



## A KINGDOM IN CRISIS

1 Kings 1; 1 Chronicles 29:20-25

Diligent obedience to God in the details of life can save us from having to address crises later in life. The crisis David faced in the last days of his reign was largely due to his failure years before in one of the most basic responsibilities of a father.

Today on our Wisdom Journey, we begin the book of 1 Kings. Now this book, along with 2 Kings, covers the same time period as the book of 2 Chronicles and—as we see in this first study—also overlaps with the last few verses of 1 Chronicles.

This means that much of what we read in the two books of Kings is repeated in the books of Chronicles. Rather than study these same events twice—first in Kings and then later in Chronicles—we are going to cover the material just one time. We will focus our study in Kings, while noting and referring to the parallel accounts in Chronicles where appropriate. Now there is some material found *only* in Chronicles, and we *will* study those passages, fitting them in chronologically as we move through 1 and 2 Kings.

Now by way of introduction, the books of 1 and 2 Kings cover around four hundred years of Israel's history.

- They begin with the coronation of Solomon and end with the destruction of Jerusalem.
- They begin with the temple being built and end with the temple being destroyed.
- They begin with a powerful nation and tragically end with a defeated nation, taken into exile.

The author of 1 and 2 Kings is unnamed, but the traditional view is that the old prophet Jeremiah penned



Anointing scene from the Temple of Khonsu at Karnak

this account, and I believe that's correct. Tradition also claims that Ezra authored 1 and 2 Chronicles, and there's no reason to doubt that either.

The book of 1 Kings begins with King David in his final days—and there's even more drama about to take place. Here's how the book begins:

*Now King David was old and advanced in years. And although they covered him with clothes, he could not get warm. Therefore his servants said to him, "Let a young woman be sought for my lord the king, and let her wait*



*on the king and be in his service. Let her lie in your arms, that my lord the king may be warm.” So they sought for a beautiful young woman throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. The young woman was very beautiful, and she was of service to the king and attended to him, but the king knew her not.* (1 Kings 1:1-4)

Well, this certainly is an awkward place to start our journey through 1 Kings! Abishag essentially serves as David’s nurse, but the relationship is obviously a lot closer than that. More than likely, David made her a member of his harem, even though we are told here they did not have sexual relations.

Once again, let me remind you that everything recorded in the Bible is not recommended by the Bible—and certainly not condoned. In fact, many of David’s troubles can be traced to his violation of God’s design for marriage: one man and one woman faithfully loving one another in a covenant relationship. Solomon will follow David’s practice in multiplying wives, and those wives will turn his heart completely away from God for most of his life.

Now we could say a lot more about these opening verses, but one thing is clear: this great man of military might and prowess is now feeble, weak, and physically suffering in his old age. It seems David is preoccupied with trying to get warm here in his palace, and he doesn’t even know about a growing crisis.

Here is verse 5:

*Now Adonijah the son of Haggith [one of David’s wives] exalted himself, saying, “I will be king.” And he prepared for himself*

*chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him.*

Just like his half-brother Absalom, who failed in his coup attempt, Adonijah craves power. He knows his father’s health is failing, and he decides the time is ripe to take the throne.

First Chronicles 22:9-10 informs us that God had already chosen Solomon as the heir to David’s throne. So why would Adonijah rebel against God’s plan? Well, verse 6 gives us some insight: “His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, ‘Why have you done thus and so?’”

In other words, Adonijah always got his way. David never challenged or disciplined him as he grew up in the palace. As great a leader as David was, this is another illustration that he failed as a father. He was literally an absent father. He never got in Adonijah’s way; he never spent any time mentoring his son.

Let me tell you, the rebellion we see today against authority and morality and truth itself finds its roots here in this verse. Where are the fathers who are spiritually leading and challenging and mentoring their children today?

*Where are the fathers who are spiritually leading and challenging and mentoring their children today?*

Now Adonijah is a pretty smart young man. He gains the support of Joab, David’s military commander, along with Abiathar the priest. We are told here in verse 8 that others, including Nathan the prophet and Zadok the priest, remain loyal to David.

Adonijah gathers his supporters for a feast, at which he plans to announce that he is the next king of Israel. It looks like he is going to succeed, but Adonijah has not



only ignored God's will that Solomon be the next king; he has also underestimated the nation's loyalty to David. Listen, God's will cannot be outvoted. Whether we like it or not, God's candidate always sits in the place of power. In fact, governing authorities are appointed by God Himself (Romans 13:2).

God now moves His prophet Nathan to step forward and take charge. We read here in verses 11-12:

*Nathan said to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, "Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith has become king and David our lord does not know it? ... Let me give you advice, that you may save your own life and the life of your son Solomon."*

In other words, "If Adonijah succeeds in this coup, he will kill you and Solomon and every other rival to the throne."

Nathan urges Bathsheba to act quickly—verses 13-14:

*"Go in at once to King David, and say to him, 'Did you not, my lord the king, swear to your servant, saying, "Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne"? Why then is Adonijah king?' Then while you are still speaking with the king, I also will come in after you and confirm your words."*

Well, David is stunned by this news. He quickly tells his loyal followers what to do to stop this coup attempt. They place Solomon on King David's mule,

which indicates the king's approval (verse 38). Then just outside the city, Zadok the priest anoints Solomon as king. Following this, the people proclaim, "Long live King Solomon!" (verse 39). The people go wild with delight and approval of Solomon, and they start celebrating their new king (verse 40).

Well, Adonijah's plan comes to a screeching halt when he and his supporters hear the celebration. Verse 49 says, "All the guests of Adonijah trembled and rose, and each went his own way." They leave Adonijah in the dust.

Realizing the trouble he is in now, Adonijah races to the tabernacle and grabs on to the horns, or corners, of the altar. He is effectively begging for mercy—for his life to be spared.

And here in verse 52, as chapter 1 concludes, Solomon gives Adonijah an opportunity to redeem himself. He vows allegiance to Solomon and is allowed to live.

Solomon watched his dad make decisions contrary to God's word. Why is it important for any Christian to be mindful of who's watching their life? Who may need to hear from you that you've not been following God's word and you welcome their input as you seek to change? How can humbling yourself break down unseen barriers in their walk or salvation?

"Collecting allies" is a sure sign someone challenging you is up to no good. What daily spiritual habits and attitudes are you practicing to help you stand with the LORD during conflict?

What would you have done if you were Solomon? Why? In what ways can applying justice actually be an act of mercy?

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## PASSING THE TORCH

1 Kings 2; 1 Chronicles 29:26-30

Godly leadership in a nation, a home, or a church requires great wisdom and discernment. It means making heartfelt obedience to God our first priority and ridding ourselves of those things that hinder our service to the Lord.

There was an athletic contest in ancient Greece in which a lighted torch was passed from one runner to another, much like the baton is passed in our modern relay races. From this ancient contest came a phrase we still use today: “passing the torch.”

In the second chapter of the book of 1 Kings, King David is effectively passing the torch to his son Solomon. In this final conversation, David has two things on his mind.

First and foremost is the importance of Solomon’s walk with God. David says here in verse 3:

*“Keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways*



Area near the southern tip of the City of David where royal tombs were probably located

*and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn.”*

By the way, this was more than telling Solomon to read the law and observe all the outward religious ceremonies.

Over in the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 28:9, there are some additional words recorded from David:

*“Solomon, my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought.”*

David is telling Solomon that his reign is connected to his relationship with the Lord. He obviously



doesn't want Solomon getting too big for his royal britches. He is reminding Solomon that he is king only because the Lord chose him to be king. All his natural abilities, his education, and his royal lineage would not bring him success. Only following the Lord—wholeheartedly—would bring Solomon true and lasting success.

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Now even though David is delivering a message from God, he is also speaking from his own experience. David knew the darkness of moral failure; he suffered the consequences of his compromises until the day he died. He knew the only compass that could direct his son through the maze of temptation and power and money was total devotion, from the whole heart, to God and to God's Word.

Now, there is something else on David's mind as he passes the torch to Solomon. He's concerned about some potential threats to Solomon's rule. There's some unfinished business, so to speak.

David mentions three people here. The first is General Joab. Even though Joab had been a capable military leader for David, he had sided with Adonijah against Solomon. David tells Solomon that Joab had killed Abner and Amasa in cold blood—two men who just happened to be standing in the way of Joab's career path (verse 5).

David tells Solomon here in verse 6, "Act therefore according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace." In other words, Joab needs to pay for his crimes.

Now you might wonder why David did not take care of this himself. Well, remember that David was com-

promised. Years earlier he had ordered Joab to make sure Bathsheba's husband Uriah did not come home from the battlefield. How does David punish this general decades later for killing Amasa and Abner when David indirectly killed Uriah?

By the way, I think this may be the same reason some judges and elected representatives and people in power will not judge someone for obvious crimes. It just might be their own consciences because they are guilty of doing the same things.

Next David mentions Barzillai, the Gileadite who had helped David when he was running for his life from Absalom (verse 7). David wants to make sure this man continues to be honored for his loyalty.

Finally, the third person David names here in verse 8 is Shimei. You might remember that Shimei publicly cursed David as the king fled from Absalom's coup attempt. Shimei had thrown rocks at David and mocked him. Later, when David returned to Jerusalem, Shimei promised him his loyalty and David spared his life. Now evidently, David had never been entirely convinced of Shimei's loyalty and so here he's warning Solomon of this man's treachery.

And with this final and confidential conversation, David passes into eternity. His death is recorded rather matter-of-factly in verses 10 and 11. We are simply told that he was buried in Jerusalem after a reign of forty years—seven years in Hebron and thirty-three years over the entire nation of Israel.

In the New Testament book of Acts, we have this wonderful epitaph for David given to us by the apostle Paul, who said, "David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers" (Acts 13:36). Isn't that the best eulogy anybody could be given? In spite of his sin and his failure—which was often—David repented and persevered, serving God's purpose in his own generation.

Now after David's funeral service is over, we are told back here in 1 Kings chapter 2 and verse 12, that Solomon's "kingdom was firmly established." Now that does not mean everything just rolled into place.



Solomon has some enemies to watch out for, as his father David warned.

Wouldn't you know it, Adonijah shows up again, and in a very clever way he attempts to make a run for David's throne. Even though he had pledged his loyalty to Solomon following his failed coup attempt, he now manipulates Bathsheba into helping him acquire Abishag as his wife (verses 17-21).

You might remember that Abishag was David's young nurse and more than likely added to David's harem. So, asking for her hand in marriage was as good as establishing a claim to the throne. Well, Solomon sees right through this treasonous plan and has Adonijah put to death immediately.

The next thing Solomon does is remove Abiathar from the priesthood (verses 26-27). Abiathar had supported Adonijah in his plans to kill Solomon and take the throne of David. So, Abiathar is banished to his hometown for the rest of his life.

Then we read in verse 28 that as soon as General Joab hears what has happened to his fellow conspirators, he runs to the tabernacle and grabs the corners of the bronze altar, claiming sanctuary. But there is no sanctuary in the tabernacle for this cold-blooded murderer, and on Solomon's orders, Joab is put to death.

That leaves one man on David's list of whom he had warned Solomon to beware, and that was the rock-throwing traitor named Shimei. What Solomon wisely does here in verse 36, instead of executing him, is restrict him from ever leaving Jerusalem. That way, Solomon can keep an eye on him.

Shimei responds to Solomon's command, saying, "What you say is good; as my lord the king has said, so will your servant do" (verse 38). And Shimei actually stays in town—for three years. Then we learn in verse 39 that he violates the king's command by leaving the city, and as a result, he too is executed.

So, when you read here at the end of 1 Kings chapter 2, "The kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon," you probably think, *That wasn't very easy at all.* Well, you are absolutely right.

And listen, what was true for Solomon is true for us today. Real success as a follower of the Lord demands that we battle every treasonous thought against our God and fight every wicked temptation that wants to take the throne of our heart and occupy it with sin.

David's dying words to Solomon as he passes the torch are words for us today. Let's follow God with our whole heart and a willing mind.

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What is your working definition of "true and lasting success?" Ponder the LORD's command of Matthew 22:37-39. In what ways does this verse help you simplify your efforts to pursue God's definition of "true and lasting success?"

What does David's dilemma and the cause of it teach you about making choices that lead to compromises? Who do you have in your life to help you avoid making compromising choices? How much of God's word do you see in their life as they guide you? Do you need a new mentor?

Reflect on these truths as you start your own list to fuel your following God each day. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, 2 Corinthians 10:5, 1 Peter 1:13, 2 Timothy 1:7, Joshua 1:9.

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## MAKING A WISH FOR WISDOM

1 Kings 3-5; 2 Chronicles 1-2

We serve God and others best when we understand how dependent we are on wisdom from the Lord. Solomon is known for his great wisdom, but he possessed that wisdom only because he humbly sought it from God.

Solomon could have had no better beginning to his reign; he had the support of a unified nation, enemy nations had been subdued, and there was prosperity throughout the land. In addition, and most importantly, Solomon begins his reign with a humble spirit.

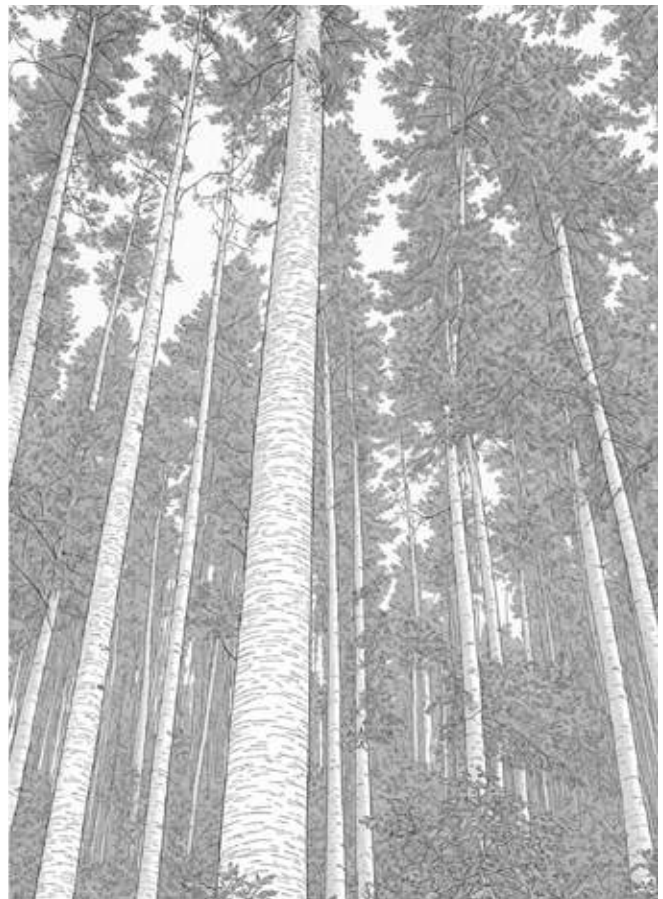
However, as we begin in 1 Kings chapter 3, we are introduced to a nagging little detail. We learn here in verse 1 that Solomon married the Egyptian pharaoh's daughter, creating a political alliance. Now this marriage might have been politically smart, but it will prove to be spiritually foolish as we will see years later in Solomon's life.

But for now, everything is starting exactly as it should:

*Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father . . . the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.* (verses 3-4)

Now as 2 Chronicles chapter 1 tells us, the ark of the covenant had returned to Jerusalem, but the bronze

altar from the tabernacle of Moses was at Gibeon (verses 3-4). So, Solomon will sacrifice to the Lord at Gibeon until the temple is built in Jerusalem. The



Cedar was used for masts because of its sturdiness and the heights to which cedar trees grew



Lord honors Solomon's worship here, and this particular night, the Lord appears to him in a dream.

Here in 1 Kings 3:5, the Lord simply tells Solomon, "Ask what I shall give you." In other words, "You've got one wish, Solomon. What would you like from Me?" Wow, what an offer! How would *you* respond?

Well, Solomon's answer reveals tremendous humility and gratitude. He says to the Lord here in verse 7:

*"You have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in."*

Unlike his brothers Absalom and Adonijah, who thought they were ready to be king, Solomon admits he is the king only because God has made him king. He also admits that he does not even know when to come in or go out, to stand up or sit down. He feels a desperate need for the Lord's wisdom.

So, he answers the Lord, "Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil" (verse 9). Solomon's wish is that his heart will be filled with wisdom. He is effectively asking God to give him an instinct for truth.

God responds in verse 12:

*"Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you."*

The Lord also effectively commends Solomon for not asking for what we might have asked for if we were given one wish from God—like a bigger chariot and a nicer boss.

With that, Solomon awakes from this dream and returns to Jerusalem and to his new role as king.

Now, at this point, the Bible gives us an amazing illustration that God truly answered Solomon's request for wisdom. Beginning here in verse 16, we are told that

two prostitutes seek to have their case settled in court. Evidently, lower justices have been stumped by this unique case, and so it is brought before King Solomon.

Evidently, these two women were running a brothel together, and each of them bore a son around the same time. One of the prostitutes says that her co-worker accidentally lay on her own son one night, and he died. Then around midnight, the woman exchanged her dead baby for the living one. But the prostitute tells Solomon that the next morning she realized that the dead child next to her was not her son (verses 19-21).

Both women now are claiming the living boy is their son. Well, Solomon can't run DNA tests--and cameras and fingerprints aren't available. It appears this case is never going to be solved because the claims of both these women are believable.

Then Solomon does the unthinkable.

*The king said, "Bring me a sword." So a sword was brought before the king. And the king said, "Divide the living child in two, and give half to the [woman] and half to the other [woman]." (verses 24-25)*

One of the women essentially just shrugs and says, "That sounds fair enough to me." But the other woman cries out and pleads with Solomon in verse 26, "Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and by no means put him to death."

Solomon knows right away that she is the real mother because she is willing to give her baby away in order to save his life. And Solomon orders the court to give the child to her.

This was brilliant! Indeed, upon hearing of the king's judgment, "all Israel . . . stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice" (verse 28).

Solomon's wisdom is demonstrated, not only in making individual decisions, but also in appointing





wise government officials, whose names are listed throughout chapter 4.

Near the end of chapter 4, we have this wonderful statement in verse 25:

*Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon.*

Verse 29 records that “God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure.” This wisdom is revealed by the many songs he composed, his wise sayings, and his in-depth scientific skills in observation and knowledge regarding plants, trees, birds, and reptiles. Solomon loved science, and his exploration led him to exalt the Creator.

Beloved, the problem with many scientific endeavors today is that they don’t ultimately lead you to worship the creator God. In fact, they usually attempt to eliminate Him by ignoring what is obvious—that this complex, magnificent, wonderful world has a brilliant, wonderful Creator.

Well, here in chapter 5, we are told of Solomon’s preparations for building a magnificent temple for this magnificent God. God had actually designed the temple and passed down the plans through King David to Solomon.

Solomon enlists the help of Hiram, king of Tyre, to provide cedar and cypress wood, along with skilled carpenters. Then in verse 13, Solomon drafts 30,000 men to work in shifts—one month out of every three months. These Israelite men will work with King Hiram’s craftsmen, logging and transporting huge amounts of timber and cutting with precision massive stones for the temple’s foundation.

More on that later!

Listen, at this early stage of his reign, Solomon loves the Lord, he’s humble, he’s focused on magnifying the

glory of God through creation, and he’s made it a priority to construct this temple for God’s glory. But above everything else, Solomon is off to a great start because he was given one wish, and he wished for wisdom.

Maybe you are thinking, *That isn’t fair. God hasn’t given me this same opportunity to receive wisdom.* The truth is, He has given it to us. The Bible says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” (James 1:5).

The problem is not that we can’t get wisdom; the problem is that it isn’t on our wish list. So, let’s revise that list. Let’s make wisdom our first and foremost desire and ask God for the wisdom and discernment we need—and do we ever need it!—to walk with Him today.

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Where is wisdom to be found, and what are the conditions for receiving it? For what, specifically, do you need divine wisdom?

Go with your gut: If God issued you a blank check with His signature already on it, how would you fill in the rest?  
Your gut again: If you issued God a blank check with your signature, how do you hope He *doesn’t* fill in the rest?  
What do your answers reveal about your heart?

What circumstances are you facing now that needs wisdom? Is there any evidence that the reason you don’t yet have that wisdom is that the condition of receiving that wisdom (James 1:6) hasn’t yet been met?

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## BUILDING THE TEMPLE OF GOD

1 Kings 6-7; 2 Chronicles 3:1-5:1

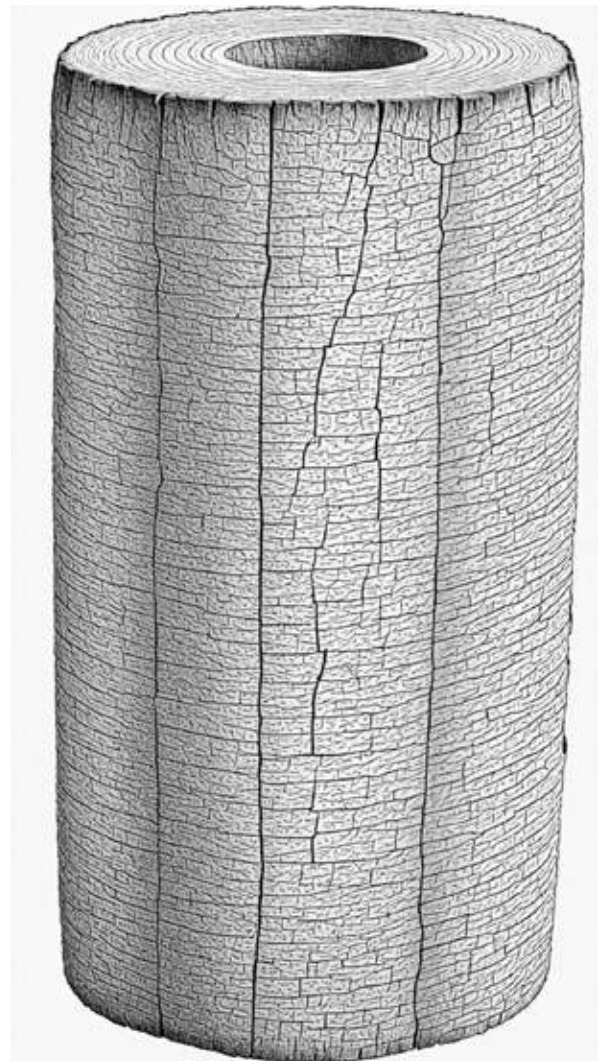
Every work we do for God—which should include *every* work we do—deserves our best effort and the use of our best resources. And in the end, like Solomon’s temple, our work should point to God and what He has done for us, not to what we have done for Him.

Ancient kings gained fame and status either through their military victories or construction projects. Israel’s most famous kings were David, the warrior, and his son Solomon, the builder.

Solomon’s reign is given considerable space in both 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles. In 1 Kings nearly half of that space is given to the construction and dedication of the temple. And in 2 Chronicles, well over half of the Solomon account is related to the temple. Solomon’s magnificent temple for the Lord will stand for nearly four hundred years.

Solomon has made preparations for this massive building project, and the details are given to us in 1 Kings chapter 5 and 2 Chronicles chapter 2. Now we come to the actual building of the temple in 1 Kings 6. Verse 1 tells us that the building project began “in the four hundred and eightieth year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt.” This is the year 966 BC.

Now over in 2 Chronicles 3:1 we are informed that the temple is built on Mount Moriah. This is where the Lord had appeared to David at the threshing floor (1 Chronicles 21). This is also where Abraham had offered up his son Isaac in Genesis 22.



Cylinder describing Gudea's dedication of the Temple of Ningirsu in Lagash



Now back in 1 Kings 6, we are given a number of details that I want to highlight so that we can picture this stunningly beautiful temple. Verse 2 tells us the temple was “sixty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high.” This would be ninety feet long, thirty feet wide, and forty-five feet high. The building is divided into two sections—the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place (or Holy of Holies). Inside the Holy of Holies, is the ark of the covenant, representing God’s presence.

Over in the parallel account of 2 Chronicles 3, verses 10-12 tell us that two massive angels—cherubim—were crafted from wood and covered in gold. Their outstretched wings together spanned thirty feet; and they sort of stood guard, in a sense, inside the Holy of Holies over the majesty of God’s presence.

Back in 1 Kings 6:7, the skill and precision of this building project is described. Notice this: “When the house was built, it was with stone prepared at the quarry, so that neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron was heard in the house while it was being built.” In other words, the stones and timber were cut away from the site, and when they arrived at the site, they fit together perfectly like pieces of a puzzle. This is no small accomplishment when you consider the foundation stones were the size of train cars.

Now in the midst of this description, we read a challenging and encouraging word the Lord gives King Solomon here in verses 12-13:

*“Concerning this house that you are building, if you will walk in my statutes and obey my rules and keep all my commandments and walk in them, then I will establish my word with you . . . and I will dwell among the children of Israel and will not forsake my people Israel.”*

In other words, no matter how beautiful and magnificent this temple turned out, it could not take the place of personal and national obedience to the Lord. This temple is not a good luck charm; it is not going to protect the people of Israel if they abandon God.

Now back to the construction project here in verse 22, we are told that “[Solomon] overlaid the whole house with gold.” Verse 29 adds, “Around all the walls of the house he carved engraved figures of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers.”

Built by the finest craftsmen and artists, using the best materials, exhibiting the rarest beauty, and sparing no expense, this temple was intended to reflect the beauty and holiness of the true and living God who would dwell there in a special sense. This was His house, and it was a wonder to behold.

Just think about the fact that the New Testament describes the Christian today as “the temple of the Holy Spirit” and then says, “Glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). So, do our lives reflect the beauty and holiness of God, who has effectively made us His dwelling place today?

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Well, the last verse of 1 Kings 6 says it took seven years to complete this project. Chapter 7 briefly interrupts the account to describe the building of Solomon’s house, which took thirteen years to complete. This is actually an entire campus that included the king’s palace and court and his personal residence,



along with some other buildings. This seems to indicate that Solomon's house was built near the temple, and that would serve as a reminder that he was accountable to God.

In 1 Kings 7:13, we return to the temple and all its furnishings. We're introduced to another man named Hiram, and he's described in verse 14 as "full of wisdom, understanding, and skill for making any work in bronze." His expertise is utilized in making two bronze pillars twenty-seven feet high and eighteen feet around. Imagine these massive pillars, which will stand on either side of the entrance to the temple. The large bronze altar of sacrifice that stood in the temple courtyard and is mentioned in 2 Chronicles 4:1 probably was Hiram's work as well.

Hiram was a very busy man. We are told that he built most of the items mentioned here in 1 Kings chapter 7. They include the "sea," which was a large basin, fifteen feet across, that rested on the backs of twelve bronze oxen (verses 23-26); and the "ten stands of bronze" with wheels attached to them, each designed to hold a smaller bronze basin and decorated with carvings of lions and palm trees (verses 27-39). These items are out in the courtyard.

Inside the temple, everything is covered in gold. The items listed in verse 48 and following include "the golden altar, the golden table for the bread of the Presence" and "the lampstands of pure gold."

Finally, at the end of chapter 7, verse 51 tells us:

*Thus all the work that King Solomon did on the house of the LORD was finished. And Solomon brought in the things that David his father had dedicated, the silver, the gold, and the vessels, and stored them in the treasures of the house of the LORD.*

It is hard to imagine the wisdom and effort and skill needed to plan, organize, fund, and carry out this seven-year project, but the result was one of the wonders of the world—a magnificent temple for the worship of the true and living God.

And we must not miss the truth that everything about the temple pointed, not to Solomon or Hiram or the stonecutters and gold workers, but to the glory and grace and power of the sovereign Creator of the universe. It was breathtaking, and it magnified God.

Now we must remember that nothing today remains of this magnificent temple. But again, as believers, we are each the temple of God's Spirit. Let's make it our priority today through our lives, our lifestyles, our convictions, our disposition, and our work ethic and attitude to enhance the fame and reputation, not of us, but of the God we love and serve.

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Why is our obedience to God and His word a far better measure of God's worth to a watching world than the good works we're counting as "beautiful and magnificent?"

What spiritual habits and attitudes are most likely to be seen in a person who's most concerned with God's fame and reputation being seen in their life? If your friends and family were asked about whose fame and reputation you are most concerned about, what would they likely say?

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## A NEW ERA BEGINS

1 Kings 8; 2 Chronicles 5:2–7:10

God cannot be limited to any one place, least of all some man-made structure. Yet, He is not far from us. In fact, He dwells with His children in a unique way—the infinite God communing with finite creatures. This was the meaning of Solomon’s temple.

With the completion of the great temple of the Lord in Jerusalem during Solomon’s reign, the nation is on the brink of a new era.

For nearly five hundred years, the ark had been housed in a tent called the tabernacle, with a few years in other temporary places. Now this little wooden box overladen with gold is about to become a permanent fixture in the glorious temple in Jerusalem, a place chosen by God Himself.

The parallel account in 2 Chronicles chapters 5 and 6 and part of 7 follows 1 Kings 8 very closely and adds some important details along the way.

Chapter 8 of 1 Kings begins this way:



Egyptian priest stretching out hands in prayer

*Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers’ houses of the people of Israel, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion.*

Now the ark has been kept in that portion of Jerusalem called the City of David; now it is going to be carried by priests to the new temple, even as King Solomon and the people are offering sacrifices in worship of the Lord.

The ark is taken through the temple doors – through the Holy Place and then into the Most Holy Place, where, verse 6 tells us, it is placed “underneath the wings” of the massive and beautiful golden cherubim.

We’re reminded here in verse 9 that the ark of the covenant contained “the two tablets of stone that Moses put there at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the people of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt.” This is a reminder of the nation’s obli-



gation to keep God's commandments if they want His blessing.

Then, having placed the ark inside the Holy of Holies, something supernatural occurs when the priests come out. Verse 10 tells us:

*A cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.*

This is exactly what happened when the tabernacle was completed at the end of Exodus chapter 40. In both cases, God's glorious presence descends, showing that the Lord is present with His people and dwelling among them.

The Lord's presence with us may not be so obvious at times, but we can be sure He dwells within us as individuals and among us as His people. Jesus Himself promised us, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Now Solomon speaks to the crowd about the faithfulness of God here in verse 20:

*"Now the LORD has fulfilled his promise that he made. For I have risen in the place of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and I have built the house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel."*

The king then offers a prayer of dedication. He begins by praising God as the unique and only God. "There is no God like you," Solomon says in verse 23. He also praises the Lord for "keeping covenant and showing steadfast love" to those who follow Him with "all their heart."

Solomon thanks God for being faithful to His promise to David, specifically God's promises of a house, a kingdom, and an eternal throne. And let me remind you that ultimately these promises will be fulfilled in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

King Solomon then confesses in verse 27, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!" In other words, no matter how grand this temple is, it is not even close to containing the glory of God. However, in this unique manner, God is going to represent His presence with His people by effectively living in this house—this temple—Solomon has built for Him on earth.

Solomon asks God in verse 29 to hear the prayers of His people as they pray toward this house, where His name dwells. As one writer put it, "To pray in or towards this temple is to pray to or in the name of God to whom it belongs, which is the Old Testament equivalent to praying [today] in the name of Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

If an Old Testament believer did not pray toward—essentially *through*—the temple, he was not honoring God's presence. Likewise, if a New Testament believer is not praying to—or through—Jesus Christ, his prayers are going nowhere. This is because Christ is our Mediator today.

*Christ is our  
Mediator today.*

Particularly, Solomon asks the Lord to forgive and restore those who have sinned when they turn from their sin and pray to Him at the temple. Whether they are suffering defeat before enemies, famine, drought, or plague because of their sins, Solomon calls on God to forgive them when they repent. He knows God is merciful and will indeed forgive, so his plea to the Lord is essentially to move those who sin to genuinely repent so they can be restored.

Beloved, this is the longest recorded prayer in all the Bible; it is loaded with timeless principles for us to-



day. And Solomon wraps up his prayer the way we should—by praising the Lord in verse 56 and then praying in verse 60 that “all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God.”

With that, Solomon offers a final exhortation to the people in verse 61:

*“Let your heart therefore be wholly true to the LORD our God, walking in his statutes and keeping his commandments, as at this day.”*

At this point, the parallel account in 2 Chronicles chapter 7 adds this detail in verse 1:

*As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple.*

That gets everybody’s attention! This is God’s dramatic statement that He approves of the temple, their offerings, and the prayer of Solomon.

As the cloud of God’s glory fills the temple, all the people now see it, and verse 3 tells us they all bow with their faces to the ground, declaring, “[God] is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.”

By the time the dedication of this temple is complete, 142,000 animals are presented up to God as offerings of praise! And of course, all this barbecue is then used to feed the nation in a celebration feast.

Verse 66 says as 1 Kings chapter 8 comes to a close:

*“[Solomon] sent the people away, and they blessed the king and went to their homes joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the LORD had shown to David his servant and to Israel his people.”*

This will be an unforgettable moment in the lives of these Israelites. Imagine what they have seen, what they have experienced, and what they enjoy as the people of God.

As great as this day was—with the fire from heaven, the cloud of God’s presence, and the joyous sacrifices offered to the Lord—it’s simply a shadow of the permanent sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the coming celebration in the presence of our Lord that will begin one day in eternity and never end.

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Read 1 Kings 8:22-61. What characteristics of God does Solomon emphasize in his prayer? What does Solomon’s prayer reveal about how any believer might pray effectively?

The joy and gladness of the people flowed out of God’s keeping His promises to David, Solomon and all of Israel. How has reflecting on God’s “kept promises” in your life been an encouragement to you? Who can you share this encouragement with this week?

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<sup>1</sup> Martin J. Selman, *2 Chronicles: A Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 10b (InterVarsity, 1994), 327.





## THE ORIGINAL KING MIDAS

1 Kings 9-10; 2 Chronicles 7:11-9:28

What is important is not how much we *have* in this world but how we *use* what we have. King Solomon's experience reminds us that all the blessings we enjoy are gifts of God and we are to use them to glorify Him, not ourselves.

As we turn to the ninth chapter of 1 Kings and the parallel passage in 2 Chronicles chapters 7-9, Solomon's construction projects continue, his wealth grows through trade, and news of his great wisdom spreads. But what we are going to see here is that everything he possesses comes from God, and for what he does with it all, he will answer to God, because to whom much is given, much is required. (Luke 12:48)

Here in 1 Kings 9 the magnificent temple has just been dedicated, and we are told in verse 2, "The LORD appeared to Solomon a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon." In this appearance, the Lord has three messages for Solomon.

First, God assures Solomon that his prayer of dedication has been heard. He says here in verse 3, "I have consecrated this house that you have built, by putting my name there forever." Over in 2 Chronicles 7:14, we learn of this additional promise to the nation Israel, should they wander away from God:

*"If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways,*

*then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."*

Second, back here in 1 Kings 9:4-5, the Lord promises Solomon:

*"If you will walk before me . . . with integrity of heart and uprightness . . . I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father,*



Six-chambered gate at Hazor





*saying, ‘You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’”*

If Solomon follows the Lord with his whole heart, the dynasty of David through Solomon will be established.

Third, the Lord presents a warning for Solomon. If he or his children turn away from the Lord, disobey His word, and follow other gods, the nation will be removed from the land and taken into exile, and the temple will “become a heap of ruins” (verse 8). And that’s exactly what eventually will happen.

But what about the promise to David of a permanent nation and a literal throne? Well, keep in mind this will be fulfilled ultimately and finally through David’s greatest Descendant, Jesus Christ. God did not promise an uninterrupted succession of David’s descendants if they abandoned the Lord, but a final successor to the throne—the Messiah, King Jesus.

And now chapter 9 shifts to a summary of Solomon’s achievements, and there are a lot of them, beginning in verse 10. Solomon ends up giving Hiram, the king of Tyre, twenty cities in Galilee as payment for his help in building the temple. Hiram is not happy with these cities, however, and the parallel account over in 2 Chronicles 8:2 implies that Hiram returned these cities and received a better payment.

We are told here in 1 Kings 9:15 that Solomon constructed the “Millo.” This refers to a terraced construction on the eastern slope of the City of David, making it possible to construct more buildings and fortifications. Solomon also rebuilt Hazor, north of the Sea of Galilee; Megiddo, overlooking the Valley of Jezreel; and the city of Gezer, which had been built on a major trade route west of Jerusalem toward the Mediterranean.

Now I must tell you, these are not little construction projects. They are major undertakings that used forced labor from the defeated Canaanite nations. Israelites worked on these projects as well, although they were soldiers and supervisors of the work.

Now verse 25 records:

*Three times a year Solomon used to offer up burnt offerings and peace offerings on the altar that he built to the LORD, making offerings with it before the LORD.*

In 2 Chronicles 8, additional details are given, noting that Solomon made sure the priests were organized and doing their duties during these annual festivals.

Then finally, here in verse 26, we read, “King Solomon built a fleet of ships at Ezion-geber, which is near Eloth on the shore of the Red Sea.” This was at the northern tip of the Red Sea. The Phoenicians were expert sailors and shipbuilders, and they helped Solomon build his fleet of ships. This is going to be very profitable for Israel.

Now chapter 10 gives us the details of a well-known visit by the queen of Sheba. We read in verse 1:

*Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions.*

She wants to know about the meaning of life and the truth about the creator God and a thousand more things.

This queen comes all the way from southwest Arabia (modern-day Yemen) because she has heard of Solomon’s wisdom and she wants to know if all the rumors are true. And they are! Solomon answers all her questions; and as a guest in his magnificent palace, she observes the variety of food and the beautiful clothing of the palace staff and sees the glorious golden temple of God. And we are told here in verse 5, “There was no more breath in her.” I mean, it all simply takes her breath away.

She is overwhelmed and says:

*“The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words*



*and of your wisdom, but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report that I heard.”* (verses 6-7)

And from her observations, she comes to understand something. Notice what she says to Solomon here in verse 9:

*“Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD loved Israel forever, he has made you king.”*

In other words, everything that Solomon is and has comes from the hand of God.

And does Solomon ever have a lot! Beginning here in verse 14, we are given a tour of his bank account, with verse 14 telling us the weight of the gold Solomon received every single year was more than twenty-five tons! Today that is over a billion dollars' worth of gold a year. Solomon took some of this gold and made 500 shields of solid gold, which were used for ceremonial purposes (verse 16). All his dining room utensils were solid gold (verse 21).

Verse 18 says, “The king also made a great ivory throne and overlaid it with the finest gold.” So great was the king's wealth that verse 21 records, “Silver was not considered as anything in the days of Solomon.” Who cares about silver?

Solomon's naval fleet also imported horses and exotic animals, like apes and peacocks (verse 22). It seems like Solomon could have anything he wanted.

But again, right here in the middle of these details, we have a reminder in verse 24: “The whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind.” You might not have Solomon's brains, and you might not have his bank account, but whatever you do have, it comes from the hand of God. The apostle Paul reminded the Corinthian believers of this truth when he asked, “What do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Corinthians 4:7).

The truth, is, Solomon is going to forget this very point. And that is going to make our next journey a rather sad one, as we come to the end of Solomon's reign.

*“What do you have that you did not receive?”*  
(1 Corinthians 4:7).

Review the three promises God makes to Solomon. What do they reveal about God's heart for His people? What expectations does God have in return for His grace towards His people? What expectation do you find the hardest to live out? Why?

Up until this point in his life, Solomon prayed (8:22) and lived in such a way that God was glorified by a presumed unbeliever. How does this challenge you own walk with God? Who is watching your life and what are they learning about God?

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## A TRAGIC END TO A GLORIOUS REIGN

1 Kings 11; 2 Chronicles 9:29-31

The lesson of Solomon's life is that age, experience, and past faithfulness do not guarantee freedom from temptation and continuing fruitful service for the Lord. We must be diligent to commit each day of our lives to obeying and honoring God.

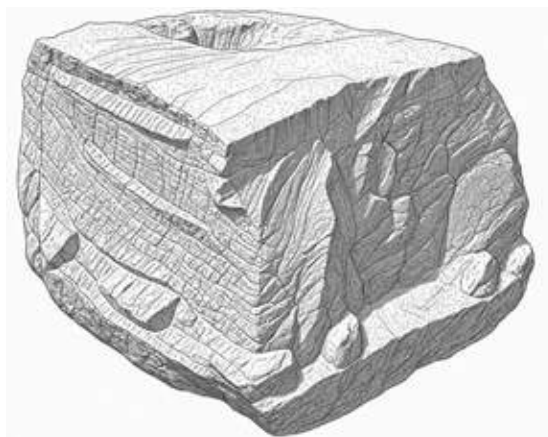
Solomon had all the wealth and fame and power you can imagine. In his early days, he sought wisdom from the Lord. He followed the Lord's plan and built that magnificent temple in Jerusalem. He even set the example for the nation of true worship.

But now as we come to the final years of Solomon's life, we sadly do not witness a glorious conclusion but a tragic ending. The young king described as loving the Lord has turned away from the Lord in his later years. And you have to ask the question: How did this happen?

God does not leave it to our imagination. He tells us exactly how someone this gifted and blessed became a spiritual disaster.

Here in 1 Kings chapter 11, we're given the details, beginning with the opening verses:

*Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the*



Votive altar for Astarte from 4th-5th century b.c.

*LORD had said to the people of Israel, "You shall not enter into marriage with them . . . for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love. He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And . . . when Solomon was old his*



*wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God.* (verses 1-4)

This is a sad chapter in the biography of King Solomon. But I want to point out three steps downward in Solomon's spiritual collapse as a warning to you and me today.

First, Solomon *stubbornly ignored God's command*. These marriages were no doubt motivated by political alliances; his wives were princesses, daughters of foreign kings. But we also read that Solomon "loved" these women, so this was more than politics. He was driven by a selfish passion and lust, literally, for 1,000 women—700 wives and 300 concubines. And such uncontrolled passion, as his father David learned, can lead one to resist and ignore God's commands. In Solomon's case, he ignored God's command not to multiply wives or take wives from among the pagan nations.

The second step downward here is that Solomon *ignored God's warning*. God had warned His people that foreign, or unbelieving, wives could turn a man's heart away from God. And by the way, God delivered that warning in Deuteronomy 17, some 500 years before Solomon was born.

But like so many people today who love their sin, Solomon must have convinced himself that he was the exception—God's warning was for other people. And here in verse 4, we're told that Solomon's wives did, in fact, turn away "his heart after other gods."

Solomon's third step into spiritual collapse is that he openly *disregarded the character of God*. God's law was clear, and Solomon knew it. "You shall have no other gods before me" is the first of the Ten Commandments. And the Israelite people daily repeated the words of Deuteronomy 6:4-5: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." Well, beloved, you can't love God and at the same time hang on to your sin.

Now verse 6 tells us that Solomon "did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done." In other words, while he didn't *totally* abandon the Lord, he justified the worship of false gods in order to appease his many wives.

Well, what is God going to do about that? First, verse 11 tells us, "The LORD said . . . 'I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant.'" Yet even in judgment there is a measure of grace, as the Lord promises Solomon that this will not take place until after his death. I believe Solomon repented, by the way, and the book of Ecclesiastes is his testimony of failure and then forgiveness.

Second, God raises up enemy nations that begin to chip away at the nation of Israel. Hadad the Edomite is mentioned here in verse 14, and verse 23 names Rezon, a leader who gains control of Damascus, in the northern area of the kingdom. Verse 25 says of him, "He was an adversary of Israel all the days of Solomon, doing harm as Hadad did."

In addition to these enemies, the Lord also raises up a man from among the people of Israel and the tribe of Ephraim by the name of Jeroboam. Verse 26 tells us that this man "lifted up his hand against the king." We're told here through the rest of chapter 11 that this young man actually had helped Solomon on some of the building projects in Jerusalem. In fact, Jeroboam had done such a great job that Solomon promoted him over the entire construction crew from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

But that is not his last promotion. We are told here in verse 29 that God sends the prophet Ahijah to inform Jeroboam that the kingdom of Israel will be divided; and Jeroboam will rule over ten of Israel's tribes, while only two tribes will be ruled by Solomon's son.

Here's what God says through Ahijah:

*"I will take the kingdom out of [Solomon's] son's hand and will give it to you, ten tribes. Yet to his son I will give one tribe, that*





*David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen to put my name.”* (verses 35-36)

Jeroboam will not rule over Judah or the small tribe of Benjamin, which together are spoken of here as “one tribe.”

The Lord says in verse 39 that He will “afflict the offspring of David because of this [apostasy], but not forever.” Those words “not forever” tell us that God’s promise to the house of David will still be fulfilled later on. We know that will happen one day yet in the future, in the millennial kingdom, when the Son of David, Jesus Christ our Lord, sits upon David’s throne.

The Lord makes a very gracious offer to Jeroboam here in verse 38: If he will follow the Lord and obey His word, God says, “I will be with you and will build you a sure house”; that is, a secure kingdom. But we will learn later that Jeroboam has no interest in following the Lord.

Now what is Solomon going to do when he discovers the prophet of God has promised half his kingdom to another man because of Solomon’s rebellion? Well, he should have repented on the spot. But instead, we’re told in verse 40; “Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam.” Does that sound familiar? Solomon is going to start acting like King Saul, who tried to kill David.

Eventually, Solomon’s forty-year reign ends when he dies and is succeeded by his son Rehoboam.

Solomon’s great beginning has come to a tragic end. Beloved, here is the warning: Obedience to God in the past does not guarantee obedience to God in the future. Our testimony for Christ should begin fresh every day. Before your feet hit the ground running, make a fresh commitment to follow the Lord, obey

His Word, and put Him first in your life. And do that every single day.

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Review the steps of Solomon’s spiritual collapse. Which one challenges you most? Why? How might Deuteronomy 6:4-5 serve to protect you from a collapse? Is there a fellow believer in your life headed for collapse that you can come alongside and encourage with scriptures that have encouraged you?

How do these painful consequences of Solomon’s sin illustrate Numbers 32:23? Solomon’s choices set in motion centuries of painful consequences for Israel. How is this truth a warning to your choices as a spouse, parent, or any other relationship you have to others in your world?

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## A DIVIDED KINGDOM

1 Kings 12–13; 2 Chronicles 10–11

An arrogant, self-seeking attitude is the starting point for conflict, division, destruction, and apostasy. There are few better examples of this principle than the two men who initiated the division of Israel into competing kingdoms: Rehoboam and Jeroboam.

The Lord revealed to Solomon the tragic consequences his apostasy would have in Israel—namely, the nation would be divided. And the way God brings this about is through the arrogance of Solomon's son Rehoboam, who is now king of Israel.

As Rehoboam arrives in Shechem for his coronation, 1 Kings 12 tells us the northern tribes arrive and want to see some changes take place. In verse 4 they make their request of Rehoboam:

*“Your father [Solomon] made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke on us, and we will serve you.”*

They are referring to the heavy taxes and the demand for manpower during Solomon's building projects. This had taken a heavy toll on the people, and now they want relief.

So, Rehoboam promises to give them an answer after three days. Verse 6 tells us that he calls a meeting with “the old men, who had stood before Solomon his father.” He asks these veteran leaders for their advice, and they tell him to grant the people's request.

But Rehoboam doesn't like their advice—this isn't what he was looking for. So, verse 8 tells us:

*He abandoned the counsel that the old men gave him and took*



The tale of Gilgamesh and Akka in which the advice of the elders is rejected in favor of the younger men



*counsel with the young men who had grown up with him.*

You know, if you ask enough people for advice, you will eventually find somebody who tells you what you wanted to hear in the first place! And that is what these young men do. They tell him to respond to the people with these words:

*“My little finger is thicker than my father’s thighs . . . my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with [barbed whips].”* (verses 10–11)

Well, that will rally people around you!

Sadly, Rehoboam follows the advice of his young friends. Clearly, he doesn’t have a clue how to lead a nation.

We read here in verse 16:

*When all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, “What portion do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse.” . . . So Israel went to their tents.*

This means they are going home and effectively declaring their independence.

In a rather desperate attempt to keep the northern tribes under his control, Rehoboam sends a messenger to speak to them and demand payment of taxes. The people stone this man to death.

Rehoboam responds by preparing to attack these tribes, but a prophet by the name of Shemaiah appears on the scene and delivers this message from the Lord:

*“Thus says the LORD, ‘You shall not go up or fight against your relatives the people of Israel. . . .*

*for this thing is from me.’” So they listened to the word of the LORD and went home again.* (verse 24)

The united kingdom of Israel under Saul, David, and Solomon now becomes a divided kingdom. And from this point, the books of Kings and Chronicles will give us the history of these two separate kingdoms. The northern kingdom, made up of ten tribes, is referred to as *Israel*. The southern kingdom, made up of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, is referred to as *Judah*, with Jerusalem as its capital.

The parallel account in 2 Chronicles 11 tells us Rehoboam gets busy building defenses in Judah; he even starts accumulating wives and concubines—just like his father, Solomon. He hasn’t learned anything from history. And as the old saying goes, “If you don’t learn from history, you are doomed to repeat it.” And he will.

Now here at 1 Kings 12:25, the focus turns to the northern kingdom and its newly anointed king, Jeroboam. Back in 1 Kings 11, God’s prophet promised Jeroboam that if he followed the Lord, he would have a successful reign on the throne. But Jeroboam evidently hasn’t learned anything from history either, because we are told here in verse 27 that he says to himself:

*“If [my] people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to . . . Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam.”*

Essentially, he is saying, “I can’t maintain my kingdom if I follow God, because the people will go to Jerusalem to worship at the temple, and I will lose control of them. I have to keep them from going there.”

Well, how does he do that? Verse 28 says that he fashions two golden calves as idols and tells the people these are the gods that brought Israel up out of Egypt. He places one in the northern part of Israel at Dan and one in the southern region at Bethel.



The second thing he does is build little temples in his territory and appoints false priests, verse 31 says, “from among all the people, who were not of the Levites.” In other words, they are not qualified to serve as priests, but who cares? Over in 2 Chronicles 11, we learn that some priests and Levites in the north defected and moved to Jerusalem.

So, Jeroboam creates this system of idolatry in order to keep his people from going near Jerusalem. And this sets a horrifying precedent of rebellion and idolatry. In fact, throughout the record of 1 and 2 Kings, we read of one king after another walking in the way, or in the sin, of Jeroboam.

Now God does not just let Jeroboam destroy himself without opportunities to repent. Here now in chapter 13, God sends a man to confront the king and denounce this idolatry. He prophesies that Jeroboam’s altar will be torn down and the ashes poured out.

Jeroboam does not repent. Instead, we read this in verses 4-5:

*Jeroboam stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, “Seize him.” And his hand . . . dried up, so that he could not draw it back to himself. The altar also was torn down, and ashes poured out . . . according to the sign that the man of God had given.*

His hand is paralyzed, and the altar is destroyed. That will make a believer out of anybody! And Jeroboam here in verse 6 asks the man of God to pray that God will heal him. He does pray, and God heals the king. But even after all this, chapter 13 ends by telling us in verse 33, “Jeroboam did not turn from his evil way.” The miracle affected Jeroboam’s hand, but it didn’t change his heart.

Before this chapter concludes, however, it records another incident involving the man of God who con-

## 1 Kings 12-13; 2 Chronicles 10-11

fronted Jeroboam. God commanded this man not to stop to eat or drink in that place but to return immediately to Judah. Tragically, he is deceived by an older prophet, and he disobeys the Lord. The next morning, he is killed by a lion as God’s judgment for his disobedience.

Now this is one of the strangest and most surprising events in the book of 1 Kings. But it serves as God’s dramatic and powerful warning to the northern kingdom. If this devout man of God was judged for this one act of disobedience, why in the world would they think they could get away with their idolatry and defiance of God?

Well, there’s much more to come. In the meantime, beloved, take God’s Word seriously, listen to the Lord’s warnings, and walk with Him in obedience today.

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What does the above history teach you about the divisive nature of sin? What heart attitude makes any believer think they can avoid the inevitable consequences of sin? On this side of your own painful consequences of sin, how would you counsel a fellow believer contemplating going against wise counsel?

What does God’s reaction to Jeroboam’s actions teach you about compromising obedience to God’s word? In what ways did the people contribute to the sin Jeroboam set his heart to do?

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## THE PARADE OF KINGS

1 Kings 14-16; 2 Chronicles 12-16

Godly character, not worldly achievements, is the true measure of a person and the only one that counts in the end. The Lord's evaluation of the early kings of Judah and Israel illustrates this universal principle.

As we continue in the book of 1 Kings, we are going to come across a lot of names. And that is what happens when we study history, right? Passing that history class was tough because you had to remember all those names.

But let me encourage you with this: remembering all the names of these kings is not the primary issue here. What God has to say about them is what's important. You see, this is more than history.

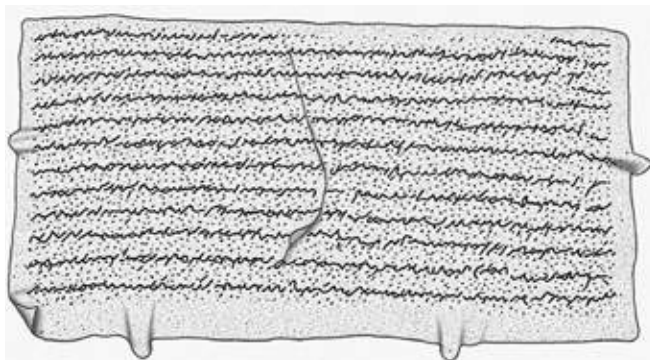
As each king walks out onto the stage of human history under a divine spotlight, we are going to read either the oft-repeated statement "he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord" or, every once in a while, "he did what was *right* in the eyes of the Lord."

Now beginning in chapter 14, we pick up the account of Jeroboam, king of the northern kingdom of Israel. And we read in verse 1, "At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam fell sick." So, this rebellious king

sends his wife in disguise to the prophet of God to find out whether or not their son will recover. But at the sound of her approaching footsteps, the prophet identifies her and gives her the bad news: their son will not survive his illness.

However, the prophet makes an interesting comment here in verse 13, indicating that the child's death actually is a blessing for him because he will be spared a lot of turmoil and bloodshed and grief. The prophet says:

*For he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found something pleasing to the LORD, the God of Israel, in the house of Jeroboam.*



Text containing Assyrian king's request for an oracle to receive guidance from deity

Of everybody in Jeroboam's family, only this boy evidently had a heart for God.

The prophet then informs Jeroboam's wife that God will raise up another king who will put an end to Jeroboam's dynasty. Indeed, as verse 16 says, judgment on all of Israel eventually will come because of "the sins of Jeroboam, which he sinned and made Israel to sin."



Jeroboam's son dies soon after this. And after a twenty-two-year reign, Jeroboam dies, and his son Nadab succeeds him.

At verse 21, the narrative shifts back to Judah's king, Rehoboam. Remember, the nation is divided into two kingdoms—the northern kingdom, referred to as Israel; and the southern kingdom, referred to as Judah, which holds the city of Jerusalem.

For seventeen years, while Rehoboam reigned as king in Jerusalem, verse 22 says, “Judah did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.”

Rehoboam's wicked reign experiences an invasion by Egypt, which takes a significant toll on Judah, including, according to verse 26, the loss of the “treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house.” Eventually, Rehoboam dies, and his son Abijam takes the throne in Jerusalem.

Sadly, as chapter 15 opens, we are told here in verse 3, “[Abijam] walked in all the sins that his father did before him.” He reigns only three years, and his son Asa follows him to the throne.

Maybe you're thinking, *I'll never remember all these guys. There are just too many names.* Well, I don't blame you for thinking that. But now we come to someone who is really worth remembering.

Let me tell you, the biography of Asa is a breath of fresh air in the midst of all this pollution. Listen to what verse 11 says: “Asa did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as David his father had done.” How great is that?

We are told here that he removes all the religious prostitutes and the idols from the land. He even banishes his grandmother, the wicked queen mother, who had led the people in worshiping a false goddess.

The parallel account found in 2 Chronicles 14 gives even more details on Asa's reign. Verse 4 informs us that Asa “commanded Judah to seek the Lord ... and to keep the law.” He also fortified Judah's cities (verses 5-8) and defeated a million-man Ethiopian army because he cried out to the Lord in faith (verses 9-13). Finally, Asa leads his people to rededicate their lives to the Lord (15:9-15).

Unfortunately, we read in 2 Chronicles chapter 16 that later in his life Asa relies on an alliance with the Syrian king Ben-hadad rather than trust the Lord when confronting the aggression of the northern kingdom. And even though the northern opponents are sent scampering back home, Asa is rebuked for his alliance by Hanani, God's prophet.

Hanani delivers this classic verse to King Asa, which is worth memorizing.

*The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.* (verse 9)

Despite the fact that Asa failed in certain areas, just like we all do, he remained faithful to God, and the kingdom of Judah was blessed to have this godly king for forty-one years.

Now the chronology of this parade of kings takes us back to 1 Kings 15, where we are told about the kings who reigned over Israel during the time King Asa was reigning over Judah.

Verse 26 tells us that Jeroboam's son Nadab “walked in the way of his father, and in his sin.” After just two years as king, Nadab is assassinated by a man named Baasha, who then proceeds to kill “all the house of Jeroboam” (verse 29). By the way, this fulfills the prophecy back in 1 Kings 14:10 that the Lord would “cut off from Jeroboam every male,” ending his royal dynasty.

Because Baasha too walks in the way of Jeroboam, the Lord promises here in 1 Kings 16:3 to “utterly sweep away ... his house” as he had Jeroboam's. Baasha reigns for twenty-four years and is succeeded by his son Elah. After just two years, Elah's servant Zimri kills him and then all his household in fulfillment of the Lord's word.

So, Zimri is now king, but he reigns only for a grand total of seven days before Omri, the commander of Israel's army, chases him into his palace, where he is left without any possible escape. And Zimri sets his palace on fire and dies himself in the flames.



If this sounds like a horror movie, it was.

General Omri now becomes the king of Israel, but he too is an evil man; verse 26 tells us again, “He walked in all the way of Jeroboam.”

Now Omri is known in Scripture for building the city of Samaria, which becomes the capital of Israel. So, while the kingdom of Judah is headquartered in Jerusalem, and the kingdom of Israel is now headquartered in Samaria.

Omri is also known for being the father of Ahab, one of the most wicked kings in the history of Israel. Note how Ahab is described:

*[Ahab] took for his wife Jezebel . . . And Ahab . . . did more to provoke the LORD . . . to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.* (verses 31, 33)

How is that for a resume? He succeeded in making God angrier than any other king was able to do.

Now after all this information, it's understandable if you're feeling a little dizzy. You may not remember the names of these kings, but I want you to remember this key principle: no matter who they were or what they did, what mattered most was whether or not they walked with God.

What does your resume look like? Let me tell you, no matter what you do in life, no matter what your title is, no matter what kingdom you rule over, when the dust of history settles, the only question that matters is this: Did you walk with God? Oh beloved, walk with God today!

*When the dust of history settles, the only question that matters is this: Did you walk with God? Oh beloved, walk with God today!*

How does God show himself to King Jeroboam during his 22 years of sinful reign? How might have God been dealing with him day to day? What spiritual opportunities did Jeroboam have each day that he was king? What does this teach you about God's heart towards sinners?

What life lessons can you learn from Asa's life as he ruled for God surrounded by sinful people? How can you apply those lessons to your own walk in a sinful world? Re-read verse 9 above, how does this truth encourage you to live faithfully before God?

Twice in these verses above God acts in judgement according to His word. How does this truth about God inform any wayward walking you may be involved in or are considering today? Who is impacted by the spiritual choices you make every day?

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## SURPRISED BY RAVENS AND A RESURRECTION

1 Kings 17

Following the Lord is not a straight and easy path. There are ups and downs and shifts. There are unexpected challenges and surprises along the way. Elijah's experience reminds us, though, that even as God is using us, He is also preparing us for what is ahead.

Have you ever thought about the fact that a lighthouse has never once stopped a storm—or kept a storm from arriving? No, it is designed to provide light when storms do come; and the darker the storm, the more desperately the light is needed. Our spiritually dark world is in desperate need of the light of God's Word.

And let me tell you, our generation is not the first to need that light. Let me take you back to a time when Satan's kingdom of darkness seemed to have the upper hand.

From their capital city of Samaria, wicked King Ahab and his wife Jezebel are leading the ten tribes of Israel to abandon God and follow after the false god Baal. Baal is worshiped as the god who brings the rain and produces the bounty of their crops.

But God graciously raises up a lighthouse, a prophet named Elijah, to deliver His word to Ahab. Now here in 1 Kings chapter 17, Elijah just sort of suddenly appears on the scene without any introduction, and he says to King Ahab: "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word" (verse 1).

There is no discussion or debate. Elijah tells King Ahab to just sit there and learn the lesson that Baal does not send the rain; God does.

The Lord then immediately gives Elijah specific instructions here in verses 3-4:

*"Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the*



Statue of Elijah at Muhraqa, the traditional site of the contest with the prophets of Baal





*brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.”*

Now this secluded spot will not only protect Elijah's life for the moment but also develop Elijah's faith for future ministry.

This brook will give him the water he needs, but the Lord is going to send ravens to bring him food. Ravens, of course, do not typically share their food—this is God's miraculous provision.

Elijah obeys: “He went and did according to the word of the LORD” (verse 5). By the way, this is a great example of following God's word even when we don't understand it.

And listen, this food delivery system is going to be a daily reminder to Elijah that God is in control of His creation. He can even use the birds to accomplish His work. Imagine this faith-developing curriculum as Elijah's trust in the Lord is deepened.

Well, when God finishes with this portion of Elijah's training, He allows the brook to naturally dry up due to the drought. Elijah is now ready to enter a new classroom, and God directs him to it in verse 9, saying, “Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.”

Now, we need to note some things here. First, Elijah has been in hiding. To go out in public is a dangerous thing to do. Second, a widow would be the last person one would go to for help during this drought and famine. And one more observation: this verse tells us the woman is living in Zarephath, which just happens to be in Jezebel's homeland, where Elijah cannot expect a very warm welcome. Once again, the Lord is developing the faith of his prophet.

Now when Elijah first meets this widow and asks her for some water and a piece of bread, she tells him here in verse 12:

*“As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a*

*handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.”*

I think Elijah would have chosen to die of hunger rather than ask this impoverished widow for her last piece of bread. But again, he is following the Lord's instructions, which do not seem to make a lot of sense at the moment.

Elijah then promises her that if she will share with him what little she has left, the Lord will provide for her:

*“Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.’”* (verse 14)

Imagine this promise. No more trips to the grocery store, no begging from friends and neighbors—just believe the word of a prophet she has never met before, and give him her last meal.

And she does! And here in verse 16 we are told, “The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.”

Notice, the Lord doesn't suddenly fill her cupboards and basement with sacks of flour and jars of oil. No, the implication here is that He produces flour and oil each day as it is needed. Every meal, then, is her *last* meal unless the Lord keeps His word—and He does! What Elijah learned from the Lord's daily provision through those ravens, this woman learns from a daily miracle of provision.

This is actually a good reminder for you and me today: we need to depend on God one day at a time. In fact, this is what Jesus taught His disciples when He instructed them to pray, “Give us this day our *daily* bread” (Matthew 6:11). One day at a time.



Now there is something surprising that happens next here in verse 18. We are told that this widow's son becomes ill and dies. Her faith is now severely tested. She says to Elijah here:

*"What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!"*

She thinks, like we so often do, that tragedy must be the result of sin and God is taking out His revenge on her.

Elijah doesn't argue with her or defend himself or God. He simply takes her son up to the room where he has been staying and begins a rather urgent prayer:

*He cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?" Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again." And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived.* (verses 20-22)

The death of this boy becomes God's way of revealing more about His power than either this widow or Elijah had ever witnessed before. It is also the final step in preparing Elijah for what is coming, for he is about to stand alone and risk his life in confronting King Ahab and Jezebel and hundreds of pagan prophets of Baal.

Let's remember that the tests we face in life are designed by God to deepen our faith. God is not interested in destroying us but in developing us so that we grow in our understanding of His character, our commitment to His purposes, and our trust in His provision.

If you are going through a difficult time today, get ready! God is more than likely preparing you for some fruitful, future service that just might surprise you and bring God even greater glory.

*Let's remember  
that the tests we  
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deepen our faith.*

In what ways can you relate to Elijah's faith building experience? Who in your life might be encouraged by your own faith building experiences? Why does God use difficult and humbling circumstances to build our faith as believers?

In what ways does your life reflect that you have a "daily bread" dependency with God? How do these verses encourage your trusting God one day at a time? Matthew 6:25ff, Luke 12:24, 2 Corinthians 9:8, Philippians 4:6-7.

How does Elijah's actions challenge the value you place on the ministry of praying?

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## STEALING BAAL'S THUNDER

1 Kings 18

The odds are never stacked against God. No matter how many people oppose Him or how powerful they seem, they are still merely human beings. To stand with God is to stand with the truth and with the one who is all-powerful. Elijah's boldness came from embracing this truth.

Today we arrive at the showdown on Mount Carmel. This is the moment that marks the ministry of the prophet Elijah. If you know anything about Elijah, going all the way back to your younger days, you probably know about prophets of Baal and fire falling from heaven.

Here is how it all begins in 1 Kings 18:

*After many days the word of the LORD came to Elijah . . . saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth."* (verse 1)

For three years it had not rained, as punishment from God upon His rebellious people. Now on his way to Samaria to confront King Ahab, Elijah comes across Obadiah, an official in Ahab's court. Obadiah has been sent out to locate grass to feed the king's livestock, and here in verse 3 we are told that Obadiah "feared the Lord." In fact, verse 4 tells us Obadiah had hidden a hundred prophets of the Lord in a cave to protect them from Queen Jezebel, who wanted to kill them; and he was providing them food and water.

Elijah says to Obadiah in verse 8, "Go, tell your lord, 'Behold, Elijah is here.'" Obadiah isn't too sure about



Seal impression indicating the name of the individual (Adaniyahu) who is "over the house"

doing that. Ahab has been searching relentlessly for Elijah with no success. To paraphrase Obadiah's response, he says, "Look, if I tell him you're on your way and you sneak off somewhere, Ahab will kill me in a heartbeat!" Elijah promises him, "I will surely show myself to him today" (verse 15).

Elijah keeps his promise, and when Ahab sees this prophet, he says to him in verse 17, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?" He thinks Elijah is the problem.



*This is so typical of  
a sinful world that  
so quickly blames  
somebody else for  
their own sin.*

This is so typical of a sinful world that so quickly blames somebody else for their own sin.

Elijah sets the record straight in verse 18:

*“I have not troubled Israel,  
but you have, and your father’s  
house, because you have aban-  
doned the commandments of the  
LORD and followed the Baals.”*

Now Elijah realizes the critical issue here is bigger than Ahab and his wife Jezebel. He knows this is a spiritual issue and the future of the whole nation of Israel is at stake. So, in verse 19 Elijah delivers this really amazing command to the king:

*“Gather all Israel to me at Mount  
Carmel, and the 450 prophets of  
Baal and the 400 prophets of Ash-  
erah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”*

So now here’s Elijah standing for God all alone. And standing against him are hundreds of prophets of Baal, along with King Ahab and all the representatives of the entire nation. Several thousand people have gathered on Mount Carmel to see this one prophet taken down.

Elijah preaches a simple yet scathing sermon, and we are given his main point here in verse 21: “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” They can’t have it both ways. You see, the people have not totally abandoned belief in the Lord, but they

think they can worship Baal too. Elijah says there is no middle ground. They have to choose.

And just in case the people are wondering which god is the true God, Elijah offers a challenge to the prophets of Baal, which they accept. We read here in verses 23-24:

*“Choose one bull for [yourselves]  
and cut it in pieces and lay it on  
the wood, but put no fire to it.  
And I will prepare the other bull  
and lay it on the wood and put  
no fire to it. And you call upon  
the name of your god, and I will  
call upon the name of the LORD,  
and the God who answers by fire,  
he is God.” And all the people an-  
swered, “It is well spoken.”*

Elijah is actually setting up something that should give the prophets of Baal the advantage, because Baal is supposedly the god of lightning, the god of fire from heaven. This is Baal’s calling card.

Verse 26 says that for the next three hours, the prophets cry out, “O Baal, answer us!” but “no one answered.”

At noon, Elijah begins to mock them (verse 27), telling them to cry louder because Baal might be on a long journey or asleep or relieving himself—literally, Baal might be in the bathroom, so you better knock on the door a little louder. I think Elijah is enjoying this challenge.

After hours more of the Baal prophets pleading with their god, there is still no answer—no fire from heaven.

Elijah then repairs a broken-down altar to the Lord that is already there—a significant act by the way—and then he pours water on, and all around, the altar and the sacrifice to make it even harder to burn. And for Elijah, there is no pleading for hours for God to answer. Listen to his simple prayer:

*“O LORD, God of Abraham,*





*Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.”*

(verses 36-37)

There is an immediate response to his prayer:

*Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, ‘The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God.’”* (verses 38-39)

Baal wasn't in charge after all.

Elijah calls the people to not only profess this truth but also to enact judgment on the false prophets, which they do. The cancer of idolatry needed to be removed.

With the idolatrous prophets now dead and the people, at least for the moment, indicating a change of heart, the Lord sends rain from heaven once again—after three and a half years of drought.

Meanwhile, Ahab heads for his winter palace in Jezreel, fifteen miles away, where Jezebel is waiting to find out what happened. Elijah is supernaturally empowered, and he runs on foot and beats Ahab back to Jezreel. We will pick up the narrative there in our next session.

But before we wrap it up today, let me make three observations from this duel on Mount Carmel.

First, don't ever forget that the majority opinion can be absolutely wrong, especially in spiritual matters. Jesus preached that the road to hell is a well-traveled path; it's the popular path in life—there is always more traffic there than on the narrow path that leads to everlasting life.

Second, you can be sincere about what you believe and yet be sincerely wrong. These prophets of Baal were sincere—they prayed for hours—and yet they were following a false god.

Third, great spiritual victories usually follow years of obscurity and preparation. Elijah did not start out on Mount Carmel; he started out as an unknown prophet, being trained to walk by faith.

I imagine that is exactly what God is doing with you today, teaching you to walk by faith. Trust Him. If you wait on God today, you will not miss His plans for you tomorrow.

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Recall a time when you were willing to stand alone for God. From what spiritual truths did you draw the courage and faith to take your stand? What did you learn from that experience? Who in your life might be encouraged by your experience as they struggle to make their stand?

How has God shown Himself to you when you have experienced standing along for Him? What did God show you about yourself? About the world? About Himself and His word? How can you use your insights to encourage a fellow believer? A yet-to-be-saved family member or friend?

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## UNMET EXPECTATIONS

1 Kings 19

Elijah's descent into despair reminds us that victory can easily give way to defeat and discouragement. The way out of the spiral of despair is not to look inward but outward—to the Lord's provisions and blessings and to serving others.

William Carey, pioneering missionary to India from 1793 to 1834, would become known as the Father of Modern Missions. He seems an unlikely candidate to experience deep depression. Yet, written in his diary are entries like these: "I am very defective in all my duties . . . In prayer I wander, and . . . I soon tire; [my] devotion languishes; I do not walk with God." <sup>1</sup>

Even the godliest people can become depressed and downhearted, and the prophet Elijah is no exception. It all begins with the reaction of Queen Jezebel to Elijah's victory on Mount Carmel recorded in 1 Kings 19:



Excavation of Beersheba

*Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." (verses 1-2)*

Now you might not think this would affect the courageous prophet of God, but we are told here in verse 3: "Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life."

Elijah had just seen the fire of God fall from heaven and all the false prophets of Baal defeated. Why, then, would he flee from Jezebel?

Well, for starters, he is human just like you and me, and every one of us can falter in our faith. But I personally think Elijah expected the news of fire falling from heaven and God sending rain again to bring Jezebel to repentance. I think he expected her to renounce Baal for good.



But she doesn't want revival; she wants revenge. And in his great disappointment, Elijah falters in his walk of faith and runs for his life.

Beloved, I believe one of the biggest challenges in the Christian life is unmet *expectations*. It's easy to become disheartened when people fail to do what we expect them to do or God doesn't do what we expect Him to do.

*One of the biggest challenges in the Christian life is unmet expectations.*

Elijah eventually wanders into the wilderness and sits down under a tree. He's exhausted and frankly depressed. He says in verse 4, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." To put it another way, he's saying, "That's it! I'm throwing in the towel. I'm through."

How does the Great Physician deal with His despairing patient? First, God does not hit him over the head with a rebuke. God does not kick Elijah to the curb and go find a better prophet. God actually gives Elijah time to sleep and rest; the Lord even sends an angel to bring Elijah food and water in verses 5-8.

In what ways can relate to Elijah's "throw in the towel" despair? What role might your "unmet expectations" of God have on your despair? Why is it important to be honest with God and yourself about despairing and its causes? When you are feeling depressed and anxious, how do you bring God into the situation?

Next, God leads him to Mount Horeb, another name for Mount Sinai, where God had given the law to Moses. In verse 9, the Lord speaks to Elijah like a wise counselor, asking him a question: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" In other words, "Elijah, tell Me how you're feeling." And Elijah sort of pours it all out in verse 10:

*"I have been very jealous for the LORD . . . For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."*

You can hear the disappointment and loneliness in his complaint. He has tried to honor God, but God did not bring the nation to repentance as Elijah had expected. Elijah now says that he is all alone in the land, and on top of that, he has a death sentence hanging over his head.

The Lord answers him now in a unique way—and He doesn't start with words. First, the Lord sends a strong wind that verse 11 says breaks apart the rocks on the mountain. Then the Lord sends an earthquake, and then a fire breaks out on the mountain. And in each case, the Bible says the Lord is not "in" these powerful demonstrations—there's no personal message for Elijah from the Lord. However, in verse 12, the Lord speaks, but it's in a still small voice, a "low whisper."

You see, the Lord is teaching Elijah that He does not always work through impressive miracles, as Elijah apparently was expecting. No, sometimes the Lord works in quiet ways to teach His children and accomplish His plans.

And now once again, here in verse 13, that quiet voice asks Elijah the second time, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" The prophet answers with the same words, but now the tone and attitude are beginning to change.

We know that because the Lord now gives Elijah some ministry assignments. No more power demonstrations are needed because God's whisper has gotten through to His prophet.

In verse 15, the Lord tells Elijah to anoint Hazael as king of Syria, and then in verse 16, he's commanded to



anoint Jehu “to be king over Israel.” He is also to anoint Elisha to become his successor as a prophet of God.

We learn later that these three men will become God’s instruments of judgment against the house of Ahab in the days ahead.

Then the Lord corrects Elijah’s feelings that he is the only follower of God left in the land. God tells him in verse 18 that there are “seven thousand [people] in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal.” Elijah thought he was the only one left, but there were thousands praying for God’s name to be honored in Israel.

The final verses in chapter 19 introduce us to Elisha. He is out in the field plowing with a team of oxen, and Elijah approaches and throws his cloak upon him. This symbolizes God’s call of Elisha to be His prophet.

Elisha agrees to follow Elijah but says that he wants to say goodbye to his parents. Elijah replies, “Go back again, for what have I done to you?” (verse 20). That sounds rather blunt and uncaring to our ears, but what Elijah means is, “Go back home, and consider carefully what I have called you to do.” And Elisha does just that.

Verse 21 then tells us:

*He . . . took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them . . . Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.*

In other words, Elisha just burned his bridges behind him. There’s no turning back. There’s no more farming in his future.

I wonder what Elisha was expecting from the life of a prophet. Well, Elijah could teach him a lesson about unmet expectations—when people, and even the

Lord, don’t respond like you expected them to. I can just imagine their conversations together.

Perhaps you are at a place right now you didn’t expect to be. You thought your commitment to God would bring you somewhere else or bring you something else. But it hasn’t. And that has led you to discouragement and even despair—like Elijah.

Let me encourage you to take a reality check. Realize, like Elijah, that you are not alone. There are many others who struggle just like you do. But don’t just *realize* that; renew your commitment to serving the Lord by serving other people. When you do that, your focus shifts away from yourself to others. You will regain a sense of joy as God uses you in the lives of others, who might just think they are the only ones with unmet expectations. I can just imagine your encouraging conversations with them.

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In what ways can relate to Elijah’s “throw in the towel” despair? What role might your “unmet expectations” of God have on your despair? Why is it important to be honest with God and yourself about despairing and its causes? When you are feeling depressed and anxious, how do you bring God into the situation?

How does God’s response to a despairing Elijah speak into your own despair and expectations? In what practical ways might you get into a position to hear God’s “quiet ways” towards you? Make a commitment today to spend that time with the LORD anytime despair is present.

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<sup>1</sup> Eustace Carey, *Memoir of William Carey* (Jackson and Walford, 1836), 158.







## THE DAY OF RECKONING

1 Kings 20–21

God is gracious and merciful, even toward people as wicked as King Ahab. But no one should take these blessings of God for granted or let them hide the truth that we are all accountable to God and will ultimately answer to Him.

Responsibility demands accountability. And this is not just for leaders of organizations; it's a divine principle that governs every position of authority. The Bible tells us in Romans 13 that God appoints civil authorities to their positions. And He has reasons for choosing certain people that we may never understand as He guides the world toward His final purposes.

If I were living in Israel back in the days of King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, I probably would have wondered what God was thinking. Ahab and Jezebel are about as wicked as you can imagine. But their day of reckoning is just around the corner.

The last chapters of 1 Kings give us the final years of Ahab's rule. God graciously and repeatedly gives Ahab opportunities to repent along the way.

Now we saw back in chapter 15 that the king of Syria, Ben-hadad, had become an ally with Judah, and here in verse 1 of chapter 20, we read that Ben-hadad “went up and closed in on Samaria and fought against it.”

In other words, his army has surrounded the capital city of the northern kingdom. Now at first, Ahab agrees to Ben-Hadad's demands for gold and silver because Ahab doesn't stand a chance.

And by the way, Ahab does not go to the Lord for guidance—and that is no surprise—but the Lord speaks to Ahab through an anonymous prophet who shows up and says in verse 13:

*“Thus says the LORD, Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will give it into your hand this day, and you shall know that I am the LORD.”*

Verse 16 tells us Ahab gathers a small army and goes out at noon, surprising Ben-hadad and his men, who



Exiles and animals carried away by Tiglath-pileser III



are all drinking themselves drunk, they are so overconfident. They run for their lives, and Ben-hadad barely escapes on horseback.

Now this divine deliverance should have caused Ahab to repent and write God a big thank-you note, but Ahab doesn't do that.

Later, the Syrian army returns. Verse 23 says they are convinced that the Lord is a god of the hills but not a god of the valleys. In other words, the Lord can handle enemy armies in the hill country because that is where He belongs; but He is not any good out in the plains or down in the valley. By the way, the world today thinks that God is a God for church; that's where He belongs, not out here in the traffic patterns of life. Well, they could not be more mistaken.

Once again, God gives Israel a great victory, and Ahab even captures Ben-hadad. But then instead of bringing judgment upon him, Ahab makes a deal with him and lets this wicked enemy king leave town alive.

But more significantly, Ahab again refuses to repent and follow the Lord. Listen, God gives people numerous opportunities to believe in Him—through that external beauty and design in creation and through that internal sense of guilt and shame over sin—but many people just keep on refusing to recognize the obvious. And here is the frightening thing: nobody has any guarantee, God will grant another opportunity. If you haven't already, you need to repent of your sin and make Jesus Christ your King today.

Now here in chapter 21 we are given an account of just how wicked Ahab and Jezebel have become. We read in verses 1-2:

*Now Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. And . . . Ahab said to Naboth, "Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house."*

Naboth responds in verse 3: "The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers." You see, Naboth is a godly Israelite who refuses to permanently sell his family land, which the law forbids in Leviticus 25:23-28.

Ahab is turned down flat! And how does he react? Verse 4 says he went home and "lay down on his bed and turned away his face and would eat no food." He is in bed pouting. He can't have this new toy, so he stomps off to bed and has a big pity party and refuses to eat his supper.

Imagine having a kingdom but pouting because you can't have a little garden. Let me tell you, the desires of selfish people are never satisfied.

Well, Jezebel comes home and asks Ahab, "Why is your spirit so vexed that you eat no food?" (verse 5). When Ahab explains why he's pouting, she says in verse 7, "Do you now govern Israel?" In other words, "You're the king! If you want something, then do whatever is necessary to get it." He is not accountable to anybody as far as Jezebel is concerned!

*Just because  
wickedness is not  
immediately  
punished does not  
mean God is blind.*

But then she adds here in verse 7, "Let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth." She is going to show him how it's done when you are in power.

She hatches a plot, and here it is:

*She wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal, and she sent the letters to the el-*



*ders and the leaders who lived with Naboth in his city. And she wrote in the letters, "Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth at the head of the people. And set two worthless men opposite him, and let them bring a charge against him, saying, 'You have cursed God and the king.' Then take him out and stone him to death." (verses 8-10)*

These equally corrupt leaders of Jezreel do exactly as Jezebel commands, and the vineyard soon belongs to Ahab and Jezebel; and frankly, they seem to get away with it.

But let me say this, beloved: just because wickedness is not immediately punished does not mean God is blind. He sees, and there is a day of reckoning coming, sooner or later.

It isn't long before God sends Elijah to confront Ahab. Elijah finds Ahab in this stolen vineyard and says to him here in verse 19: "In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood." He adds that Ahab's entire family line will come to an end. And as for Jezebel, Elijah prophesies, "The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel" (verse 23). This cruel murder of godly Naboth is the final straw.

Now something rather amazing happens next. Ahab tears his clothing, puts on sackcloth, and begins to fast. These are all outward symbols of repentance, and it seems to have been somewhat sincere because the Lord delays judgment against the dynasty of Ahab until after Ahab dies. But we will discover later that Ahab's remorse does not last; it is not full and true repentance.

But don't miss the message here: Ahab was accountable to God. He was in his position of authority by God's design. God determines how long someone sits on the throne, or in any place of authority, and He graciously warns people to repent. And in the end, those who reject God face a day of reckoning that is just around the corner.

Before we point our fingers at Ahab, I believe there is a little bit of Ahab in all of us. Even Christians can struggle with selfishness, covetousness, greed, and pride, and abuse our power and authority. So, let's listen to God's word to us here; let's confess our sin daily. And let's walk with Him daily and live with the understanding that in the end we all are accountable to God.

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How can you relate to Ahab's response, even as a believer?

Consider who regularly observes your life. Why is it important as a believer for you to be quick to repent of your sins?

When you consider Ahab's life, who in your sphere of influence comes to mind? How is your lifestyle earning you the right to share with this person your, and God's, heart from them? What would God have you do to prepare for such a meeting?

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## DEFIANCE, DISASTER, AND DEATH

1 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 18:1–19:3; 20:31–37

No one can continue to defy God and escape His judgment. Ahab is just one of many examples that illustrate this truth. We have just one earthly lifetime to humble ourselves and submit in faith to the sovereign Lord.

You are a wise person, and especially a wise leader, if you are willing to hear a word of criticism or a different viewpoint or even a challenge to rethink something. Surrounding yourself only with people who agree with you is a setup for disaster. And there's no better example of this than King Ahab.

Here in 1 Kings 22, the old hostilities between Israel and Syria ignite again. Verse 1 says, "For three years Syria and Israel continued without war." Apparently, though, the Syrians have not returned the city of Ramoth-gilead to Israel as King Ben-hadad had promised Ahab. Ahab wants to make Ramoth-gilead an important city east of the Jordan River, and that means taking it back from the Syrians.

Now if you can follow this bouncing ball, Ben-hadad had been an ally of King Asa, father of Jehoshaphat, the current king of Judah. But things are changing, according to 2 Chronicles 18:1, where we're told that "Jehoshaphat . . . made a marriage alliance with Ahab." Ahab's daughter marries Jehoshaphat's son (2 Chronicles 21:6; 22:2). And there's nothing quite like a family alliance.

Back in 1 Kings 22:43, Jehoshaphat is described as a godly king who walked in the ways of his father, Asa. But this marriage alliance with Ahab, was unwise and, ultimately, it's going to bring harm to his kingdom.



Ruler's podium in the gate at Dan

But now Ahab has the help of Jehoshaphat, and he's ready to launch an attack on Ramoth-gilead to win it back from Ben-hadad, the king of Syria. But before they march into battle, Jehoshaphat wisely says to Ahab, "Inquire first for the word of the LORD" (verse 5). In other words, "Let's ask God if we should go to battle against Ben-hadad."





Well, Ahab was not planning on asking God anything, but we're told here in verse 6:

*The king . . . gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, "Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-gilead, or shall I refrain?" And they said, "Go up, for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king."*

These prophets are on the king's payroll, and they tell Ahab what he wants to hear. But Jehoshaphat is suspicious about these 400 men, so he asks Ahab if there is any other prophet in the land.

Ahab's answer in verse 8 is almost comical:

*"There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, Micaiah the son of Imlah, but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil."*

"He's always raining on my parade. He never tells me what I want to hear!"

But Ahab is stuck now, so he calls for Micaiah. The messenger sent to bring Micaiah to Ahab warns him that he needs to speak favorably to the king. I love Micaiah's response here in verse 14: "As the LORD lives, what the LORD says to me, that I will speak." King or no king!

When Micaiah arrives, he mocks these prophets by delivering to Ahab the same favorable message. "Go up and triumph; the LORD will give it into the hand of the king" (verse 15). Ahab immediately detects the sarcasm in Micaiah's voice and demands that he speak the truth.

"Oh, you want me to speak the *truth* and not some feel-good message? Okay, here it is"—verse 17:

*"I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the LORD said, 'These have no master; let each return to his home in peace.'"*

In other words, Israel is going to be defeated and scattered. And they will lose their shepherd—their king—in battle, as well. Ahab says to Jehoshaphat in verse 18: "Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?"

But how could 400 prophets be wrong and only Micaiah be right? Well, Micaiah explains why here in verse 23: "The LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the LORD has declared disaster for you." That is, God has allowed a "lying spirit" to speak through these 400 prophets in order to convince Ahab to go into battle so that God's plan regarding Ahab's death will be fulfilled.

Well, Ahab has Micaiah thrown into jail—mind you, for telling the truth. But I find it surprising that godly King Jehoshaphat goes with Ahab into battle. We're not told why. Perhaps it was because he felt committed to helping Ahab as he had promised; or maybe he was convinced that Micaiah really did have a chip on his shoulder against Ahab. We just don't know.

Now as they head into battle here, Ahab disguises himself so that he cannot be targeted by the Syrian army. And at first his plan works. In fact, the Syrians target King Jehoshaphat, and his life is in danger. But over in the parallel account in 2 Chronicles, we read, "The LORD helped him; God drew them away from him" (18:31).

God is actually directing the armies in this battle. He's protecting King Jehoshaphat, and He's about to judge King Ahab.

Although he is disguised, Ahab cannot run from God's will. We are told here in 1 Kings 22:34, "But a certain [Syrian soldier] drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel between the scale armor and the breastplate." Notice those words: a soldier fired an arrow "at random." He just aims up in the sky, and



God directs that arrow to find the small gap between Ahab's breastplate and the flexible scale armor that covered his stomach. What seems to be a random event is not outside the plan of God.

The severely wounded Ahab is propped up in his chariot, but as his life begins to slip away at sunset, even then, tragically, he doesn't cry out to the Lord. There is no word of repentance, no prayer of surrender.

With that, he dies. And just as the Lord had predicted through His prophet Elijah, verse 38 now records, "They washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood."

There is a warning in all this about the danger of compromise. Jehoshaphat compromised on two occasions. First, he joined Ahab in this battle, and he will be rebuked for this in the parallel account in 2 Chronicles 19 by the prophet Jehu.

Second, and again recorded in 2 Chronicles 19, Jehoshaphat will begin a ship-building enterprise with Ahab's wicked son Ahaziah. And all these ships will be destroyed, as God judges this ungodly business alliance.

Now as the biography of Ahab comes to a close—just as the book of 1 Kings comes to an end—we need to realize that we have been given a tragic illustration, in living color, of the grip of sin and unbelief that can hold on to someone all the way to the doorway of death.

People who defy God and surround themselves with those who just tell them what they want to hear are in great danger. And that's because sin just grips all that much harder. I have seen this happen in my years of ministry, that with the arrival of death, a person can grow even more defiant in unbelief.

Is that you today? Where do you stand before God? Have you listened to His warning? Have you believed His gospel and accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior? Do that today, because only God knows—today might be your last day, your last opportunity to believe. Believe in Him today.

*Where do you stand  
before God? Have  
you listened to His  
warning? Have you  
believed His gospel  
and accepted the  
Lord Jesus Christ as  
your Savior?*

Recall a time when you were called by God to be "prophet-like" to someone? (kids, spouse, friend, coworker, etc.) How did you respond to the call? Why? What feelings stirred in your heart prior to delivering the truth to this person? What encouragement did you experience afterward from the Lord, even if you suffered like Micaiah?

How has compromise been a hinderance to your walk with God? Reflect on what heart-attitudes contributed to that compromise. Why is it important that the local church would be united in the area of not compromising God's word? How would you now advise a fellow believer that you see is leaning or running into compromise?

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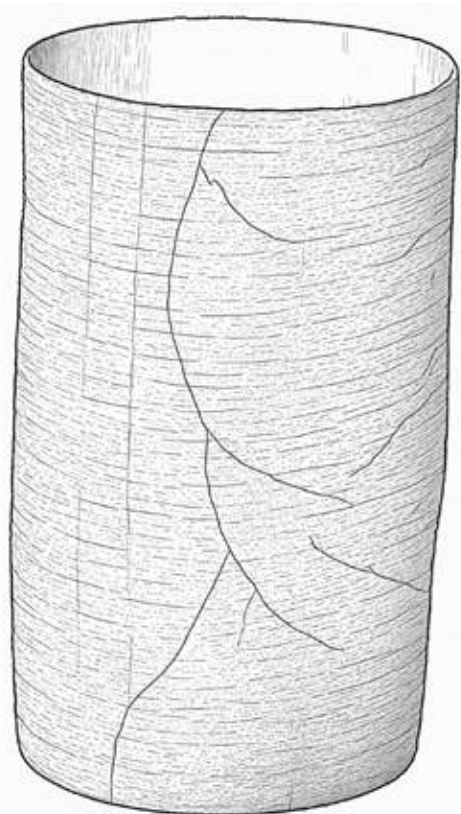


## STANDING STRONG . . . STAYING ALERT

2 Chronicles 17–20

We can learn much from King Jehoshaphat's godly example of following the Lord and actively urging others to follow Him as well. We also do well to heed the warning of his life—that the pressures of life and the temptation to compromise are always present and unrelenting.

We've already met Jehoshaphat in the account of Ahab and in the brief mention of Ahab's son Ahaziah in 1 Kings 22. But the book of 2 Chronicles has much more to say about this king. In fact, four chapters of this book (17–20) are devoted to Jehoshaphat.



Gudea temple cylinder

So, let's go over to that parallel account and take a closer look. As I have said before, we are covering the events in Kings and Chronicles chronologically, since they repeat so much of the same material. So, when we finish the two books of Kings, we also will have covered the two books of Chronicles.

Now Jehoshaphat is the son of Judah's King Asa, who had followed the Lord and urged his people to do the same. Asa's reign, however, was plagued by conflict with Israel to the north. And when his son comes to the throne, we're told in verse 1 of 2 Chronicles chapter 17 that he "strengthened himself against Israel," fortifying Judah's cities and stationing troops throughout the land.

Jehoshaphat is given a glowing commendation here in verses 3–4:

*The LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the earlier ways of his father David. He did not seek the Baals, but sought the God of his father and walked in his commandments, and not according to the practices of Israel.*



Verse 6 says, “Furthermore, he took the high places and the Asherim out of Judah.” Those were the wooden poles representing the mistress of Baal, usually set up right next to an altar to Baal.

Jehoshaphat also sent some of his officials, along with Levites and priests, throughout the land to teach the people God’s law. God’s people could not ask for a better king. Under his rule, Judah will enjoy peace and prosperity, as we see in verses 10 and 11, as well as a strong army.

But when everything seems to be going so well, right here in chapter 18 and verse 1 we read, “He made a marriage alliance with Ahab.” He arranged to have his son marry Ahab’s daughter, Athaliah. Why in the world would he do that? Now his son’s mother-in-law is Jezebel, and that can’t be good.

No doubt, King Jehoshaphat saw strategic advantages to this alliance. He was motivated primarily by political desires.

This decision almost cost Jehoshaphat his life when he went to war in support of King Ahab against the Syrians. Chapter 18 recounts this episode, which we have already covered in 1 Kings 22.

Now 2 Chronicles 19 begins with a prophet named Jehu. He shows up and rebukes King Jehoshaphat after his return from battle against the Syrians. Remember, this is the battle in which King Ahab is killed.

The prophet Jehu says to Jehoshaphat:

*“Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Because of this, wrath has gone out against you from the LORD. Nevertheless, some good is found in you, for you destroyed the Asheroth out of the land, and have set your heart to seek God.”* (verses 2-3)

This pretty much sums up Jehoshaphat’s reign. He sought the Lord, he had a godly walk, but he also made some unwise decisions that were driven by political motives.

This rebuke must have moved Jehoshaphat to institute a second round of reforms. We read in verse 4, “He went out again among the people . . . and brought them back to the LORD, the God of their fathers.”

He also appoints judges throughout the land and tells them in verse 6, “Consider what you do, for you judge not for man but for the LORD. He is with you in giving judgment.” Likewise, he appoints others to serve as judges in Jerusalem, perhaps as a higher court. His charge to them is, “Thus you shall do in the fear of the LORD, in faithfulness, and with your whole heart” (verse 9).

When I was asked to speak at the installment of the chief justice of the supreme court here in my home state, he asked me to speak from this text. It was his life verse. He wanted to be one of these godly judges who did what was right, judging not so much in the sight of man but in the sight of God. And he certainly did.

Chapter 20 of 2 Chronicles further highlights the faith of King Jehoshaphat, which is suddenly challenged by a military threat. Verse 1 tells us that the Moabites, Ammonites, and some tribes called the Meunites come up out of Edom to do battle against him. Judah is vastly outnumbered.

Jehoshaphat proclaims a time of fasting and praying. He calls the people to assemble in the courtyard of the temple. There, the king stands and prays to the Lord before all the people. Listen to what he prays beginning in verse 6:

*“O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand you. Did you not, our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel, and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend? . . . And now behold, the*





*men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom you would not let Israel invade when they came from the land of Egypt, and whom they avoided and did not destroy—behold, they reward us by coming to drive us out of your possession, which you have given us to inherit. O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.”* (verses 6-7, 10-12)

Wow, what a prayer! Have you ever prayed that? I'm sure you have if you know the Lord: "I don't know what to do, Lord, but my eyes are on you."

A prophet of God responds to Jehoshaphat's prayer:

*“Thus says the LORD to you, ‘Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God’s. . . . You will not need to fight in this battle. Stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of the LORD on your behalf.’”* (verses 15, 17)

Jehoshaphat acts in faith and the next day goes out with his army. Interestingly, verse 21 informs us that he sends the Levites out ahead of them singing praise to the Lord.

How is that for a military strategy? Just send out the choir first, and then watch what God does. Well, here is what God does: He confuses this massive army, and they end up fighting and destroying each other.

King Jehoshaphat is rightly commended by Scripture as a godly man. He was a man of great faith, whose desire was to follow the Lord and lead others to do the same. At the same time, he allowed political pressure to drive him to make some unwise and compromising decisions.

So, he should become for us both a warning to stay alert, recognizing that Satan's temptations come in all shapes and sizes. But he also serves to encourage us; for even when we fail the Lord, even when we make unwise decisions, God in His grace continues to forgive us and allow us to walk with Him and serve Him.

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In what ways might 2 Chronicles 19:6 serve any believer as they daily interact with the people in their world? What promise does the LORD make in this verse? How does this encourage you as you interact with people under your authority?

How has the biblical history represented in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles opened your eyes to the grace and goodness of God? To the effects of sin? To the potential of trusting God and His word?

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## WHEN THE TRUTH HURTS

2 Kings 1–2

Elijah's ministry ended uniquely and dramatically, but his departure did not mean the end of God's work. He had Elisha prepared and ready to step in and continue the work—a reminder that we are all uniquely equipped to serve God when and where we are.

Sometimes the truth hurts. And it especially hurts when our desires and commitments are wrong. When we feel that sting of pain, the best thing to do is face up to the truth and follow it. To ignore the truth is to invite disaster into our lives.

As we come to the book of 2 Kings, we find the very first chapter is an illustration of this in the life of Ahab's son, who has just ascended the throne of Israel. He is going to reign for only two years (1 Kings 22:51), but Ahaziah will follow the wicked path of his father and mother, Ahab and Jezebel.

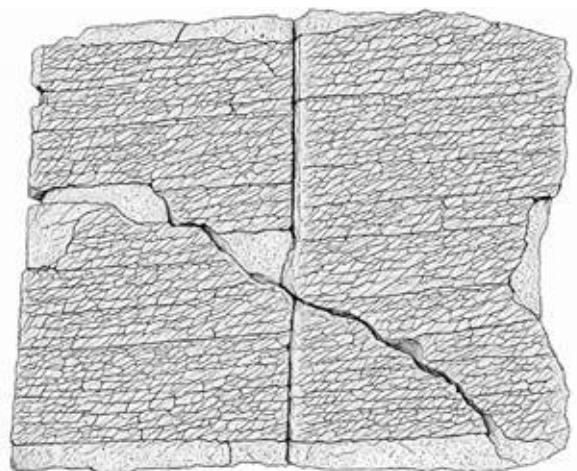
Now two traumatic events take place during Ahaziah's reign. First, the people of Moab rebel and refuse to pay tribute to Israel or to serve the nation. This rebellion will continue for several years, as we will see in chapter 3.

The second traumatic event is a personal injury. Verse 2 says, "Ahaziah fell through the lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria, and lay sick." This upper chamber would have been on the flat roof of his palace in the capital. It would have had an open balcony enclosed by lattice work. Evidently, Ahaziah was leaning against that lattice work, and it gave way, sending the king crashing to the earth. This injury is serious

enough to confine Ahaziah to his bed; he may very likely have been partially paralyzed.

You will notice here that his response is not to seek the Lord. Rather, he tells messengers, "Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this sickness" (verse 2). Some people get sick and turn to God. Ahaziah gets sick and turns to a false god.

The king's messengers never make it to Ekron because Elijah the prophet intercepts them. He says to them here in verse 3, "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?"



A history providing a chronology of the kings of Babylon



By the way, *zebub* is the word for fly, so Baal-zebub means “lord of the flies.” The king is seeking supernatural knowledge from a god who supposedly controls flies!

Elijah continues here in verse 4:

*“Now therefore thus says the LORD, You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.”*

When the messengers return to the king and describe what happened, he recognizes that they have encountered Elijah. He sends fifty soldiers to arrest the prophet. When they find Elijah, they demand his surrender. Verse 10 tells us:

*Elijah answered the captain of fifty, “If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.” Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.*

Instead of learning from this, Ahaziah just sends fifty more soldiers, and the exact same thing happens to them.

Ahaziah still won’t acknowledge his sin and rebellion. Instead, he sends a third captain with fifty more soldiers.

But this captain has enough sense to fall on his knees and beg Elijah, “O man of God, please let my life, and the life of these fifty servants of yours, be precious in your sight” (verse 13). With that humble request, the captain and his men are spared. Elijah goes with them to King Ahaziah and there repeats his message: “Because you have sent messengers to

inquire of Baal-zebub . . . you shall surely die” (verse 16).

And that’s exactly what happens here at the end of chapter 1. The truth hurt, but sadly, it didn’t hurt enough to bring this king to repentance. Like his father, Ahab, Ahaziah throws away his life and, even more tragically, loses out in eternity.

Let me urge you today to believe the truth of God’s Word. Believe the gospel that through faith in Christ alone there is forgiveness of sin. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I want to point out another truth here in chapter 2 that God’s people are going to have to face. It’s the truth that Elijah’s ministry is coming to an end.

Verse 1 tells us, “The LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind.” As that time approaches, Elijah seems to be testing Elisha’s loyalty to see if he is really prepared to wear the mantle of his teacher, Elijah.

Elijah tells Elisha to stay behind—first at Gilgal (verses 1-2), then at Bethel (verse 4), and then again at Jericho (verses 5-6). Each time, Elisha says, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.”

When they finally arrive at the Jordan River, with fifty prophets of God watching, Elijah rolls up his cloak and strikes the water. The river miraculously parts, and they cross over on dry ground (verse 8).

Once they are on the other side, Elijah turns to Elisha and says, “Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you.” Elisha replies, “Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me” (verse 9).

What is Elisha asking here? The Bible does record that Elisha performed more miracles than Elijah and that his ministry was nearly twice as long, but Elisha is not asking here for some kind of magic wand that will give him twice as much power. Not at all.

What he asks for is a “double portion.” That is the expression used for the firstborn son’s inheritance. He carried on the family business and received twice the inheritance of his brothers. Elisha is effectively asking



to carry on the work of God as Elijah's heir, his first-born son, so to speak.

Elijah responds in verse 10, "If you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you." And a few minutes later, verse 11 tells us: "Chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven."

The biography of Elijah ends as dramatically as it began. Imagine, this was the prophet who had been so discouraged earlier in his ministry that he had asked the Lord to end his life. And now, this old prophet of God is taken to heaven in a chariot of fire without dying.

As soon as those horses disappear into the clouds, the powerful ministry of Elisha begins. God immediately validates Elisha, as he repeats the miracle of parting the waters of the Jordan River (verse 14). Then Elisha goes to Jericho, where the water supply has become poisoned in some way, making it unfit for drinking and irrigation. And he miraculously cleanses the water (verse 21).

As he is traveling to Bethel, Elisha is insulted, and more than likely threatened, by a gang of boys. Your translation might call them children, but these were young men who were especially antagonistic toward God's prophet. Elisha ends up bringing down on them a curse in verse 24: "And two she-bears came out of the woods and tore forty-two of the boys." These momma bears literally kill this gang of young men who defied the prophet of God.

That is another way of saying to the nation, "This is a true prophet, and you had better listen to the truth he is going to deliver on behalf of God."

God has given us His Word today, and His Word is truth. And sometimes the truth hurts, but God designed it to protect us and convict us and keep us on the right path, as we walk with Him today.

*Sometimes the truth hurts, but God designed it to protect us and convict us and keep us on the right path*

Consider a time when you faced a debilitating hurt or injury (physical, emotional or spiritual). How did you respond to that hurt? To what degree did you seek God and His word to comfort you? Would you recommend now your response to others? Why or why not?

How does God's response to Ahaziah's hard-heartedness warn you about allowing any rebellion against God in your life? What spiritual disciplines are you practicing to head off such an attitude?

In what ways have you experienced the "sometimes the truth hurts" principle only to discover God's goodness was waiting for you on the other side? How can this experience become a means of encouraging fellow believers or a hurting but curious unbeliever?

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## A MINISTRY OF MIRACLES

2 Kings 3-4

Unlike many other biblical prophets, Elisha's ministry was marked by numerous miracles. These spectacular works served as a powerful rebuke to those who favored false gods and religion over the true God, reminding us all of the utter foolishness of abandoning the Creator.

Solomon writes in Proverbs 24:25 that those who rebuke the wicked will be rewarded. They may not be rewarded by the people they rebuke, but God will surely reward them for courageously standing for the truth. Without a doubt, the prophets Elijah and Elisha received a great reward as they proved, over and over again, that God is the true and living God. And here in chapters 3 and 4 of 2 Kings, Elisha performs several more miracles.

King Ahaziah, the son of the wicked King Ahab, has died after reigning for only two years. And now Jehoram, another son of Ahab, takes the throne of Israel. Verse 2 tells us that, just like his father and brother, Jehoram "did what was evil in the sight of the LORD."

Jehoram immediately faces the Moabite rebellion that began during his brother's reign. Verse 4 reveals that the Moabites had been paying tribute to Israel in the form of lambs and wool, but now they have stopped paying it. Of course, Jehoram mobilizes the army to attack. And he's not alone. He is joined by Judah's king, Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom. Evidently, they all want to put down this Moabite insurrection.

Now as they approach Moab from Edom, the combined armies run into a big problem. Verse 9 says,



Judah, Edom, and Moab

"There was no water for the army or for the animals that followed them." We're not told why, but Jehoram assumes the Lord is behind this predicament.



So, Jehoram and the other two kings go down to talk to Elisha, who is somewhere nearby. But Elisha is not impressed by them. He rebukes Jehoram here in verse 13, saying, “What have I to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and to the prophets of your mother.”

In other words, go ask the false gods that your dad and mom, Ahab and Jezebel, loved so much. He says in verse 14:

*“Were it not that I have regard for Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would neither look at you [Jehoram] nor see you.”*

This is real courage in the face of this wicked king.

Well, Elisha delivers from God a promise that the next day, God will miraculously send a river of water to fill the dry streambed nearby. The text may indicate that the “pools,” or trenches, are to be dug by the king’s men to hold the excess water. Elisha makes it clear, though, that God is not going to send water by way of rain or wind but by filling these trenches with water that will just come rushing in like a wave.

Elisha also promises the kings that the Lord will deliver Moab into their hand.

Well, the next morning the promised water streams in, and in the morning sunlight it appears to be red. From a distance, the Moabite army assumes this is blood, and they interpret it to mean the armies of Israel and Edom have turned on each other and their bloodshed has colored the water. So, they rush toward the camp to clean up the spoil, only to be surprised by a living army that is there waiting for them. They are soundly defeated.

The Moabite king, who has retreated into a city, realizes he is about to be taken captive, and in desperation he sacrifices his oldest son – the heir to the throne – as an offering to his god Chemosh (verses 26-27). Verse 27 tells us that following this horrific act up there on the city wall, “there came great wrath

against Israel. And they withdrew from him and returned to their land.”

Now frankly we don’t know what this great wrath was that brought the battle to an end. Some believe Israel was so appalled by this that they stopped fighting and went home. Others believe that upon witnessing this, the Israelite soldiers were struck with guilt over allowing child sacrifice in their own land. Others believe God permitted some sort of demonic power to stop the battle.

We do know how the king of Moab interpreted this, though. Archaeologists have discovered the Moabite Stone in this land, on which Mesha, the Moabite king, recorded his own record of this battle. And he claims to have stayed alive with the help of Chemosh.

Well, one thing is for sure here, beloved: Israel, Judah, and Edom, have seen the mercy and power of God in providing the water they desperately needed. And they have also seen the depths of idolatry and depravity in the Moabite king sacrificing his oldest son in order to stay alive himself.

Now in chapter 4, we have a series of miracles performed by Elisha, not on a national stage, but on a personal stage in the presence of individuals and families. Verse 1 says:

*Now the wife of one of the sons of the prophets cried to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and . . . the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves.”*

With her husband gone, she has no means of support. Her sons are in danger of being put to work by this creditor until her debts are paid.

Elisha comes along and tells her here in verses 3-4 to borrow empty vessels from her neighbors and start pouring the oil from her jar into these empty containers. As she does, the oil miraculously keeps on pouring out until all the containers are full. She is



now able to sell the oil, pay her debts, and keep her family together.

Next, beginning in verse 8, we are told about a wealthy couple living in the village of Shunem, in the Jezreel valley. They build onto their home a lovely room where Elisha can stay when he passes by—this would have been a five-star hotel in today's world.

Well, Elisha asks his assistant, Gehazi what they can do to thank this couple. And Gehazi says in verse 14, "Well, she has no son, and her husband is old." So, Elisha calls the woman and promises her she will have a son within a year. And she does, just as Elisha said.

*These miracles  
prefigure the power  
of the coming  
Messiah*

Fast-forward the tape to verse 18. The boy now has grown up, but suddenly, one day, he develops a severe headache while out in the fields with his father, and a short time later he dies.

This woman immediately goes to find Elisha. He returns with her, and here in verses 34-35, he miraculously raises her son from the dead.

But we're not through. Sometime later, Elisha returns to Gilgal, where there is a community of prophets. It's a time of famine, and one of the prophets gathers herbs and wild gourds to make a pot of stew—the kind where you just throw everything into the pot and hope for the best. Verse 40 records that when they tasted it, "they cried out, 'O man of God, there is death in the pot!'" That is what people probably would say if I did the cooking.

Evidently, he put something into the stew that was poisonous. And Elisha here in verse 41 miraculously purifies the food so that these men can eat it.

One final miracle then is recorded in chapter 4, when Elisha multiplies twenty loaves of barley and some ears of grain to feed a hundred men. Verse 44 tells us they all ate "and had some left, according to the word of the LORD."

Does that sound familiar? Yes, these miracles prefigure the power of the coming Messiah, who will feed the multitudes, care for the poor, and raise the dead by His own miraculous power.

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Every believer is surrounded by the extremes of evil and God's mercy. What value is it to your walk with God to witness these extremes? How does Deuteronomy 30:15-20 and Joshua 24:15 influence your answer?

What does it say about God's heart that He would continually orchestrate history so that the Savior He promised in Genesis 3:15 would be "pictured" in the lives of His people individually and corporately? In what ways is God calling you in your own small world to also "picture" that same Savior?

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## HEALING LEPROSY FOR FREE

2 Kings 5

The miraculous healing of Naaman illustrates that God often uses unexpected means and people to accomplish His purposes. It also reminds us that at the center of God's plan is His grace, which must be humbly received in faith and never compromised.

Some words instantly produce strong emotional responses in us. Words like *wedding* or *vacation* or *springtime* give us happy thoughts and feelings; words like *war* and *hurricane* and *disease* do the opposite.

One of the most disturbing words a person could ever hear in biblical times was *leprosy*. As we journeyed through the book of Leviticus, we learned that leprosy can refer to a variety of skin diseases, but all of them were considered incurable. Leprosy was a dreaded disease, not only because of the physical danger, but also because of the isolation and ostracism that went along with it.

Now we are here in 2 Kings chapter 5 in our study through the Bible, and we're about to watch the prophet Elisha miraculously heal a leper who lived outside the nation of Israel.

The first verse sets the stage by introducing us to a very important man:

*Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the LORD had given victory to*

*Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper.*

Israel and Syria had been engaged in conflict off and on for years, but at this point there seems to be some degree of peaceful coexistence. Evidently, Naaman



This relief from 800 b.c., describes King a siege of Hazrak by Bar-Hadad and the armies of several Syrian states





was successful in the past when these two nations fought, because we are told here in verse 2 that his wife has a young Israelite girl serving as a housemaid. This girl had been carried away after one of Naaman's victories.

Now you might have noticed the resume of Naaman here: he's called "a great man," in "high favor," and a "mighty man of valor." But then you have this shocking statement: "but he was a leper." Listen, he has had all these accolades and great titles over the years, but now he is simply known as Naaman the leper.

And among all the people who are concerned about him is this young Israelite girl. She is evidently not holding any grudges for her life of servitude to this commander. In fact, we read here in verse 3: "She said to her mistress, 'Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.'" Now this tells us that she has faith in God's power and in the ministry of the Lord's prophet—Elisha.

Naaman knows he has no other hope of being healed, so he goes to the Syrian king and asks for permission to go find Elisha. Here in verse 5, the king not only grants permission but also gives him a letter to deliver to Israel's king. And with that, Naaman takes off, carrying with him as payment "ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten changes of clothing."

He's going to pay Elisha for healing him—and this would equal several million dollars today. That's almost as much as your copay when you visit *your* doctor.

Naaman goes to Samaria and presents the letter to King Jehoram of Israel, which basically reads, "See that my servant Naaman is healed of his leprosy." Of course, Jehoram knows this is impossible, so he assumes the king of Syria is looking for a reason to start another war. He says, "See how he is seeking a quarrel with me" (verse 7).

Well, Elisha hears about this and sends word to the king in verse 8, saying, "Let him [Naaman] come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel." So, Naaman and his entourage drive over to Elisha's house, but Elisha will not even come to the door. Instead, he sends a messenger to him with some simple instructions, here in verse 10: "Go and

wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean."

Naaman is offended by such treatment. Here is his response:

*"Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. Are not . . . the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage.* (verses 11-12)

Elisha is bringing this man to a point of humility and obedience to the word of God. But it doesn't look like Naaman is interested in humbling himself. He gets ready to ride away, but then one of his servants effectively tells him to be willing to eat humble pie and do this simple procedure. After all, what does he have to lose?

So, Naaman humbles himself and goes to the Jordan River and dips himself in it seven times, and verse 14 says, "His flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child." This was no medical procedure; this was no major surgery; this was a miracle of God.

Naaman returns to Elisha and says, "I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel" (verse 15). He urges Elisha to accept the money and clothing he has brought along, but Elisha tells him there is no copay needed for the grace of God.

Now I wish this encounter ended at this point, but it doesn't. Look at verse 20:

*Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, "See, my mas-*



*ter has spared this Naaman the Syrian, in not accepting from his hand what he brought. As the LORD lives, I will run after him and get something from him.”*

Gehazi runs after Naaman and spins a lie about two prophets who need some money and clothing. Naaman is only happy to comply.

Gehazi thinks he has gotten away with his deception, but upon his return, Elisha asks him where he has been. Gehazi says he's been nowhere. This sounds like when you see your child with cookie crumbs around his mouth and you ask him, “What were you doing in the kitchen?” and he says, “Nothing.” Well, you know that nothing was a lot of something.

Elisha sees through this lie. He tells this unrepentant man here in verse 27, “The leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants.” And the chapter closes with these words: “He went out from his presence a leper.”

The healing of Naaman teaches us something about the grace of God. Grace is not limited to those born into the right family. Grace is available to everyone. And it isn't something you have to purchase with gold or good deeds. By the way, that is what made

*Gehazi's actions robbed Naaman of a clear understanding that God's grace is completely free of charge.*

Gehazi's sin so serious; his actions robbed Naaman of a clear understanding that God's grace is completely free of charge. You just have to leave your accolades and your titles and your impressive resume at the door and by faith humbly receive God's grace.

Have you accepted the free gift of God's grace that brings salvation? The Bible says, “The wages of sin is death, but the *free gift* of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Ask Him for this gift, and humbly receive it by faith in Christ alone. If you have not done that, you can pray right now, “Lord Jesus, thank You for doing all the work for my salvation, for dying on that cross for my sin. I ask for the gift of salvation right now and believe in you as my Lord and Savior. In Your name I pray. Amen.”

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<https://www.wisdomonline.org/comments>

Consider the people you live among that have Naaman-like burdens or are homeless or aimless or hopeless. What is your heart towards them? What would they say is your heart towards them? What would God have you do in response to this person or these kind of people?

Naaman's conclusion about God was exactly what Elisha hoped to accomplish - “there is but one God!” In what ways do you live your life so that those who are watching you draw the same conclusion?

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## TRUSTING GOD IN DESPERATE TIMES

2 Kings 6-7

Elisha's unique ministry reflects the heart of the God he served. His divinely empowered works demonstrate God's concern for individuals and small groups, as well as for kings and nations. Not one of us is beyond God's sight, mercy, compassion, or love.

Our study in 2 Kings chapters 6 and 7 gives us a glimpse, not only of Elisha's fruitful ministry, but also of God's concern for individuals as well as entire nations. There is much here to inspire us and encourage us to keep on serving the Lord.

Chapter 6 begins with these words:

*Now the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, "See, the place where we dwell under your charge is too small for us. Let us go to the Jordan and each of us get there a log, and let us make a place for us to dwell there."* (verses 1-2)

Here we have a group of young prophets in Israel who are being instructed and trained in the minis-

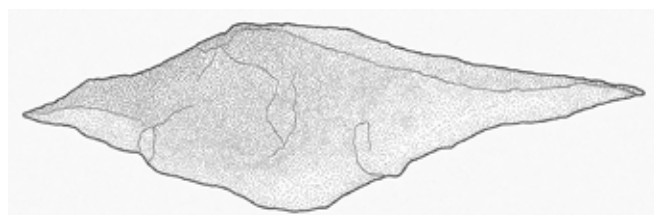
try. And apparently because of Elisha's ministry, the number of young prophets has grown and packed out the little place where they are living. It reminds me of my missionary parents and their four sons all living in a little house with one bathroom—the line was always longer than we wanted.

Well, this family of prophets, more than likely located in Jericho, needs a larger dormitory. So, Elisha and all these young men go down to the Jordan River to cut down some trees to build a new facility.

We read in verse 5, "As one was felling a log, his axe head fell into the water, and he cried out, 'Alas, my master! It was borrowed.'"

Now this might not seem like a big deal to us, but back in these days, an iron axe head was state-of-the-art equipment and very expensive. This one has been borrowed, and there is probably no way the man can pay for another one. This is a desperate situation.

Well, verse 6 says that Elisha throws a stick into the river, and miraculously, that iron tool floats to the surface, where it is retrieved. I imagine the stick Elisha threw into the water was merely a symbol of what he wanted that iron axe head to do—float. And it did!



In one of the miracle accounts of Elisha, an iron axehead that has fallen into the water is made to float. This axehead is from the Iron Age



How encouraging this must have been to all these prophets. God even cared about something personal like this.

Now the scene shifts here at verse 8, where Syria's hostility toward Israel is causing trouble again. Elisha provides unusual revelatory assistance to Israel's king by telling him what the Syrian army is up to and where they happen to be. It's like Elisha has a camera taking intelligence photographs of the enemy army and then sending them to his king.

Verse 11 tells us this information is so remarkable that the Syrian king thinks he is being betrayed by someone on the inside. Then someone tells him, "Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom" (verse 12). In other words, "Your life is an open book to Elisha!"

So, the king of Syria sends a large army to the town of Dothan, where Elisha is staying, to capture the prophet. When Elisha's servant gets up that morning, he sees the city surrounded, and he is terrified. But when he delivers the news to Elisha, the prophet is not at all concerned. He calmly responds here in verse 16, saying: "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

Evidently that young man looked around and said, "I don't see anybody at all!" So, Elisha prays:

*"O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.* (verse 17)

What a great reminder to us today that even when life is desperate and we cannot see what God is doing, the air around us is filled with God's invisible, angelic army. They are always on call as they serve the God of the universe on our behalf.

Well, the Lord opened the eyes of Elisha's servant, but He now closes the eyes of the Syrian army. Elisha prays again in verse 18, and we read that the Lord "struck them with blindness in accordance with the prayer of Elisha." That's not all. Elisha then leads the entire Syrian army right into Israel's capital city of Samaria. And once the soldiers are inside, their sight is restored, and they see they are now captives of the Israelites. Not a shot has been fired in this victory.

*It's true, isn't it,  
that the best way to  
lose an enemy is to  
make him a friend  
by serving him?*

Now you might think they will be killed or imprisoned, but Elisha orders the Israelites to feed and release this army and demonstrate the grace of God. And let me tell you, when this meal is finished and the soldiers are allowed to leave, they end their raids on Israel for quite some time. It's true, isn't it, that the best way to lose an enemy is to make him a friend by serving him?

Unfortunately, the king of Syria is not as impressed as his soldiers are, and sometime later he decides to wipe Israel off the map. He sends his army to surround Samaria and essentially starve the people into surrender. The famine conditions become so desperate, verse 28 tells us, that some Israelites actually turn to cannibalism in order to survive.

In the midst of this, Elisha steps forward and makes a promise to the king of Israel, here in chapter 7. He says the famine is going to come to an end in twenty-four hours and food will be plentiful once again (verse 1).

The king's aide scoffs at Elisha's prophecy and effectively says what Elisha has promised is impossible.





So, Elisha tells him here in verse 2, “You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it.”

Now how in the world is the Syrian threat going to disappear and food become plentiful within twenty-four hours?

Well, the following verses tell us how it all happens, through the experience of four lepers who have been sitting there at the gate of Samaria. Early that next morning they decide to take their chances and surrender to the Syrians since they are going to die anyway. Maybe they will get some food to eat. So, they walk into the Syrian camp, and they find it completely abandoned. Verses 6-7 tell us what had happened:

*The LORD had made the army of the Syrians hear the sound of chariots and of horses, the sound of a great army so that . . . they fled away in the twilight and abandoned their tents, their horses, and their donkeys.*

So, these lepers have just walked into a gold mine. They are gorging on food and gathering clothing and money that has been left behind.

But suddenly they realize their hometown back there is still starving. So, they return and report the good news. The city is delivered, just as Elisha had promised.

What about the other part of Elisha’s prophecy concerning the king’s aide who had mocked him? Verse 17 records that as people stampeded out the gate to find food, “the people trampled him in the gate, so that he died.”

Isn’t it interesting that God would choose humble lepers to deliver the good news to their people? Centuries later God will use humble shepherds to announce the good news of Christ’s birth.

Regardless of what position you might hold, don’t forget to tell those in the traffic pattern of your life the good news of Jesus Christ. They need what you have in Christ. They are starving spiritually. Show them what it means to trust God, to walk with God, even in desperate times.

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Ponder the truths of Matthew 6:26, 32 and 7:9. Why do we as believers sometimes think God isn’t concerned about the small, seemingly insignificant moments in our lives? Where does God place the threshold of “insignificant” in our lives? Explain your answer.

Hebrews 13:2, Acts 5:19-20, Genesis 19:1-22, all describe angels interacting with humans. God doesn’t need angels, but He created them to serve His interests and in particular, His people. What then can we learn about God from these created beings and the ministry He gave them?

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## HISTORY IS *HIS*-STORY

2 Kings 8; 2 Chronicles 21:1–22:6

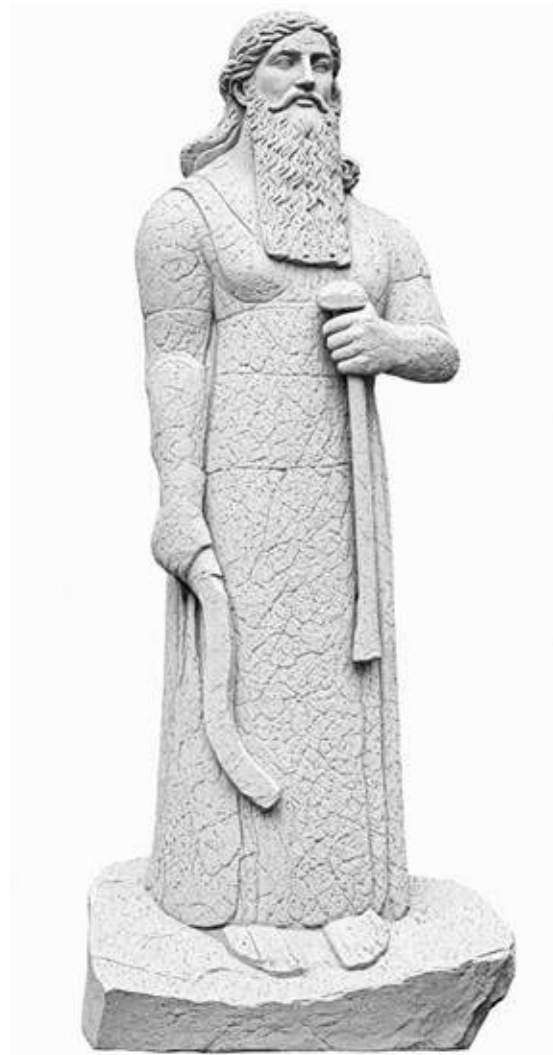
God's plans seldom follow what we might expect or certainly how we would do things. But biblical history gives us a wonderful picture of God's providential workings so that even in the sad proceedings of the wicked kings of Israel and Judah, His glory and grace shine through.

We never want to forget that God is at work in the movement of history. History is *His*-story, and God is directing world powers and individual nations in His own mysterious way to accomplish His purpose for the human race—and Planet Earth. But listen, God is not interested only in the high and mighty; He's just as interested in ordinary people like you and me.

Here in the eighth chapter of the book of 2 Kings, we are given three different scenes in the history of God's chosen people.

Verse 1 begins by recounting a message Elisha had given to the woman whose son he had miraculously raised from the dead—there is no mention of her husband here, which implies he may have died by that time. Elisha had said to her:

*“Arise, and depart with your household, and sojourn wherever you can, for the LORD has called for a famine, and it will come upon the land for seven years.”*



Basalt statue of Shalmaneser III



She immediately obeyed the prophet of God.

But now, seven years later, the famine has ended, and the woman has returned to her homestead, only to discover that someone else has moved in and taken over. So, she appeals to King Jehoram, who ultimately responds in verse 6:

*The king appointed an official for her, saying, “Restore all that was hers, together with all the produce of the fields from the day that she left the land until now.”*

What would move a wicked king—the son of Ahab—to be compassionate toward a widow who really cannot do anything for his kingdom? Well, we are told here in verses 4 and 5 that when she shows up at the palace, Elisha’s former servant, Gehazi, is telling the king “all the great things that Elisha has done.”

Note the timing of this conversation in relation to the woman’s arrival:

*And while he was telling the king how Elisha had restored the dead to life, behold, the woman whose son he had restored to life appealed to the king for her house and her land.* (verse 5)

A coincidence? Some kind of lucky timing? Far from it. God is at work on behalf of just one ordinary woman in the kingdom.

You might wonder how Gehazi was allowed to speak to the king. The last time we saw him, he was covered with leprosy. Well, we simply are not told.

Now here in verse 7, we are given another scene involving the prophet Elisha. He arrives in Damascus, the Syrian capital, when Ben-hadad the king is sick. The king sends his servant Hazael to Elisha to find out if he is going to recover from his illness.

Elisha’s response is fascinating. He tells Hazael in verse 10, “Go, say to him, ‘You shall certainly recover.’” But then he adds, “The LORD has shown me that he shall certainly die.” In other words, the sickness will not be what kills him, but he will die nonetheless.

Now to make this encounter even stranger, Elisha just stands here and stares at Hazael and then begins to weep. Why? When questioned, Elisha explains that he knows the great evil Hazael will inflict upon Israel. God is going to use Hazael as His instrument to bring judgment upon Elisha’s nation. Elisha then tells him here in verse 13, “The LORD has shown me that you are to be king over Syria.”

Well, Hazael doesn’t just wait around to become king. He suffocates King Ben-hadad right there in his sickbed and takes the throne of Syria. As sad as this is, it’s a reminder, beloved, that God is not surprised. He even uses evil mankind to move the nations of the world along His divine path. That is what we mean when we talk about a sovereign, all-powerful, always-in-control God. There are no accidents in the universe. God is in control of the chaos that might be surrounding you today.

The third scene here in 2 Kings chapter 8 takes us over to the southern kingdom of Judah. Remember, Elisha is ministering in the northern kingdom of Israel. But here we are going to see how these two kingdoms are still tied together in the plan of God.

Now it’s easy to get confused here, but the chart of the kings of Israel and Judah, which you will find at the end of this study guide for Crew members, is a very helpful tool for keeping track of these various rulers as you follow along.

Verse 16 tells us that the godly King Jehoshaphat of Judah was succeeded by his son Jehoram (see 1 Kings 22:50). Jehoram became king in the fifth year of King Joram in Israel. These two men have the same name. Joram is a shortened form of Jehoram; in fact, the king of Judah will be called Joram just a few verses later.

So, we have Jehoram (Joram), the son of Ahab, in the north, and Jehoram (Joram), the son of Jehoshaphat,



in the south. It is the southern king of Judah who is the subject of this next scene.

You may remember that Jehoram's father foolishly allied with Ahab. In fact, Jehoram married King Ahab's daughter, Athaliah. And she was just like her mother, Jezebel. Due to her influence, no doubt, we are told in verse 18 that Jehoram walked "in the way of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done."

The parallel account over in 2 Chronicles 21 tells us Jehoram killed his own brothers in order to eliminate any rival to his throne. And 2 Chronicles 21:11 records that Jehoram also "made high places in the hill country of Judah and led the inhabitants of Jerusalem into whoredom and made Judah go astray." Elijah, whose ministry overlapped Jehoram's reign, was so disgusted and provoked that he wrote the king a letter warning him that God would send a plague and he would die a horrible death. His only hope at this point is to repent.

Well, he refuses to repent, and even though the people in his southern kingdom are spared total extinction at the hands of enemy nations, Jehoram will die with this terrible disease. In fact, 2 Chronicles 21:19 states that he "died in great agony."

Following his death, Ahaziah, his son, comes to the throne and reigns for one year. And he is just as wicked as his father was.

King Ahaziah also joins with King Joram—the king of the northern kingdom of Israel—and together they fight against King Hazael and the Syrian nation. King Joram is wounded in battle and retreats to Jezreel to recuperate. King Ahaziah travels there to visit him.

And at this point, the stage is set for a dramatic work of divine judgment against both kingdoms—the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. And in His sovereign providence, God

will once again use an evil man to bring about His divine purposes.

Second Kings chapter 8 reveals more than just historical events; it reveals the God who orchestrates the events of history. God isn't surprised here, and He isn't worried about what might take place. As I have said before, I am going to say again: there has never been an emergency meeting of the Trinity.

And next time, beloved, we will see what God is orchestrating—what He is about to bring to pass.

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Ponder the truths of Matthew 6:26, 32 and 7:9. Why do we as believers sometimes think God isn't concerned about the small, seemingly insignificant moments in our lives? Where does God place the threshold of "insignificant" in our lives? Explain your answer.

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Hebrews 13:2, Acts 5:19–20, Genesis 19:1–22, all describe angels interacting with humans. God doesn't need angels, but He created them to serve His interests and in particular, His people. What then can we learn about God from these created beings and the ministry He gave them?

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## JUDGMENT COMES THROUGH JEHU

2 Kings 9-10; 2 Chronicles 22:7-9

Jehu is not listed among the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11 or anywhere else. Yet God used him to fulfill the promise of judgment upon Ahab and Jezebel. God can use *anyone*, but our goal should not simply be for God to use us but for us to willingly, selflessly serve God.

One of the remarkable things about the nature of God is an attribute we call *immutability*. That's a long word, but immutability simply means that God does not change. He says what He means, and He does what He says.

If you remember back in 1 Kings, the prophet Elijah had pronounced judgment on the house of Ahab and Jezebel because they had led Israel into the idolatrous worship of Baal. They had added to their evil deeds the cold-blooded murder of Naboth so they could steal his vineyard.

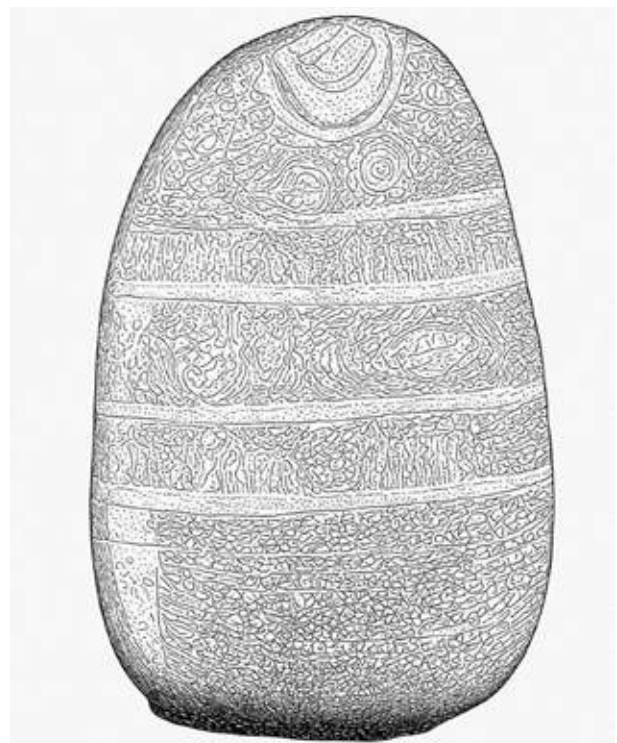
Well, in chapter 21 of 1 Kings, Elijah prophesied that Ahab's dynasty would come to a violent end—every male descendant of his would die. Elijah also announced that Ahab would die a bloody death, and that his wife Jezebel would be eaten by dogs after she died.

By the time we get to chapter 9 in the book of 2 Kings, Ahab has long since died, but Jezebel is still alive. Her son Joram is now the king of Israel, and he is carrying on the evil legacy of his parents.

In our last study, we left King Joram in Jezreel, where he is recovering from wounds suffered in battle. His nephew, Ahaziah, the king of Judah, has come to visit him in Jezreel. God's judgment on them both is about to take place.

God has not changed His mind; He is immutable, and His word always comes true.

Chapter 9 begins with Elisha appointing a young prophet to go to Jehu, one of Israel's military commanders. Elisha wants him to anoint Jehu king over Israel. Verse 6 tells us:



A boundary stone with a curse for trespassers



*The young [prophet] poured the oil on [Jehu's] head, saying to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, I anoint you king over the people of the LORD, over Israel. And you shall strike down the house of Ahab your master, so that I may avenge on Jezebel the blood of my servants the prophets."*

After this takes place, Jehu's fellow soldiers proclaim their allegiance to him as the new king. But there is this little problem—King Joram is still alive. He's still the king. Well, the newly anointed King Jehu is going to ride over to Jezreel and take care of this little problem.

Now as Jehu approaches—verse 20 says, driving furiously—King Joram is notified. And Joram gets in his chariot and rides out to meet Jehu, along with Judah's king, Ahaziah.

God providentially arranges that they meet up at the site of Naboth's vineyard. When Joram asks if Jehu has come in peace, Jehu answers here in verse 22: "What peace can there be, so long as the whorings and the sorceries of your mother Jezebel are so many?" Jehu then draws his bow and sends an arrow straight through the heart of King Joram.

Jehu then tells his military aid here in verse 25:

*"Take him up and throw him on the plot of ground belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite. For remember, when you and I rode side by side behind Ahab his father, how the LORD made this pronouncement against him: 'As surely as I saw yesterday the*

*blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons—declares the LORD—I will repay you on this plot of ground.'"*

God's word has come true.

Now King Ahaziah of Judah finds himself in Jehu's crosshairs. Ahaziah is hit with an arrow as well, but he manages to get away.

Over in the parallel account of 2 Chronicles 22:7-9, we learn he eventually makes it to Samaria and then later to Megiddo, where he dies.

Jehu now takes off for the city of Jezreel, where Jezebel is living. She is up in a tower of some sort, and she looks down and defiantly taunts Jehu. On his command, servants throw her from that upper window, and she dies immediately upon impact. And just as God said years earlier back in 1 Kings chapter 21, wild dogs come and consume her body before she can be buried.

This is not the end of the bloodshed, however, for there remains the prophecy regarding all the other wicked members of Ahab's family. So, the killing continues here in 2 Kings 10. Seventy sons of Ahab are living in Samaria, and Jehu orders them put to death—and they face the firing squad, so to speak.

And Jehu is still not finished! Verse 18 down through the rest of chapter 10 tells us that Jehu now sets in motion a plan to wipe out all the false prophets and worshipers of Baal. He invites them all to join him, saying here in verse 19, "Call to me all the prophets of Baal, all his worshipers and all his priests. ... for I have a great sacrifice to offer to Baal." The author adds, however, "Jehu did it with cunning in order to destroy the worshipers of Baal." When they all gather in the temple of Baal, Jehu sends in his men to destroy them all.

We are told in verse 28, "Jehu wiped out Baal from Israel." He just cleaned it out of the nation of Israel. He effectively carried out God's judgment in cleansing Israel of this false worship. God commends him for it here in verse 30, saying to him:



*“Because you have done well in carrying out what is right in my eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.”*

Now it would be wonderful if we could read that Jehu went on to serve the Lord faithfully. But that is not the case at all. Verse 29 states:

*Jehu did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin—that is, the golden calves that were in Bethel and in Dan.*

Jehu was more capable of wiping out the followers of Baal than in leading the people to follow God. As one writer put it, “Jehu . . . was more of an instrument than a servant of Jehovah, and was spiritually incapable of promoting the true worship of Israel’s God.”<sup>1</sup>

For the next twenty-five plus years, Jehu will reign as king of Israel, but his reign will be marked by conflict, defeat, and humiliation.

Our study through these two chapters has been a lot like the way Jehu drove his chariot. It’s been a wild ride. But there are some lessons we need to learn here that impact our lives to this very day.

First, don’t be deceived; sin has consequences—even if some of those consequences are delayed for years. And by the way, even *forgiven* sins can have continuing consequences in this life. We thank God for His

forgiveness, but we ought to take warning from Jehu’s biography: “Jehu was not careful to walk in the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart” (verse 31).

And second, don’t be discouraged; God’s plans always come to pass, even if it might take a while. The unchanging Word of God will never fail. And that means the promises of God will also come true. His promises of forgiveness, salvation, grace and mercy, and His promise of a future home in heaven forever—all that will indeed, one day, come to pass.

In the meantime, let’s continue on our life journey of wisdom from the unchanging Word of God.

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What comfort do you draw from the fact that God is immutable? Explain. What discomfort might you feel from the fact that God is immutable? Why?

How might you use the fact that God never changes to minister to an unbeliever whose struggling?

What spiritual insights about God and about the nature of sin can you draw from Jehu’s persistent rebellion? What might God have been doing during the twenty-five years of Jehu’s reign? (Psalm 145:8) How does God’s actions encourage you?

After you apply the two principles above to yourself, with whom in your life might you share these truths to encourage them too? (both believer and not-yet-believer)

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<sup>1</sup> John J. Davis and John C. Whitcomb, *Israel: From Conquest to Exile* (BMH Books, 1969-71), 425.







## A PARADE OF ROYAL HEIRS

2 Kings 11–12, 14–16; 2 Chronicles 22:10–28:27

The God who established the kings of Judah—both good and evil—also worked providentially through them to accomplish His purposes. One of those purposes was to teach us important truths and principles revealed in the lives of these men.

Someone once said, “If you don’t learn from history, you’re doomed to repeat it.” That’s often true. History can be a wonderful teacher, so long as we pay attention and learn its lessons.

Now we are about to literally cover more than 120 years of history. In just a few chapters here in the book of 2 Kings, we are going to watch a parade of royal heirs—six kings of Judah and eight kings in the northern kingdom of Israel. Today, I want to focus on the southern kings of Judah.

This same period of history is covered in chapters 22–28 of the book of 2 Chronicles, and I will refer at times to that passage. By the way, 2 Chronicles traces only the history of the kingdom of Judah.

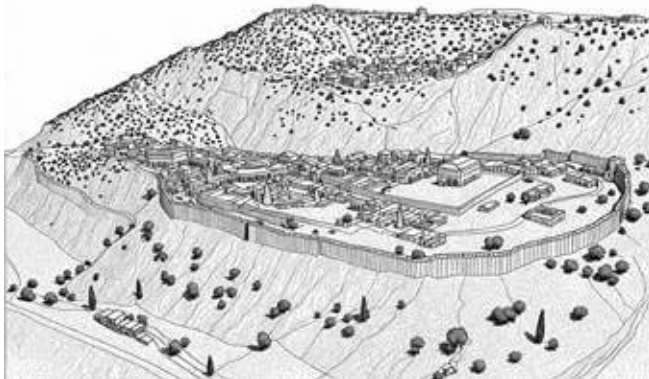
You might remember from our last study that Jehu was God’s instrument to bring the wicked dynasty of King Ahab to an end. Jehu not only killed King Joram and established himself as king over Israel, but he also killed Judah’s king, Ahaziah.

Now the focus of Scripture turns to Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah. She is the wicked daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. And she immediately takes the throne after her son Ahaziah is killed by Jehu.

And that’s not all. Second Kings chapter 11 opens with a bloodbath. Verse 1 says of Athaliah, “She arose and destroyed all the royal family.”

In other words, to secure power for herself, she actually murders her own grandchildren! And let me tell you, this is more than a vicious power grab. It is actually the devil’s attempt to wipe out any descendant from the line of David, the line God has promised will endure.

Athaliah succeeds in seizing the throne of Judah, but she is not completely successful in eliminating all her potential rivals. King Ahaziah’s sister is able to hide her infant nephew, Joash. Verse 3 tells us Joash “remained with her six years, hidden in the house of the LORD, while Athaliah reigned over the land.” So,



Model, the Temple mount and the city of David





the last of David's descendants is protected by the Lord's providence.

Now the plot thickens. When Joash turns seven years old, a godly priest named Jehoiada secretly gathers support and then anoints Joash as Judah's king. Athaliah finds out and screams "Treason!" But she is quickly executed, and Jehoiada calls the nation to renew their covenant with the Lord. We are told in the parallel account over in 2 Chronicles 23:17, "All the people went to the house of Baal and tore it down."

Here's the lesson from history: *\*The plans of God are never crushed by the plans of Satan.*

*The plans of God  
are never crushed by  
the plans of Satan.*

Then we are given some wonderful news: Joash, who is also known as Jehoash, "did what was right in the eyes of the LORD," according to 2 Kings 12:2. But there's a hint of a problem over in 2 Chronicles 24:2, which adds a qualifier, saying he did what was right "all the days of Jehoiada the priest."

And that is going to spell trouble later on. Even though Joash raises funds to repair the temple and restores proper worship, when that old priest Jehoiada dies, Joash begins to follow the advice of others and actually permits idolatrous worship to resume.

Jehoiada's son comes along and rebukes the king for this, but instead of repenting, Joash has that godly son stoned to death. God then moves in judgment, and King Joash is assassinated.

What can we learn from history here? Well, we've got a clear warning: *\*Be careful who you listen to for advice.* Don't listen to ungodly counselors.

And with that, the son of Joash, Amaziah, takes the throne of Judah. He too starts out well, but he's not really sold out to the Lord. In 2 Kings 14:4, we read, "The people still sacrificed and made offerings on

the high places." Over in the parallel account in 2 Chronicles 25:14, after Amaziah defeats the nation of Edom, he took their idols and "set them up as his gods and worshiped them."

Imagine, defeating a pagan nation in battle and then choosing to worship their false gods. Frankly, that is about as idiotic a thing as you could ever do. So, at the end of his life, we are told here in verse 27, he "turned away from the LORD" just like his father did; and tragically, just like his father, he is assassinated.

And here is the lesson to learn from history: *\*Half-hearted commitment in the present just might become wholehearted corruption in the future.*

Amaziah's son Azariah, better known as Uzziah, succeeds his father as Judah's king. The book of 2 Kings gives us a brief overview of his reign. Over in 2 Chronicles 26 we are given more information and told that he also begins his reign well. Verse 5 says, "He set himself to seek God . . . and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper."

Uzziah will reign for fifty-two years and experience one military victory after another, but here in verse 16 we read this:

*But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.*

Here's what is happening. He is victorious and proud of it. And he assumes that he can do anything he wants—even take on the role of a priest, in defiance of God's law.

God strikes him with leprosy till the day he dies, and this uncleanness kept him from ever entering the temple again.

Uzziah had it all, but he was not content. And here is a lesson from history for all of us to learn: *\*It's possi-*



*ble to so want something we don't have that we lose the ability to enjoy what we do have.*

Well, in this parade of kings, the next man to sit on the throne is Jotham, Uzziah's son. The accounts we have of him in 2 Kings 15 and 2 Chronicles 27 are brief, but they commend this king as a godly ruler.

Verse 6 of 2 Chronicles chapter 27 sums up his reign by recording: "Jotham became mighty, because he ordered his ways before the LORD his God." Jotham's life gives us yet another lesson from history: *\*It's possible to live an obedient life for God even though your parents lived in disobedience to God.*

Finally, both 2 Kings 16 and 2 Chronicles 28 recount the reign of Judah's King Ahaz, the son of Jotham. Neither book has anything good to say about this man. In 2 Kings 16:2, we read, "He did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD." And that is an understatement.

In 2 Chronicles 28:2-3 we read that Ahaz "made metal images for the Baals, and he made offerings in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom and burned his sons as an offering." It's hard to imagine that a descendant of King David would sacrifice some of his own sons to a pagan god.

Ahaz's reign is marked by military defeat. God graciously attempts to get his attention, but Ahaz isn't interested in any warning or message from God.

And here's a lesson from history: *\*To ignore God's warning is to guarantee even greater wandering in life.*

Ahaz's reign ends after sixteen years. And in God's providence and grace, his death brings to the throne one of Judah's godliest kings. We will have to wait for another time to meet him.

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How does the above truth impact how you feel and how you react to the struggles and disappointments you face? What lies of Satan might you need to tear down (2 Chronicles 23:17) in order to be strengthened in your walk with the LORD?

How does the summary of Joash's reign influence your thinking about with whom you're surrounding yourself? How do you "leave" the influence of someone you know isn't a godly influence on you without "losing" the opportunity to influence them for God later?

Prayerfully review the five (\*) principles above. Which one speaks to your heart the strongest? Why? What actions are the LORD calling you to make in response?

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## SAILING THROUGH MUDDY WATER

2 Kings 13-15, 17

The depraved, self-centered nature of human beings is nowhere more evident than in the lives of the kings of Israel. What a warning they are to us not to refuse God's gracious, patient appeals to repent and trust and follow Him.

As we sail on this wisdom journey through the Bible, there are times when it will feel like we are sailing through polluted waters. And that's what it's going to feel like in these chapters of 2 Kings—sailing through muddy waters stirred up by rebellious kings and a defiant nation.

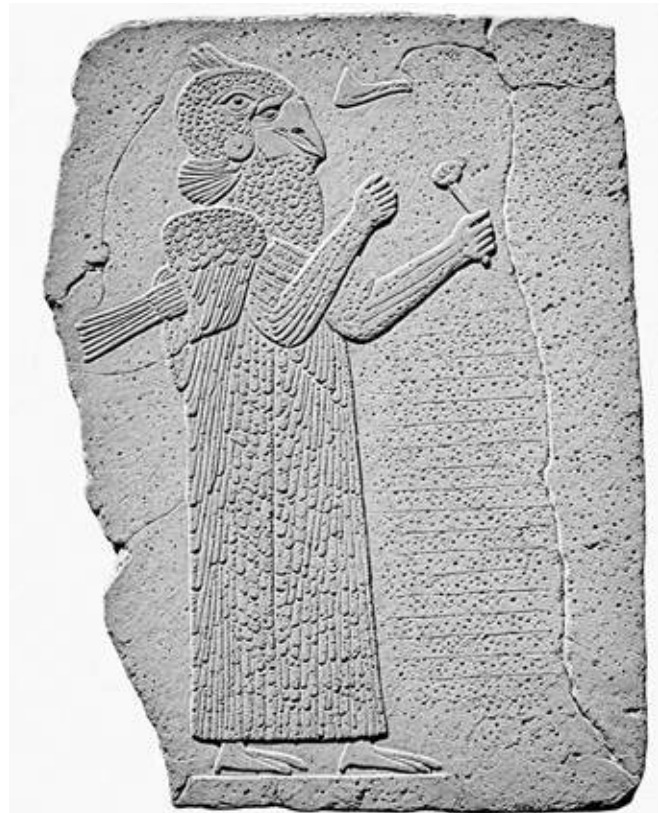
You might remember that the northern kingdom, known as Israel, split from the kingdom of Judah in the south. The kingdom of Israel quickly began to serve false gods, and as a nation they never turned back to God.

Now as we begin our study of these polluted days here in chapter 13, we meet Jehoahaz, who followed his father Jehu to the throne of Israel. Here is what verse 2 says about Jehoahaz:

*He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and followed the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin; he did not depart from them.*

By the way, you will read almost identical words about all but one of the nine kings of Israel mentioned in these four chapters of 2 Kings.<sup>1</sup>

During the seventeen-year reign of Jehoahaz, we do have one brief glimmer of hope. Verse 4 tells us that when his kingdom was harassed by the Syrians, “Jehoahaz sought the favor of the LORD, and the LORD listened to him.” The king cries out in des-



Bar-Rakib, King of Zinjirli



peration, and the Lord graciously delivers him. The tragedy is that this deliverance does not change the heart of the king, and he goes right on practicing and promoting idolatry.

Jehoahaz finally dies, and his son Jehoash (or Joash) takes the throne. Now don't get confused by the fact that he has the same name as the king of Judah whose reign is described earlier in chapter 12. And that is easy to do since the reigns of these two men overlap.

But one thing is for sure: Joash, the king of Israel is nothing like Joash, the godly king of Judah. It's not because he doesn't know any better. In fact, he knows the prophet Elisha personally, and Elisha prophesies his victory over Syria when he seeks out the prophet. But Joash is not interested in the message of Elisha for very long.

Now we are told rather briefly about the death of Elisha, this faithful prophet of God. And we're given this fascinating account about a dead man who is in the process of being buried in the same graveyard as Elisha. Verse 21 tells us:

*As a man was being buried, behold, a marauding band was seen and the man was thrown into the grave of Elisha, and as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet.*

He stands up in the grave. That will send people running out of the cemetery for sure!

But this is just one more testimony to all the people in the northern kingdom of Israel that God is still powerful and present and graciously available to them if they will only turn to Him in repentance. But they refuse.

As we move into chapter 14, we are introduced to the next king of Israel. Verse 23 tells us his name is Jeroboam. He's the son of Joash, and we usually refer to him as Jeroboam II. He is going to reign forty-one

years as the king of Israel, from the capital city of Samaria.

This is a very prosperous time for Israel, and we read of a prophet named Jonah who shows up here to prophesy that Jeroboam II will succeed in expanding Israel's territory. And if you're wondering, yes, this is the same Jonah who is going to end up soaking wet, a few years later.

In spite of Israel's expansion and prosperity, they continue to backslide spiritually. And like all the other kings of Israel, Jeroboam, we are told, "did what was evil in the sight of the LORD" (verse 24).

*Let me tell you,  
beloved, adversity  
encourages us to  
walk with God,  
but prosperity can  
tempt us to walk  
away from God.*

Let me tell you, beloved, adversity encourages us to walk with God, but prosperity can tempt us to walk away from God. During Jeroboam's reign, the Lord sends the prophets Amos and Hosea to warn him of coming judgment and the need to repent, which he and his nation refuse to do.

Chapter 15 then mentions in rapid fire the next five kings of Israel. They are all spiritually polluted and equally sinful. Zechariah, the son of Jeroboam II, reigns only six months before he is assassinated and replaced by Shallum. Shallum is on the throne only one month before he too is killed by Menahem.

Menahem manages to reign for ten years, during which time he begins to pay tribute to the Assyrian Empire, which is beginning to rattle its sabers throughout the region. Menahem is succeeded by his





son Pekahiah, and he reigns for two years before he is murdered by one of his military leaders, Pekah, who then takes the throne.

Pekah is king for twenty years. He forms an alliance with the Syrians to oppose the Assyrians, but he is unsuccessful, and the Assyrians capture a number of cities in the land of Israel. A man by the name of Hoshea hatches a plot against Pekah, kills him, and takes the throne. Chapter 17 describes the reign of Hoshea, who becomes the final king of Israel.

Israel has rejected God and His word for two hundred years, and God's patience with them has come to an end. They had adopted the customs of their pagan neighbors, practiced idolatry, served other gods, rejected the warnings of God's prophets, practiced the occult arts, and offered their own children as human sacrifices to the false gods.

And chapter 17 records the tragic details of Israel's fall to the kingdom of Assyria and their deportation to Assyrian lands in the east.

Sadly, the kingdom of Judah wasn't any better spiritually. We read in verse 19, "Judah also did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the customs that Israel had introduced." Back in chapter 16, we are given the details of the reign of Ahaz over the southern kingdom of Judah, and he was every bit as evil as Israel's kings. Still, in spite of all this sinful pollution and spiritual defiance, God was not through with the descendants of David, as we will soon find out.

But as for the northern kingdom of Israel, verse 23 tells us:

*The LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had spoken by all his servants the prophets. So*

*Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day.*

Now I warned you earlier that we would be sailing through some muddy water. But there are lessons to be found here in the mud.

The grace of God is not diminished against a backdrop of wickedness. No matter how wicked a nation becomes, the grace and mercy of God is available to those who will follow His word. When the water is muddy and polluted around you, God still lovingly invites undeserving people to follow Him—people like you and me.

The northern kingdom cared about God only when they were in trouble. They wanted God to make life pleasant and prosperous. He was a good God only if He gave them what they wanted and served them. Beloved, God is not here to serve us and glorify us; we are here to serve Him and glorify Him. Let's make that our goal—and our joy—today.

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**This resurrection isn't random. God has a purpose beyond speaking to Israel about their sin. What future event is God pointing to through this resurrection? What does this say about God's heart for his people and the world?**

**Read Deuteronomy 30:15-20 with the history we've just covered in mind. How is your view of God influenced by what you've read? How is your view of the human heart - your own heart influenced?**

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<sup>1</sup> See 2 Kings 13:11; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28; 17:2.





## CHARACTERISTICS OF GENUINE REVIVAL

2 Kings 18:1-8; 2 Chronicles 29-31

In the midst of the darkness of apostasy, the Lord raised up a godly king in Judah. Hezekiah's reforms turned the nation back to the true worship of the Lord and inform us of the way to revitalize our walk with God.

The record of Scripture informs us that the northern kingdom of Israel has fallen to the Assyrians because of their evil practices and defiance of God. And frankly, it looks like the southern kingdom of Judah is heading in the same direction.

But somewhat unexpectedly, God graciously brings to the throne of Judah a godly king. Even though his father Ahaz was wicked, young King Hezekiah walks with God. He will become one of Judah's godliest rulers.

Chapter 18 of the book of 2 Kings begins a lengthy and detailed account of Hezekiah's reign. Now I should point out here that the chronology is a bit difficult. It appears that Ahaz was still king of Judah when Israel fell. So, you need to understand that Hezekiah was reigning for some time, as co-regent with his father. Once Ahaz dies, some dramatic changes are going to take place under the reign of Hezekiah.

Listen to this impressive description of King Hezekiah here in verses 3-4:

*And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had*



The seal of King Hezekiah

*done. He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah.*

He broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it.

Did you notice that? The bronze serpent that had been set up on a pole 700 years earlier (Numbers



21:4-9) had become an idol. The people had turned it into some sort of superstitious, mystical image. Well, Hezekiah gets rid of it.

Verse 5 says of Hezekiah:

*He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel, so that there was none like him among all The kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him.*

And in verse 7, we read, “The LORD was with him; wherever he went out, he prospered.”

That’s quite a resume here in the book of 2 Kings, but that is just a summary. Over in the parallel account of 2 Chronicles—which we are combining in our study as we work our way through the books of Kings and Chronicles—we are given an expanded account of Hezekiah’s reign. Second Chronicles 29 is the first of three chapters devoted to Hezekiah’s reforms in Judah following the wicked reign of King Ahaz.

In chapters 29 through 31 we find several characteristics of genuine revival. And the first is this: true revival begins with *righteous leadership*.

Spiritual awakening is, and always has been, the work of the Holy Spirit; but He always uses some key, godly people in that work. Hezekiah has a heart for God, and we see this in one of the first things he does after his father’s death. In 2 Chronicles 29:3 we read, “In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them.” He also calls on the Levites to consecrate themselves in preparation for serving the Lord according to God’s law.

This brings up another characteristic of true revival: yes, it begins with consecrated leadership, but secondly, it leads to *a renewal of worship*. Hezekiah understands that the people have abandoned God’s prescribed temple worship; so he says here in verses 6-8:

*“Our fathers . . . have forsaken him [the Lord] and have turned away*

*their faces from the habitation of the LORD and turned their backs. They also shut the doors of the vestibule and put out the lamps and have not burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the Holy Place to the God of Israel. Therefore the wrath of the LORD came on Judah and Jerusalem.”*

So, with the help of the Levites, Hezekiah restores the temple and cleans out all the dirt and debris, as well as the idols Ahaz had placed there. And when it is all cleaned out, sacrifices are offered, and verse 35 tells us that the long-neglected “service of the house of the LORD was restored.”

This sets the stage for another characteristic of revival in 2 Chronicles chapter 30; and that’s *a return to obedience*. People cannot turn to the Lord in faith without becoming aware of His commands and desires. So, Hezekiah reinstates the Passover festival that had been long neglected.

*Revival always  
brings God’s people  
fulfillment and joy.*

There is a logistical problem here, however. Passover is to be observed in the first month, but the priests cannot get properly consecrated and prepared in time. So, rather than wait an entire year, verse 2 records, “The king and his princes and all the assembly in Jerusalem had taken counsel to keep the Passover in the second month.”

The king sends messengers throughout Judah, calling the people to come to Jerusalem for the Passover. They even go into the regions of Israel to the remnant



of people left there after the Assyrian conquest of that land. Listen to Hezekiah's invitation to all of them, here in verses 6-7:

*Return to the LORD . . . Do not be like your fathers and your brothers, who were faithless to the LORD God of their fathers, so that he made them a desolation, as you see.*

I'm glad to tell you that the people of Judah respond to this invitation; but I'm disappointed to tell you only a few from Israel come to Jerusalem. In fact, many of them laugh at Hezekiah's messengers and mock them.

Nonetheless, Jerusalem is soon filled with songs of celebration. We are told in verse 26:

*There was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem.*

There was a revival in the land, and that always brings God's people fulfillment and joy.

It also brings even more obedience. As we come to chapter 31, we find this fourth characteristic of true revival: *the removal of idols*. The worshipers leave Jerusalem after the festival and begin to dismantle all the remnants of idolatry in their land. Even the few people who came from Israel, return home to tear down the pagan altars in their land.

This is a good lesson for us today; if you follow the Lord with your whole heart, you will get rid of anything that can pull you back down into disobedience. This is what you call "burning your bridges behind you." Get rid of whatever it is that will lure you back into sin.

When you find yourself faltering in your walk, recommit yourself to intentional, focused, biblical worship, and recommit to obeying God's Word, whether you feel like it or not.

Make sure you get rid of those idols. As someone once said, our hearts are factories that so easily produce idols; so, let's stay alert to anything that consumes our attention and distracts us from our love for Christ and His Word. And when we do, well, we're in the process of experiencing another personal, genuine revival.

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Think through each of these characteristics of genuine revival: a righteous leadership, a renewal of worship, a return to obedience, and the removal of idols. How do these steps from God's word differ from what the world says brings about a revival?

Think about how you've set out to change your life in the past. Was it a biblical or worldly approach? What approach would you recommend to another believer seeking your advice on how to revive their walk with God? Why?

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## ANOTHER GOLIATH

2 Kings 18:9–19:37; 2 Chronicles 32:1–23

Faithfulness to the Lord does not guarantee a smooth and easy life; in fact, it invites opposition and hardship. Hezekiah is a perfect example. Here was one of Judah's godliest kings, faced with a seemingly impossible challenge—and a wonderful opportunity.

Our Wisdom Journey continues now in the reign of Judah's godly King Hezekiah. As we pick up the biblical narrative in 2 Kings 18, I want to go back to verse 7 to note just a brief statement there concerning Hezekiah: "He rebelled against the king of Assyria." In other words, he stopped making the tribute payments to Assyria that his father Ahaz had been paying to keep the barbarians at bay.

In verses 9–12, we are told again of Assyria's conquest of Samaria, Israel's capital, and the capture of the Israelites. This underscores the great seriousness of Hezekiah now refusing to make any further payments to this brutal nation.

In our last study, we watched as the godly King Hezekiah led the nation in a great revival. He reopened the temple, reinstated the worship of God and the Passover observance, and led the people to get rid of their idols and turn back to God.

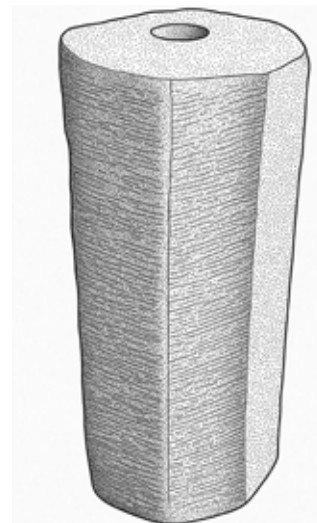
Now after all that, it's surprising what happens next. Over in the parallel account in 2 Chronicles 32, verse 1 tells us:

*After these things and these acts of faithfulness, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah and encamped against the*

*fortified cities, thinking to win them for himself.*

You would think that Hezekiah's acts of faithfulness would be rewarded with peace. But instead, the Assyrian army comes to invade Judah. Beloved, it's a hard lesson to accept, but walking with God does not necessarily mean the absence of trials. In fact, walking with God sometimes creates new troubles for the believer.

We can't imagine the terror in this moment for Hezekiah. This is like little David taking on a terrifying giant like Goliath. David's descendant, Hezekiah, now is facing the giant of the Assyrian Empire.



The annals of Sennacherib are preserved on several prisms like this



Hezekiah then makes a mistake, out of fear. When he discovers that the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, is in the process of conquering nearby Lachish, he sends a message to Sennacherib, asking for forgiveness and offering to pay a ransom to be left alone. He's trying to negotiate Goliath, as it were. You don't negotiate with Goliath.

*It's a hard lesson to accept, but walking with God does not necessarily mean the absence of trials.*

And back in 2 Kings 18:14, we read; “The king of Assyria required . . . three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.” That's more money that Hezekiah has—today it would be worth several million dollars. Well, he ends up having to empty the treasuries of the temple and the palace and even strip the gold off the temple doors.

This is a tragic disgrace. But it only gets worse. Sennacherib decides he wants *everything*—which means not only all the gold and silver but also the city of Jerusalem itself. So, he sends three officials, along with an army, to Jerusalem to intimidate Hezekiah and the people into surrendering themselves and their city in exchange for their lives being spared.

The spokesman for Sennacherib stands outside Jerusalem's wall and delivers the message:

*“Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria! Thus says the king: ‘Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you out of my hand. Do not let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD . . . Make your peace with me and come*

*out to me. . . . that you may live, and not die. . . . Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?’” (verses 28–33)*

In other words, no god can stop this Assyrian giant. Well, Hezekiah realizes what he has opened the door to and that he is backed into a corner. In chapter 19 verse 1, we are told how Hezekiah responds to this message from Sennacherib: “*He tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth and went into the house of the LORD.*” He should have done this in the first place instead of stripping the temple doors of their gold. Now he prays. He also sends two men to get counsel from the prophet Isaiah—the same Isaiah who wrote the biblical book of Isaiah. God responds through Isaiah, telling Hezekiah not to be afraid because the Lord will move Sennacherib to return to his own land, where he will die by the sword.

Sennacherib has no thought of returning to his land yet. He sends a letter to Hezekiah repeating his threat, along with his prediction that the God of Israel is not strong enough to help Hezekiah.

Verse 14 then records:

*Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD and spread [the letter] before the LORD. And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD.*

He prays then in verse 19:

*“O LORD our God, save us, please, from his [Sennacherib's] hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone.”*

The Assyrian giant has not just challenged Judah; he has challenged God. And Hezekiah gets it right here—he wants all the earth to know that his God, the Lord, is the true and living God.



And once again, God responds through His prophet Isaiah. His response, given at length in poetic form here beginning in verse 21, stresses the sovereignty of God. God isn't ringing His hands or calling an emergency meeting with the angels.

Isaiah says here in verses 32–34:

*“Thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city or shoot an arrow there, or come before it with a shield or cast up a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city, declares the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.”*

God accomplishes this miraculously. He sends just one little angel—not a host of angels—just one anonymous angel, and he will be enough to do what is described here in verse 35:

*And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.*

With that, Sennacherib abandons the siege of Jerusalem and returns to his home in Nineveh. And some years later—ironically while he is worshipping his god—the God of Israel's prophecy through Isaiah comes true; this boastful, blasphemous king is assassinated by his own sons who want his throne.

There is no natural explanation for the deliverance of Jerusalem from this mighty Assyrian giant of an army. It was the miraculous work of God in response to a humble prayer of faith. And just like David defeated Goliath, Hezekiah's victory is the result of his faith in the one true God.

I can't help but think, beloved, that God sometimes challenges our own faith by putting us in difficult, even desperate, situations and doesn't immediately deliver us from them. Why? Because He wants instead to develop us—to cause us to grow in our faith so that we faithfully walk with Him.

We don't need a prophet coming over to our front porch to assure us that God has heard our desperate prayers. Frankly, we have something Hezekiah did not have—the written promise of God, which assures us “that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us” (1 John 5:14).

---

Compare how you typically respond to overwhelming circumstances, to this truth: “It was the miraculous work of God in response to a humble prayer of faith.” What heart-attitudes and spiritual disciplines contribute to a lifestyle of praying by faith in God and his Word?

When your faith is being put to the test, what do you typically first assume: that God is for you - or against you? Why? How does your answer reflect the truth of Romans 8:28?

“...if we ask anything according to his will he hears us” (1 John 5:14).” What spiritual discipline does this verse assume we're regularly practicing for it to be effective in our lives?

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## A SURPRISING TURN OF EVENTS

2 Kings 20-21; 2 Chronicles 32:24-33:25

King Hezekiah knew with certainty he had fifteen more years to live because the Lord told him this. Yet this knowledge did not prove beneficial to him. The uncertainties of life have a purpose. They drive us to trust in the Lord daily and remain faithful to Him.

Many of us have been told, “Be careful what you ask for; you just might get it.” That is simply a way of saying that when we get the things we want, we often find out they are not nearly as satisfying as we thought they would be. In some ways, this is what King Hezekiah experienced in the final years of his reign.

Second Kings chapter 20 opens with these ominous words: “In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death.” Now “those days” actually refers to events in the previous chapter. In fact, the king’s illness took place prior to the Lord’s deliverance from the giant empire of Assyria, which we studied in our last session.

So, the Assyrian invasion isn’t Hezekiah’s only problem here; he’s also facing a health crisis. The prophet Isaiah says to the king in verse 1, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover.’” In other words, write out your will, and pick out your casket.

Hezekiah’s response is probably what yours and mine would be. We are told here in the next verse that Hezekiah starts praying and weeping before the Lord.

Now keep in mind that Hezekiah is only thirty-nine years old at this time. He wants to live, and he begs God to heal him.

God answers his prayer immediately. In fact, even before Isaiah can get back on his mule, the Lord answers through him and delivers this wonderful news to Hezekiah:

*“Thus says the LORD . . . I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you. . . . and I will add fifteen years to your life.”* (verses 5-6)

Let me tell you, beloved, even if God doesn’t heal you, you can rest assured that He has heard your prayer and seen your tears.

Hezekiah then asks the Lord for some sign to accompany this promise of fifteen more years of life and health. Apparently in the palace courtyard there were some steps,



Sundial with Aramaean inscription from the 6th century b.c.





and the shadow moving along those steps throughout the day was used, much like a sundial, to determine the time. So, God causes the shadow to retreat ten steps, miraculously making the day longer, just as He has promised to make Hezekiah's life a little longer.

*Let me tell you,  
beloved, even if  
God doesn't heal  
you, you can rest  
assured that He has  
heard your prayer  
and seen your tears.*

Now let's be honest here. I think most of us would like to know how much longer we have to live. I think we are under the impression that this knowledge would make life richer and more meaningful. Well, it actually has the opposite effect. Not knowing how long we have to live and that today could be our last day reminds us to walk with God *today* because we may not have tomorrow.

Look at what happens to Hezekiah. This knowledge didn't help him a bit. In fact, let me point out several results.

First, guaranteed health and life for the next fifteen years resulted in *pride and a sense of self-sufficiency*. When the king of Babylon sends envoys to Hezekiah to congratulate him on his recovery, Hezekiah rather arrogantly gives them a back-door tour of "his" glorious kingdom.

Verse 13 tells us:

*Hezekiah . . . showed them all his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his armory, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in*

*his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them.*

You might notice the references to *his* treasure house, *his* armory, *his* storehouses, and *his* realm. There is not one reference to God.

Over in the parallel account in 2 Chronicles 32, we are told that this visit from Babylon was a test from the Lord to see what was brewing in Hezekiah's heart. What was brewing in there was pride, and there would be a price to pay for it.

You see, it's not going to be the Assyrians but the Babylonians who will one day overthrow Judah. And Hezekiah has just given them a look at what is in the bank vault.

Second, this guarantee of fifteen more years brings a sense of *spiritual complacency and apathy*. In 2 Kings 20:17-18, Isaiah tells Hezekiah:

*"The days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. . . . And some of your own sons . . . shall be taken away."*

And what is his reaction to this terrible prophecy? Verse 19:

*Then said Hezekiah . . . "The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good." For he thought, "Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?"*

He is not concerned at all with what this prophecy means. He just notices that it's not going to happen until after he is gone. So, instead of praying, seeking the Lord for his kingdom's safety and his own family's well-being, he just says, "Hey, this isn't my problem. I'll let the next generation deal with it." What incredible apathy. Sadly, these are the last recorded words of Hezekiah.

In spite of all the good things he did and his faithful trust in the Lord during his earlier years, Hezekiah failed to pass on the truth of God to his own son and



successor, Manasseh. Tragically, the first nine verses of 2 Kings 21 describe Manasseh as terribly wicked. He builds altars for Baal and other pagan gods; he even places altars and images in the temple of the Lord.

Sickeningly, verse 6 records:

*He burned his son as an offering and used fortune-telling and omens and dealt with mediums and with necromancers.*

He was simply the most wicked king ever to rule in Judah.

But then the most unlikely thing happens. Over in 2 Chronicles 33, Manasseh is taken captive to Babylon. Now listen to this testimony in verses 12-13:

*When he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. He prayed to him, and God was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.*

Listen, beloved, if you've ever thought someone was beyond the reach of God, think about Manasseh. He's a prime example of human depravity, but he becomes an example of the greatness of God's grace. Upon his return to Jerusalem, Manasseh attempts to turn Judah back to the Lord. He removes the idols, restores the altar of the Lord, and verse 16 tells us, "He commanded Judah to serve the LORD."

Evidently, the kingdom of Judah is not interested. And when Manasseh's son Amon takes the throne, the Bible says he lives a wicked life and refuses to fol-

low God. Tragically, he is assassinated after reigning as king only two years.

As I look back over these chapters detailing the lives of Hezekiah and Manasseh, I think there are two timeless principles we need to underscore: first, *a godly past is not a guarantee of future success*. Hezekiah was a godly king, but his pride ruined his future and final years on the throne.

Second, *a wicked past is not an obstacle to a godly future*. Look at Manasseh. If God can move in a heart like his and bring him to repentance, maybe you need to keep praying for your son or daughter or husband or mom or dad. There is hope for even the most hardened unbeliever.

---

Since God's name is "I am" (Exodus 3:14), does He live in yesterday, today or tomorrow? Why is it important for your walk with God to have a "live today" mentality? What attitudes cause any believer to live in the past or future? How are those attitudes helpful to Satan's work against you? Why is it important when you're talking with people who are not-yet-saved that your story is thoroughly saturated with God and what He's done, doing and going to do in your life?

Apathy can be a useful tool for Satan to use against a believer. How can it be used to destroy the believer's peace and witness?

Consider these last two principles, how does each one apply to your own life and to the life of someone you love and want to encourage?

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## AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY FOR A UNEXPECTED KING

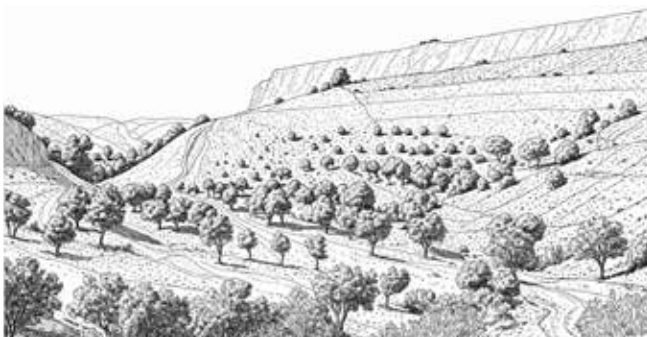
2 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 34:1-28

We cannot change people's hearts or deliver them from divine judgment, but we can show them what it means to follow the Lord and enjoy His blessings. King Josiah's pursuit of the Lord and commitment to obeying Him was both an example and a rebuke to the people of Judah.

When Judah's wicked King Amon was assassinated after reigning only two years, nobody expected a better king would take Amon's place on the throne. And certainly, nobody expected very much from his eight-year-old son, Josiah, who was suddenly placed on the throne of Judah. They were all in for a surprise.

We are given an overview of Josiah's reign here in 2 Kings 22:1:

*Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. . . . And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in all the way of David his father.*



Kidron Valley

Then verse 3 jumps to the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign. But over in the parallel account in 2 Chronicles, chapter 34 fills in some of the details of the earlier years of his reign.

As we begin our survey of his kingship, I want to highlight some of the qualities of Josiah that make him such a godly example to his people. And the first quality is this: He has an insatiable *spiritual hunger*.

In 2 Chronicles 34:3, we read, "In the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David his father." The Hebrew verb translated "to seek," means, "to carefully, diligently look for." In Chronicles, this verb usually refers to looking to God in every life situation. <sup>1</sup>

Now we would like to know what caused this diligent walk with the Lord when Josiah was sixteen years old, but we are not told. I do not think it's a coincidence, though, that the prophet Nahum as well as the prophet Zephaniah are ministering at this time, and they will be joined shortly by the prophet Jeremiah.

I don't doubt for a minute that these prophets are reinforcing the work God is doing in the young king's life. They are surely feeding the spiritual hunger that will establish the godly foundation in Josiah's life and reign.



A second important quality of Josiah appears in the twelfth year of his reign, when he is twenty years old. Listen to verses 3-7 of 2 Chronicles 34:

*He began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, and the carved and the metal images. And they chopped down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and he cut down the incense altars that stood above them. And he broke in pieces the Asherim and the carved and the metal images, and he made dust of them and scattered it over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. He . . . cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. And in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, and as far as Naphtali, in their ruins all around, he broke down the altars and beat the Asherim and the images into powder and cut down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel.*

This second quality is what we will call uncompromising *spiritual courage*. It takes a bulldozer of bravery to take on this industry of idolatry. Josiah is standing against the crashing waves of wickedness that have grown through nearly seventy years of national apostasy. And Josiah's own father had led the way.

So, where did this courage come from? Well, it started with that spiritual hunger, which ended up creating spiritual muscle and determination to do the right thing.

Now the third quality of Josiah is highlighted in both 2 Kings 22 and the parallel account in 2 Chronicles 34. Josiah is in his eighteenth year on the throne; he's now twenty-six years old.

We will call this third characteristic, unshakable *spiritual conviction*. Josiah already has torn down the pagan altars; now he wants to repair the temple in Jerusalem. He wants his people to return to true worship, and God is about to reward him with a rather unexpected discovery.

While the priests get started repairing the temple and apparently are in the process of cleaning out the rubble, Hilkiah the high priest finds what he calls here in 2 Kings 22:8 the "Book of the Law." Based on the responses we see here, this might have been the book of Deuteronomy, but it's possible it was the entire Pentateuch—the first five books of the Old Testament.

What a discovery this is! Hilkiah gives the book to Josiah's servant, Shaphan, who heads over to read it to King Josiah.

Verse 11 records that after hearing the book read, Josiah "tore his clothes"; that was a symbolic act of grief and repentance. Josiah's command to Shaphan, Hilkiah, and the other servants here in verse 13 explains his reaction:

*"Go, inquire of the LORD . . . concerning the words of this book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book."*

Josiah is stunned by the nation's disobedience and guilt. He fears God's judgment is just around the corner. Josiah pulls the fire alarm.

Let me point out another characteristic of this godly king: a sense of *spiritual priority*. What matters most to him is what matters most to God.

Now realizing how far Judah has gone astray, Josiah knows that nothing less than national repentance is needed. But is there any hope?





Josiah seeks an answer from a prophetess in Jerusalem named Huldah, and she responds in verses 16-17:

*“Thus says the LORD, Behold, I will bring disaster upon this place and upon its inhabitants, all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read. Because they have forsaken me and have made offerings to other gods . . . therefore my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched.”*

In other words, the wheels of judgment are already rolling toward the nation. But there is a ray of hope for Josiah as Huldah continues:

*“Because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the LORD, when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you . . . Therefore . . . you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place.”* (verses 19-20)

In other words, judgment will not arrive during Josiah's lifetime.

Now Josiah will continue to do everything possible to turn his people back to the Lord, and many will follow him, but his nation as a whole will refuse to repent. Less than forty years from this point, divine judgment will finally come as the nation is sent into exile.

Whether you're a teacher today, or a lawyer, a mechanic, a surgeon, a mom, or a dad, your godly example is standing against the waves of wickedness in our day. You may not be able to turn everyone in your world toward Christ, but your life is a beacon of light to show the way home for those who repent and join you in following the Lord.

So, let's be more like young King Josiah—having a spiritual hunger for God's Word, a willingness to obey God's Word, and the courage to live out the truth of God's Word, wherever God has placed us in the world today.

- In what ways is your walk with God like an insatiable spiritual hunger?
- Upon what source of truth does an uncompromising spiritual courage rest and become active?
- What value does your unshakable spiritual convictions have in convincing an unbeliever that God's promises are true?
- What does a strong sense of spiritual priority look like in a world that continually forces its influence on believers?

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How does this example of the prophet's investment in Josiah's life encourage you to have maturing believers investing in your life? What must you first admit about yourself so that the investment of the maturing believer in your life becomes effective?

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<sup>1</sup> Martin J. Selman, *2 Chronicles: A Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 10b (Inter-Varsity, 1994), 528.

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## A FAITHFUL INFLUENCE WITH FEW RESULTS

2 Kings 23; 2 Chronicles 34:29–36:5

The measure of faithfulness to God is not how many people follow us but how consistently we follow God. Josiah made some unwise choices, but he was faithful to the Lord. Although few followed his example, his life testified to the importance of obeying and worshiping God.

Young King Josiah had a heart that followed after God. In our last study, as Josiah was reforming his nation and cleaning out the temple, a long-lost copy of the Word of God was discovered. After it was read to him, Josiah was profoundly moved. And now we find him here in 2 Kings chapter 23 determined to lead the kingdom of Judah to repentance and renewal.

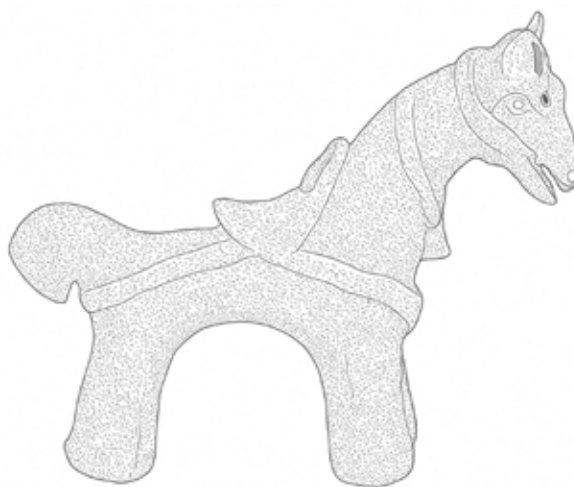
Josiah is going to lead by example. He gathers all the people of Judah together, and verse 3 tells us:

*The king stood by the pillar and made a 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 all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people joined in the covenant.*

Josiah follows up this ceremony with widespread reforms that go beyond what he has already instituted.

Verses 4-5 give us the basic idea of what his reforms involved:

*The king commanded Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the second order and the keepers of the threshold to bring out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven. He burned them outside Jerusa-*



Horse figurines such as this one from the 8th-7th century b.c. are common in the period of Kings and Chronicles



*lem . . . and carried their ashes to Bethel. And he deposed the priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to make offerings in the high places.*

Verse 7 adds:

*He broke down the houses of the male cult prostitutes who were in the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the Asherah.*

Imagine sexual immorality inside the temple, along with devotion to Asherah, the supposed mistress of Baal.

Then we read in verse 10:

*He defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, that no one might burn his son or his daughter as an offering to Molech.*

Again, it's hard to imagine the Jewish people stooping to such a wicked place in their idolatry as to sacrifice their children to pagan gods. But they did.

In the midst of all this, we see a remarkable fulfillment of biblical prophecy in verse 16. Josiah goes to Bethel and tears down the high place of idolatrous worship that had been built earlier by Israel's King Jeroboam. The bones of the false priests of Bethel are literally dug up and then burned on this altar to desecrate it. And we are reminded here that this was done "according to the word of the LORD that the man of God proclaimed, who had predicted these things."

This takes us back to 1 Kings 13, where a man of God confronted Jeroboam at Bethel. Here is what happened:

*And the man cried against the altar . . . and said, "O altar, altar,*

*thus says the LORD: 'Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name, and he shall sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who make offerings on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.'"* (verse 2)

Now understand that this prophecy was given 300 years earlier and not only foretold what the king would do but also gave the very name of the king—King Josiah. It took 300 years before God was ready to fulfill His word in this regard.

Following Josiah's reforms throughout the land, he now reinstates the Passover observance, which had been long neglected by the nation. Josiah says to the people here in 2 Kings 23:21: "Keep the Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant." Passover, of course, was a time of remembering God's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage.

Over in the parallel account in 2 Chronicles 35, we are given details about this particular Passover celebration. An enormous number of animals were personally contributed by King Josiah and his officials as offerings. These were not required but were appropriate expressions of worship and thanksgiving, especially since this was the first Passover observance in many years.

Josiah did everything he could to remind the people that God had chosen them, delivered them, provided for them, and protected them. The sad news is given to us by the prophet Jeremiah, who quotes the Lord as saying, "Judah did not return to me with her whole heart" (Jeremiah 3:10).

Some thirteen years later, Josiah's godly influence is cut short when he is killed in battle. Pharaoh Neco of Egypt moves north to help the Assyrians hold off the Babylonian army. Josiah sees this as an opportunity to end the threat of Judah's enemy, the Assyrians. So, Josiah leads his army out to confront the Egyptians in an attempt to prevent them from aiding the Assyrians.

Now something surprising and quite fascinating happens. The pharaoh sends a message to Josiah, and it's recorded for us in 2 Chronicles 35:21. He says to



Josiah, “God has commanded me to hurry. Cease opposing God, who is with me, lest he destroy you.”

Josiah didn’t believe Pharaoh Neco was speaking for God, but he actually was. In verse 22, the Chronicles account tells us, “[Josiah] did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God.” Amazingly, God truly was using an unbelieving king to warn Josiah to stay out of this fight. It was a warning Josiah failed to believe and heed.

*Yes, live for God—  
set the example—  
but leave with God  
what God alone  
can do.*

You see, God actually wanted the Egyptians to reinforce the Assyrians, not so they could defeat the Babylonians, but so they could be defeated by the Babylonians. This was all setting up God’s ultimate judgment against Judah. We’re told, sadly, that Josiah was mortally wounded in battle at Megiddo.

Beside this rather strange turn of events, Josiah was a godly example. The tragic news is that his example did not rub off on his people. In fact, we discover back in 2 Kings 23 that his example did not rub off on his own sons. When Josiah dies, at the age of thirty-nine, his son Jehoahaz replaces him. Verse 32 says of him, “He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.”

Jehoahaz reigns only three months, for when Pharaoh Neco returns through Judah after being defeated by the Babylonians, he deposes Jehoahaz and takes him captive to Egypt. The pharaoh replaces Jehoahaz with his older brother Eliakim, whom he renames Jehoiakim. We will meet up with him again, but let me tell you

ahead of time that like his brother, verse 37 tells us, “He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.”

When I think of the godly example of Josiah, it reminds me of the simple fact that leaders can influence others but they can’t change people’s hearts—only God can do that. You might be leading a family, a congregation, or a business. Yes, live for God—set the example—but leave with God what God alone can do; only God’s Spirit can open the eyes and the hearts of your children, your coworkers, your congregation, to follow after God. If they don’t follow the Lord, you don’t take the blame; and if they do follow God, you don’t take the credit either.

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What is God’s intended purpose when He announces and records a prophecy (Romans 15:4)? How does your answer encourage you to take God’s word more seriously?

Was Josiah’s ministry a failure, explain your answer. Why is it important to remember who is responsible to give the increase in any believer’s ministry (1 Corinthians 3:6-8)?

What was missing from Josiah’s battle plan? How often do you set out to execute your own plans without seeking God’s input? Compare the endings of your plans when you set out on your own versus setting out after first consulting God. How does Proverbs 19:21 influence your next planning without God?

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## JUDGMENT DAY FOR JUDAH

2 Kings 24-25; 2 Chronicles 36:6-23

The last days of the kingdom of Judah reveal the power of sin and an eternal principle: we reap what we sow. The tragic events recorded in the final chapters of Kings and Chronicles also highlight the righteousness of God and the hope He offers to all who will trust Him.

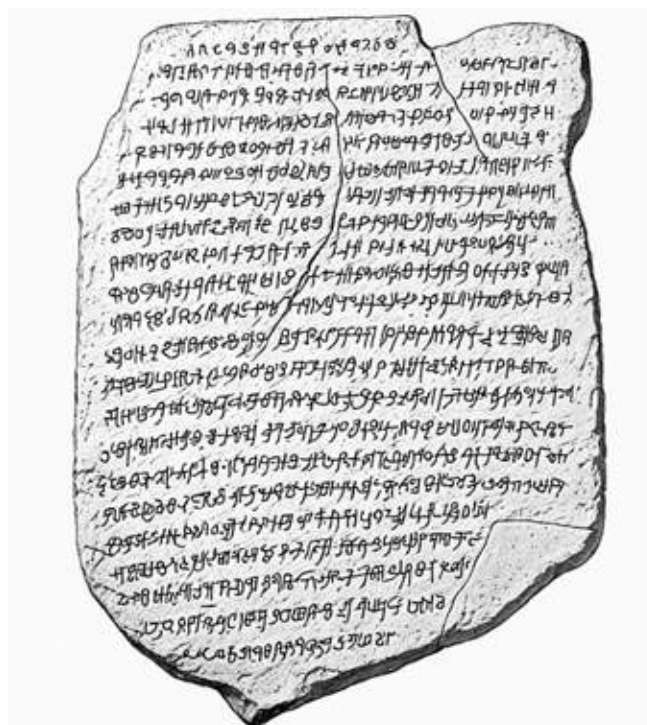
Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, “Sooner or later everyone sits down to a banquet table of consequences.” He was simply putting into different words a biblical principle: “Whatever one sows, that will he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

As we arrive at the conclusion of 2 Kings in chapters 24 and 25 and the parallel account over in 2 Chronicles 36, that banquet table is set and the kingdom of Judah is about to be seated.

Josiah was Judah’s last godly king. His efforts to turn the nation back to the Lord were admirable, but they did not break through the bedrock of unbelief. The nation continued down the path of sin and self-destruction, and frankly, it only accelerated with the kings who followed Josiah. First was Jehoahaz, and he was followed by Jehoiakim.

Aside from the statement in 2 Kings 23:37 that he “did evil in the sight of the LORD,” little is said in either 2 Kings or 2 Chronicles about Jehoiakim’s reign. The book of Jeremiah, however, informs us that Jehoiakim hated the word of God. In fact, when Jeremiah’s prophetic message was read to Jehoiakim, he cut up the scroll and threw the pieces into a fire (Jeremiah 36:23).

Now it’s during the eleven-year reign of Jehoiakim that the Babylonian army under Nebuchadnezzar forces



Babylonian Chronicle of Nebuchadnezzar’s early years, 605–595, recording both the fall of Carchemish in 605 and the attack on Jerusalem in 597

Judah to pay tribute. This is described in 2 Kings 24:1, which tells us, “Jehoiakim became his [Nebuchadnezzar’s] servant.” At this time, around 605 BC, the Babylonians take some treasures from the temple back to Babylon. They also take some outstanding Jewish



young people back as well, four of whom are Daniel and his three friends (Daniel 1:1-7).

Three years into his reign, Jehoiakim decides to rebel against Babylonian rule, and for the rest of his reign he is occupied with defending Judah from enemy raids.

Following the death of Jehoiakim, we are told in 2 Kings 24:8 that his son Jehoiachin takes the throne. The Bible says here, “Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king.” Verse 9 tells us, “He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done.”

You would think he would be smarter than that, but he isn't. And his reign lasts only three months before the Babylonian army shows up and demands his surrender. Jehoiachin surrenders and is taken captive to Babylon, and verse 13 informs us that the Babylonians “carried off all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house.” In addition, some 10,000 Jewish captives are deported to Babylon. These, verse 14 tells us, include “all the officials and all the mighty men of valor . . . all the craftsmen and the smiths,” and, by the way, the prophet Ezekiel.

King Nebuchadnezzar places Jehoiachin's uncle Mattaniah on the throne of Judah and changes his name to Zedekiah. Zedekiah reigns for eleven years. You would think he would get the message that God was bringing judgment on Judah and repent, but instead, verse 19 tells us he too “did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.”

How foolish can you get? Well, he is foolish enough to repeat the mistake of Jehoiakim. In the parallel account in 2 Chronicles 36, we are told in verse 13:

*He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar . . . He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD, the God of Israel.*

The book of 2 Chronicles then inserts this tragic summary statement in verses 15 and 16, explaining to us the rebellion, not only of the king of Judah but also of the people of Judah:

*The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy.*

Let me tell you, they are finally seated at the banquet table of consequences. God's judgment arrives and it comes in the form of the mighty Babylonian army (sometimes called the Chaldeans), and they now surround and besiege the city of Jerusalem to starve it into submission.

Back in 2 Kings 25, we are told, “The famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land” (verse 3). King Zedekiah tries to sneak out of Jerusalem during the night, but he is captured. Verse 7 records that his sons are executed before his eyes; then he is blinded and taken to Babylon.

The fall of Jerusalem is also described in 2 Chronicles 36:

*Therefore [God] brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He gave them all into his hand. And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the*



*king and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon. And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels.* (verses 17-19)

Jerusalem is completely destroyed. The temple is leveled to the ground. The majority of the people of Judah are taken away from their land and into exile. Only the “poorest of the land” are left in Judah (2 Kings 25:12).

Second Kings 25 describes what happens to the few people who are left behind in the land of Judah, and it is not a very pretty picture. They continue to rebel against Babylon by assassinating the governor the Babylonians appointed over them (verse 25). After the murder of the governor, all these remaining people, in fear, flee to Egypt.

Although Jehoiachin is treated favorably in Babylon, the narrative ends on a tragic note with the kingdom of Judah devastated and the people deported to a foreign land.

Now as the books of Kings and Chronicles come to an end, an interesting glimmer of hope appears. The last two verses of 2 Chronicles 36 actually fast-forward the tape, so to speak, to the end of Judah’s seventy-year exile in Babylon. We are introduced to a Persian king named Cyrus, the conqueror of the Babylonian Empire. And Cyrus is the man God moves to allow the Jewish people to return to their homeland once again.

We are going to see that happen as we continue our Wisdom Journey through the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

But before we wrap up this study, let’s consider what we can learn from the tragic downfall of Judah. Well, one thing we should learn is how firmly sin can grip

our heart—so that we hang on to it even to the point of self-destruction. Listen, the only way to escape the bondage of sin is to walk in humility and obedience to God’s Word.

We also learn here that God is the God of justice, and He tells the truth when He says people will reap what they sow.

But we also learn from this sad history that God is the God of hope. Despite Judah’s past, the Lord would offer them the hope of returning again to the land of promise.

And we who know God through faith in Jesus Christ always have hope, as we look to His gracious promises—promises of forgiveness, eternal life, and peace.

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How has the LORD used your “banquet table of consequences” to get your attention? As you sat at that table, did you see the “food” on that table as punishment or nourishment? What kind of heart in a believer sees God’s consequences as nourishment? What kind of God gives consequences as nourishment?

If a struggling believer asked you how you manage to keep a humble heart and why God’s word was important to your walk with God, how would you answer? If a curious unbeliever asked you the same question, how would your answer differ?

Read Hebrews 6:19. What is this hope according to verses 13-18? How is this hope an anchor to your soul? Who in your life needs to hear about this anchor?

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:  
[www.wisdomonline.org](http://www.wisdomonline.org)

