *And the king commanded Hilkiah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the servant of the king, saying, "Go, inquire of the LORD for me and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah concerning the words of the book that has been found; for great **is** the wrath of the LORD that has been poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do according to all that is written in this book."*

Josiah sent Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Abdon, Shaphan and Asaiah to "inquire of the LORD." Josiah did not only want to know what the book said. He wanted to know what God would do. "Great is the wrath of the LORD that has been poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do according to all that is written in this book."

Notice that he prayed "for me and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah." He thought of the whole people, north and south, and he included himself. He did not point the finger at others.

34:22 *And Hilkiah and **those** whom the king **had sent** went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the garments; and she **was** dwelling in Jerusalem in the Second **Quarter**; and they spoke to her like this.*

They went to "Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum," who kept the royal or temple wardrobe. She lived "in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter," a newer part of the city.

It is interesting that they went to Huldah, though Jeremiah and Zephaniah were prophesying at this time. Perhaps she was close by and well known. God has spoken through women prophets at many times: Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), and Anna, who saw the baby Jesus (Luke 2:36-38). Huldah spoke God's word, and the king listened.

34:23-25 *And she said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'Say to the man who sent you to me, "Thus says the LORD: Look, I **am** bringing calamity on this place and on its inhabitants, all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah, because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods, so as to provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands; and My wrath will be poured out on this place, and it will not be quenched."'*

Huldah's answer came in two parts. First, for the nation: "Thus says the LORD: Look, I am bringing calamity on this place and on its inhabitants, all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah." The judgment was coming. Why? "Because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods." "My wrath will be poured out on this place, and it will not be quenched."

This is hard to hear. Even Josiah's great reform would not turn away the judgment. The sins of Manasseh's reign had gone too deep, and the people's hearts had not truly changed (2 Kings 23:26). Jeremiah says that in these years Judah "did not return to Me with all her heart, but rather with falsehood" (Jeremiah 3:10). Outward reform is not the same as inward repentance.

34:26-28 *And to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus you shall say to him: 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: "**As for** the words which you have heard, because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place and against its inhabitants, and you humbled yourself before Me, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard, declares the LORD. Look, I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your graves in peace, and your eyes will not look on all the calamity which I **am** bringing on this place and on its inhabitants."'" And they brought back word to the king.*

Second, for the king: "because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place and against its inhabitants, and you humbled yourself before Me, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard, declares the LORD."

A tender heart is soft, easily moved by God's Word, the opposite of a hard heart. Josiah's heart was tender. When he heard God's Word, he humbled himself, tore his clothes and wept. And God heard him.

"Look, I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your graves in peace, and your eyes will not look on all the calamity." Josiah would die before the disaster came. Josiah was later killed in battle (35:23-24), so "in peace" does not mean a peaceful death. It means he would be buried before the city fell and the temple burned, and that he would die at peace with God. He was spared seeing the ruin of Jerusalem.

God sees the tender heart. Even when judgment must come on a nation, He knows those who are His. The psalm says, "The LORD is near to the broken of heart, and the crushed of spirit He saves" (Psalm 34:18).

34:29-30 *And the king sent and gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up **to** the house of the LORD, and every man of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the Levites and all the people, from great even to small; and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found **in** the house of the LORD.*

Josiah could have accepted God's word for himself and done nothing more. After all, he was promised peace. Instead, "the king sent and gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem." He went up to the temple with "every man of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the Levites and all the people, from great even to small; and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant."

The king himself read God's Word to the whole nation. This is what Moses had commanded, that the law be read before all the people (Deuteronomy 31:10-13). Josiah did not keep the Word to himself. He gave it to everyone, great and small.

34:31-32 *And the king stood in his place, and he made the covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and with all his soul, to do the words of the covenant that are written in this book. And he made everyone who was found in Jerusalem and Benjamin stand **to it**. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers.*

"The king stood in his place, and he made the covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and with all his soul, to do the words of the covenant that are written in this book."

"With all his heart and with all his soul." This echoes the great command of Deuteronomy 6:5, which Jesus called the first and greatest commandment (Matthew 22:37-38). Josiah gave God his whole heart. "He made everyone who was found in Jerusalem and Benjamin stand to it," and "the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God."

Hearing God's Word is not enough. James says, "be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). Josiah heard, wept and then committed himself to obey.

34:33 *And Josiah removed all the abominations from all the lands that **belonged** to the sons of Israel, and he made everyone who was found in Israel serve, to serve the LORD their God. All his days they did not turn aside from after the LORD, the God of their fathers.*

"Josiah removed all the abominations from all the lands that belonged to the sons of Israel." He made everyone in Israel "serve, to serve the LORD their God. All his days they did not turn aside from after the LORD, the God of their fathers."

"All his days." As long as Josiah lived, the people followed the LORD. But that phrase also carries a warning, like "all the days of Jehoiada" in Joash's story (24:2). After Josiah died, the nation went back to its idols very quickly (36:5-14). One godly leader can hold back a flood for a time. But each heart must choose God for itself.

Chapter 34 Summary

Josiah became king at eight and reigned thirty-one years, walking in the ways of David without turning aside. At sixteen he began to seek God, and at twenty he began to cleanse Judah and Jerusalem of idols. He tore down the altars of the Baals, broke and ground the images to dust, burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and carried the cleansing into the northern lands. In his eighteenth year he sent officials to repair the temple, and Hilkiah the high priest found the book of the law of the LORD given through Moses. When Shaphan read it to the king, Josiah tore his clothes and sent to inquire of the LORD. Huldah the prophetess answered that all the curses written in the book would come on Jerusalem, because the people had forsaken God. But because Josiah's heart was tender and he humbled himself, he would be gathered to his grave in peace before the calamity came. Josiah gathered all the people, read them the book of the covenant and made a covenant before the LORD to keep His commands with all his heart and soul, and the people stood to it. He removed the abominations from all the land, and all his days the people did not turn from the LORD.

Scripture moved me most in the early days of my sobriety. I was raw and honest, and God's Word met me there. Josiah's heart was tender when he heard the Law read. I want to keep that tenderness, not only in the hard seasons.

Chapter 34 Study Questions

1. How old was Josiah when he began to seek God, and when he began to cleanse the land? (34:3)

2. What prophecy did Josiah fulfill when he burned the bones of the priests? (34:5; 1 Kings 13:2)

3. What did Hilkiah find while the temple was being repaired? (34:14-15)

4. How did Josiah respond when he heard the words of the law? (34:19, 27)

5. What did Huldah say would happen to Jerusalem, and why? (34:24-25)

6. What did Huldah say to Josiah, and why? (34:26-28)

7. What did Josiah do after hearing from Huldah? (34:29-32)

8. God's Word was lost in God's house for years. How much place does the Bible really have in your daily life? Is it lost on a shelf?

9. Josiah had a tender heart toward God's Word. When was the last time Scripture moved you to repent or to change something?

10. Josiah began seeking God as a teenager. How can you encourage young people in your family or church to seek God now?

Chapter 35: Josiah's Passover and Death

Scripture

35:1-19 And Josiah kept a Passover to the LORD in Jerusalem, and they slaughtered the Passover on the fourteenth of the first month. And he set the priests at their duties, and he strengthened them for the service of the house of the LORD. And he said to the Levites who taught all Israel, who ***were*** holy to the LORD, "Put the ark of holiness in the house which Solomon the son of David, the king of Israel, built. ***There is*** no burden on the shoulder for you. Now serve the LORD your God and His people Israel. And prepare ***yourselves*** by the house of your fathers, according to your divisions, by the writing of David the king of Israel and by the writing of Solomon his son. And stand in the holy place according to the divisions of the house of the fathers of your brothers, the sons of the people, and a division of a father's house for the Levites. And slaughter the Passover, and consecrate yourselves, and prepare for your brothers, to do according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses." And Josiah contributed to the sons of the people flocks of lambs and young goats, all ***of them*** for the Passover ***offerings***, for everyone who was found, to the number of thirty thousand, and three thousand cattle; these ***were*** from the property of the king. And his officials contributed for a freewill offering to the people, to the priests and to the Levites. Hilkiah and Zechariah and Jehiel, the leaders of the house of God, gave to the priests for the Passover ***offerings*** two thousand six hundred, and three hundred cattle. And Conaniah and Shemaiah and Nethanel, his brothers, and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Jozabad, the officials of the Levites, contributed to the Levites for the Passover ***offerings*** five thousand, and five hundred cattle. And the service was prepared, and the priests stood at their place, and the Levites by their divisions, according to the command of the king. And they slaughtered the Passover, and the priests sprinkled ***the blood*** from their hand, and the Levites ***were*** skinning ***them***. And they removed the burnt offering, to give them to the divisions of the house of the fathers of the sons of the people, to bring near to the LORD, as ***it is*** written in the book of Moses; and so with the cattle. And they cooked the Passover in the fire according to the ordinance, and the holy things they cooked in the pots and in the cauldrons and in the pans, and they brought ***them*** quickly to all the sons of the people. And afterward they prepared for themselves and for the priests, for the priests, the sons of Aaron, ***were busy*** offering up the burnt offering and the fat ***portions*** until night; and the Levites prepared for themselves and for the priests, the sons of Aaron. And the singers, the sons of Asaph, ***were*** at their post according to the command of David and Asaph and Heman and Jeduthun the seer of the king; and the gatekeepers ***were*** at each and every gate. ***It was*** not for them to turn aside from their service, for their brothers the Levites prepared for them. And all the service of the LORD was prepared on that day, to keep the Passover and to offer up burnt offerings on the altar of the LORD, according to the command of King Josiah. And the sons of Israel who were found kept the Passover at that time, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days. And a Passover like it had not been kept in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet; and all the kings of Israel had not kept ***one*** like the Passover which Josiah kept, and the priests and the Levites and all Judah and Israel who were found, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah this Passover was kept.

35:20-27 After all this, when Josiah had prepared the house, Neco the king of Egypt came up to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates; and Josiah went out to meet him. And he sent messengers to him, saying, "What ***is there*** to me and to you, king of Judah? Not against you, you, ***do I come*** this day, but against the house of my war; and God has said to hurry me. Cease for yourself from God, who ***is*** with me, and let Him not destroy you." And Josiah did not turn his face away from him, for he disguised himself to fight against him; and he did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, and he came to fight in the valley of Megiddo. And the archers shot at King Josiah, and the king said to his servants, "Take me away, for I have been wounded greatly." And his servants took him away from the chariot, and they made him ride in the second chariot that ***belonged*** to him, and they brought him to Jerusalem; and he died, and he was buried in the graves of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem ***were*** mourning over Josiah. And Jeremiah lamented over Josiah, and all the male singers and the female singers have spoken in their lamentations over Josiah to this day; and they made them a statute for Israel, and look, they ***are*** written in the lamentations. And the rest of the matters of Josiah, and his ***deeds of*** steadfast love according to what is written in the law of the LORD, and his matters, the first and the last, look, they ***are*** written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah.

Chapter 35 Preview

Josiah keeps a Passover in Jerusalem, carefully following the Law of Moses and the order David set for the Levites. He tells the Levites to put the ark back in the temple and to serve the LORD and His people. Josiah and his officials give thousands of lambs, goats and cattle so that everyone can take part. The priests and Levites work from morning until night, and the singers and gatekeepers stay at their posts. There had not been a Passover like it since the days of Samuel.

Thirteen years later, Pharaoh Neco of Egypt marches north to fight at Carchemish. Josiah goes out to stop him. Neco warns him that God is with Egypt and that Josiah should not oppose God. Josiah does not listen. He disguises himself and fights at Megiddo, is shot by archers and dies. All Judah mourns, and Jeremiah writes laments for him. Kings tells this Passover in three verses (2 Kings 23:21-23) and Josiah's death in two (2 Kings 23:29-30).

Chapter 35 Study

35:1 *And Josiah kept a Passover to the LORD in Jerusalem, and they slaughtered the Passover on the fourteenth of the first month.*

"Josiah kept a Passover to the LORD in Jerusalem, and they slaughtered the Passover on the fourteenth of the first month." Hezekiah had to keep his Passover in the second month because the priests were not ready (30:2-3). Josiah kept his on the right day, as the Law commanded (Exodus 12:6; Leviticus 23:5). This was in his eighteenth year, about 622 B.C., the same year the book of the law was found (35:19). The Passover came right after the covenant of chapter 34. Having heard God's Word, they obeyed it.

35:2-6 *And he set the priests at their duties, and he strengthened them for the service of the house of the LORD. And he said to the Levites who taught all Israel, who **were** holy to the LORD, "Put the ark of holiness in the house which Solomon the son of David, the king of Israel, built. **There is** no burden on the shoulder for you. Now serve the LORD your God and His people Israel. And prepare **yourselves** by the house of your fathers, according to your divisions, by the writing of David the king of Israel and by the writing of Solomon his son. And stand in the holy place according to the divisions of the house of the fathers of your brothers, the sons of the people, and a division of a father's house for the Levites. And slaughter the Passover, and consecrate yourselves, and prepare for your brothers, to do according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses."*

Josiah "set the priests at their duties, and he strengthened them," encouraging them in their service.

Then he spoke to the Levites "who taught all Israel, who were holy to the LORD." The Levites were the teachers of God's Law (Deuteronomy 33:10; Nehemiah 8:7-8). He told them, "Put the ark of holiness in the house which Solomon the son of David, the king of Israel, built." The ark of the covenant was the gold-covered chest that held the tablets of the Law, with the mercy seat on top, where God's presence was shown between the cherubim. It belonged in the Most Holy Place. Scripture does not tell us why it had been moved. Perhaps Manasseh or Amon had removed it when they set up idols in the temple, or the priests had taken it out to protect it, or it was moved during the repairs.

"There is no burden on the shoulder for you." In the wilderness, the Levites had carried the ark on their shoulders from place to place (Numbers 4:15; 1 Chronicles 15:15). Now that it rested in the temple, they had a different job: "Now serve the LORD your God and His people Israel." They were freed from one duty to serve in another. Their service was to God and to His people. That is what all ministry is.

He told them to prepare by their families and divisions "by the writing of David the king of Israel and by the writing of Solomon his son," to stand in the holy place for each group of families, to "slaughter the Passover, and consecrate yourselves, and prepare for your brothers, to do according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses." Every part of the plan was rooted in God's Word: the Law of Moses for the sacrifice, and the order of David and Solomon for the service.

35:7-9 *And Josiah contributed to the sons of the people flocks of lambs and young goats, all **of them** for the Passover **offerings**, for everyone who was found, to the number of thirty thousand, and three thousand cattle; these **were** from the property of the king. And his officials contributed for a freewill offering to the people, to the priests and to the Levites. Hilkiah and Zechariah and Jehiel, the leaders of the house of God, gave to the priests for the Passover **offerings** two thousand six hundred, and three hundred cattle. And Conaniah and Shemaiah and Nethanel, his brothers, and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Jozabad, the officials of the Levites, contributed to the Levites for the Passover **offerings** five thousand, and five hundred cattle.*

Josiah gave "flocks of lambs and young goats, all of them for the Passover offerings, for everyone who was found, to the number of thirty thousand, and three thousand cattle; these were from the property of the king." He paid from his own wealth so that no one would be left out, even the poor.

His officials followed his example. The leaders of the temple, Hilkiah, Zechariah and Jehiel, gave 2,600 Passover animals and 300 cattle to the priests. The chief Levites gave 5,000 Passover animals and 500 cattle to the Levites. Altogether more than 37,000 lambs and goats and 3,800 cattle. Hezekiah's gifts had been generous (30:24), but Josiah's were even greater.

Generous leaders make generous people. When the king gave first, the officials gave too. Paul pointed to the Macedonians, who gave themselves first to the Lord and then gave beyond their means (2 Corinthians 8:1-5).

35:10-15 *And the service was prepared, and the priests stood at their place, and the Levites by their divisions, according to the command of the king. And they slaughtered the Passover, and the priests sprinkled **the blood** from their hand, and the Levites **were** skinning **them**. And they removed the burnt offering, to give them to the divisions of the house of the fathers of the sons of the people, to bring near to the LORD, as **it is** written in the book of Moses; and so with the cattle. And they cooked the Passover in the fire according to the ordinance, and the holy things they cooked in the pots and in the cauldrons and in the pans, and they brought **them** quickly to all the sons of the people. And afterward they prepared for themselves and for the priests, for the priests, the sons of Aaron, **were busy** offering up the burnt offering and the fat **portions** until night; and the Levites prepared for themselves and for the priests, the sons of Aaron. And the singers, the sons of Asaph, **were** at their post according to the command of David and Asaph and Heman and Jeduthun the seer of the king; and the gatekeepers **were** at each and every gate. **It was** not for them to turn aside from their service, for their brothers the Levites prepared for them.*

"The service was prepared, and the priests stood at their place, and the Levites by their divisions, according to the command of the king." They slaughtered the Passover lambs, the priests sprinkled the blood, and the Levites skinned the animals.

They set aside the parts for the burnt offering, "as it is written in the book of Moses," and "they cooked the Passover in the fire according to the ordinance," that is, roasted it as the Law said (Exodus 12:8-9). The other holy offerings were boiled in pots and pans, "and they brought them quickly to all the sons of the people." It was a huge meal, served fast.

The priests were busy "offering up the burnt offering and the fat portions until night," so the Levites prepared the meal for them as well as for themselves. Nobody went hungry. Everybody did his part.

"The singers, the sons of Asaph, were at their post according to the command of David and Asaph and Heman and Jeduthun the seer of the king; and the gatekeepers were at each and every gate." They did not have to leave their posts to cook, "for their brothers the Levites prepared for them."

This is a beautiful picture of God's people serving together. Some slaughtered, some sprinkled, some cooked, some served, some sang, some guarded the gates. No one did everything, and everyone did something. Each one served so that others could serve. Paul describes the church the same way, one body with many members, each doing its part (1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 4:16).

35:16-19 *And all the service of the LORD was prepared on that day, to keep the Passover and to offer up burnt offerings on the altar of the LORD, according to the command of King Josiah. And the sons of Israel who were found kept the Passover at that time, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days. And a Passover like it had not been kept in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet; and all the kings of Israel had not kept* ***one*** *like the Passover which Josiah kept, and the priests and the Levites and all Judah and Israel who were found, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah this Passover was kept.*

"All the service of the LORD was prepared on that day, to keep the Passover and to offer up burnt offerings on the altar of the LORD, according to the command of King Josiah." They kept the Passover and then "the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days."

"A Passover like it had not been kept in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet." That is a remarkable statement. It means no king, not even David, Solomon or Hezekiah, had kept a Passover just like this one. Hezekiah's Passover had great joy, but it was kept in the second month and many ate it unclean (30:18). Josiah's was kept on the right day, exactly by the Law, with all Judah and those of Israel who were present. It was the high point of worship in the last days of the kingdom.

"In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah this Passover was kept." About 622 B.C. Within forty years, the temple would be in ashes. God gave His people one more great Passover before the end.

The Passover pointed forward to Jesus, who on the night of the Passover took bread and the cup and gave them to His disciples as His body and His blood (Luke 22:14-20). "For also our Passover was sacrificed for us: Christ" (1 Corinthians 5:7). Every Passover lamb Josiah gave was a picture of the Lamb of God, who gives Himself so that all who come may eat and live.

35:20-21 *After all this, when Josiah had prepared the house, Neco the king of Egypt came up to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates; and Josiah went out to meet him. And he sent messengers to him, saying, "What **is there** to me and to you, king of Judah? Not against you, you, **do I come** this day, but against the house of my war; and God has said to hurry me. Cease for yourself from God, who **is** with me, and let Him not destroy you."*

"After all this, when Josiah had prepared the house, Neco the king of Egypt came up to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates." This was in 609 B.C., thirteen years after the great Passover. Carchemish was a city on the Euphrates River in what is now northern Syria. The Assyrian empire was collapsing. Nineveh, its capital, had fallen to Babylon in 612 B.C., as the prophet Nahum had foretold. Neco was marching north to help what was left of Assyria against the rising power of Babylon (2 Kings 23:29).

"Josiah went out to meet him." Scripture does not tell us why. Perhaps Josiah feared Egypt would become too strong. Perhaps he wanted Assyria, the old enemy of God's people, to fall for good. Perhaps he was trying to keep Egypt from passing through land he considered God's.

Neco sent messengers: "What is there to me and to you, king of Judah? Not against you, you, do I come this day, but against the house of my war." In other words, I am not here to fight you. "And God has said to hurry me. Cease for yourself from God, who is with me, and let Him not destroy you."

This is surprising. A pagan king claimed to speak for God. Was he telling the truth? Verse 22 answers: these were "the words of Neco from the mouth of God." God really had spoken through him, as He once spoke through Balaam (Numbers 22-24) and would later move Cyrus (36:22). God can use anyone to speak His word, even a foreign king who does not know Him.

35:22 *And Josiah did not turn his face away from him, for he disguised himself to fight against him; and he did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, and he came to fight in the valley of Megiddo.*

"Josiah did not turn his face away from him, for he disguised himself to fight against him; and he did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, and he came to fight in the valley of Megiddo."

This is a sad verse. The king who had been so tender toward God's Word (34:27) did not recognize God's word when it came from an unexpected mouth. Perhaps he could not believe God would speak through a pagan king. Perhaps he did not stop to ask. Unlike earlier in his life, there is no mention of him inquiring of the LORD (34:21).

He "disguised himself," just as Ahab had done at Ramoth-gilead (18:29). That is a troubling echo. It did not work for Ahab, and it did not work for Josiah.

Megiddo was a fortress city guarding the main pass through the hills, on the great road between Egypt and the north. Many battles had been fought there. Its name is the root of the word Armageddon, where Scripture says the kings of the earth will gather for battle at the end of the age (Revelation 16:16).

Even the godliest people can make serious mistakes. Josiah's heart was right with God, but here he acted on his own judgment without seeking God's will. Whenever we make a big decision, especially one that looks right to us, we need to ask God first.

35:23-24 *And the archers shot at King Josiah, and the king said to his servants, "Take me away, for I have been wounded greatly." And his servants took him away from the chariot, and they made him ride in the second chariot that **belonged** to him, and they brought him to Jerusalem; and he died, and he was buried in the graves of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem **were** mourning over Josiah.*

"The archers shot at King Josiah, and the king said to his servants, Take me away, for I have been wounded greatly." His servants took him out of his chariot, put him in his second chariot and brought him to Jerusalem, "and he died, and he was buried in the graves of his fathers." Kings says he died at Megiddo (2 Kings 23:29-30). The two fit together: he was mortally wounded at Megiddo and died on the way or soon after reaching Jerusalem.

Josiah was only thirty-nine. The great reformer was gone. Yet Huldah's word had come true: he was gathered to his grave before the calamity, and his eyes did not see the ruin of Jerusalem (34:28).

"All Judah and Jerusalem were mourning over Josiah." This was a nation's grief for a beloved king.

35:25 *And Jeremiah lamented over Josiah, and all the male singers and the female singers have spoken in their lamentations over Josiah to this day; and they made them a statute for Israel, and look, they **are** written in the lamentations.*

"Jeremiah lamented over Josiah, and all the male singers and the female singers have spoken in their lamentations over Josiah to this day." Jeremiah had begun prophesying in Josiah's thirteenth year (Jeremiah 1:2), and he loved this king. Later he would say of Josiah that he did justice and righteousness and judged the cause of the poor and needy, and that this was what it means to know God (Jeremiah 22:15-16).

"They made them a statute for Israel, and look, they are written in the lamentations." These laments became a regular part of Israel's mourning. They are not the same as the book of Lamentations in our Bibles, which mourns the fall of Jerusalem. These laments for Josiah have been lost.

The mourning for Josiah at Megiddo was so great that it became a byword. The prophet Zechariah, looking far ahead, says that one day the mourning in Jerusalem will be great, "like the mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo" (Zechariah 12:11). That will be the day when Israel looks on Him whom they pierced and mourns for Him as for an only son (Zechariah 12:10). I believe that day is still future, when Jesus returns and the nation of Israel turns to her Messiah. The grief for a good king who died at Megiddo is a small picture of the grief and the healing that will come when Israel sees the King who died for her.

35:26-27 *And the rest of the matters of Josiah, and his **deeds of** steadfast love according to what is written in the law of the LORD, and his matters, the first and the last, look, they **are** written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah.*

"The rest of the matters of Josiah, and his deeds of steadfast love according to what is written in the law of the LORD," were written "in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah." His deeds were "according to what is written in the law." That was the measure of Josiah's whole life. He found God's Word, and he lived by it.

Josiah's story leaves us with both encouragement and warning. He sought God young, loved God's Word and led a whole nation back to worship. And he made one great mistake at the end. Let us learn from both. Seek God with all your heart. Love His Word. And never stop asking Him what He wants, even in the decisions that seem obvious to you.

Chapter 35 Summary

Josiah kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. He set the priests at their duties, told the teaching Levites to put the ark back in the temple and to serve the LORD and His people, and organized them by the writings of David and Solomon. He gave thirty thousand lambs and goats and three thousand cattle so everyone could take part, and his officials gave thousands more. The priests sprinkled the blood, the Levites skinned and cooked the animals and served the people and the priests, and the singers and gatekeepers stayed at their posts. No Passover like it had been kept since Samuel's day. Thirteen years later Pharaoh Neco marched to Carchemish, and Josiah went out to meet him. Neco warned him that God was with him and that Josiah should not oppose God, but Josiah did not listen to these words from God. He disguised himself and fought at Megiddo, where archers wounded him. He was taken to Jerusalem and died, and all Judah mourned. Jeremiah lamented him, and the laments became a statute in Israel.

Chapter 35 Study Questions

1. How was Josiah's Passover different from Hezekiah's? (35:1; 30:2-3, 18)

2. What did Josiah tell the Levites to do with the ark, and what did he say their service was now? (35:3)

3. How did Josiah and his officials provide for the Passover? (35:7-9)

4. How did the priests, Levites, singers and gatekeepers work together? (35:11-15)

5. What does the Chronicler say about this Passover compared with others? (35:18)

6. What did Neco tell Josiah, and where did his words come from? (35:21-22)

7. How did Josiah die, and how did the people respond? (35:23-25)

8. Everyone at Josiah's Passover had a part. What is your part in serving God's people in your church?

9. Josiah did not recognize God's word when it came from an unexpected source. How can you stay open to God's correction, even when it comes from someone you don't expect?

10. Josiah seems not to have asked God before going to war. What decision are you facing that you need to bring to God before you act?

Chapter 36: The Fall of Jerusalem and the Decree of Cyrus

Scripture

36:1-13 And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and they made him king in place of his father in Jerusalem. Jehoahaz ***was*** a son of twenty-three years when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. And the king of Egypt removed him in Jerusalem, and he fined the land approximately 7,500 pounds (a hundred talents) of silver and approximately 75 pounds (a talent) of gold. And the king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and he changed his name ***to*** Jehoiakim. And Jehoahaz his brother Neco took, and he brought him to Egypt. Jehoiakim ***was*** a son of twenty-five years when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD his God. Against him Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came up, and he bound him with the bronze fetters to take him to Babylon. And some of the articles of the house of the LORD Nebuchadnezzar brought to Babylon, and he put them in his temple in Babylon. And the rest of the matters of Jehoiakim, and his abominations which he did, and what was found against him, look, they ***are*** written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. And Jehoiachin his son reigned in his place. Jehoiachin ***was*** a son of eight years when he became king, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem; and he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD. And at the turn of the year King Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him to Babylon with the desirable articles of the house of the LORD, and he made Zedekiah his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem. Zedekiah ***was*** a son of twenty-one years when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD his God; he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet ***speaking*** from the mouth of the LORD. And also against King Nebuchadnezzar he rebelled, who had made him swear by God; and he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart from returning to the LORD, the God of Israel.

36:14-23 Also all the officials of the priests and the people multiplied committing unfaithfulness, according to all the abominations of the nations, and they made unclean the house of the LORD which He had consecrated in Jerusalem. And the LORD, the God of their fathers, sent to them by the hand of His messengers, rising early and sending, for He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. And they were mocking the messengers of God, and despising His words, and scoffing at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD went up against His people, until ***there was*** no healing. And He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, and he killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and he did not have compassion on young man and virgin, old man and aged; all ***of them*** He gave into his hand. And all the articles of the house of God, the great and the small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his officials, all ***of it*** he brought to Babylon. And they burned the house of God, and they tore down the wall of Jerusalem, and all its palaces they burned with fire, and all its desirable articles, to destroy ***them***. And he carried into exile those left from the sword to Babylon, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had accepted its Sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years. And in the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia, to complete the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the

LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus the king of Persia, and he made a proclamation pass through all his kingdom, and also in writing, saying, "Thus says Cyrus the king of Persia: 'All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD, the God of the heavens, has given to me, and He has charged me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which ***is*** in Judah. Who ***is*** among you of all His people? The LORD his God ***be*** with him, and let him go up.'"

Chapter 36 Preview

After Josiah's death, the end comes fast. Four kings reign in just over twenty years, and all of them do evil. Jehoahaz is taken to Egypt after three months. Jehoiakim is put on the throne by Pharaoh and then bound by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Jehoiachin reigns three months and is carried to Babylon. Zedekiah refuses to humble himself before Jeremiah and rebels against Nebuchadnezzar.

The Chronicler then explains why it all happened. The leaders and people were unfaithful, they defiled the temple, and they mocked the messengers God sent again and again out of compassion, until there was no remedy. Babylon comes, the young men are killed, the temple is burned, the walls are torn down, and the survivors are carried into exile for seventy years, as Jeremiah had said. And then, in the last two verses, a new day dawns. Cyrus king of Persia declares that the LORD has charged him to build His house in Jerusalem, and he tells God's people: let him go up. Kings tells these years in 2 Kings 23:31 to 25:30; the last verses are repeated at the start of Ezra.

Chapter 36 Study

36:1-4 *And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and they made him king in place of his father in Jerusalem. Jehoahaz **was** a son of twenty-three years when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. And the king of Egypt removed him in Jerusalem, and he fined the land approximately 7,500 pounds (a hundred talents) of silver and approximately 75 pounds (a talent) of gold. And the king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and he changed his name **to** Jehoiakim. And Jehoahaz his brother Neco took, and he brought him to Egypt.*

"The people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and they made him king in place of his father in Jerusalem." He was twenty-three and "reigned three months in Jerusalem," in 609 B.C. Then "the king of Egypt removed him." Pharaoh Neco, fresh from the battle where Josiah died, now controlled Judah. He put a heavy fine on the land, a hundred talents of silver (about 7,500 pounds) and a talent of gold (about 75 pounds).

Neco "made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and he changed his name to Jehoiakim." Changing a man's name showed that the one who changed it was his master. Jehoahaz was taken to Egypt, where he died (2 Kings 23:34; Jeremiah 22:10-12). The line of David was now a puppet of foreign powers.

36:5-8 *Jehoiakim **was** a son of twenty-five years when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD his God. Against him Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came up, and he bound him with the bronze fetters to take him to Babylon. And some of the articles of the house of the LORD Nebuchadnezzar brought to Babylon, and he put them in his temple in Babylon. And the rest of the matters of Jehoiakim, and his abominations which he did, and what was found against him, look, they **are** written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. And Jehoiachin his son reigned in his place.*

"Jehoiakim was a son of twenty-five years when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem," about 609 to 598 B.C., "and he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD his God." Jeremiah tells us much about him: he built a fine palace with forced labor (Jeremiah 22:13-17), killed the prophet Uriah (Jeremiah 26:20-23) and cut up and burned the scroll of God's Word (Jeremiah 36:23).

"Against him Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came up, and he bound him with the bronze fetters to take him to Babylon." Babylon had defeated Egypt at Carchemish in 605 B.C. (Jeremiah 46:2), and Nebuchadnezzar became the master of Judah. In that year he carried off some of the temple vessels and some young men of the royal family, among them Daniel (Daniel 1:1-6). That was the first deportation to Babylon.

Did Jehoiakim actually go to Babylon? Scripture does not say. He may have been bound and then released to rule as Babylon's servant, or the plan to take him may never have been carried out. Kings says he rebelled after three years and died in Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:1, 6), and Jeremiah said he would have no honored burial (Jeremiah 22:18-19).

"Some of the articles of the house of the LORD Nebuchadnezzar brought to Babylon, and he put them in his temple in Babylon." This is the first of three times this chapter tells of the temple's treasures going to Babylon (36:7, 10, 18). Isaiah had warned Hezekiah of this a hundred years before (2 Kings 20:17). Daniel tells how these very vessels were later used at Belshazzar's feast (Daniel 5:2-3).

"The rest of the matters of Jehoiakim, and his abominations which he did," were written in the book of the kings. "And Jehoiachin his son reigned in his place."

36:9-10 *Jehoiachin **was** a son of eight years when he became king, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem; and he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD. And at the turn of the year King Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him to Babylon with the desirable articles of the house of the LORD, and he made Zedekiah his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem.*

"Jehoiachin was a son of eight years when he became king, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem; and he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD." Kings says he was eighteen (2 Kings 24:8). Most think "eight" in Chronicles is a copying error, since a man of eighteen fits better with a king who had wives (2 Kings 24:15) and who was judged for doing evil. Some suggest he was made co-ruler with his father at eight. Either way, the number does not change the story.

"At the turn of the year King Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him to Babylon with the desirable articles of the house of the LORD." This was the second deportation, in 597 B.C. Kings says ten thousand people were taken, including the craftsmen and leaders (2 Kings 24:14). The prophet Ezekiel was among them (Ezekiel 1:1-3).

Jeremiah had prophesied that no descendant of this king, also called Coniah or Jeconiah, would prosper sitting on David's throne (Jeremiah 22:30). Yet he appears in the family line of Jesus through Joseph (Matthew 1:11-12). Jesus was Joseph's legal son, not his physical son, and Luke traces Jesus' family line through David's son Nathan, which many Bible teachers believe is Mary's line (Luke 3:23-31). In this way God kept both His curse on Jeconiah and His promise to David.

Nebuchadnezzar "made Zedekiah his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem." Zedekiah was actually Jehoiachin's uncle, a son of Josiah (2 Kings 24:17). The word brother in Hebrew can mean any close male relative.

36:11-13 *Zedekiah **was** a son of twenty-one years when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD his God; he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet **speaking** from the mouth of the LORD. And also against King Nebuchadnezzar he rebelled, who had made him swear by God; and he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart from returning to the LORD, the God of Israel.*

"Zedekiah was a son of twenty-one years when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem," about 597 to 586 B.C., the last king of Judah. "He did the evil in the eyes of the LORD his God; he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the LORD."

This is the key to Zedekiah's failure. The whole book of 2 Chronicles has been asking one question: will you humble yourself? Rehoboam did (12:6-7). Hezekiah did (32:26). Even Manasseh did (33:12). Josiah did (34:27). Zedekiah would not. The book of Jeremiah shows him to be a weak man who sometimes asked Jeremiah for a word from God in secret, but was too afraid of his officials to obey it (Jeremiah 37:17; 38:14-23).

"Also against King Nebuchadnezzar he rebelled, who had made him swear by God." Zedekiah had sworn an oath in God's name to serve Babylon, and then broke it (Ezekiel 17:13-19). "He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart from returning to the LORD, the God of Israel." A stiff neck is the picture of an ox that will not bow to the yoke. Zedekiah would not bend.

36:14 *Also all the officials of the priests and the people multiplied committing unfaithfulness, according to all the abominations of the nations, and they made unclean the house of the LORD which He had consecrated in Jerusalem.*

"Also all the officials of the priests and the people multiplied committing unfaithfulness, according to all the abominations of the nations, and they made unclean the house of the LORD which He had consecrated in Jerusalem."

It was not only the king. The leaders of the priests and the people joined in. Ezekiel was shown in a vision what was going on in the temple in these years: idols on the walls, elders burning incense to images, women weeping for a pagan god, and men bowing to the sun with their backs to the temple (Ezekiel 8). The house God had filled with His glory (7:1-3) had been defiled by the very people who were to keep it holy.

36:15-16 *And the LORD, the God of their fathers, sent to them by the hand of His messengers, rising early and sending, for He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. And they were mocking the messengers of God, and despising His words, and scoffing at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD went up against His people, until* ***there was*** *no healing.*

"The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent to them by the hand of His messengers, rising early and sending, for He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place."

Here is the heart of God, even at the end. "Rising early and sending" is a picture of someone who gets up at dawn to do something urgent. Jeremiah uses the same phrase again and again (Jeremiah 7:13, 25; 25:3-4). God kept sending prophets, year after year, because "He had compassion." He did not want to destroy them. He wanted them to turn.

"And they were mocking the messengers of God, and despising His words, and scoffing at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD went up against His people, until there was no healing." There is a point where God's patience ends. Not because His love runs out, but because people refuse it to the end. "No healing" means no remedy, no cure left. They had rejected every cure God offered.

Jesus told a story about this. A vineyard owner sent servant after servant to his tenants, and they beat and killed them. Last of all he sent his beloved son (Mark 12:1-9). Jesus wept over Jerusalem because it did not know the time of its visitation (Luke 19:41-44). God still sends His word with compassion today. And there is still a day when His patience will end. "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:15).

36:17 *And He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, and he killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and he did not have compassion on young man and virgin, old man and aged; all* ***of them*** *He gave into his hand.*

"He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, and he killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and he did not have compassion on young man and virgin, old man and aged; all of them He gave into his hand."

This is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. The Chaldeans were the people who ruled Babylon. They broke into Jerusalem in 586 B.C., after a long siege, and killed people even in the house of their sanctuary, the temple courts where they had fled.

Notice the contrast between verse 15 and verse 17. God "had compassion" (36:15). The king of Babylon "did not have compassion" (36:17). When the people rejected the compassion of God, they fell into the hands of a man who had none. This is the terrible truth of judgment: when we refuse God's mercy, we are left to the mercy of the world, which has none.

"All of them He gave into his hand." God was not helpless. He was not defeated. Babylon was His instrument of judgment, as He had warned for centuries (Deuteronomy 28:49-52; Jeremiah 25:8-11). This was not God abandoning His promise. It was God keeping His word, the word of judgment that came with His covenant. God took no pleasure in it (Ezekiel 33:11). Lamentations, written by those who lived through it, is full of grief at what happened, and also of hope: "The steadfast loves of the LORD, for we are not finished, for His compassions do not come to an end" (Lamentations 3:22).

I do not want to say more about the horror of that day than the Bible does. If this verse brings to mind violence you or someone you love has suffered, know that God does not take it lightly. The same God who judged sin also wept over Jerusalem in His Son (Luke 19:41), and He will one day wipe every tear away (Revelation 21:4).

36:18-19 *And all the articles of the house of God, the great and the small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his officials, all **of it** he brought to Babylon. And they burned the house of God, and they tore down the wall of Jerusalem, and all its palaces they burned with fire, and all its desirable articles, to destroy **them**.*

Nebuchadnezzar took "all the articles of the house of God, the great and the small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his officials." Everything Hezekiah had shown the envoys from Babylon was now carried off to Babylon, as Isaiah had said (2 Kings 20:17).

"They burned the house of God, and they tore down the wall of Jerusalem, and all its palaces they burned with fire." The temple Solomon built, where the glory of God had filled the house (7:1-3), stood nearly four hundred years, from about 966 to 586 B.C. Now it was ashes. Ezekiel had seen in a vision the glory of the LORD leave the temple before it fell (Ezekiel 10:18-19; 11:22-23). God does not stay in a house where He is not wanted.

36:20 *And he carried into exile those left from the sword to Babylon, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia,*

"He carried into exile those left from the sword to Babylon, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia." Exile means being forced to live away from one's homeland. The people of God, who had been brought out of slavery in Egypt, were now slaves in Babylon. The book of Psalms gives us their song: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat; also we wept when we remembered Zion" (Psalm 137:1).

But even in this verse, there is a word of hope: "until." The exile had an end date. It would last "until the reign of the kingdom of Persia."

36:21 *to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had accepted its Sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.*

"to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had accepted its Sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years."

Jeremiah had prophesied that Judah would serve the king of Babylon "seventy years" (Jeremiah 25:11), and that "When seventy years for Babylon are completed," God would bring His people back (Jeremiah 29:10). Daniel, reading Jeremiah's scroll in Babylon, understood that the seventy years were nearly over and began to pray (Daniel 9:2).

The Chronicler adds a second reason: "until the land had accepted its Sabbaths." God's Law told Israel to let the land rest every seventh year, the Sabbath year, when no crops were planted (Leviticus 25:1-7). Israel had often ignored this. God had warned through Moses that if they disobeyed, they would be scattered, and "Then the land will accept its Sabbaths all the days of its lying desolate" (Leviticus 26:34). What the people would not give the land, God gave it Himself. Some have counted seventy missed Sabbath years over about 490 years, but Scripture does not give that count, and I would not press it.

How do we count the seventy years? Bible teachers give two main answers, and both work. One counts from the first deportation in 605 B.C. to the first return about 538-536 B.C. The other counts from the burning of the temple in 586 B.C. to the finishing of the new temple in 516 B.C. Either way, God's word through Jeremiah came true to the year.

This is fulfilled prophecy in plain view. Jeremiah named the length of the exile before it began, and history matched it. God's Word is true. "The word of our God will stand forever" (Isaiah 40:8).

36:22 *And in the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia, to complete the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus the king of Persia, and he made a proclamation pass through all his kingdom, and also in writing, saying,*

"And in the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia, to complete the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus the king of Persia, and he made a proclamation pass through all his kingdom, and also in writing."

Babylon fell to the Persians in 539 B.C., the night of Belshazzar's feast (Daniel 5:30-31). In his first year as ruler of Babylon, 538 B.C., Cyrus issued this decree. A clay cylinder from Cyrus' reign, found in the 1800s, shows that his policy was to let conquered peoples return home and restore their temples. The Bible tells us the deeper reason: "the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus."

More than a hundred and fifty years earlier, Isaiah had named Cyrus. God said of him, "My shepherd, and he will perform all My desire," even saying of Jerusalem, "Let her be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let it be founded" (Isaiah 44:28). God called Cyrus "His anointed" (Isaiah 45:1), not because Cyrus knew God, but because God had chosen him for this work. "Streams of water is the heart of a king in the hand of the LORD; to all that He desires He turns it" (Proverbs 21:1). The most powerful man in the world was moved by the LORD to send God's people home.

36:23 *"Thus says Cyrus the king of Persia: 'All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD, the God of the heavens, has given to me, and He has charged me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which **is** in Judah. Who **is** among you of all His people? The LORD his God **be** with him, and let him go up.'"*

"Thus says Cyrus the king of Persia." Then his words: "All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD, the God of the heavens, has given to me, and He has charged me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah."

Cyrus spoke of "the LORD, the God of the heavens." Whether he truly believed in the LORD or was honoring the God of each people he ruled, Scripture does not say. But he spoke the truth: it was the LORD who gave him his kingdom, and the LORD who charged him to build the house.

"Who is among you of all His people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up."

These are the last words of 2 Chronicles. In the Hebrew Bible, where Chronicles comes last, they are the last words of the whole Old Testament. The book that began with Solomon building a house for God ends with a pagan king telling God's people to go and build it again. After all the sin, all the judgment, all the burning and exile, the last word is not destruction. It is an invitation: let him go up.

Ezra 1:1-3 begins with these same words and tells what happened next. About fifty thousand people went back to Jerusalem (Ezra 2:64-65), laid the foundation of a new temple and finished it in 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:15).

The ending also points beyond itself. The people went home, but no son of David sat on the throne. The temple was rebuilt, but the glory did not fill it as before (Haggai 2:3). The returned exiles were still waiting for something more, for the Son of David who would reign forever (Luke 1:32-33) and for the One who would be God dwelling with His people (John 1:14). Jesus is that King. And He promised that He Himself would build God's true house (Matthew 16:18; John 2:19-21).

I believe God's promises to Israel are not finished either. God brought His people back from Babylon in 538 B.C., and the prophets speak of a greater return still to come, when Israel will be gathered to her land and turn to her Messiah, and the Son of David will reign in Jerusalem over all the earth (Jeremiah 23:5-8; Romans 11:25-29; Revelation 20:4-6). Some Bible teachers read these promises as fulfilled in the return from Babylon or in the church, but Paul says God's gifts and calling to Israel are without regret (Romans 11:29), and I take these promises as still to come for the nation of Israel. The last word of Chronicles is still God's word to His people: let him go up.

For each of us, the invitation is the same. No matter how far we have fallen, God calls us home. "Who is among you of all His people?" Will you go up?

Chapter 36 Summary

After Josiah's death the people made Jehoahaz king, but after three months Pharaoh Neco took him to Egypt, fined the land and made his brother Eliakim king, renaming him Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim did evil for eleven years. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon bound him and took some of the

temple vessels to Babylon. His son Jehoiachin reigned three months and ten days and was carried to Babylon with more of the temple treasures, and Nebuchadnezzar made Zedekiah king. Zedekiah did evil, would not humble himself before Jeremiah, broke his oath to Nebuchadnezzar and hardened his heart. The leaders of the priests and the people defiled the temple. The LORD in compassion sent His messengers again and again, but they mocked them until there was no remedy. So God brought the king of the Chaldeans, who killed young and old without compassion, even in the sanctuary. He carried all the treasures to Babylon, burned the temple, tore down the walls and took the survivors into exile until the kingdom of Persia, so that the land kept its Sabbaths for seventy years as Jeremiah had said. Then in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, the LORD stirred up his spirit, and he proclaimed that the LORD had charged him to build Him a house in Jerusalem, and he told God's people to go up.

Chapter 36 Study Questions

1. Who were the last four kings of Judah, and what did they have in common? (36:1-12)

2. What was Zedekiah's great failure before Jeremiah? (36:12-13)

3. Why did God keep sending messengers to His people? (36:15)

4. How did the people treat God's messengers, and what was the result? (36:16)

5. How does the word compassion in verse 15 contrast with verse 17? (36:15, 17)

6. What two reasons does the Chronicler give for the seventy years of exile? (36:21; Jeremiah 25:11; Leviticus 26:34)

7. How did God bring the exile to an end, and what did Isaiah say about Cyrus long before? (36:22-23; Isaiah 44:28)

8. God rose early and sent His messengers because He had compassion. How has God kept speaking to you, even when you were not listening?

9. Zedekiah would not humble himself. Looking back over 2 Chronicles, what have you learned about humility before God?

10. The book ends with an invitation: let him go up. Where is God calling you to "go up" and rebuild with Him today?

Conclusion

2 Chronicles begins with Solomon asking God for wisdom and building a house for His name, and fire falling from heaven as the glory of the LORD filled it. It ends with that house in ashes and God's people in Babylon. In between, we walked with the kings of David's line, one after another. Some sought the LORD: Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash in his early years, Uzziah until he grew proud, Jotham, Hezekiah and Josiah. Others forsook Him: Jehoram, Ahaziah, Ahaz, Amon and the last four kings. Again and again the Chronicler showed us the same thing. When a king sought God, God helped him. When he forsook God, trouble came.

As I said at the start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, as it is written, and let Scripture explain Scripture. Read that way, 2 Chronicles is not only a record of what went wrong. It is a book of hope written for people who had come home from exile and wondered whether God was still with them. The Chronicler's answer is yes. God gave His promise at the dedication of the temple: "and My people, over whom My name is called, humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways, then I Myself will hear from the heavens, and I will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land" (7:14). Then he showed it at work. Jehoshaphat prayed, "we do not know what we should do; but our eyes are on You" (20:12), and God fought for him. Hezekiah prayed for people who came to the Passover unclean, and "the LORD listened to Hezekiah and healed the people" (30:20). And Manasseh, the worst king of all, humbled himself in chains in Babylon, "and He heard his supplication, and He brought him back to Jerusalem to his kingdom" (33:13). No one is too far gone for God to hear.

2 Chronicles also shows us a God who keeps His covenant when His people break theirs. When Jehoram killed his brothers and Athaliah tried to destroy the royal line, God would not put out the lamp He had promised David (21:7), and one baby was hidden in the house of God. When Jerusalem fell, God's word through Jeremiah set the limit: seventy years (36:21). And the book ends not with the ashes but with Cyrus telling God's people, "let him go up" (36:23). The house was built again, and the line of David went on until the Son of David was born in Bethlehem. Jesus is the King every king in this book failed to be, the One who is "something greater than Solomon" (Matthew 12:42), the true temple where God dwells with us (John 2:19-21), and the King-Priest who has passed through the heavens to intercede for us (Hebrews 4:14). God has not forgotten Israel either. He will keep His covenants with Abraham and David, and the Son of David will reign in Jerusalem (Luke 1:32-33; Romans 11:25-29).

I hope this study has done what I set out to do: bring you closer to God, help you grow in your walk with Him, and teach you to seek Him with your whole heart. "The LORD, His eyes are roving in all the earth to show Himself strong with those whose heart is complete toward Him" (16:9). The message of 2 Chronicles is the same for us today as it was for the returned exiles. Humble yourself, pray, seek His face and turn from your sin, and He will hear. Jesus died for our sins and rose again so that every sinner who comes to Him can be forgiven. The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized, and find a church where you can grow in God's Word and, like Jehoshaphat, keep your eyes on the LORD (2 Chronicles 20:12; Hebrews 12:2).

Bibliography

The following source was consulted throughout this study. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions, and any direct quotation from an outside source is identified and cited at the point where it appears.

Green, Jay P., Sr. (ed.). The Interlinear Bible: Hebrew-Greek-English. Hendrickson Publishers, 1986 (2nd ed.; printing used 2005). ISBN 1-56563-977-4.